Variation in the Production and Perception of Regional Putonghua in Ningbo, China

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Background

Variationist sociolinguistics has benefitted from a combination of production and perception data (Drager, 2009; Labov, 1972; Walker, 2014), which not only offers a fuller picture of the variation in question, but also contributes to our theoretical understanding of, for example, the mechanism of indexicality (Campbell-Kibler, 2009, 2010).

• To understand language variation in contact variety(-ies) of Putonghua (standard Chinese) better by linking speakers’ production and perception.
• To investigate how social meanings are conveyed for different features in the same variety.

Produced and perception data from young adult speakers of Ningbo Putonghua, Putonghua and Ningbonese/Wu in Eastern China.
(non-standard) phonetic/phonological merger in Ningbo Putonghua.

Perception

Participants: 310 responses (80 from men, 167 from women, mean age: 22.6)
Matched guise experiment:
Qi shi/si wo jianguo zuotian zai gongjiatou zan peng/pen daodenei jige
actually I meet-PP yesterday at bus stop Bump-DE those several-CL
ren, zui niangjing/qinde neige over hui chou/cou yan.
person most young-DE that-CL occasionally can smoke-cigarette
‘I have actually met those people we bumped into at the bus stop yesterday, the youngest one smoked occasionally.’

Linear regression: [rating ~ presence/absence of target variant]

Results (Significant for S/SH)
• Status: (PCA) Standard + Educated + Leadership + Quality (suzhi)
• Formality
• Occupation

Results (Non-Significant)
• Solidarity: (PCA) Familiar + Gentle
• Femininity
• Localness

Summary

• In perception, use of SH (retroflex variants) associated with higher status, greater formality, better occupations
  ➢ SH = the ‘standard’ variant: more standard = more overt prestige
  ➢ -N/NG not associated with overt prestige
• Neither S/SH nor -N/NG linked to solidarity, femininity or localness
  ➢ ‘Standard’ and local variants enjoy the same level of solidarity.
  ➢ Surprising yet consistent with previous findings on regional Putonghua varieties (Chong & Tan, 2013; Zhang, 1990; Zhao, 2018).
  ➢ Supralocal variable shared by many Southern varieties?
• Speakers, especially women avoid
  ➢ less prestigious S variant for S/SH
  ➢ Not the -N variant for -N/NG
  ➢ Gaining social status while not penalised on solidarity dimension

Production

Participants: 44 university students in Ningbo (22 women & 20 men).
Data: 44 Sociolinguistic interviews with all participants (~45 hours total)
Social factor: gender
Variables:
• (merger = local/non-standard)
  ➢ dental-retroflex fricative/affricates /s/~/ʃ/., /ts/~/ʈʂ/ & /tsʰ/~/ʈʂʰ/ (S/SH)
  ➢ alveolar/velar nasal finals /n/~/ŋ/ (N/NG).

Mixed-effect logistic regression: [presence/absence of target variant ~ gender]

Results
• 10 women & 8 men (2200 tokens)
• Overall, more (-N) than (S)
  ➢ -N/-NG merger > S/SH merger

Data analysis:

• Women use more -SH than men, while no significant gender differences for -N/-NG.