Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Global Politics and Socio-Humanities
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.HT24110

The Influence of Shanghai Dialect on Identity and Regional Recognition among High School Students

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Abstract: This paper investigates the degree to which Shanghainese influences high school students' sense of identity and regional belonging. This paper investigates how Shanghainese influences high school students' regional identity. Combining identity theories with mixed-methods research (questionnaires and interviews.) Research shows a strong relationship between the identity of students with the frequency of using Shanghainese dialect, Shanghainese dialect enhancing their sense of belonging to this region. Besides, this study discussed dialects as a tool for cultural heritage and its role in social interaction and education. Consequently, it can be inferred that future educational practices should consider protecting and promoting dialects and local culture. This article aims to provide scholars and educators with a new perspective on the relationship between language, culture, and identity.

Keywords: Shanghai dialect, identity recognition, cultural heritage, dialect preservation

1. Introduction

Shanghainese reflects local cultural heritage, so it can be considered one of the fundamental ways to shape. Its vocabulary has been influenced by several cultures and has formed a unique system of language [1].

In the context of an international metropolis, the attitudes and frequency of dialect use exhibited by Shanghai high school students reflect their attachment to traditional culture; therefore, the density of such an attachment influences their feeling of belonging to the city. By analyzing specific data, the study aims to determine the impact of dialects on students' identity and belonging.

This study aims to highlight the urgency and importance of protecting dialects and regional culture. Local dialects face many challenges, and therefore, it’s crucial for preserving and promoting Shanghainese among new residents of Shanghai. The research has both theoretical and practical significance for academic studies and for local education policies. It is important for high school students to examine dialects to understand youth identity and regionalism. This makes forthcoming generations conscious of an age-old practice while improving their knowledge of cultural paradigms. It also thereby creating new opportunities for research in cultural diversity and social inclusion.

2. Literature review

The formation of identity is based on social identity theory, cultural identity theory, and social network theory which so to speak helps to understand how the Shanghainese shapes the sense of regional belonging [2]. According to social identity theory, self-perception is one of the outcome

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results of group membership, while cultural identity theory gives an emphasis on the role of language in preserving identity roots [3]. With regard to social network theory, it also explains that dialect helps to community—like in the case of Shanghainese, speakers get connected and form stronger relationships through shared fondness of regional folklore and this helps to build a distinctive regional identity. Families and schools are the primary agents of socialization with regard to this language and culture interface. However, those cultures face the challenge of globalization which makes such traditions require immediate attention. This study combines the theoretical perspectives with the empirical evidence collected from students attending secondary schools in Shanghai by offering some recommendations on how to preserve the dialects as socio-cultural systems rather than linguistic relics for identity evolution.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research subjects

The study uses a stratified random sampling method to select a total of 318 students from high schools in various districts of Shanghai [4]. The timing of the study is set for the middle of the semester to avoid the impact of end-of-term exam pressures on the survey results. The surveys are conducted on the school campuses to ensure convenience and encourage participation.

3.2. Data collection

The questionnaire is designed with the understanding abilities and interests of teenagers in mind. It focuses on the frequency of Shanghainese use and related issues of student identity. The survey includes scaled questions to assess students' proficiency in Shanghainese and its use in their daily lives. The questionnaires are distributed and collected online to ensure their completeness and validity. To enhance the depth of the study, six participants were selected for one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The selection was based on their frequency of dialect use and their identification with it. The interview transcripts will be gathered for later analysis.

3.3. Data analysis

During the data analysis phase, survey results reveal differences in identity perception among students with varying frequencies of Shanghainese use. Next, principal component analysis are used to interpret the relationship between students' use of Shanghainese and their regional identity to a further extent. For the interview data, recordings are transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. Also, students' subjective perceptions and attitudes towards using Shanghainese are summarized. Additionally, the study inquires how students' family backgrounds might influence their language use and sense of identity.

Statistical software is employed to conduct the quantitative and qualitative analyses to facilitate the analysis. This enables a comprehensive understanding of the current use of Shanghainese among teenagers and its impact on their identity and regional belonging. This combination of methods aims to provide full insights into the teaching committee’s future policy-making and practical teaching applications in schools.

4. Results

4.1. Frequency of Shanghai dialect usage and identity recognition

Among 318 participants (47.2% male, 52.8% female; G12 31.4%, G10 34.6%, G11 34.0%), 37.7% reported high-frequency Shanghainese use (75% scoring cultural identity 4-5/5), 28.3% medium, and

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34.0% low-frequency (only 27.8% scored 4-5). Therefore, we can conclude that Shanghainese usage frequency positively correlates with cultural identity. High-frequency users exhibit stronger local cultural affiliation, while low-frequency users align more with national/global perspectives.

A deeper analysis of the samples reveals significant differences in attitudes and recognition of local culture, particularly evident between high-frequency and low-frequency users of the Shanghai dialect. High-frequency users generally show greater participation in traditional festivals and local activities and a better understanding of Shanghai's history compared to low-frequency users [5]. Thus, the dialects function as both a cultural symbol and social identity constructor.

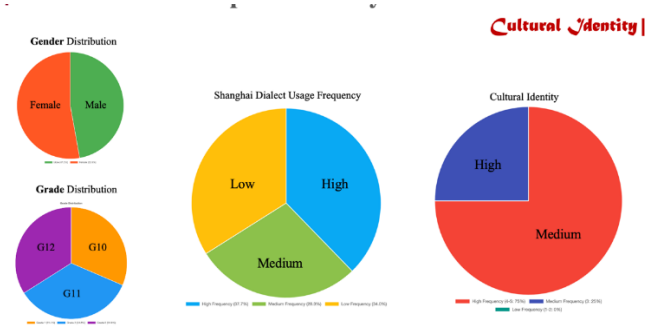


Figure 1: Correlation between Shanghai dialect usage frequency and cultural identity among high school students (by gender & grade)

4.2. Impact of Shanghai dialect usage on regional recognition

The Shanghai dialect strongly influences regional identity, particularly students' sense of belonging. Survey data shows 83.3% of high-frequency users (100 individuals) rated their attachment to Shanghai as high (4-5/5), while none reported weak connection (1-2/5). In contrast, only 23.1% of low-frequency users felt strong belonging, with 39.8% expressing minimal connection.

These results confirm daily dialect use significantly shapes cultural attachment. Students who frequently use the Shanghai dialect in their daily conversations have a more positive emotional connection to their city. They are more prone to consider themselves as Shanghainese. They are even more open to the possibility of making friends with others. This provides the basis for their forming close bonds both on school and out of school.

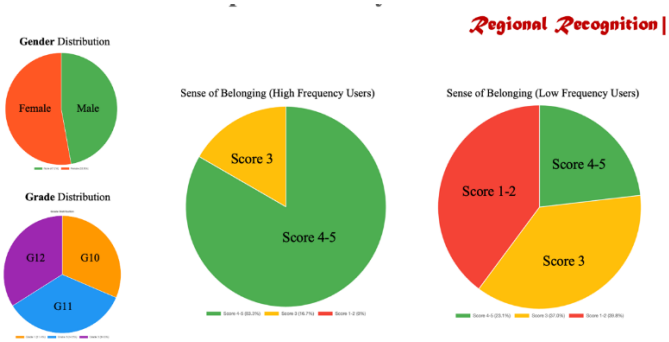


Figure 2: Frequency of Shanghainese dialect use and its correlation with regional belongingness among high school students (stratified by gender and grade)

4.3. Expressions of cultural identity

Students who love and recognize Shanghai culture enjoy using the Shanghai dialect in their daily conversations [3]. They also tend to participate in activities related to Shanghai culture. Their

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knowledge of the history and culture of Shanghai makes them feel proud. They regard the Shanghai dialect as a crucial link to the culture of their city. Shanghai dialect hitherto has been an essential component of the identity and the regional peculiarities of high school students. The extent to which it is dispensed with or practiced responds to youth's attitudes towards their traditional culture. Therefore, endorsing and safeguarding the use of the Shanghai dialect is a core issue. This venture leads to cultural heritage promotion and also facilitates the formation of regional identity.

5. Discussion

The importance of Shanghai dialect in the cultural identity and social life of the high school students is significant and has consequences for future educational undertakings. As a mark of identity, Shanghainese is an important part of culture in the sense that it strengthens local identification among users of the dialect, who are dominated with regional traditions and a deeper sense of identity [6]. Such ‘gluing’ helps to improve social relations because it allows more complex emotions and humor to be shared among friends which, in turn, strengthens relationships. In order to achieve some of these goals, it should be made clear that innovations in teaching methods—including cultural history strands and cooperative local activities—are required, while policy makers need to focus on protecting the local vernaculars in other reforms. These steps will avoid the loss of dialects and encourage balanced development of students by enabling them to operate freely within their culture.

6. Conclusion

It shows that the intensity of the use of Shanghainese incurs a greater identification with the region of Shanghai. Those who use the language actively feel more connected to the local culture and tend to identify with it more than others.

The study has weaknesses especially in the aspect of the sampling method. Furthermore, due to the scope of the study, there is a lack of representation of other teenagers from other dialect regions and the entire debate is constructed around the particular social phenomenon of a Shanghainese speaking and its use in identity construction.

For future inquiries, it would be relevant to extend the research scope to include new geographical areas and examine how various dialects helps shape identity and a feeling of belonging among adolescents. It provides us with a more nuanced view on the link between social interaction and language within the context of the emerging multicultural society.

In conclusion, Shanghai dialect is one of the factors that promote and sustains self-identity and fosters culture among the youth. The study of identity and culture within the framework of several or multiple dialects in the era of globalization and new cultural regions should be studied further. This can shed light on the intricate and multi-faceted issues of language and identity.

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