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**Language attitudes in the People's Republic of China's leading
English-language newspaper, China Daily**

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Abstract

Since time immemorial, various governments in China have attempted to promulgate writing reforms and speech reforms in order to unite the nation, mostly for political gain. The aim of this paper is to discover and analyze some language issues in the People's Republic of China, specifically attitudes and comments on spoken usage of Putonghua (also called Modern Standard Chinese), Shanghai dialect, Cantonese and English by researching *China Daily's* online newspaper article archive. A few valid articles could be retrieved and they uncovered that Putonghua, Shanghai dialect and Cantonese are all considered prestigious in different regions of the country; furthermore, English is gaining support rapidly, especially in corporate China.

Keywords: language planning, the PRC, Putonghua, Shanghai dialect, Cantonese and English

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1. Introduction

The broad subject of this essay is the issue of language attitudes expressed in China's main English-language newspaper, *China Daily*. My interest in this subject was aroused when I was studying Modern Standard Chinese (also called Putonghua) at *Beijing Foreign Studies University* in Beijing in 2003. During my stay in Beijing, it occurred to me that people from different parts of the country speak differently. The essay at hand aims to examine the commentaries on language issues found in the online news article archive of an English-language newspaper, *China Daily*, (e.g. <http://search.chinadaily.com.cn/advancesearchen.htm>). For starters, in order to define my research issues, it was crucial to review some of the literature on Chinese speech reform and attitudes towards other languages spoken in the nation, primarily, Cantonese, Shanghai dialect (of Wu) and English. In the next section follows the literature review.

2. Literature review

This literature review is divided into two sections, the first concerned with literature on speech reform in China relating to the political promotion of one vernacular and attitudes towards other speech varieties and languages in China, the second is concerned with literature discussing the impact of English on both Modern Standard Chinese and contemporary Chinese society.

2.1 Literature on speech reform in China

DeFrancis (1984)

According to DeFrancis (1984:224-228), the revolution of 1911 was a great catalyst for a number of developments in Chinese society. First off, the imperial system was overthrown and a republic form of government was established. Moreover, there sprung an enthusiasm to decide on a standard form of speech in order to unite the nation. The initial steps were taken at the Conference on Unification of Pronunciation in 1913 where the north provinces were victorious in adopting “a standard pronunciation” (1984:228) which in large approximated the Beijing speech variety (i.e. *Mandarin*). It was wished that this new standard would become the “means of official communication” (1984:224) and language of instruction in all schools from primary grades and onward. In addition,

DeFrancis continues (1984:224), “[t]his standard form of speech, which it was hoped would replace regional forms of speech as a medium of instruction and eventually in ordinary usage as well” (1984:224) was renamed from *Mandarin* to *Guoyu* which is possible to render as *National Language* as well as *State Language* in English. DeFrancis (1984:224) believes, that the differences in these two translations are reflected in the disagreement over what language policy to adopt. One fraction of nationalists viewed “*Guoyu* as a state language ... of a unitary people in China” (1984:224). Others “were willing to tolerate the use of local speech forms” (1984:224) in schools when necessary to acquire the standard. Still others wanted to preserve the regional speech varieties (see 1984:67 for the Chinese language family) and leave the national standard for those who wish or need to learn it. However, in the coming period, the speech reform was defined by the Chinese National Party, which seized the power in 1919 and ruled from Nanking until the breakdown in 1949. Their right-wing ideology was to accomplish a single standard spoken by all and eliminate all minority languages and speech varieties. In addition, they believed that everyone inhabiting the republic of China originates from one single people. To conclude, it was natural to strive for a completely unitary state according to the National Party.

In this part of the discussion, DeFrancis (1984:231) talks about the last major progress in speech reform. It was made in contemporary time by the Communist Party of China (the CPC). The national standard was once again renamed and officially set in 1955; however, the promoted speech variety was still that of educated Beijing citizens. The new name was *Putonghua* ‘common language’ and rendered in English as *Modern Standard Chinese*. In regard to concrete speech and what vocabulary to use, DeFrancis (1984:231) asserts, that “individual speakers [were] permitted considerable latitude in their attempts to master the norm ... [t]his leniency [was] true both of official policy and of popular attitudes” (1984:231). On the contrary, little or no deviation from the norm was permitted in speech occurring in radio and television broadcasts and other nationwide public services. Moreover, also the educational system was supposed to apply the norm as its medium of instruction, however, DeFrancis (1984:231) continues, the low number of professional teachers and professors proficient in *Modern Standard Chinese* (*MSC*) resulted in “an uneven” (1984:231) distribution of actual usage of *Putonghua* in

“regionlect areas” (see 1984:34 for a Linguistic Geography of China). “This situation is indicated by the criticism made by the linguist Wang Li that many students, especially, those in teachers’ colleges, do not speak Putonghua well and, moreover, that the teaching of Putonghua is so deemphasized after the early grades that students forget how to speak it” (1984:232). To continue on the topic of teaching methods in primary school, DeFrancis points out research made by Ridley, Godwin & Doolin (1971:13), who did a study partly concerned with what lexical items were taught in primary schools. In accordance to DeFrancis’ reference to their research, it can be seen that some words preferred in writing were taught in *Spoken Standard Chinese* classes (1984:233). This might result in students having a hard time, firstly, making sense of the standard language and, secondly, sounding natural and native-like in a *Modern Standard Chinese* environment. As a final note on DeFrancis, it is of importance to mention the *Baihua* (‘vernacular language’) movement. This movement was implemented by the Nationalist Party in 1919 “as the grammatical norm of written Chinese” (1984:234). In short, ‘vernacular language’, in this context, is an informal writing style that approximated spoken language. In the beginning, it was promoted to facilitate reading and comprehending for illiterates, however, it spread to radio resulting in informal language and easily understood broadcasts. The *Baihua* movement was rather successful and in popular use until Mao Zedong began his publication “of poetry in the classical style” (1984:235), which had an immense effect on especially spoken *Standard Chinese* in post-1949 China. For example, DeFrancis states in reference to Destenay (1981), Mao Zedong’s poetry “[contributed] to the reversal in style in China because a great deal of news broadcasting is done in a style closer to that of formal writing than to that of informal speech” (1984:236). In summary of the discussion on the *Baihua* movement, DeFrancis asserts in reference to Fraser (1965:131), “[i]t is particularly ironic that a supposedly populist government is promoting a form of speech so heavily influenced by writing that it works a special hardship on the 90 percent of the population that in 1952 was classified as illiterates by the then Minister of Education, Ma Xulun”(1984:236).

Li (2006)

In 1949, when the Peoples Republic of China was founded, “the central government” (Li, 2006:155) stood before a nation in need of reform and reconstruction. However, “tremendous linguistic diversity across the country and a largely illiterate citizenry” (2006:155) worked as two enormous barriers blocking the nation from progress. The language reform that would change this outset was fully approved in 1958 and consisted, in summary, of three points (a) simplification of the Chinese characters; (b) promotion of Modern Standard Chinese as the national norm; and (c) the construction of a phonetic alphabet to facilitate adoption of standard pronunciation. According to Wang, L (1954; 1959), here paraphrased by Li (2006), the establishment of a standard language is crucial for “effective governance” (2006:155), “socioeconomic development” (2006:155), “national aspiration of progress through education” (2006:155) and finally “the cultivation of shared cultural values” (2006:155). In conclusion, this language reform could result in the formation of a unitary state.

In the following paragraph, Li (2006:155) states that promotion of Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) was “acute” (2006:155) due to “[c]ross-dialectal intelligibility problems” (2006:155), however, “the language experts and planners had no intention to replace local dialects with the standard language” (2006:155). Conversely, CCTV, the Central Television Network, broadcasts in MSC to such an extent that TV programs have to be subtitled “[t]o assist dialect speakers in their comprehension” (2006:156). Furthermore, Li (2006:156) continues, “there is evidence suggesting that in the production of drama series on TV, linguistic realism is relatively low-level concern compared with a higher-priority of promoting [P]utonghua through broadcast media” (2006:156). In his article, in reference to Chen, Ping (1999:28-30), Li states that removal of high-prestige speech varieties like Cantonese, Suzhou dialect and Shanghainese would increase the chances of MSC ever becoming a *lingua franca* (2006:160). Next, the discussion in Li’s article is based on studies by Zhan (1995, 1997) and Zhang (1998). According to Li (2006), they concluded that, due to economic well-being in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, “government officials reportedly felt so superior that they had little incentive to learn and speak [P]utonghua” (2006:160) in the beginning of the nineties. However, this changed in 1997 with “the global economic downturn and the

pandemic, SARS” (2006:160), resulting in a recent decrease in the demand for Cantonese. In parallel to the discussion above, similar economic factors regulate the interest in Putonghua among dialect speakers. Due to being very affordable, TV sets are now glowing in almost every living room throughout China bombarding people with “images and sounds of self-proclaimed high quality products and services—the meta-message of commercials—in the national language, thereby subconsciously creating and reinforcing an association between sophisticated tastes and [P]utonghua speakers” (2006:161).

On the subject of the extent to which a person should learn the standard, “[t]here are signs ... that more and more mainland researchers consider varieties of ‘local Putonghua’ as legitimate terminal goals of the learning process. One correlate of such a change in attitude toward deviations from the standard is increasing recognition of different levels of *Putonghua*: level 1 is closest to the standard; level 2 is characterized by some deviation from it; and level 3 exhibits considerable influence from the local dialect” (2006:162). To conclude the review of Li (2006), in December 1997, “[i]t was resolved that by 2050, there should be no more ‘blind spots’ within the borders of the People’s Republic of China where [*P*]utonghua cannot be understood, and that communication problems caused by mutually unintelligible dialects should cease to exist” (2006:163 referring to Zhou (2003:258).

2.2 Literature review on contemporary attitudes to English in the PRC

In this section, an attempt was made to clarify some linguists’ and scholars’ opinions on the influence of English on Chinese society. A few articles from a large collection were selected to be reviewed below.

Zuo (2005)

The topics of this article, *Language planning with respect to English into China*, are the adoption of English words and abbreviations into Modern Standard Chinese, and furthermore, “the language planning designed to deal with this problem” (2005:284). In the People’s Republic of China, there is a central government “making an effort to standardize and spread” (2005:284) one national standard speech variety. However, Zuo

(2005:284) continues, even Putonghua has to conform and meet the demands of its speakers “in the information age” (2005:284). Due to the need of new lexical items in more or less all scientific subjects, Putonghua has “borrowed heavily from European languages” (2005:284) over the past two decades. “This process has accelerated in recent times and since the beginning of the 1980s, Chinese society has become more and more open to external influences; thus English words have entered [Putonghua] vocabulary in even larger numbers” (2005:284). The attitude of the central government towards loanwords is quite conservative and allows “external influences” (2005:285) only if it is vital and can conform to Modern Standard Chinese. For the process of handling foreign loanwords, there are two principle methods and one rather recent. (a) “Semantic transposition consists of the use of indigenous morphemes to capture the most salient features of the foreign concept” (2005:285). An example of this is *telephone*, 电话 *diànhuà*, which consist of two characters the first one can mean *electricity* and the second one *speech*, together they are ‘one word’ and carry the meaning of *telephone* in English. (b) “Phonetic transcription consists of borrowing directly from the source language, using Chinese characters to approximate the source language pronunciation” (2005:285). For example, the English word *sofa* is 沙发 *shāfā* in Modern Standard Chinese. (c) A new manner of borrowing consists of direct transfer of abbreviations in Latin script into Putonghua (2005:285). Some frequent examples are IT (*information technology*), UN (*United Nations*), CD (*compact disc*) and many more. This last type of loanwords has emerged during the last two decades. According to Zuo (2005:287), phonetic transcription has become more popular, although semantic transposition is the most preferred manner of borrowing.

“Generally speaking, in recent years Chinese has opened up a little more in its acceptance of foreign influences” (2005:288) at least if linguists and scholars are asked to comment on this question. In his article, Zuo (2005:289) mentions two prominent citizens one chief and one linguist whom “both favor the borrowing of loanwords to enrich” (2005:289) Putonghua. It is even conceivable, Zuo (2005:289) continues, that Putonghua “has become more and more tolerant of using foreign words in texts” (2005:289) at least informal texts approximating spoken language such as *emails* (2005:289). In 2003, a

conference was held by the State Commission to discuss, among other matters, “English abbreviations [...] as previously mentioned” (2005:289). The main attitudes at the conference were: (1) “At present abbreviations are to some extent overused and misused” (2005:289). (2) Reasons behind the use and spread of loanwords according to the linguists and scholars at the conference. (a) “the open policy and globalization” (2005:289); (b) the lack of equivalents (in Putonghua) to some English words in certain technical and scientific fields; (c) “English abbreviations are usually short and convenient to use for international communication” (2005:290) thus the spread in society; (d) “some people regard foreign words as being more prestigious” (2005:290). (3) To continue the discussion of English abbreviations, the delegates disagreed on how to treat them in the future. Some were conservative meaning that “English abbreviations contaminate the Chinese language, damaging national image and pride” (2005:290). Other scholars were more tolerant calling for regulations on how to use foreign words in shortened form; however, they accepted some abbreviations relevant to global communication. (4) The hierarchy of the borrowing patterns was set with *semantic transposition* at the top, next was *phonetic transcription* and last *the adoption of foreign letter words*. (5) “The following measures were recommended to standardize the use of loanwords: (a) draw up translating rules; (b) conduct surveys; (c) set up a social supervisory mechanism or language use; (d) make regulating rules by way of legislation” (2005:290). In summary, the scholars are somewhat disagreeing on a number of points and this will undoubtedly slow down the process to construct a widely accepted set of rules to control the influence of foreign languages on Putonghua.

Qiang and Wolff (2003)

The authors of this article, *China and Chinese, or Chingland and Chinglish*, use the connection between language and culture to show that the autonomy of China might be endangered. The main argument for this, according to Qiang and Wolff (2003:10), is that English education in China is accompanied by “Western culture” (2003:10) displaying a whole different way of life. The examples of strong English-language influence that Qiang and Wolff bring up are (1) that Chinese students of Western business will learn about *democracy*, “which is the foundation for Western corporate ownership” (2003:10)

and (2) that “the nationwide ESL (English as a Second Language) campaign brings with it an immersion in Western concepts, including social, cultural business and political thought” (2003:10). In their point of view, there is a piecemeal progress of traditional Chinese reasoning slowly being replaced by Western reasoning. To conclude, Qiang and Wolff (2003:10), stipulate that the product might be a Westernized China instead of a purely Chinese nation. To support their ideas Qiang and Wolff researched newspaper articles and found various reactions to English. According to Zang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of Education, “China’s accession to the World Trade Organization and the approaching Olympics in 2008 more than ever is it a priority for young Chinese to learn and improve their language skills” (source: “Government encourages public to learn English”, *China Daily*, 2002-10-25) (2003:10). Conversely, Professor To Choyee of Hong Kong, “argues that the widespread study of English is a waste of valuable resources” (2003:10) (source: “English Dominance”, *Shanghai Star*, 2002-10-02). Finally, Shanghai Star printed “Guangzhou ... public servants should possess an English vocabulary of at least 1,000 words” (2003:10) retrieved 2002-10-24.

2.3 Comments on the literature review

In the text above, there are numerous comments and attitudes on speech reform and the impact of English on Chinese society and its standard language. However, the voices heard all belong to linguists and scholars, who more or less deliver the message of the central government from the halls of power out to their peers. However, the final article is an exception, because it addresses the masses of Chinese people studying English and also the central government itself. Furthermore, the authors of that particular article used attitudes and comments expressed by government officials and scholars in order to present their arguments. On the contrary, the paper at hand aims to bring forth the opinions of laymen on the research issues stated in the next section.

3. Research issues

The paper at hand is based on news articles written by objective journalists quoting general people and a few scholars living in the PRC, mainly Beijing, whose attitudes and

comments are spread freely throughout the nation in printed press and on the internet. The specific research issues for this paper are stated below.

- (i) What are the attitudes in *China Daily* towards the concept of having one single spoken standard language in the People's Republic of China (the PRC)?
- (ii) What comments can be found in *China Daily* on public use of prestigious speech varieties as spoken Shanghai dialect and spoken Cantonese in the PRC?
- (iii) What are the main attitudes towards English in the PRC, as expressed in *China Daily*?

4. Methodology

To conduct this research, it felt vital to find one single source of information that contains current data in English exclusively that can be retrieved online at any given time. The selection of possible sources was rapidly narrowed down to the online news article archive of *China Daily*, an English-language newspaper, in China. It was assumed that *China Daily's* online archive would provide with rather straightforward and somewhat uncensored material for analysis that would contribute to accurate conclusions concerning the research issues of this paper. Below follows a detailed description of how the data was retrieved and processed. To begin with, the news article archive was found at <http://search.chinadaily.com.cn/advancesearchen.htm>. Furthermore, the data searches followed a three-step procedure, as explained below, in **Step 1** the search word (e.g. *Putonghua*, *Shanghai dialect*, *Cantonese* and *English*) was typed in the box, below, in **Step 2** the search was limited to **China daily**, in the final step, **Step 3** the box next to 'Search in a certain period?' was marked and the certain time periods were "from 2000-01-01 to 2002-01-01", "from 2003-01-01 to 2005-01-01" and "from 2006-01-01 to 2008-01-01", however, it was necessary to reopen the archive page (e.g. <http://search.chinadaily.com.cn/advancesearchen.htm>) and repeat all three steps for each specific time period to conclude the queries for one search word. The division of the research into three time periods was crucial to make the number of hits low and

manageable. The selection of data was based on a few factors: there had to be a *byline* (an author of the article) in addition, it had to contain a few instances of the *search word* in the context of *spoken language*, moreover, it was important that the particular search word was preceded or followed by some indication of attitude, comment or comparison related to *spoken language* use or *speech reform*, preferably expressed by a non-linguist, and finally, best of all was if open disagreement between language policies promulgated by the central government and *laymen's* opinions could be retrieved from the data.

5. Presentation of results and analysis

In this section, excerpts of articles, where the previously mentioned search words could be found, are presented and analyzed starting with *Putonghua*.

5.1 Putonghua

This section seeks to uncover some comments on spoken *Putonghua* (also called spoken Modern Standard Chinese).

5.1.1 2000-01-01 – 2002-01-01

No articles in this search were eligible for analysis.

5.1.2 2003-01-01 – 2005-01-01

In this search, there were twenty-six hits, however, only a small portion of quotes could be obtained and examined. The examination of *Putonghua* starts with an article written by Zheng Caixiong.

[I]t will be difficult to popularize *[P]utonghua* in classes in which Cantonese has been spoken for ages. (Zheng 2004-04-26)

In Zheng's (2004-04-26) article Cai Xiaoyue, Deputy President of the Educational College at Guangzhou University, states that *Putonghua* is less popular than Cantonese in university classes at Guangzhou University. This attitude indicates honest resistance against the *speech reform* promulgated by the central government. It is assumed that this

rebellion towards *Putonghua* originates from the student body, the motivation behind it might simply be an ambition to build a future in a Cantonese speaking region or even abroad. In conclusion, maybe *Putonghua* is scarcely popular among students in Guangzhou due to the poor employment prospects it represents to them. The second article written by Qin Jize discusses the outcome of a survey that measured Chinese people's ability to communicate in *Putonghua*.

More and more Chinese nowadays are able to communicate using Chinese Mandarin, says a survey that indicates that 53 per cent of the population can communicate with the standard spoken language also known as *[P]utonghua*.

(Qin 2004-12-27)

In Qin Jize's article, the words “[m]ore and more” (Qin 2004-12-27) gives the impression that the author promotes a positive attitude to the continuous spread of *Putonghua*. In addition, the result of the survey, “that 53 per cent of the population can communicate with the standard spoken language” (2004-12-27), indicates that *Putonghua* is nonetheless supported by a slight majority of the people. However, in contrast to these positive views, the other half of the nation, forty-seven per cent of one point three billion people, choose to speak in speech varieties other than *Putonghua*. In summary, the census indicates that *Putonghua* has grown to become the major speech variety in the PRC, which in its own right shows an increasing acceptance towards the norm, however, it is a precarious assumption to say that the PRC will become a fully linguistically unified nation. In the next part of Qin Jize's article, some areas where the speech reform has been more or less successful are illustrated.

As a standard spoken language, *[P]utonghua* is widely used as the communication medium during public activities while people use the dialect native to their areas when communicating within their family or with other native speakers. (Qin 2004-12-27)

In the quote above, Qin (2004-12-27) argues that *Putonghua* and the local dialect are used in different contexts and surroundings. This might mean that there is an emotional connection between people and their dialects as they choose to use them when talking to

family members instead of practicing their *Putonghua*, while *Putonghua* seems to be used in more formal contexts. This indicates that the influence of *Putonghua* has resulted in a society linguists often refer to as *diglossic*, where there are two speech varieties within one specific speech community, one High variety for public and formal situations and one Low variety for informal communication between friends and family members. In conclusion, Qin Jize's (2004-12-27) article argues that there are areas of communication where *Putonghua* is dominant and squeezing itself into Chinese society. The discussion based on an article by Qin, Jize is concluded with the final string below.

[P]utonghua is perceived as a sign of good breeding (Qin 2004-12-27)

This attitude has been maintained by people living in the north provinces (with Beijing as its source) since the times of *Guanhua* during the Qing dynasty nevertheless it is still current in Chinese society. The next segment is a comment on pop music performed in *Putonghua*.

But not many young Jings sing the songs today. Liu Hongtao, 25, from [Shanxi] prefers to listen to pop songs in *[P]utonghua*, which is not uncommon among his contemporaries. (Mu 2005-10-25)

The segment above displays an increased interest in music performed in *Putonghua* in an area of the country where mainly dialects of Jin (eight in total) and sub-dialects of *Putonghua* are spoken. In conclusion, this indicates that *Putonghua* is partly being spread through music.

5.1.3 2006-01-01 – 2008-01-01

This search gave eighty-seven hits some of which are useful for this paper. The first comment is expressed by Xue Chaohua, a thirty-three year-old Beijing University graduate, who went to Dongxiang, one of the poorest areas in Gansu province, to teach *Putonghua*

He was to be posted, though voluntarily, to one of the country's poorest counties Dongxiang in Linxia Prefecture of Northwest China's Gansu Province to oversee China Daily's Hope education project. (Sun 2006-08-05)

Part of his job is to get as many primary-school age students, who can barely converse, let alone write, to learn *[P]utonghua*. The parents see more value in children working on potato patches than an education, even though the latter pay off more in the long term. (Sun 2006-08-05)

According to Sun Shan (2006-08-05), Xue Chaohua wishes to do something *real* in his life, and therefore, he went to the remote areas of Gansu province to spread *Putonghua*. In summary, Sun (2006-08-05) argues that farmers in Dongxiang believe that acquiring *Putonghua* is a low-priority exercise (Sun 2006-08-05). On the contrary, Xue Chaohua believes that learning *Putonghua* is more essential for children growing up in Dongxiang than hard labor on farms (Sun 2006-08-05). It is arguable that Xue Chaohua wishes to change this negative attitude to *Putonghua* in Gansu province and, furthermore, teach his students a language that can help them to find employment in wealthier parts of the country. Below follows a discussion on dialects versus the promotion of *Putonghua*, the article at hand was written by Wang Ying (2007-03-17).

"Some expressions definitely have a better effect when spoken in the native dialect, especially when it needs to sound saucy or comical," said Qian Nairong, a language professor with the Shanghai University. (Wang 2007-03-17)

In the quote above, Qian Nairong shows strong support for his native dialect, *Shanghai dialect*, moreover, he stresses the significant relationship between a local dialect and its speakers by pointing out the genre of comedy and how specific expressions are perceived as amusing by a certain audience. To conclude Professor Qian argues that there is a connection between people's way of thinking and a speech variety (Wang 2007-03-17).

However, on the whole, there has generally been a decline in the use of native dialects. Many words and phrases in the Shanghai dialect today are lost to youngsters as is the case with the other dialects. China boasts 56 ethnic groups and seven main dialects, with each

further divided into several local varieties. This has always led to confusion and a loss of efficiency. (Wang 2007-03-17)

According to Wang (2007-03-17), young people in Shanghai are now showing less sympathy towards *Shanghai dialect*, which is something positive according to Wang Ying, because he argues that linguistic diversity is holding the PRC back from evolving. In the next segment, Wang Ying exemplifies what the Communist Party of China (the CPC) has done to promote *Putonghua* during nearly six decades in power.

The country in the past five decades has launched campaigns encouraging the use of standard Chinese, known as *Putonghua*. A law was promulgated in 2001, requiring *Putonghua* to be used in education, broadcasting, and other public service sectors. A national survey in December 2004 found that 53 percent of the population could communicate in *Putonghua*. (Wang 2007-03-17)

In the segment above, Wang Ying seems to be in lack of any attitudes or ideas of his own; however, the numbers he presents are consistent with Qing (2004-12-27) a previously mentioned journalist.

Zhou Lei, a language researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said he was concerned that local dialects were facing increasing challenges and might one day just disappear. "The larger the city, the more damage local dialects receive," Zhou told China Youth Daily. (Wang 2007-03-17)

In the final segment from Wang Ying's article, he quotes Zhou Lei, a language researcher, who is somewhat concerned with the future of different speech varieties spoken in large urban areas. In summary, *Putonghua* seems to be a natural choice of communication in cities growing rapidly due to migration from rural areas. The next comment is related to language use. It discusses one journalist's reaction to poor pronunciation of *Putonghua* during a press conference presumably in Beijing.

In a film's premiere ceremony, a Hong Kong actor ... was struggling with his broken *[P]utonghua* to answer another question, [when] some reporters began to audibly murmur. (Liu 2007-08-10)

Give him a good microphone! Don't you see he cannot speak well? How can we hear without a good mic when he speaks so poorly? (Liu 2007-08-10)

These comments on spoken *Putonghua* vocalized with a strong accent reveals low acceptance to deviation from the way Beijing citizens pronounce *Putonghua*, moreover, it mirrors a certain linguistic tension between, on one hand, native speakers of *Putonghua* and, on the other hand, native speakers of Cantonese, in this case, struggling to accommodate a *Putonghua* speaking community. In summary, from these segments above, it can be discerned that linguistic diversity can give cause to verbal hostility and that people from the south are discriminated against by people from the north.

5.2 Shanghai dialect

DeFrancis (1984:67) states that *Shanghai dialect* and the Beijing variety of *Putonghua* are two dialects which belong to different mutually unintelligible regionalects (a language spoken in a specific region of a country). In conclusion, DeFrancis and many Chinese linguists who have studied the phonetic and grammatical characteristics of *Shanghai dialect* state that it is practically another language compared with the variety of *Putonghua* spoken in Beijing. In the following section, comments on spoken *Shanghai dialect* are presented and analyzed.

5.2.1 2000-01-01 – 2002-01-01 and 2003-01-01 – 2005-01-01

The search results in these two time periods were not acceptable for this paper since the search word *Shanghai dialect* did not produce any valid articles.

5.2.3 2006-01-01 – 2008-01-01

Thirty-three articles were found in this search from which a few valuable comments on *Shanghai dialect* could be retrieved. The first article comments on the lack of a proper *Shanghai dialect* dictionary.

Every *Shanghai* native can tell you that "luosu" means eggplant in the local *dialect*, but they do not know how to write the two characters "luo" and "su". A new dictionary, to be published next month by the Shanghai Lexicography Press, will help solve some of these problems. (Zhang 2007-07-06)

This dictionary can provide all Shanghai citizens with a deeper understanding of their spoken and written language. Moreover, a publication of this sort might strengthen the position of *Shanghai dialect*, and thereby prevent *Putonghua* from gaining prestige and be fully integrated in Shanghainese society. The following observation is also from Zhang's article.

On many *Shanghai* bulletin boards, there are many messages written in the *dialect*. (Zhang 2007-07-06)

Although, the string of words above is related to written *Shanghai dialect*, it was included in this research because the *messages* were posted on public bulletin boards and it can be assumed that these messages were spread verbally among people in Shanghai, henceforth, the string is, in one sense, actually related to spoken *Shanghai dialect* because these messages evoke usage and spread of the dialect in spoken form. In the next text segment, Professor Qian Nairong mentions to Zhang Kun a change in attitude towards spoken *Shanghai dialect* in kindergartens.

"Now, when children talk in the *Shanghai dialect* in kindergartens, teachers no longer stop them. Sometimes ballads in the *Shanghai dialect* are taught as well," said Professor Qian Nairong of Shanghai University. (Zhang 2007-07-06)

This indicates that teachers at kindergartens accept it when children speak in *Shanghai dialect* instead of the norm (i.e. *Putonghua*) compared with a more rigid and strict approach in the past when only *Putonghua* was allowed in kindergarten communication. The teachers at this specific kindergarten that Zhang (2007-07-06) mentions have gone so far as to even teach the children songs in *Shanghai dialect*. To conclude, they go against the *speech reform* of the central government by promotion of spoken *Shanghai dialect*.

In the last segment from Zhang's article, Qian discusses growing forces from within society.

"People are now more aware of their local culture, and realize their dialects are closely related to their lives. I believe anyone interested in the *Shanghai dialect* would want to read the dictionary," said Qian. (Zhang 2007-07-06)

This statement is found very interesting, because it indicates forces from within the Chinese society working for linguistic individuality and away from the ideas of *one language one nation* cultivated by the Communist Party of China. If what Professor Qian says is true this might be the beginning of conscious linguistic division in the PRC.

In the following article, the journalist, Shang Ban (2007-12-18), goes as far as to claim that the *Shanghai dialect* is considered one of the most popular speech varieties according to the State Language Affairs Committee, which conducted an extensive survey of *Shanghai dialect* using video cameras to record both facial expressions and lip movements. Furthermore, the survey seeks "to find out the influence local dialects have on the official language [or *Putonghua*]" (Shang 2007-12-18). In the text segment below Shang, Ban comments further on *Shanghai dialect* and what is happening to it in present day.

As more and more young people in *Shanghai* use *the dialect* to communicate online, and as its vocabulary expands, it will be standardized and promoted as a distinct local language. (Shang 2007-12-18)

If the central government is sympathetic with this kind of comments is difficult to be sure of and it seems weak to claim that expanded online usage would result in *Shanghai dialect* becoming accepted and protected as a separate language, since the CPC rarely changes its plans due to public opinion of any particular sort. Nevertheless, it is possible that online communication as an activity can result in language growth if the expressions and abbreviations that are used in written online communication are considered new words and are ultimately added on to the spoken variety of, in this case, *Shanghai dialect*.

5.3 *Cantonese*

This section aims to analyze comments on spoken *Cantonese* in the PRC (e.g. mainland China) excluding Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), Macao SAR and Taiwan.

5.3.1 2000-01-01 – 2002-01-01

There were only three hits in this search and none of them referred to spoken *Cantonese*, instead, they were about food and culture.

5.3.2 2003-01-01 – 2005-01-01

A total of fifty-nine hits came out of this search. The first comment on spoken *Cantonese* in mainland China comes from Guangdong province.

"It is likely that it is because most of the students have gotten used to thinking in *Cantonese* rather than [P]utonghua," Cai said. Guangzhou residents, of course, have difficulty when they are communicating with people from outside their province, Cai added. Cai admits it will be difficult to popularize [P]utonghua in classes in which *Cantonese* has been spoken for ages. Chen Xiaolan, a teacher from Guangzhou's Huanghua Primary School, said many parents of students in her classes refuse to speak [P]utonghua, favouring the *Cantonese* dialect, which is spoken in Guangdong Province, parts of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Hainan Province, Hong Kong and Macao. (Zheng 2004-04-26)

In Zheng's article, Chen Xiaolan, a primary school teacher, asserts that many of her students refuse to speak or in other ways use *Putonghua* in school, moreover, this is one example of a widely spread discontentment towards *Putonghua* in Guangdong province. As a result, the students mentioned in the article (Zheng 2004-04-26) might have difficulties communicating with people from other provinces however their future might be established outside in Hong Kong SAR since they can speak *Cantonese*.

Affected by bordering Hong Kong and Macao, many Guangzhou students use *Cantonese* dialect characters when they write letters, essays and even resumes. More than 90 per cent

of local students use *Cantonese* dialect characters in writing mobile phone short messages. Currently, students who can speak *Cantonese* usually have the advantage of being employed in Guangdong Province, particularly in many Hong Kong-funded companies and joint ventures where bosses speak only *Cantonese* and foreign languages. Meanwhile Guangdong has seen more than 20 million overseas Chinese migrate around the world. Most can speak only *Cantonese* and local foreign languages. "This is also one of the reasons why Guangzhou residents refuse to use [P]utonghua in their classes," Chen said. (Zheng 2004-04-26)

In Zheng's words, fluency in *Cantonese* assists people from Guangdong to attain a job not only in their home province but it also opens a door to Hong Kong SAR, Macao SAR or even in a foreign country. In the next article, Qin (2004-12-27) writes about a man who moved from the north of China down to the *Cantonese* speaking city of Shenzhen to work.

As a boy growing up in the northern part of the country, Wang spoke wonderful putonghua but he began to learn Cantonese when he started to work in Shenzhen in South China's Guangdong Province in 2001. He said the prevalence of the local dialect has excluded outsiders from social networks. "I am learning Cantonese because I want to better integrate into local society," he said. (Qin 2004-12-27)

According to Qin (2004-12-27), some proficiency in *Cantonese* is necessary to be accepted in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. This illustrates Cantonese as the prestigious speech variety in Shenzhen followed by Putonghua as the low variety, at least in everyday communication with people.

5.3.3 2006-01-01 – 2008-01-01

One hundred and twenty-nine articles were found in this search however only one comment was coherent with this research. It comes from Jacky Chan who was in Guangzhou at the time of the interview.

There are also problems with communication. Not all the staff speak *Cantonese*, and many only speak [P]utonghua. Chan also finds the staff are not very innovative. After he teaches them one week, they only repeat what he has told them until he teaches something new the next week. (Chen 2007-10-10)

In this segment of Chen's article, knowledge of *Putonghua* as the only means of communication appears to be a handicap in the *Cantonese* speaking city of Guangzhou.

5.4 English

This part of the essay strives to uncover some attitudes towards spoken *English* in a number of cities through out the PRC.

5.4.1 2000-01-01 – 2002-01-01

This search produced ninety-one hits, however, only one article was found that comments on spoken *English*.

Language training is also being highlighted by the hotels. "To make this work more efficiently, staff at many hotels have been told to use *English* at daily meetings," Chen said. (Lu 2001-04-24)

In this article by Lu Chang, Chen Xueyu (an official with Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administrative Commission) states that one of the preparations for the Asian-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) summit was to improve staff members' ability to talk in English to the foreign guests arriving to the meeting. It is highly possible that this measure was taken in order to meet the needs of the delegates and also enhance the service of the hotel in general.

5.4.2 2003-01-01 – 2005-01-01

In this search, an unexpected error occurred in the search engine in China Daily's online news article archive.

5.4.3 2006-01-01 – 2008-01-01

The number of hits in this query reached a total of 7118 articles. All of which contained the word *English* in various contexts. This section starts with an article written by Chu Tian and Jin Bao.

English has brought together two men who live in a house for the elderly in Wuhan of Hubei Province and used to feel lonely because their different Chinese dialects hindered their communication with others. Li Xiaocang, 97, from Guangdong Province, felt very isolated because he has difficulty talking with other peers because of his heavy Cantonese accent and poor [P]utonghua. (Chu and Jin 2006-10-25)

In the segment above, *English* seems to have functioned as a *lingua franca* between the two men. This coincidental linguistic situation is indicative of how fundamentally different the Chinese languages are from one and other. Furthermore, it proves how difficult *Putonghua* is to learn for a non-native speaker. In an article with the crafty title *English invades Chinese language*, the journalist Wang, Ying refers to the thoughts and ideas of Professor Hou Min on the topic of English influence on the Chinese language.

"Nowadays, more and more *English* abbreviations are being used in Chinese, making them an important part of the contemporary language," said Hou Min, a professor at Communication University of China. (Wang 2007-08-17)

Professor Hou Min asserts that the introduction of *English* abbreviations in contemporary Chinese is a positive addition to the language. Thus, he indulges borrowing words from *English*.

"The abbreviations have gained popularity because of the ease of usage," Hou said. (Wang 2007-08-17)

The major reason why abbreviations of long and sometimes complicated English nouns and phrases have become so popular is, according to Hou Min, the fact that they are short and not complicated to pronounce. The next string is a comment on usage of English abbreviations in modern Putonghua made by the author of the article.

For example, DNA is much simpler to use than its Chinese version tuoyang hetang hesuan, (Wang 2007-08-17)

An interpretation of the statement above is that simplicity alone is motivation enough to welcome adoption of *English* abbreviations into modern *Putonghua*; however, if English abbreviations are firmly rooted in the Chinese society, it might bring about a loss of genuine expressions in both Putonghua and other speech varieties. In the following segment, Huo Min continues the discussion on usage of abbreviations.

"As more Chinese people learn foreign languages, especially *English*, in recent years, using abbreviations has become a trend among educated people," she said.
(Wang 2007-08-17)

In the statement above, it is claimed that abbreviations have become more popular as a result of an increasing interest in foreign languages; moreover, it is pointed out that people with a university or collage education are more inclined to use abbreviations, possibly in their professions and among their peers. This, on the whole, argues for a so called *from top to bottom* spread of *English* abbreviations in Chinese society. The next segment is the last retrieved from Wang's article.

Li Yuming, deputy director of the State Language Commission, said: ... "It is ideal that people speak some foreign languages besides their mother tongue." (Wang 2007-08-17)

In this comment, it is literally stated that verbal communication in foreign languages between Chinese nationals is promoted and accepted by the CPC. Furthermore, it is plausible to say that positive comments on language learning similar to the example above, expressed by the government, are in fact major catalysts behind the evident boost in English teaching enterprises in the PRC during the last decade. In conclusion, a lot of people in the PRC are sensitive to the attitudes and recommendations of the government and follows them seemingly blindfolded. In the following article, an Anonymous author presents some contrastive views on *English* if compared with Wang, Ying's sources.

"As a Chinese, why should I learn a foreign language?" (Anonymous 2007-08-18)

The comment above is possibly an old slogan used in the past to warn off foreign influence. Nevertheless, it discards the idea that a Chinese national could have any use of a foreign language at all. This can be discerned as a somewhat negative attitude towards foreign influence and integration between Chinese nationals and foreigners. In the next segment, the same author has picked out a similar statement of criticism towards *English*.

"Without knowing the ABCs, I can still be a good successor (revolutionary cause)." (Anonymous 2007-08-18)

One possible interpretation of the segment above is that the future of the nation is independent of whether the coming generations are able to speak *English*. The following segment from Anonymous' article contains a comparison between the era represented in the two segments above and present day.

Present-day China's enthusiasm for foreign languages, *English* in particular, was unimaginable those days. Knowing a language other than our own, especially if spoken by Westerners, was a despicable sign of worship to things foreign. (Anonymous 2007-08-18)

The segment above suggests an attitudinal change to *English* throughout the history of China. From one perspective, English has gone from representing disloyalty to Chinese ways and culture to become a necessity for anyone who wants a prosperous life. This is described fairly straightforward in the short quote below.

Without decent scores from *English* proficiency tests, you cannot graduate from colleges, not to mention land a well-paid job. (Anonymous 2007-08-18)

Judging by the definition of *English* in the quote above, it appears to manifest a socioeconomic and intellectual barrier in the Chinese society with a growing ambitious middle-class and upper-class on one side and a neglected working-class on the other. Anonymous concludes the article with the next segment.

While satisfying the need for international communication, we should not neglect our native language's role in preserving and enriching our cultural identity.
(Anonymous 2007-08-18)

Anonymous wishes to encourage conservatism and prevent *English* from contaminating Chinese society any further; however, *English* should be allowed in international communication. In the next article, the author, Xie (2007-12-11), went to Beijing Senior High School for Foreign Affairs Service (BFAS), a school that trains personell for the Olympic Games. The next segment is based on a comment by the vice-principal of BFAS.

[V]ice-principal Guo Dijun ... reveals the biggest obstacle facing the students is their oral English. (Xie 2007-12-11)

Guo Dijun states that acquiring proper spoken English is a great ordeal for the students. Based on this statement, it is fair to say that learning *English* is probably the most important task facing the students in order to obtain the occupation they are aiming for.

More hours have been added to the English-teaching program, accounting for nearly one-third of all courses. (Xie 2007-12-11)

BAFS appears to be willing to put every resource available into its *English* learning program, which shows how essential it is to have service personell proficient in proper spoken *English* for the Olympic Games.

Last month Air China announced it was recruiting 300 Olympic airline attendants from all over the country. In addition to the conventional standards, good oral English and communication skills were must-haves. (Xie 2007-12-11)

In the last segment from Xie's article, it seems evident that perfect spoken English is the quality Air China looks for in these nation-wide advertisements. To conclude the analysis of Xie's article, it is important for companies to employ personell proficient in *English*, in addition, a mastery of *English* seems to be required in corporate China in general.

6. Commentary and conclusion

The attitudes towards *Putonghua* seem to be different in the two flourishing regions Shanghai and Guangdong province compared with, for example, rural areas, and Beijing and the north provinces in general. It is fairly accurate to say that the languages spoken in Shanghai and Guangdong province have maintained their prestigious status due to socioeconomic advantages and, even more important, these local languages, *Shanghai dialect* (or Shanghai language) and *Cantonese* are used in all parts of these two societies respectively. In contrast to Shanghai and Guangdong, young people in rural or otherwise remote areas are enthusiastic to learn *Putonghua* because it might lead them to a better and wealthier life in their home province or even away to another part of the country. To continue the discussion on *Putonghua*, the support for the Standard Language in Beijing and the north provinces is fundamental and is very unlikely to change because it is the native tongue in these areas and the central government seated in Beijing has immense control over this region. As a final note on *Putonghua*, it should be added that over fifty percent of the population is proficient in the norm but there are still hundreds of millions of people that persist in speaking only their local speech variety, therefore, the PRC appears far from linguistically united but still struggling in diversity and will probably not reach conformity by 2050 as predicted.

The next part is related to public usage of *Shanghai dialect* and *Cantonese*. The two languages are both considered *first languages* (e.g. L1) in their two regions and *Shanghai dialect* is adopted as the medium of instruction in kindergartens in Shanghai and the general interest in the language seems to increase; however, this might relate to its written form. On the topic of spoken *Cantonese*, proficiency in the language is the only method to find employment or otherwise succeed in Guangdong province. However, the educational system in the province attempts to teach *Putonghua* in all grades. Nevertheless, it is hard to tell if there has been any success at all.

Finally, the comments on *English* were many and somewhat two-sided with some people embracing *English* and even welcoming it to substitute scientific terms of *Putonghua* in respected dictionaries of *Modern Standard Chinese* and others with a more conservative

approach to *English*. However, the general attitude towards *English* in the PRC, according to the news articles, is positive and some people believe that knowledge in *English* is essential to land a well-paid and attractive job. The challenge to resolve the research issues for this paper by analyzing news articles was a greater enterprise than first expected. It was assumed that the comments on language issues use would be more straightforward and especially more numerous. However, the collected data contained some valid comment that could be analyzed, but further and more complete studies in this area are needed to produce a wider and more correct view of the language issues in the PRC and maybe interviews would be more suitable research method instead of studying news articles.

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