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**Prestige and the local dialect:
The social role of Shanghainese in Shanghai¹**

Abstract. Shanghai lies in the Wu dialect area in east central China. Whereas Modern Standard Chinese is the prescribed national standard in instruction, broadcasting, and commerce, a specific variety that descended from Wu is the native language of the city. We are accustomed to finding that local varieties experience a diminution of prestige in such circumstances. The social and historical circumstances of Shanghai, however, uniquely create a situation in which this is not the case. In this paper I will briefly discuss the history of the city and its development, trace social attitudes (and ideas of prestige) on the part of its natives, show how the use of the local variety indexes social status and prestige among residents of the city, and provide evidence that the use of the native dialect of Shanghai is neither transitional nor restricted to the spheres heretofore considered Low in the typical diglossia situation.

Introduction

When a local, minority language is used alongside a national variety, especially when the national language is upheld as a standard, the local variety is generally seen to suffer in prestige. In a diglossia situation, as outlined by Ferguson in his groundbreaking article, the two varieties are complementarily distributed among social situations, and the prestige variety is identified as the one used in all “High” circumstances. Most familiar, writes Ferguson, is the situation in

which “many speakers speak their local dialect at home or among family or friends of the same dialect area but use the standard language in communicating with speakers of other dialects or on public occasions” (1959:325).

Fishman elaborates the notion of diglossia further, noting findings that “one set of behaviors, attitudes and values supported and was expressed in one language, [and] another set ... supported and was expressed in the other” (1967:29) and broadening the application of the concept of diglossia to speech communities characterized by “widespread (if not all-pervasive) bilingualism”; in such speech communities the national, standard languages are shown to be used in the “status stressing” spheres (op. cit 31). Fishman also allows for bilingualism without diglossia, which he recognizes, “tends to be transitional both in terms of the linguistic repertoires of speech communities as well as in terms of the speech varieties involved” (op.cit. 30, 34-6).

Kaye emphasizes the “strict complementary distribution of formal vs. informal usage” (2001:117) originally outlined in Ferguson (for rubric, see Ferguson 1959:328-9), and reemphasizes (op. cit. 118) Ferguson’s focus on “two or more varieties of the same language” as distinct from what was formerly called *bilingualism*, “the analogous situation where two distinct (related or unrelated) languages are used side by side throughout a speech community, each with a clearly defined role” (Ferguson 1959:325).

In both the “strict” view of diglossia, as initially formulated by Ferguson, and the more extended conception, as developed by Fishman, where two (or more) coexisting codes are used side by side, typically, the national, standard variety is seen to enjoy prestige, in comparison with which the local one suffers. The situation in Shanghai, however, is quite different.

Language background of Shanghai

The city of Shanghai lies within the Wu dialect area (for dialect distribution in China, see Ramsey 1987:16ff.).² The dialects in this region and the Mandarin Chinese dialects are mutually unintelligible, cf. the Yue dialects of Guangdong (Cantonese). The dialect indigenous to natives of Shanghai is called by its speakers *Shanghaihua* (hereafter, SHH). The standard national variety of Chinese, *putonghua* ‘general (common) language’ (hereafter, PTH), is the language of instruction in schools in Shanghai, and by government mandate, the *lingua franca* for business and public services. Television and radio broadcasts primarily use PTH. All Shanghainese have some degree of competence with PTH, and those younger than a certain age have adult, native competence in PTH (see Angus 2001 for details of PTH teaching and acquisition in Shanghai).³ Nonetheless, SHH remains the language of prestige among its residents, its many immigrants, and business people in the surrounding region.

In this paper I will demonstrate the social attitudes that Shanghainese hold toward their city and the outsiders who go there, and how the use of language serves to index these relationships. Since SHH and its use in and around Shanghai involves social attitudes, and those social attitudes relate to the city itself and its relation to the rest of China, a brief history of the development of the city is in order.

History

Historically, Shanghai was a relatively insignificant village situated near the banks of the Huangpu river, which connects the Changjiang (the Great River) to the north with the Pacific Ocean. After the Nanjing Treaty of 1842, the city’s growth and its rise in importance as a center of trade accelerated. The treaty opened the port of Shanghai to foreign trade and gave Great Britain effective administrative control over the city and its environs (see, for example, *Oxford*

Enc.: 458, 676). Since that time (despite persisting official resentment over the “unequal” nature of the treaty), Shanghai has been developing economically at a rapid pace. Throughout the last several centuries the culture of China proper has remained moribund, backward looking (see Waley 1956:17, 18 for an example of ancestor worship and its influence in Chinese thought). In Shanghai, however, the influence of the foreign (European) powers has been strongly felt. Modern European style buildings were erected, early examples of which still stand overlooking the Huangpu river, and the city’s skyline is magnificent to behold. Western modernizations and conveniences were introduced early into the daily lives of many Shanghainese, who now number more than 13 million. Shanghai became the center of manufacturing for the nation; during the 1990's its industrial output constituted more than one-eighth of that of all of China, and its port on the Huangpu River is the busiest in all Asia. Popular and modern arts flourished in Shanghai during the first half of the twentieth century, and the city has long been the fashion capital of China. Shanghai women, for example, are notable for their fashion awareness and responsiveness to new trends (see Ramsey 1987:89 for an anecdote). As Shanghai developed economically and grew in size and importance, so its language grew apart from the other Wu dialects.

Much of China has been engaged in modernizations in recent years, but it is to be noted that it is Shanghai that has taken the lead in this regard (see n. 13). One frequently identified social attitude that distinguishes Shanghai natives in general from the rest of their countrymen is a greater degree of open-minded receptivity to innovations and new ideas than seen in Chinese citizens elsewhere.⁴

A direct consequence of Shanghai’s development and of the foreign influence that to an extent has driven it is a higher degree of prosperity in comparison with the interior provinces.

The Shanghainese have been able to enjoy a generally higher standard of living, with more conveniences and amenities than are found in the interior. Accompanying the higher standard of living is what natives refer to as a more “civilized” level of conduct and deportment.⁵ The tremendous growth of the city and expansion of its economy has attracted a great number of immigrants, outsiders drawn to Shanghai for economic benefits.

Social attitudes and language choice

To study the social attitudes toward language use on the part of Shanghai residents, a survey was developed and native (Shanghainese) informants were recruited to conduct interviews. Any student attempting to elicit data regarding social attitudes toward language, of course, treads slippery ground. Milroy and Milroy express the well-known admonition that “it seems to be virtually impossible to rely on speakers’ reports of ... their attitudes to usage, so we cannot easily find out what people actually think” (1985:18). One of my primary informants, for example, reported to me that she believes that several subjects she interviewed were attempting to appear “democratic” by giving somewhat egalitarian (politically correct) responses. Nonetheless, from the pattern of responses and some frank comments and complaints from numerous informants, the social attitudes held by and about Shanghai people and the prestige that the use of the SHH indexes do emerge.

Social attitudes have developed among the people of Shanghai associated with the city itself. ‘George’ Kong majored in English at a major university in Shanghai and serves as general manager of a large shipping company there. Kong moved to Shanghai with his parents when he was a small child. He expresses the oft-heard theme that the Shanghainese feel prejudice toward outsiders as a social response to increasingly congested conditions in the city, given the city’s higher standard of living: “It’s already crowded enough – why do you come here and make it

more crowded?” He says that outsiders bring a lower standard of living with them and degrade the living standard. On the other hand, they take jobs that the Shanghainese do not want, and to this extent they are welcome, albeit ambivalently. But, he says, that professionals and office workers come to the city and compete for jobs with the locals is not acceptable to many Shanghainese.

Jason Tang, a Shanghai native and former resident of the United States in his middle thirties, reports that outsiders work in heavy construction and dirty maintenance jobs, as waiters and waitresses, hotel maids and domestics, job categories considered beneath many Shanghai natives.⁶ He believes that over the years there has been a “huge” social and cultural difference between Shanghai people and outsiders.⁷

Along similar lines, a university student of my acquaintance, who was born in Shanghai and whose parents are lower (working) middle class, remarked to me candidly that she refused to live in the dormitory because she thought the conditions were too “primitive” for her. (Unheated walk-up dormitory rooms, where six girls live in bunks, sharing two study tables in their room and a cold water lavatory and shower with the rest of the floor, where laundry is washed by hand and hung anywhere there is room, reflect typical living conditions nationally.)

An instructor at a highly regarded university has lived in both Beijing, the national capital, and Shanghai as an adult. He has acquired a fair receptive competence in SHH, but he does not speak it. He states that over the time he has lived in Shanghai, the “Shanghai attitude” has rubbed off on him, too. He feels that the city is more developed, that the standard of living is higher, and that the city is more open to innovation, new influences, and new ideas than elsewhere in China. He compares Shanghai and Beijing: “Shanghai is a village of cities; Beijing is a city of villages.” (In the Chinese rendition, Beijing suffers in the comparison.) By

associating with the people of Shanghai, he says, he too has developed a “feeling of superiority” to Chinese who live in other parts of the country. He says the Shanghainese look down on *waidiren* (lit., ‘outside area person’), and that he too has acquired that “attitude,” which he notices when he travels to his home village. These attitudes are revealed in the view reflected by Shanghai native Zhou Junyan, an accountant in his 20's, that the development of the city requires more labor than the Shanghainese are willing to do, because of “their natural sense of superiority.”

Informant Zhang Ying (Joy) notes, “it is quite natural to be quite proud of one's city or province, everyone is, but in Shanghai they despise people from other areas.” A lawyer in his 40's, for example, says outright, “I do not like *waidiren*.” He feels there are too many of them in Shanghai, and it is making the job market too competitive. He says, “As a Shanghai person, I feel proud of myself. I think Shanghai people are better than those from other places in China ... What's more,” he adds, “as a lawyer I have seen that more and more crimes have been committed by those *waidiren* in recent years ... public safety has become worse because of them.”

Zhang Rongxian, a 58 year old accountant, agrees that the labor market in the city needs the outsiders, yet she feels that “their uncultured behavior is harmful to the image of Shanghai.” She complains of temporary houses built illegally and unsafely, lay-offs among Shanghai workers due to competition from outsiders, and such behavior as littering. She says, “when I see them do something uncivilized, such as littering, I look down on them.”⁸

Yang Yuli, herself a *waidiren* who obtained a Master's Degree in English from a well-known Shanghai university, recalls that a shoe mender who operated an outdoor stall near the side gate of her university behaved toward her in a superior, insolent manner. “How can such a

person,” she exclaims, “working outdoors year-round, repairing my shoes, imagine himself superior to me in any way!” (Traditionally students enjoy relatively high social status; thus this behavior was particularly galling to her.)

Discrimination against outsiders has been common in the city. When Kong first entered school, he says, the other children ignored him. In order to “fit in”, he endeavored to learn SHH. Chen Yingying, a student at a national university located in Shanghai, relates that she once asked directions of a ticket seller on a Shanghai bus. That woman failed (or affected not) to understand Chen’s PTH, and did not help her. As the student stepped off the bus, she heard the woman contemptuously mutter, “*wadinin!*” (In standard pinyin orthography, *waidiren* represents the PTH word; *wadinin* phonetically captures the Shanghai word used for outsiders.)

Another university student, Jin Yuanhan, relates an experience of her girlfriend from Dalian, in the north of China. The girl “spoke to the shop assistant in PTH quite loud, and she did not move; but another woman’s gentle words in SHH had a better effect.” Xu Jinghua, a university teacher, says “sometimes police raid the markets and catch unlicensed peddlers. They will probably let the Shanghai peddlers go, but not the others.”

Zhang Wei, who holds a Master’s Degree in English and who served for several years as an editor for the *Beijing Ribao* ‘*Beijing Daily*’, lived in Shanghai for years as both a student and a newspaper employee. He reports that in the workplace, outsiders are avoided or ignored by Shanghai citizens⁹, and that Shanghai residents are likely to be hired or promoted in preference to outsiders.

Attitudes in a large social group, however, are seldom unanimous, and not always unambiguous. Zhou Zhiqing, 39, a manager in a local company, says,

My theory is that intelligent people are always clever, wherever they are. A *waidiren* can always become a big boss in Shanghai, even richer than us. In

our company, I saw *waidiren* become rich with their business mind. Of course, many of them are still working hard for others.

He goes on to remark that “all of the *waidiren*, whether boss or worker, have the mentality of small-scale farming, which means they ‘want to get fish as well as a bear’s paw’.” (referring to a proverbial saying, *yu he xiong zhang bu neng jian de* lit., ‘you cannot have both a fish and a bear’s paw’, i.e., ‘you must make a wise choice’ [but naturally, one should choose the bear’s paw, I am told, traditionally one of the most treasured of dishes in China]). Zhou thus complains that if he pays his employees ¥ 1 for an hour’s overtime, next time they want ¥ 2. Implicit in Zhou’s remarks is his view of the category ‘them’, over against ‘us’.

Zhou Xinhua, a shop assistant in her 40s with a high school education, comments,

waidiren have been divided into good ones and bad ones. Many high buildings and overpasses were built with their hands, but those whose behavior is uncivilized, including poor hygiene habits like spitting on the bus, leave a bad impression on the Shanghainese – then they look down on the *waidiren*.

Zhu Haijing, 20, a secretary with a community college education, tells us,

there are two types of *waidiren* in Shanghai. One has received a high level of education, and wants to find more opportunity for their careers, and I have a good feeling for them. The other sort comes to Shanghai just to stuff their stomachs. They pursue the fantasy that Shanghai is a place covered with gold. Some of them begin to idle around, even become thieves.

Some Shanghainese do not support such attitudes. Zhou Xiaoyan, an accountant in his 20s, says, “Humans are created equal. I do not think the superior attitude of the Shanghainese is moral.” Tong Yongjing, 29, a nurse, married an outsider from Shandong province. She relates,

He is excellent as a doctor and husband. At first my parents did not want me to marry a *waidiren*, but afterward they have liked him more and more ... I am very happy. I think Shanghai people are too proud of themselves. They have a lot of prejudice towards *waidiren*. They should realize that such an attitude is unfair and narrow-minded.

Zhou Ming, a 19-year-old office assistant with some professional school training, protests,

I think this question [about how Shanghai people feel about *waidiren* coming here] is provocative. *Waidiren* and Shanghainese are Chinese. I do not know what the difference is. They are not foreigners from other countries ... I will not purposely watch them twice ... Shanghai is opening up ... the focal point is they do contribute to Shanghai, isn't that right?

Such "democratic" sentiments contradict a normative attitude in a city where a primary marker of social difference is whether one is or is not a native.

One fact, social and linguistic, must be pointed out. PTH *waidiren* 'person from another place' corresponds to SHH *wadinin*, as already noted, but the latter has a far different connotation. The SHH form, according to every native speaker informant I queried, is generally pejorative. Thus, when Chen Yingying was called '*wadinin*' by the ticket seller on the bus, she was the recipient of a social slur. (Numerous possibilities avail for periphrastically conveying the denotation of geographic origin without using the derogatory word. Admittedly, our questions were phrased with PTH *waidiren*, which translates into the SHH form, in order to focus on the topic and any attitudes associated with it; nonetheless, that the word occurs readily and repeatedly in the mouths of even the most "democratic" of our respondents speaks volumes about the social attitudes and social distinctions involved in its use.

The social attitudes associated with residing in the city find expression through the choice of language. We will recall that PTH is the language of instruction, as mandated by the central government, but stories abound of schoolteachers who in years past eschewed the national standard language out of preference for SHH. Tales also circulate of Shanghai natives who were sent to distant places during the cultural revolution and who married and had children there (some with speakers of other varieties), but when they brought their families back to Shanghai, their children were fluent in SHH. The point of these stories is the insistence by these parents that their children, regardless of the place they are forced to live, be able to speak SHH natively.

Although PTH is also mandated for use in business and service, I frequently heard ticket sellers on the bus lines (virtually all of whom are young enough to have been educated in PTH) calling, 'buy your tickets!' and so on in SHH.¹⁰ Liu Minkun, a software engineer in his middle forties, notes that when he visits stores and shops, the staff regularly use SHH with him.

There are other social consequences associated with the use of the variety. Zhu Haijing says that she uses SHH in the city, but that in other places she feels it is offensive to do so, and she relates an experience of traveling by bus outside Shanghai when some Shanghai people boarded and loudly spoke in SHH; Zhu thought that they were showing off their status, and that they looked down on the other passengers. Zhang, the accountant, reflects a general attitude when he states, "Shanghai is a big, international city, and I feel proud when I speak my language." The other side of the social distance coin is pointed out by Zhou Xiaoyan and Zhou Junyan: "Shanghainese are considered too shrewd by many others, so when we travel to another city, we don't use Shanghai dialect. If they know we are Shanghainese, we will be treated carefully and cautiously, which makes trouble for us."

Lin claims to have "no special feeling while speaking Shanghai dialect" and makes clear that there is no "inconvenience for me while using Chinese," yet he does "admit that [he] feels more comfortable using Shanghai dialect to communicate to people."

This sensation of "comfort" when using the local language is, no doubt, intuitively recognized by all students of language. As Gumperz articulates it, "shared history and communicative experience are important factors in facilitating conversational cooperation" (1982:144). When this is present, a sensation of "comfort" is possible. Absent such "shared history and communicative experience," it seems to me, prejudicial stereotypes may be keyed, and at minimum, an awareness of *otherness* among the conversationalists is foregrounded. Thus

when Zhang Caigen, age 51, a high school graduate and professional driver, says “I think it is a kind of instinct for me to speak Shanghai dialect. We need a way to communicate in daily life,” he articulates a fact that is linguistic and social: it is not *language*, in itself, that provides a satisfying means of communication, but *our* language, spoken *here*, by *us*.

The natives of Shanghai appear to be conscious of a world populated by “us,” the native population of the city, and “them,” immigrants and outsiders (*wadinin*). In the outdoor markets, where most of the daily shopping for fish, vegetables, meats, and products used in the home is done, the vast majority of peddlers come to the city from outside it. Xu comments,

“The Shanghainese are well-known for their shrewdness, but I do not think that is exactly a problem we [Shanghainese] have created. We go to the market every morning. We are used to bargaining with the peddlers because we do not trust them ... we are afraid of being overcharged, and [aggressive] bargaining is a way of protecting ourselves.”

Steve, a university student, says that within the area of Shanghai, the speaker of SHH will “have a much greater advantage” than the Mandarin speaker, “It is most likely that the dialect speaker will get a good bargain when buying something ... where a Mandarin speaker would be cheated out of some money.” Thus, it seems that the social attitudes (of and toward the Shanghainese) work both ways.

In Shanghai, it is the use of SHH that indexes the distinction between natives and outsiders. Cen Ying, a university student in Shanghai, says, “I am a foreigner to my Shanghainese classmates because I did not come to Shanghai until I entered the university ... I am always overwhelmed by the feeling that I am a foreigner” [because she does not speak the language]. Liu says when he meets a person for the first time he generally uses SHH, and if the person does not answer, or answers in PTH, he recognizes the person as an outsider.¹¹ Tang says that one may distinguish a Shanghai person by their face (physical characteristics), their clothing,

or perhaps by their name, but in all cases, it is the use of SHH that unequivocally marks the distinction.

Cen Ying goes on to relate her perception of the very close association between the social attitudes of and toward Shanghai people and their language, and how its use serves to distinguish social groups, “The too-widely spoken Shanghai dialect seems to declare its superiority over other dialects, and the people, by always speaking in their native dialect, seem to distinguish themselves from those who cannot speak it ... The exclusiveness of the Shanghai dialect prevents me from identifying with its people and culture.” Zhou Sheng, another university student, sums it up very succinctly: “The Shanghainese usually regard themselves superior to others, and Shanghai dialect is a most powerful point to differentiate Shanghainese from non-Shanghainese.”

The use of SHH serves also to index attitudes socially and in the workplace. Liu reports that people who cannot use SHH are considered outsiders in the workplace, and they are not included in close-knit groups for friendship and camaraderie. He says that, as shop assistants address him in SHH, there, too, he shares the closer sense of camaraderie and easy friendship enjoyed by the Shanghainese.¹² Robin, a Shanghai native, university student, and foreign relations intern, states that when a Shanghai person meets another person for the first time, and they both speak SHH, they feel closer, “I am likely to feel that he is my friend.” But if the other does not speak it, “I do not trust him so much.”

Even among children, the distinction is to be felt. Kong relates that when he entered school, the other children ignored him. In order to “fit in”, he endeavored to learn SHH, and he can use it fluently. (His native Shanghai friends, however, remind me that his SHH is “not that good”, i.e., not native-like).

On their face, these attitudes seem to be founded on social distinctions arising from *a priori* identification of social categories; there may, however, be a more fundamental linguistic component as well. It is well known that daily language use in the casual register involves both propositional, open-ended (infinitely variable) utterances and those which are recurrent and formulaic in given social situations. Thus, basing our understanding of the sensation of “us” and “them” on an identification of social categories masks an important communicative principle: “formulaic phrases reflect indirect conversational strategies that make conditions favorable to establishing personal contact and negotiating shared interpretations” (Gumperz 1982:134). Native speakers of a language variety share sensitivity to style conventions and cultural backgrounds which facilitate “analysis of interactive processes by which participants negotiate interpretations” (ibid. 130). Those lacking a native competence with SHH, whatever else they lack socially or culturally, also lack access to these strategies and analyses.

Languages may be learned, of course, and just as the people of Shanghai learn PTH in schools in order to participate in the national economy and culture, so immigrants to the city learn to use SHH. Lu Wubin, a university student and Shanghai native, points out that many immigrants learn to use SHH to facilitate communication, as did Kong. But using the dialect “to fit in” and “to facilitate communication” is only part of the story. Zhou Xiaoyan remarks,

“after *waidiren* have established an economic base, they begin to change their shabby appearance. In order to be more like regular Shanghainese, they try to learn the language. They are pursuing higher status.”

Zhou Xinhua points out,

“it is normal for Shanghainese to speak Shanghai dialect. The [SHH] used by *waidiren* is below standard. But that, after all, stands for a sense of emotion toward Shanghai. They want to be half Shanghainese.”

Thus, outsiders seem particularly sensitive to the indexicality of the language in the Shanghai social scheme.

We have seen, from these data collected from residents of Shanghai—working people and students representing various elements of Shanghai society—and nonnatives of the city, that the people of Shanghai share typical (and stereotypical) social attitudes toward themselves and outsiders that are associated with the history of the city and its relation to the rest of China, that these attitudes result in perceptions of social distance between the respective peoples and at least occasional acts of discrimination stemming there from, and that it is the use of SHH which indexes these attitudes and relations. But we have also seen that to leave it at that would fail to recognize the influence of fundamental social processes involved in language use within a speech community.

The efforts of outsiders to learn and use SHH seem to be less than completely successful in achieving status and acceptance. Zhou Xinhua relates, “I suppose they feel proud when using [SHH]. But that for me is nothing at all – I am a native.” Zhou Xiaoyan likewise says, “As a Shanghainese, I also can learn some dialects from other cities – it’s normal. So if *waidiren* can speak Shanghai dialect, I will not feel disgusted, although I will not feel genial, either.” Part of this lack of success in using the dialect may be attributed to social difference. Zhou Junyan acknowledges,

some *waidiren* can speak Shanghai dialect well after living here for a long time ... [but] his temperament does not change as well. I mean, a person’s behavior will not change because his language has changed. That relates to one’s knowledge, perception, and education.

Apparently some Shanghainese feel, as the old American cliché says, “one can take boy out of the country, but one can’t take the country out of the boy.” The marking of status that lies on the

surface of these remarks overlays the communicative realities that imbue any language use situation. Zhu puts it this way:

I would prefer that *waidiren* speak Mandarin Chinese that sounds good. It is unnecessary for them to go to all the trouble to learn Shanghai dialect ... I had a classmate who came from Harbin (a city far to the northeast), and who speaks a dialect of Mandarin, but she wanted to be regarded as a Shanghainese, so she changed into Shanghai dialect, which sounds strange in her mouth.

Zhu goes on to complain, “They cannot pronounce SHH standardly.” Thus, even their use of SHH sets the outsiders apart. It is true that the phonological system of Shanghai is unique among the dialects of the Chinese group (because of the occurrence of voiced stops and palatals, among others). For the phonemic inventory of SHH and a comparison of consonants among the major dialects of the Chinese group, see Forest 1958 194-238; Ramsey 1987:90-3.

But phonological accuracy is not the whole picture. Underlying the structural realities of the language is the principle that “understanding of communicative strategies is ... less a matter of length of residence than of communicative experience” (Gumperz 1982:140). Nonnative speakers “often learn the clause level grammar of another language, but in using it they rely on their own native discourse conventions” (ibid. 152). Speakers in a community rely on what Gumperz defines as “contextualization cues”, features of “linguistic form that contribute to the signaling of contextual presuppositions” (ibid. 131). Learners intent on using the language for utilitarian and status reasons may not readily pick up on these cues, for as Gumperz points out, “the meanings of contextualization cues are implicit” (ibid.). It may well be the case that how the use of SHH marks insider/outsider status may relate as much to how well (or how poorly) a learner may acquire the communication conventions that native speakers use and share. Here we

may recall the failed efforts of Jin Yuanhan's Dalian friend to communicate to the shop assistant when the Shanghai native's "gentle words" proved effective.

We cannot overlook the prosodic and discourse conventions of a variety. Learners may master the "vocabulary, grammar, and segmental phonology" of the target language, but differences in intonation do affect the success of utterances, (for discussion, see Gumperz 1982:100-29). Furthermore, "different norms of politeness and different expectations as to language use in different speech events ... may affect perceptions" (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 3-4). Lacking this essential competence, outsiders remain marked as such. In contrast, young men and women who were born in distant provinces but grew up speaking SHH with their parent(s), such as Andrew, who grew up in Jiang Xi province, still function, sociolinguistically, as insiders when they return to Shanghai.

So it is that Zhang says, "It is a kind of freedom for people to choose the language they like to use, but unavoidably there is some local accent when [outsiders] try to speak Shanghai language. That is the only difference, I think," But what a difference it is! An international student from Vietnam put this very well in commenting about the parallel situation of immigrant children talking with residents of the country where their mother tongue is the native language: "when I speak in Vietnamese with my cousins (Vietnamese-Americans who grew up in the United States), it feels like I am speaking with foreigners."

Using the language is one thing. Using it in the same way, to do the same things, is another. It cannot be assumed that among the speakers of the several dialects of the Chinese language group the same meanings are conveyed according to the same rules and formulas, in the same ways, using the same prosodic and discourse conventions.¹³ For "all verbal behavior is governed by social norms specifying participant roles, rights and duties vis-a-vis each other,

permissible topics, appropriate ways of speaking ... such norms are context and network specific” (Gumperz 182:165). Outsiders seeking to “pick up” SHH through the general course of their lives in the city are not likely to be sensitive to and to absorb the context- and network-specific norms and cues that govern its use. Thus Zhang Wei says a native speaker of SHH recognizes “his own” according to natural fluency in the use of SHH. Outsiders may learn the words, but as the old saying goes, they don’t learn the tune.

Prestige and High use

A further point remains with respect to the prestige associated with the use of SHH in “status stressing” spheres vis-a-vis the usual distribution of varieties in a diglossic language environment. The use of PTH in schools, broadcasting, and government speech is mandated by national policy, and it is in the utilitarian spirit of achieving and maintaining educational and economic success, not of prestige in its usual sense, that Shanghai natives embrace PTH. In the long-standing traditional social hierarchy of the city, except for some foreigners (who enjoy a separate status as honored guests) and famous people of particular accomplishment, those who enjoy the most prestige in Shanghai are the business and social leaders, who by virtue of their wealth, influence, family history, and connections, participate in the networks that control affairs. Their children may have educated, adult competence in PTH, but their networks function most fluidly in SHH. Thus, Jin Yuanhan relates, because Shanghai has long dominated the region economically¹⁴, it is SHH that has been adopted as a *lingua franca*, in preference to PTH.

In contrast to the pattern of High and Low distribution usually observed between local and national, standard varieties, SHH displaces PTH in some spheres generally regarded as High. Zhang Wei recounts that at one time the three senior managing editors of the Beijing Daily were Shanghai men. During that time, board meetings were conducted in SHH (in defiance of

national and newspaper policy). Their attitude, Zhang says, was, “if you can’t understand the Shanghai language, too bad.”

Paradoxically, in a sphere traditionally regarded as ‘Low’, love talk among the young, my informants report that among their acquaintances, PTH is used. Television is broadcast in PTH, and the many soap operas have taught amorous young adults the basic vocabulary and discourse conventions of love talk. Informants suggest that it is because the PTH variety is already to that extent familiar in this register that young lovers employ it when cupid strikes.

There is at least anecdotal evidence that the social situation is changing to some degree. The testimony of some of our younger informants demonstrates that Joy Zhang is probably right when she says that “discrimination toward *waidiren* really exists, but [the tendency] is gradually weakening in the younger generation.” She accounts for this in part with the observation that the younger Shanghainese focus more on the practical benefits that outsiders bring to the city. Another factor may be that many Shanghai young people attend universities and share dormitories with natives of the several provinces, with whom they develop close relationships.¹⁵

Summary

The economic and social history of Shanghai uniquely influences traditional social attitudes toward outsiders and, correspondingly, toward the use of the local language. Shanghai has led the way in economic development and social modernization, which is reflected in what is generally recognized as a higher standard of living. Citizens of Shanghai perceive that they occupy a position of prestige in relation to their countrymen, and that is reflected in the efforts by business people in the Shanghai sphere of influence to acquire and use SHH in commerce and in a national leadership dominated by individuals whose backgrounds lie in Shanghai.

It is the use of SHH that indexes status as native or as *waidiren* and all the distinctions that follow there from. Life in the city has traditionally functioned along networks using SHH. Shanghai is a bilingual city (and for those who aspire to good jobs in foreign companies, a trilingual one), but the typical distribution associated with diglossia does not occur. SHH is the language of choice for citizens of Shanghai, regardless of socio-economic status, in spheres where PTH is not enjoined by the national government. SHH was used during newspaper board meetings, when the managing editors were Shanghai men. On the other hand, the typically LOW sphere of causal love talk among the young is frequently undertaken in PTH.

Conclusion

Shanghai natives embrace PTH to attain and maintain personal economic success and in so doing sustain prominence in the national economy. I see this not as acquiescence to a prestige, majority group enjoining its socially superior language on the local minority, but as a concession of the Shanghainese to the world they have grown into, made for utilitarian purposes. For in the end it is groups of speakers, not languages, which have prestige. The prestige associated with a language is a function of the social and/or geographical prestige enjoyed by its speakers. For this reason, although it is frequently observed that local languages are displaced by national, standard varieties, I cannot foresee such an eventuality in Shanghai.

Notes

¹ The assistance of native speaker informants Zhang Ying (Joy Zhang) and Lin Yan (Linda Lin) was indispensable in soliciting data using Shanghai language from some 'regular citizens' of Shanghai, who have jobs in Shanghai companies, who do not know English, and who have no association with the universities, people who otherwise are inaccessible to the author.

² The major dialects of the Chinese language group are mutually unintelligible, and according to that criterion may be seen as different languages; due to political and social considerations, however, the Chinese traditionally regard their several speech varieties as dialects, and I see no reason not to follow that convention here.

³ It should be pointed out that one of the five subjects that constitute the national university entrance exam is PTH. Also, that nationally about one in 20 middle school graduates are accepted at a university, whereas, as the common wisdom has it, about one in two Shanghai students are accepted.

⁴ Numerous informants, in fact, offer the history of foreign influence as an explanation for the palpable difference between the attitudes of the Shanghainese and other Chinese citizens toward new ideas.

⁵ An anecdote may illuminate this point. While I was visiting Yangzhou, a city in Jiangsu province about a four-hour bus ride from Shanghai, my companion and I ate in an upscale restaurant, appointed with gleaming tile floors and brass-plated fixtures, situated near two large hotels and a canal connecting to a popular tourist attraction. A waiter standing near our section suddenly bent forward at the waist, expectorated on the floor, and covered the material with his foot, giving it a slight swirling movement. No one present appeared to think anything of it. Back in Shanghai, I asked a friend what the reaction to that behavior would have been in a Shanghai restaurant; my friend thought that the server would have been discharged on the spot.

⁶ Even among prostitutes, Tang says, a distinction is found. Shanghai women working as prostitutes are more likely to serve at the high end of the market, in the ¥1,000 or ¥2,000 (equal to more than a month's salary for a hotel or restaurant service job) per night category, while women from the countryside are more likely to work at the bottom level, sometimes for as little as ¥10 (about \$1.25) per time.

⁷ I can offer an anecdote when I inadvertently triggered this issue during a conversation with an immigrant to the city and a native. In the company of the immigrant and a Shanghai native, I mentioned the old race rack that formerly occupied the land on which the center of modern Shanghai culture (People's Park, with the Shanghai Museum, the city government buildings, the Grand Theatre, and the Shanghai Exposition) now stands. The immigrant, who occupies a high position in a foreign company in Shanghai, was incredulous, but the native confirmed the fact. I think that the immigrant's subsequent embarrassment can be attributed less to not having known the facts than to the immediate perception of social distance vis-a-vis place of origin that she and the local experienced.

⁸ To illustrate, as I was walking along a Shanghai street recently behind a young woman who, by her dress and manner of walking, struck me as having come from the countryside, I saw her raise her right hand and let a half dozen strips of paper flutter to the ground behind her as she walked. I could not help recalling the remarks of Zhang Rongxian when I observed this.

⁹ In China, one is a citizen (*hukou*) of the city or county of one's birth. Immigrants to a city retain their original citizenship, except under certain circumstances.

¹⁰ This topic reminds me of an incident on a bus when I wanted to test my pronunciation of some SHH vocabulary; I asked the ticket seller a question about the line's schedule, code switching to the target vocabulary. She responded by "Oh, you speak Chinese so well!" (Apparently not noticing the code-switching as such, simply as 'good Chinese').

¹¹ An interesting anecdote occurred concerning this point. I arranged to send a book to a university student, a Shanghai native, via Liu's home, and the student went to the home to retrieve it. Later, when I mentioned the young woman to him and identified her as a 'Shanghai person', Liu was astonished, as she neither used SHH during their meeting nor spoke PTH with the typical SHH influence. Throughout her university experience, associating with her circle of friends from the provinces, and her later work experience, she became accustomed to using PTH as her primary means of communication. Also, because of her particular talent for monitoring her pronunciation, she bears only minimal 'Shanghai accent' in her oral PTH. Thus he did not recognize her as Shanghainese. Clearly he was polite and friendly, but a measure of warmth and conviviality was absent from the exchange that would have been present otherwise, and just as clearly, he experienced some embarrassment therefore.

¹² Here I can supply a personal anecdote. On a crowded bus I passed money, change, and a ticket between a passenger and the ticket seller. The ticket seller quickly said '*siaya nong*', 'thank you' in SHH, but on noticing my foreign face, immediately supplied '*xiexie*' (the PTH form). The SHH form felt warm and close, as though I had done a small kindness for an intimate; in contrast, the PTH form sounded formal, correct and distant. The point here is that 'thank you' is used to do different things among the dialects.

¹³ Among my acquaintances are a young man who is a native speaker of Taiwanese and his Cantonese-speaking wife. My friend related to me that when he first met his (Cantonese speaking) in-laws-to-be, he asked his wife why they argued and fought all the time, such was his interpretation of their language behavior, based on the prosodics of the different dialect.

¹⁴ And in the last decades, the national political sphere as well. Party Secretary and Premier Jiang Zheming and former Secretary Zhou Enlai both hail from the Shanghai sphere of influence and rose in national politics through their work in Shanghai. It is to be borne in mind that Shanghai, over the past century and a half, has achieved leadership in the nation's economy and commerce.

¹⁵ In the typical dormitory, six students live in very close proximity, and as the dormitory assignments typically extend through the entire four-year period, strong relationships of mutual dependence and close cooperation develop. One may hear anecdotes about dormitory-mates learning features of each other's dialects for use in various communicative situations and as a form of amusement; one also, however, hears anecdotes of Shanghai students in a dormitory pairing off to the exclusion of others.

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