

Original Paper

An Ecolinguistic Perspective Study on Linguistic Resources

Emotions of Migrants in Huizhou

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Abstract

Mobility has received burgeoning attention in social science studies, and it is of great significance to the academic research to migrants' dialects in China. Most research shows that individuals have a strong emotional attachment to their first language. However, in this study, from the perspective of ecology, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the experience and emotional attitudes of immigrants living in Huizhou city, Guangdong Province. Although immigrants take their native language as a symbol of their early life memories, other languages could also be a suitable medium for showing their inner world when they move to a new place and use another language. People's positive or negative emotions towards their first or second languages depend on how they interact with their surroundings. Based on the results, this paper provides a deeper understanding of adult migrants' language choices from an ecolinguistic perspective.

Keywords

ecolinguistics, immigrants, emotion, multilingualism

1. Introduction

In recent years, China's economy has been developing rapidly. With the continuous progress of urbanization construction, the advantages of China's resources are gradually appearing in some coastal cities in our country. Due to excellent social, economic and educational resources in coastal cities, the phenomenon of large population flow occurs in our country, for example, the population of the inland area goes to live in coastal areas. Immigrants make a significant contribution to the construction of the cities where they move to live, providing their expertise and even ordinary manual labor. In addition to housing, education and social security issue, migrants may face challenges between their own cultural

practices and traditions and the way of life of the local community. From the macro level, immigrants' recognition of the cities they move to is conducive and significant for promoting local development; From the micro level, immigrants' satisfaction with the city they move to is also conducive and significant to their personal physical health and mental pleasure.

Huizhou City, with a permanent population of 4.75 million, and its numbers of population ranks ninth in the whole Guangdong Province. It covers an area of 11,000 square kilometers and is one of the six cities in the Pearl River Delta. Due to its unique advantages for development, Huizhou's urban economic level is higher than that of the central and western regions in China, however, and there is still a certain gap compared with other cities in Guangdong. Even so, Huizhou's urban competitiveness and attraction to migrants should not be underestimated. Firstly, Huizhou has convenient geographical and transportation advantages, it is close to two developed cities: Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Second, Huizhou has excellent land resources, beautiful natural scenery, fresh air condition and so on. In addition, the people in Huizhou are generally friendly and not exclusive, so that people from all over the nation could have a strong sense of belonging to the city and live in harmony with each other.

According to the "China Urban Vitality Research Report" released in recent years, among all cities in China, Huizhou ranks at the front of the list in terms of population attractiveness. According to the census data released, Huizhou's population increase could be thought to be very considerable.

According to Krashen's the Affective Filtering Hypothesis, learners' affective factors play an important role in language learning. Positive emotions promote language acquisition, while negative emotions limit language input. Delightful emotions can improve learners' agency in language learning. Linguist Dewaele indicate that emotions are at the basis of any learning or absence of learning.

Emotions come from the environment, and the environment refers to the ecosystem in which people live. People all live in an ecosystem and form a language ecosystem within this environment. As large as the influence from the external social environment, the interaction between family members, as small as personal factors, are all indispensable parts of this ecosystem. Ecolinguistics reveals the interaction between language and environment through the study of language ecosystem and the relationship between language, natural ecology and social ecology. The current academic approaches could mainly be divided into two models, one is called "Haugenian Approach/Dogma", and the other is "Hallidayan Approach/Dogma". Previous Studies have shown that teachers can build a positive language ecological environment in terms of external factors such as suitable dressing, so as to mobilize the enthusiasm of language learners to the greatest extent (Xie, 2023). American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner believes that the process of adaptation between human beings who is continuously growing organisms and their changing environment is called the Ecology of Human Development. He divides the environment we live in into five interconnected systems that affect us from direct to indirect. The first is the Microsystem, which refers to the environment in which humans are in direct contact, in which every factor has an impact on the development of individuals, such as peer groups and other close relationships; The second is the Mesosystem, which refers to the interaction between two or more systems. For example,

there are differences in the education methods of teenagers between two micro-systems, school and family. The third is the Exosystems, which refers to some factors in the individual development environment that could not be directly contacted by human, such as work units, schools, educational institutions, etc., they will have a recessive influence on the formation and development of individual thoughts; The fourth is the Macrosystem, that is, the cultural ideology that has existed for a long time in the whole society, such as national customs, people's educational concepts and lifestyles. The fifth is the Chronosystem, which indicate the concept that all human development is within the dimension of time. As a native person of Huizhou, the author has been in contact with many immigrants from various provinces and cities in China since my childhood, and gets along with them harmoniously. In most cases, speaking individuals tend to have stronger feelings for their First Language, especially when people move to a whole new place where a different language is spoken. They have stronger and more positive emotions for their First Language due to homesickness or some other various external factors. However, in the study, immigrants living in Huizhou, Guangdong province, also demonstrate positive emotions toward languages which might not be their first language, such as Cantonese and Hakka. The immigrants who have a good memory during the period when they lived in Huizhou makes their acquisition of Huizhou dialects more smooth. In this article, I will show from an Ecological perspective that people's emotions towards language depend on the interaction between people and their surroundings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Instrument

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted to explore how immigrants' ecological environment affects their feelings towards different languages through semi-structured in-depth interviews. My research subjects are three migrants who have lived in Huizhou for a long time, and their First Language is not Cantonese. I used a method commonly used in social network research, that is, the Friends' Introduction Method, to constantly look for people who meet the criteria of the survey objects through my familiar friends. Our face-to-face and one-on-one interview was conducted in Mandarin. I recorded the interview content with a recorder and then imported it into the computer for word by word analysis through software.

Since it is impossible to predict the respondents' answers to the questions, my interviews are not conducted by determined specific questions and then being answered by the participants. Instead, I design the main interview topics first, and then constantly raise questions according to the specific circumstance during the interviews. In order to find the relationship among the interviewees' experience, language and emotions, my questions are usually some general ones, such as, "Tell me the story of your hometown and what happened after you came to Huizhou", "What kind of city do you think your hometown and Huizhou are respectively", "When you communicate with different people in work time or private life time, what language do you usually use?" These questions are more easy for people to understand and answer, which could release their feeling and I could get more effective information during the interview.

2.2 Background Information of the Participants

The first interview subject, her name is Dalin, her husband is a native person of Huizhou, and she is proficient in Guangdong dialects. She is a native of Fuzhou, Fujian province, she came to live in Huizhou in the last century. And she is now 52-year-old. In Fuzhou, she worked as a laborer, after getting married she became a housewife briefly, and then make herself into a job as a preschool teacher. She can understand and use Cantonese fluently.

The second interviewee is Xiao He, a 28-year-old physical education teacher from Yiyang City, Hunan Province. After graduating from university, she came to Huizhou to live and acculturate very well. She has many good friends in Huizhou and can understand Guangdong dialects.

The third interviewee is Xie, a 31-year-old doctor who came to Huizhou in 2012 and has been living there for 12 years. She has a happy family of her own in Huizhou, with a handsome husband and a lovely daughter. When she was a young girl, she had known from the social media that Huizhou is a very inclusive and livable city, so she chose to move from her hometown of Guangyuan, Sichuan province, to live in Huizhou after graduating from university. She is also able to understand and skillfully use the Cantonese dialect, she also said that because of living in Guangdong for a long time, she has a deep emotional connection with Huizhou, even people said her Mandarin pronunciation have a strong Cantonese accent which makes her feel like a native, she is not bothered by this, but found it very interesting.

3. Result

3.1 The First Interviewee

Dalin is the mother of Liu Qianhui, a good friend of the author when I was in college. Due to the factors of her growing environment, Liu Qianhui could proficiently master Mandarin, English, Cantonese, Hakka dialects and Fujian dialects, which is in line with the author's research on immigration and multilingual environment, so I immediately contacted my friend's mother. Born in Fujian province, Dalin lived in Huizhou after she got married with her husband. They had a very harmonious romantic relationship and a happy family. In her household with her husband and two daughters, she communicates most frequently with her family in Mandarin, and exclusively with her own family who are living in Fuzhou in Hokkien. She said that after coming to Huizhou to live, the neighbors who are near where she lived and her husband and his family all spoke Hakka dialect, so she gradually learned Hakka dialect in the process of communicating with everyone. For her, learning Cantonese is a very convenient and happy thing. For example, in daily life, when she needs to go to the supermarket to buy goods, she can communicate with people in Cantonese. When she is chatting gossip with her family and friends here, the Cantonese dialect can also accurately express her mood. Dalin is a middle-aged woman with a relatively introverted personality. She has a different situation from Xiao He, our second interviewee, who acquired Cantonese dialect through active communication with friends. She can fully master the Cantonese dialect, mainly because of the Chronosystem under the theory of the Ecology Development

System, since she has lived in Guangdong for nearly 30 years; The second is the significant role of the Exosystem and the Microsystem, which prompted Dalin to learn the Cantonese dialect out of the emotional need to communicate with everyone around her. Even so, she also said that her Family Language Policy management for the future generations of her is more hoping that her children could learn several foreign languages, and for the language awareness of dialect acquisition, she believes that it is better to let go.

Dalin has deep feelings for her hometown. When she spoke of her hometown during the interview, her emotion were full of pride. After coming to Huizhou to live, all her living habits also tend to be localized. She also mentioned that one of the most regrettable things after marriage is to become a housewife after giving birth to her children, if she had not resigned, perhaps her career would have had better development now, but she has not regretted having children, she thinks that her two daughters are the proud of her.

However, in daily life, when Dalin encounters some emergency situations, she prefers to express her emotions in Mandarin, perhaps out of instinct, or perhaps Mandarin is a better choice for her in a complex multilingual environment of Guangdong.

3.2 The Second Interviewee

Xiao He, a PE teacher from Hunan, shared her story in Huizhou with me. She is a very positive and optimistic person. Even though she lives in a place where is totally different from her hometown, she still maintains her positive and optimistic attitude towards life, which had been totally reflected during the interview with her. As soon as she graduated from university, she came to Huizhou to find a job. In addition to eating habits in her life, she adapted well in other aspects. The language she uses in her hometown and her family is Hunan dialect. After coming to Huizhou, she usually uses Mandarin to communicate with people at work. During her spare time, since there are a lot of local friends in Huizhou for Xiao He, and people often use Guangdong dialect when they play with each other, so she have learned the language from that moment.

She has a strong sense of pride in her hometown of Yiyang city. As a native of Yiyang, she says that she remembers her hometown as having a lot of delicious food and rich cultural resources. If she meets people from her hometown in Huizhou, she prefers to communicate in her hometown dialect, which is more cordial for her. She is the only child in her family, so every year she goes back to Hunan to visit her family when there is vocation from work.

I tried to ask her if there were any her own stories in Hunan or Guangdong that impressed her deeply. She said that since she had have been an independent and optimistic person since childhood, she rarely felt unhappy. After coming to Huizhou, she also made a lot of local friends in Huizhou, and Huizhou is a very livable city for her, so she is very satisfied with her life from the past until now.

When she first came to Huizhou, even when she the heard locals speaking Cantonese that she could not understand, she would ask directly for the meaning of the conversation. In her impression, most of the Huizhou locals she has got along with were Hakka people, and she thought that the Cantonese people

were friendly, so even if she did not understand the Cantonese dialect at the very first time, she would directly ask its meaning. She has learned her Cantonese through communication with friends, which is the Microsystem under our ecological environment. Xiao He said that staying with her friends is very happy, so she is willing to take the initiative to learn how to speak Cantonese, and she thinks that it is very easy to learn it. When playing with friends, using the Cantonese dialect to communicate with everyone is also very interesting for her.

3.3 The Third Interviewee

The last interviewee is Xiao Xie from Sichuan Province. More than ten years ago, she saw the propaganda clip of Huizhou Cultural and Tourism Bureau, and she indicated that she was at that time particularly longing for the cultural scenery of Huizhou. So she chose to come to Huizhou to find a job after graduating from university. She said she learned the Huizhou dialect through daily contact with her husband and his own family. Therefore, the language ecological environment have played a very important role in the process of her acquisition of Cantonese dialect. Her husband's mother who is also her mother in law is an elderly woman who speaks only Hakka, so she uses the Hakka dialect entirely when communicating with her mother in law.

During her interview, I can see that she is very satisfied with the city of Huizhou and has a high degree of recognition of her family happiness. Her memory of her hometown Guangyuan city in Sichuan province is that it is a city with a relatively slow pace of life and people feel relaxed here, but after coming to Huizhou, her life began to become busy and personal leisure time decreased, which is also due to the nature of her doctor work. But she said that even though life in Huizhou is very busy, it is part of her personal life plan, so she enjoys it. In her own point of view, she believed that Huizhou people are warm and simple, so even if Huizhou dialect is not her first language, she is very happy to learn it and communicate with the locals in this language, which is a very delighted thing for her. In the second half of the interview, Xiao Xie also shared the story of a turning point in her work. She once worked in different hospitals in Huizhou, and she was deeply touched by this memory. Most of the colleagues in the hospital where she worked were the Huizhou locals, and she quickly integrated into the new environment because they were very friendly to her.

In her work as a doctor, she also meets many patients who speak only Huizhou dialect, and she is also very happy to communicate with them in Huizhou dialect, which has been integrated into her life.

According to the theoretical framework of this study, Xiao Xie's language ecological environment has brought her a nice experience and promoted her second language acquisition. Firstly and foremost, from the aspect of the Microsystem level, Xiao Xie learns the Cantonese through contact with her intimate family members. Secondly, from the Exosystem level, Xiao Xie's work allows her to have more exposure to the Cantonese dialect, and she always uses the Cantonese dialect intentionally or unintentionally. Thirdly, from the Macrosystem level, Xiao Xie's recognition to the culture of Guangdong region since her seeing the propaganda film of Huizhou Cultural and Tourism Bureau, and then it started to promote her process of formally contacting the Guangdong dialect. Last but not least, it is also because Xiao Xie

has stayed in Huizhou for a long time. From the perspective of the Chronosystem, the development of Xiao Xie's second language acquisition depends on the latitude of time. She also said that she will cultivate her children's acquisition of the Cantonese in their daily life, consciously or unconsciously. From this demonstration we could see that Xiao Xie, as an immigrant, has a very positive attitude towards Hakka dialect.

4. Discussion

The author herself has grown up in a multilingual environment, and my feelings towards different languages led me to study the relationship between language and environment. For the three interviewees in this study, their feelings towards language are closely related to the surrounding environment. During the interview, they all said that Huizhou is a multi-lingual city with strong inclusiveness, so they have no psychological burden toward the dialect acquisition. It could tell that building a good social interaction environment could well increase immigrants' positive emotions towards the local language.

The author has had a lot of immigrant friends who have come to Huizhou from other cities since my childhood. When I am taking my master programme, I have known that especially immigrants have strong emotion to their First Language. Therefore, I hope this article can show that people's emotion towards a language could depend on their life experience, and also hope to make better understanding toward the multilingual resource and the acculturation practice of immigrants.

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