

Metalinguistic Judgments of Idiomatic Language in Diaspora Hoisanva

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Abstract

This case study of metalinguistics in the Toisanese-American diaspora presents the judgments of seven speakers of varying levels of fluency in Hoisanva¹ dialect of Chinese. It was found that there is an apparent gradient correlation of formality on speakers' perceived use of idiomatic language. What's more, it was observed that speakers' had a moderate level of linguistic security, despite the dialect being considered a "peasant" variant. Plausible causes for this behavior are examined.

1 Introduction

Hoisanva is a Yue dialect of Chinese, with origins in the Guangdong province. It is notable as a language of American diaspora, as the majority of first-wave immigrants from China to the western United States (Leung, 2012b, p.1).

As a "peasant" dialect, Hoisanva is subject to both metalinguistic judgment from a lens of stigmatization, and a relative lack of interest from the research community. Leung (2012b) notes that "there is little to no work which actually expounds on this particular heritage of people done in English or any Chinese. Instead, as one of the strongest reminders of the existence of Hoisan-wa is its sounds in speech, Hoisan-wa becomes an easy target for people saying it is a language that 'sounds funny'" (p.15).

In contrast, there is a general trend toward language and ethnic pride within the diaspora community. Mobilization on non-traditional internet forums (e.g. YouTube comments sections) points towards speakers' interest in overt forms of language maintenance (Leung, 2011). Metalinguistic sentiments in other media, too, echo a fondness for the language from within the diaspora. It is viewed as an insignia of the old country and of the traditional ways of being. Hoisan-ngin author William Poy Lee (2007) writes of his mother tongue:

Our dialect reflects life wrested from the mud, clay, and stone of wet delta land and the need to be heard over vast stretches of fields. Not surprising then that the sounds of Toisanese syllables come wrapped up like clods of dirt embedded with stones and held together by the long, sinewy grasses used for cooking. Sentences explode out of the mouth like a mortar barrage, with consonants, vowels, all the tones meshed into a tight, barbed clump of earthy linguistics. Toisanese can arc over rice paddies, penetrate a flock of noisy geese, cut through a stand of bamboo trees, and curve around a hill. As the sentence lands, the remaining barbs of sound hook your eardrum so you know that, indeed, you are being addressed and the reasons why.

Later, in comparing Hoisanva with the higher-prestige Cantonese, Lee says that "even Big City Cantonese appreciated that the earsplitting, spitty Toisanese attained its oratorical finest reach when downright rude and disdainful to the bones of your family and especially your ancestors. It soared even higher when salty and sexually graphic. You know you were told off when you were tongue-lashed in Toisanese" (Lee, 2007). In these two quotations there is both a poetic longing for the cultural identity that the language represents for the speaker, as well as an acknowledgement of the perceived harshness and peasant-ness that is generally ascribed to it.

We may from a sociolinguistic perspective ask, do these overt language attitudes matter? We know from previous experience that language attitudes influence how speakers in a community use language.

¹The romanized orthography of this language (and ethnic group) does not have an accepted form. In this work, I use the terms Hoisan, Hoisanva, and Toisanese to refer to the language, and Toisan, Hoisan-ngin, and Toisanese to refer to the people interchangeably. This is out of personal preference. One may also see these referred to as Taishanese, which is the romanized form of the Mandarin pronunciation, and Hoisanwa, reflecting an alternative romanization of the phone [v].

For example, Gal (1997) observed that speakers' perception of Hungarian as a "peasant" language when compared to the German of the industrialized sphere influenced how much and with whom they were willing to speak Hungarian. Speakers may have attitudes about specific features of language as well.

1.1 Question

In this work, I endeavor to offer support for some answer to the following question:

What is the relationship between perceived use of idiomatic language and speakers' metalinguistic perceptions of their dialect (Hoisanva)?

The body of this work progresses in the following way: In Section 2, I survey the previous works which inform and provide the foundation for this study. In Section 3, I outline the methodology and data format for an online case study. Section 4 provides the experimental results from this case study, and offers tentative explanation. Finally, Section 5 outlines the necessary further steps for this work, including potential extensions.

2 Background Work

2.1 On language attitudes

Speakers have opinions about the languages they are exposed to. There is evidence that speakers have especially strong opinions about non-standard varieties of language. The Oakland Ebonics debate, where community members expressed extreme outrage at the misnomer that African American English would be taught in public classrooms, is a prime example of this (see Smitherman (1998) for discussion). Perscriptivism and the established social power structures in which language exists allow pejorative attitudes toward non-standard language to fester. Hill (1998) demonstrates how these festering sentiments lopsidedly fall on speakers from oppressed communities; they found that Whites speakers using Mock Spanish (i.e. marked borrowings from Spanish) did so with impunity, while Latino speakers were condemned for any perceived Spanish-ness in their English.

However, oppressed communities can also claim non-standard features as positive markers of in-group identity. For example Eckert showed how release of intervocalic /t/, a non-standard phonological process for American English, was used by young women as a performative marker of intellectualism and by gay men in environments where overt sexual preference is beneficial. Communities may also reclaim stigmatized features, especially lexical epithets, as a way of rising against oppression. One well-known example of this is the former epithet *queer*, now commonly seen as a neutral identifier within the queer and allied community (Brontsema, 2004).

Language is essential in the creation and maintenance of cultural identity. (Kroskrity, 2004). For members of diaspora communities, language choice is an aurally tangible declaration of membership and alignment within the diaspora. Those who speak the language, especially in the face of social pressure to conform to the majority language, are asserting their identity within the speech community. Those speakers who either choose the majority language over the mother tongue or who lack the linguistic competence to be able to choose the mother tongue, are also performing their language maintenance, but on the side of language neglect. This, in turn, informs their cultural identity. Although not central to this research, the idea of maintenance and identity seems to naturally emerge as the product of any inquiry into speech in diaspora.

2.2 On the use of case study

Though smaller in scale, this work follows the convention of case study approaches in sociolinguistics. Like Gal (1997), this research aims to find some sociological connection to the changes in a speech community by examining the perceived contexts and motivations of a lower prestige language. A very legitimate concern is the degree to which anything of this scale can approximate the general attitudes of a large speech community, especially one spread across diaspora pockets of the United States. After all, as Kroskrity (2004) points out, "Language ideologies are thus grounded in social experience which is never uniformly distributed throughout

politics of any scale” (p.503). Kroskrity also observes that speakers within any one community will have varying awareness of the language ideologies that affect them (2004).

This type of study has been applied to Hoisanva speech and related languages before. Genevieve Leung conducted a longitudinal study of children’s use of uniquely Hoisanva lexemes, with $n = 14$ (2012a). Stanford used a small baseline of speakers to show the influence of Matrilect and Patrilect on children’s speech of Sui, a minority language of southwestern China (2008).

While the data put forth in this study is too small to carry statistical power, in following the precedent of this established work it can serve as a qualitative assessment of the language attitudes that may exist for some subset of speakers within the community.

3 Methodology

3.1 Study Design

A study was designed in two parts, to elicit both the language usage and behavior of Hoisanva speakers in the American diaspora, and to probe their metalinguistic opinions about the language in comparison to other dialects of Chinese.

3.1.1 Task choice

Idiomatic expressions occupy an interesting place in the linguistic hemisphere. Use of idiomatic languages requires both grammatical fluency and cultural competency to achieve the idiomatic readings. It is for this reason that I have chosen to test subjects’ judgments of various well-known idioms. Each subject was exposed to four audio samples sourced from Mr. Stephen Li’s Taishanese archive (<https://www.stephen-li.com/TaishaneseVocabulary/Taishanese.html>). Translations for these idioms are given in Table 1.

#	Transcription	Literal	Gloss	Idiomatic Reading
0	m↓ soɪ̄ mun↓ a↓ gi↓	not cause ask Ol’ Gui	There’s no need to ask Gui.	It is well known and obvious
1	ma↓ ɦī l̄ l̄ i↓ haŋ↓	horse dead drop ground walk	One walks after the horse died.	To do what is necessary
2	ŋui↓ gəŋ↓ yi↓ san↓	stupid man move mountain	The foolish old man moves the mountain.	Anything is possible if one has the will to do it.
3	kein̄ gək̄ kein̄ sein̄	collapse country collapse city	beautiful enough to cause a city or state to collapse	(of female) extremely beautiful, devastatingly gorgeous

Table 1: Idioms used and their translations, as read by Stephen Li

Following the convention in Gal (1997), this study asks speakers about the contexts/interlocutors with which they would use certain types of language (in this case, idioms of a non-prestige dialect), and compares this to metalinguistic descriptions from the speakers in an attempt to understand the underlying language attitudes. While Gal’s study additionally considered the role of gender on observed variation, the analysis presented in this paper relies on more heavily on the language samples themselves to provide explanations for the subject responses.

3.1.2 Instrument Design

An online survey was designed and made available on my personal UW server space. It was determined that an online format was necessary because of geographic constraints; the American diaspora is centralized in areas with larger Chinatowns like San Francisco and the San Gabriel Valley, and so that is where I expected to have the greatest success recruiting subjects (indeed, a soft majority of the final subjects were concentrated in the Bay Area, see 3.3.1).

Four idioms were selected as the linguistic prompts of the activity, as described in Table 1. These were chosen to be representative of the range of differences that exist between Hoisanva and higher prestige

varieties, namely Standard Chinese and Cantonese. Idiom #0 contains phones present in all three varieties, although the pronunciations of this phrase vary moderately between Cantonese and Hoisanva (the final syllable being a diphthong in Cantonese). Idiom #1 has segments that do not exist in either Standard Chinese or Cantonese, and idiom #2 contains a syllable pattern that does not exist in Standard Chinese. Finally, Idiom #3 has a very similar pronunciation in Cantonese, and a moderately similar pronunciation in Standard Chinese. Each of these idioms also have varying degrees to which their idiomatic readings differ from the literal interpretation. As a proxy for this intuition, each gloss and idiomatic reading were tested through AllenNLP’s demo version of the Parikh et al. (2016) textual entailment model (available at <https://demo.allennlp.org/textual-entailment/ODM3MTM0>). The result of this is provided in Table 2. A higher level of entailment between a premise (i.e. Gloss) and hypothesis (i.e. Idiomatic Reading) implies that the interpretations are similar.

Scores	Idioms			
	0	1	2	3
Entailment	16.5%	90.3%	55.8%	17.7%
Contradiction	79.9%	1.2%	6.3%	5.9%
Neutral	3.6%	8.5%	37.9%	76.4%
Summary	It is very likely that the premise contradicts the hypothesis.	It is very likely that the premise entails the hypothesis.	It is somewhat likely that the premise entails the hypothesis.	It is very likely that there is no correlation between the premise and hypothesis.

Table 2: Entailment scores for the used idioms. A higher entailment probability implies an inference relation between the gloss and idiomatic reading for that idiom. The provided summaries are an automated interpretation of these scores.

Once the audio materials were selected, an interface was designed with three sections. In the first, users are given the following instructions:

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Your results will be anonymous, and the experimenters won’t collect any data you don’t freely provide. Please wear headphones and make sure you are in a quiet place. You will be asked to listen to some speakers of Chinese and answer questions about what they say. There are no right or wrong answers; we just want to know your opinions. If you can’t answer a question, you can skip it. You may end the survey early at any time by pressing the “End Experiment” button at the bottom of the page.

Anonymity was addressed outright because it was anticipated that some subjects may be recruited through personal contact, and subjects recruited in this way may be under the impression that their responses would be obviously tied to them. As no personally identifiable information was collected on the research side, it was the case that subjects should expect anonymity, regardless of recruitment medium. Subjects were encouraged to use headphones in the hopes that they would be hearing the audio samples in higher fidelity. The overview instructions make reference to “Chinese” otherwise unspecified, so that the user is not primed to hear any dialect.

The second section of the questionnaire consisted of four pages, one for each idiom. Each page had an audio play button, with the following questions:

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

1. I understand what this person is saying.
2. This person talks like me.
3. This person talks like people I know.
4. This person speaks good Chinese.

If the following people would understand it, how likely would you be to say this phrase to them?

1. Your parents?
2. Your siblings?
3. Your children?
4. Your friends?
5. Your boss?
6. A stranger?

Each question corresponded of a five point scale, ranging from . Strongly Disagree/Very Unlikely to Strongly Agree/Very Likely. For each question, there was also option to respond with “Don’t Know” or N/A. To avoid priming, it was not indicated anywhere that the speech samples contained idiomatic language. There was also no orthographic input, do avoid confounding perceptions between the audio and text.

The phrase “good Chinese” was used in the first section in lieu of similar expressions like “standard language” or “proper Chinese” to avoid the potential of subjects interpreting this to explicitly refer to Standard Chinese (i.e. Mandarin). The kinds of interlocutors that subjects were asks to make judgments about are analogous to the categories used in Gal (1997), with the exception that friends and strangers are considered separate categories without a notion of age attached. This was done to keep question language succinct, while maintaining a similar level of division.

In the final section of the questionnaire, subjects were asked demographic questions (age, where they were raised, and languages spoken) as well as an overt question about their metalinguistic opinions. In the same format as the second section, subjects were asked to respond to the assertion “Some dialects of Chinese are better than others,” on both a five-point scale and in a free-form prose response.

A working version of the questionnaire is available at <https://staff.washington.edu/sbng/socio/experiment.php>. Screenshots of each of page type are provided in the appendix.

3.2 Subject Recruitment

It is not a trivial exercise to recruit Hoisanva speakers. While it is estimated that around 500,000 Americans have Toisan ancestry (Pierson, 2007), it is impressionistically uncommon for younger generations of Toisanese-Americans to speak the language. This difficulty is confounded by the fact that research was conducted far from the Bay Area center of the Toisanese diaspora. Therefore, speakers had to be recruited who were technologically literate enough to complete an online survey, and self-identified speakers of the language. Recruitment was attempted in three stages, with only the third stage represented in data below.

In the first stage, a call was sent out through social media, and shared through the social networks of my linguist friends who benevolently circulated the survey on my behalf. While there were a few subject responses obtained this way, none were deemed usable by the pre-processing heuristics I determined (see 3.3.1, below).

In the second stage of recruitment, a compatible version of the survey was curated for deployment on Amazon Mechanical Turk. This is a crowd-sourcing interface where paid workers can elect to take surveys or complete small tasks. Ten surveys were made available, with payment of \$2.00 for completion. Explicit instructions given to Workers that work would not be accepted from those who didn’t speak Toisanese. Of the ten surveys received, nine indicated that they did not speak Toisanese or any close Chinese dialect. One Worker indicated that they spoke Toisan, but conflicting information in the main part of the survey and the other demographic questions (e.g., living in India and speaking Tamil as an L1) made this seem extremely unlikely. This negative experience with MTurk mirrors complaints I have heard from other linguistics researchers working with smaller speech communities (pc). If this study were to be repeated, I would not attempt any kind of crowd-sourcing platform for Hoisanva. In the final stage of recruitment, I first put calls onto internet forums for items of interest to the Hoisan community (e.g. in the comments section for makeup tutorials in Hoisanva, on a forum for Hoisan genealogy, etc.), as well as reaching out to specific individuals who I personally know and who I know to speak at least some Hoisanva. Four subjects were recruited through direct contact, and three more were recruited from the calls on the online cultural media.

3.3 Pre-Processing

For each survey completed, a JSON object is sent to the server which include variables for each selection a subject makes as well as their long-form text responses and a uniquely identify subject number in the range 1-100. The following sections describe how rows (i.e. individual subjects) were filtered, and how the various JSON variables were operationalized for analysis.

3.3.1 Subject selection

No subjects were selected from the second stage of recruitment, as these proved too unreliable. For all subjects recruited in stages one and three, responses were discarded where they indicated that they did not speak either Toisan, Cantonese, or Chinese. While the conservative approach would have excluded speakers identifying generically as Cantonese speaking, Leung (2012b) notes that this is a common reporting practice among speakers:

It is not uncommon to hear Hoisan-wa speakers call themselves “Cantonese” speakers, qualified with a phrase to the effect of, “But I speak a rural form of Cantonese.” Because there are no young monolingual Hoisan-wa speakers today in the U.S. or China, Hoisan-wa is hardly ever viewed without (Standard) Cantonese or Mandarin in tow. (Leung, 2012b, p.2)

Because of this convention, seven subjects, all claiming some level of competence in Toisanese/Cantonese/Chinese, were included in the following analysis. This final set consists of five speakers from California and two from Utah, all between the ages of 55 and 74. Figure 1 shows the demographic information, as provided in the questionnaire, of the subjects superimposed on a map of the western United States.

3.3.2 Operationalization of variables

The content of the questionnaires was organized into three categories: *familiarity*, *usage*, and *goodness*.

For *familiarity* and *usage*, scores were computed as averages of responses across across the four idioms in the questionnaire. A score is a value from 1-10, which corresponds to a goodness or frequency judgment. These equivalencies are shown in Table 3. If a subject responded to any question with “Don’t Know” or skipped that question, it was excluded from the computation of the average.

Score	Interpretation
1-2	Strongly Disagree/Very Unlikely
3-4	Disagree/Unlikely
5-6	Neutral
7-8	Agree/Likely
9-10	Strongly Agree/Very Likely

Table 3: Scores with corresponding interpretations in the questionnaire

The four metrics that comprise *familiarity* are the assertions **I understand what this person is saying**, **This person talks like me**, and **This person talks like people I know**.

For *usage*, subjects were asked how likely they would be to use each idiom with the following people **parents, siblings, friends, children, strangers, and boss**. These were likewise averages to compute usage scores.

The *goodness* metric was operationalized using the average of the assertion **This persons speaks good Chinese** across all idioms, as well as the assertion **Some dialects of Chinese are better than others**, which was only asked once of each subject.

4 Results

In the sections below, I present the subjects’ responses across the metrics of *usage*, *familiarity*, and *goodness*, as well as some statistical measures of center for the data. The raw data is available as tables in the appendix.

Demographic Map



Figure 1: Speaker-reported demographic information, arranged by geographic origin and color-coded for age. Speakers are identified by their subject number and the languages they speak.

4.1 Usage and Familiarity

Figure 2 shows the average *usage* scores of the seven participants, arranged by according to descending gradient of use. This follows the convention put forward in Gal (1997), although interestingly the formality gradient observed in this case study is not consistent with the ranking that Gal observed in her study of Hungarian/German bilingualism.

For the purposes of summarization, missing values were estimated using an average across both subject and interlocutor, i.e. the value for Subject 20 against a stranger was the average of values for Subject 20 and the average score for Stranger across all participants. The imputed average scores ranged from 2.4 for Subject 6 to 7.2 for Subject 9. With few exceptions, subjects followed the pattern wherein they felt they would use the idioms more often with parents than siblings, more with siblings than friends, and decreasing use still for children, strangers, and bosses. I believe that the reason for the observed order may have to do with cultural factors within the diaspora. It is probably safe to infer that Toisanese speakers have parents and siblings with at least a similar level of fluency in the language. If the subjects themselves understand the language at least fairly well (which we have reason to believe from the *familiarity* scores, below), then

Average Usage Scores by Interlocutor

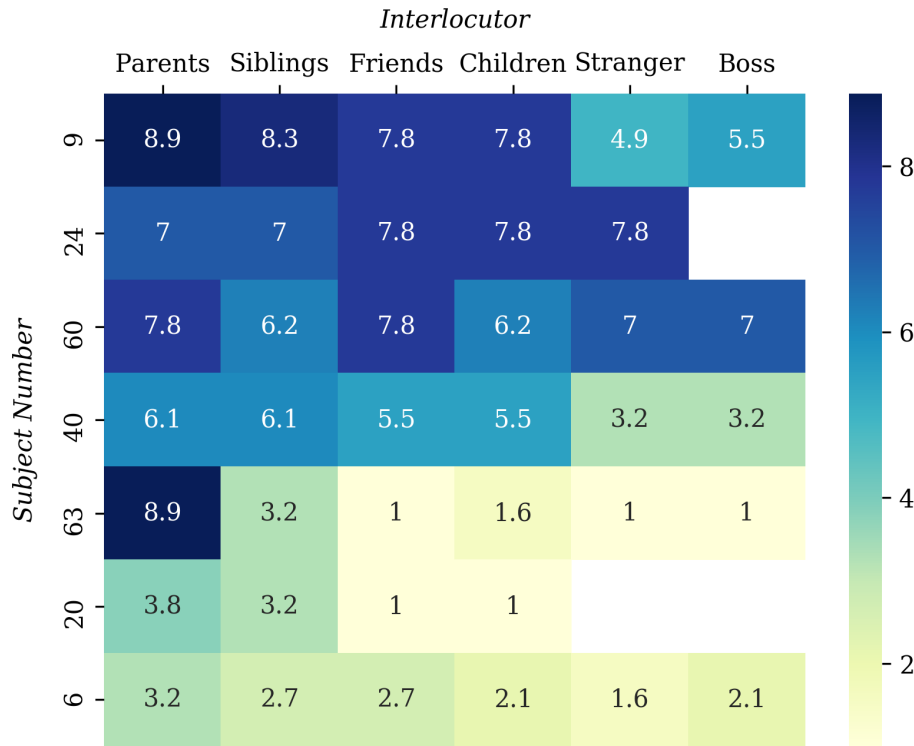


Figure 2: Likelihood of use scores, scaled from 0 to 10, where an average of 0 means that the speaker is strongly unlikely to use the idiom with the specified interlocutor, and a score of 10 indicates that the speaker is strongly likely to use the idiom. Each row represents a speaker.

out of anyone their family would be the most likely to respond. In contrast, the younger generations are increasingly less fluent Leung (2012a), and so subjects may be more reluctant to use idiomatic language with their children, for example. In contrast, Gal (1997) found that speakers were making choices about whether or not to use Hungarian because of the cultural pressures of formality. From the rankings seen in this data, it does not seem like formality is a main concern. If it were, then we would expect to see children with a higher usage score than more senior or non-family members, for example. That this is not observed suggests that formality is not a primary cause of the observed gradient.

There is impressionistically also a bifurcation between participants, where Subjects 9, 24, 60, and 40 all said they were at least moderately likely to use the idioms with the average interlocutor. On the other hand, Subjects 63, 20, and 6 all reported low usage scores (excluding with parents for Subject 63). There is no demographic detail that divides these two subgroups of the sample. In fact, the subject who said they spoke very little Toisan speaking abilities reported usage on the higher side. Granted, this is a report of likelihood of use and not frequency of use. It may be that the difference in score from subject to subject is an idiosyncratic effect of the interpretation of the questionnaire; the sample is too small to do much besides speculate on this matter.

Subjects also had varying judgments about the familiarity of the sample speech. This is shown in Table 4.

Subjects were fairly consistent in their evaluation of the three assertions, and only 6 of the 21 values deviated from the average more than 1 point. One notable exception to this generalization is Subject 40, who assigned the **Talks like peers** sub-score a drastically higher value than the other two metrics. This seems to be influenced by a relatively high score given to the first idiom. It could be that there was a learning

Subject Number	Understood	Talks like subject	Talks like peers	Average
9	7.188	7.750	7.750	7.563
63	7.750	5.500	6.063	6.438
20	5.500	5.500	5.500	5.500
6	4.750	5.500	5.500	5.250
60	6.063	3.813	4.938	4.938
24	3.250	2.688	7.750	4.563
40	4.750	3.813	4.375	4.313

Table 4: Familiarity Scores in Descending Order

effect at play; that is, it took the subjects one sample to acclimate to the task, and so the first idiom’s scores were not reflective of actual attitudes toward the audio sample. If the sample set were larger, it may be possible to exclude the first one for this purpose. However, it seems that there is about the same level of agreement/discrepancy between the subsequent samples (see 4.3), so this was deemed unnecessary.

Overall, subjects reported neutral to high average familiarity scores. For all of the questions used to compute this average, as well, the same ranking appears to hold for the most part. This suggests that these questions are either targeting or being influenced by the same extralinguistic variables.

The *usage* heat map is repeated below, juxtaposed against the *familiarity* scores with the subjects in the same order (the color gradient has been retained for comparative purposes). Although the trend is not exact, there does seem to be a soft relationship between *usage* and *familiarity*. For example, Subject 6 had the lowest average usage scores, and scores on the lower end for familiarity. At the other end of the spectrum, Subject 9 had the highest average usage scores (scoring an average of 7.2 across all environments), and also had the highest familiarity average. That usage and familiarity pattern in a similar way is encouraging; it suggests that there is some degree of relatedness of this measures. Perhaps it is the case that a speaker’s familiarity with an elicitation influenced how they perceive their use. It should also be noted that on the interface, the familiarity questions all preceded the usage questions. There is a chance that this introduces bias into the usage responses, although the extent to which this is actually occurring is unknown.

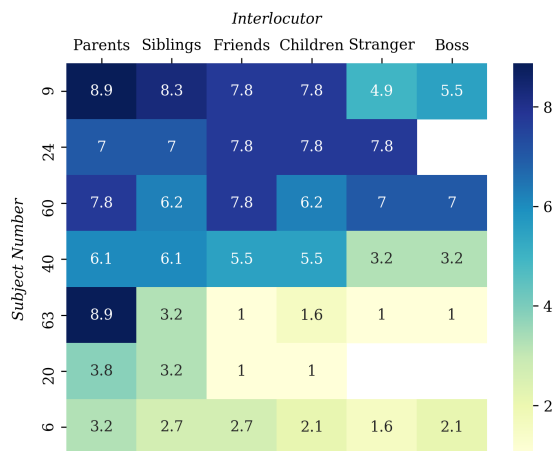


Figure 3: Usage heat map, duplicated

Subject Number	Understood	Talks like subject	Talks like peers	Average
9	7.188	7.750	7.750	7.563
24	3.250	2.688	7.750	4.563
60	6.063	3.813	4.938	4.938
40	4.750	3.813	4.375	4.313
63	7.750	5.500	6.063	6.4382
20	5.500	5.500	5.500	5.500
6	4.750	5.500	5.500	5.250

Table 5: Familiarity Scores in relative order to Usage Scores

4.2 Goodness

Of special interest to this study are speakers’ metalinguistic opinions about the language, especially with respect to other, less stigmatized forms of Chinese. In pursuit of this, data was collected on both the idiom-

and speaker-level pertaining to judgments of goodness or prestige. Figure 4 shows the operationalized scores for *goodness*. Most of the speakers responded relatively centrally to the assertion that the audio sampled contained good speech. It is tempting to say, for example, that Subject 9’s apparent disbelief in the existence of good dialects as a contradiction to their high average scores of the goodness of the idiomatic speech. However, in Table 6 their response doesn’t seem to reflect a dialectal agnosticism consistent with feelings of linguistic awareness and security. Subject 60 pushed back against the assertion in their long form response, and made sure to couch their value judgment on economic grounds (i.e. “being useful in the corporate business world”). They also scored the idiomatic language fairly highly.

Subject 20’s response acknowledges their own role in creating the language attitudes, noting that speakers (excluding, it seems, themselves) will judge whichever dialect in which they have the greatest competency as the best. This was an unexpected and exciting finding: the subject asserts a language attitude for themselves, and assigns a perceived language attitude to other speakers. This subject’s metalinguistic intuition interestingly contradicts previous study in the language maintenance this same community. In her dissertation work, Leung found that the more prestigious dialects of Chinese that speakers knew in addition of Hoisanva, the more error-prone they judged speech samples of Hoisanva, even when their L1 was Hoisanva. It is amusing to speculate why this particular subject’s intuitions do not match with Leung’s findings. Of the other subjects, #24 and 60 say that they speak only one kind of Chinese. However, their responses are by no means orthogonal to the responses of the multilingually-Chinese respondents, and so this data can’t really support Leung’s findings. Subject 20 indicates that they speak “Chinese,” not otherwise specified. It may be that their own Chinese is only Hoisanva, and this is the experience they are drawing from. Or, like Preston (2002) observed, it may just be that the folk linguistic ideology is divergent from attested empirical observations.

Of the subjects that had a neutral opinion of the assertion that good dialects exist, no single generalization is available to compare their justifications with the scores they assigned to the goodness of the idioms. All their responses acknowledged Hoisanva as one of many Chinese dialects.

The relative neutrality of responses supports Preston’s conception of the “folk theory of language,” where speakers observe that “ordinary” language consists of dialects and “errors” (2002) That is, speakers will have a mental construct of the dialects in their consciousness that is separate from error-full language.

What does this say about the language attitudes held by the sample set? It may be that these sentiments are indicative of the diaspora at large. In here analysis of how Hoisan-ngin are expressing their language on the internet Leung (2010) claims that “[i]n a more optimistic and pragmatic view, Hoisan-wa is gaining positive momentum, spearheaded by speakers who care dearly about their language and heritage” (p.48). One of the comments she found on a Hoisan YouTube video reads, “YOU ARE HECKA TIGHT THANK YOU FOR POSTING THIS. I was actually going to do this. I love songs sung in Hoisan. I especially liked how you used the thl- sound, because a lot of people take that sound out since they think it sounds too harsh. Hoisan Pride” (p.47). This statement not only reclaims the stigmatized phonology (referencing the belt l pronunciation), but also has language quite similar to the response of Subject 63.

In fact, Leung notes in other research as well that speakers’ attitudes are in general reclaiming the stigmatized forms as markers of identity. Of the influence of YouTube culture in particular, Leung asserts that “Hoisan-wa speakers and supporters have both reconstituted and co-constructed positive beliefs about their heritage language” 2011.

Whatever stigma has historically existed for this language is changing. As Milroy notes, whether a language variety either has or lacks prestige depends entirely on whether its speakers have prestige in their communities at large (2001). In their study of young adult diaspora speakers, Wu and Leung (2015) found that their subjects had positive sentiments toward linguistic diversity in the community. Indeed, there is no “Hoisan peril;” it seems that in the face of hegemony within Chinese-American culture, stigmatization is quelled. Perhaps then, the neutral and positive scores and justifications found here are indicative of 21st century trends for the language community.

One may call into question the degree to which membership in the speech community influences conceptions of prestige or linguistic security. For example, can Subject 60, who says they speak “Very little Toisan,” be expected to hold well-formed ideas about prestige in the language. I argue that this is in fact true. While it wasn’t explicitly asked of subjects, it is fairly safe to assume that they all had at least some ethnic tie to the language (i.e. that they are all Hoisan-ngin to some degree). Even in the diaspora, Toisanese as a Foreign Language classes do not exist; there are no textbooks or primers encouraging out-group speakers

Subjects' Notions of Goodness and Prestige

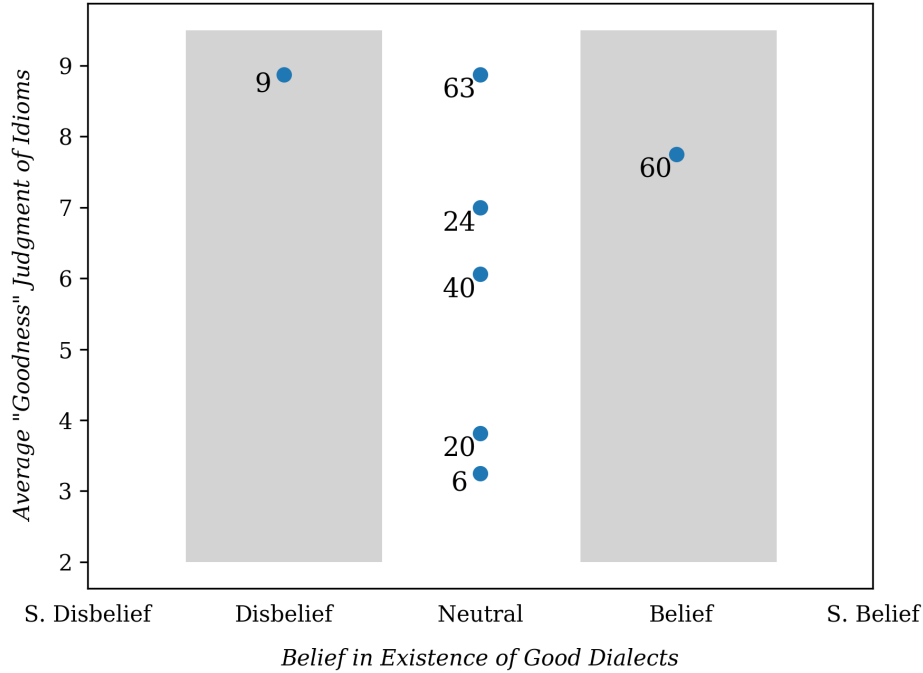


Figure 4: Graph of *goodness* score. On the x-axis is the absolute score of subjects' belief that "Some dialects of Chinese are better than others." On the y-axis is the subjects' average judgment of the goodness of the Chinese presented in the audio files, where a score of 1 represent Strong Disbelief and a score of 10 represents Strong Belief.

#	Justification for response: Some dialects are better than others.
24	Its not a matter of better, just different dialects from different regions of China.
20	two many dialects of chinese and none are better than others because who ever speaks it will think that is the best dialect because they know it the best.
40	Neutral in the sense that Mandarin is China's national language and my family's dialect is Taishanese.
60	Depends upon the definition of "better". Better on what basis? Also, the question of dialects does that also include Mandarin vs Cantonese? There is an advantage of Cantonese over Toisan. And there is a much larger advantage of Mandarin over Cantonese. I am rating them better based upon being useful in the corporate business world.
6	There are many dialects of Chinese
63	Although the main language of China is mandarin, it doesn't mean it is better . I love Hearing and speaking Cantonese and toishanese.
9	Each region has its own dialect.

Table 6: Subject explanation for their level of assertion that "Some dialects of Chinese are better than others."

to join the community. Thus, even though the speakers may have limited use of the language itself, they will still have experience in the same community practices that inform the language ideology. As De Vos and Romanucci-Ross notes, ethnic identity provides a sense of connection to the past. For fringe speakers of language, this can mean a tie to a past where fluency in their heritage language is the norm. King (2000)

points to the case of Irish, which holds an important place in the Irish ethnic identity. Even though speakers rate the language highly and express a desire for the younger generations to speak, individual speakers are not maintaining frequency of use and parents are not enforcing Irish use in their children. In this way, we need not legitimize a speakers attitudes through their fluency, but accept that their ideologies are indeed organic because they exist in the same culture in which those ideologies exist.

4.3 Agreement

Because the judgments from which most of these scores were computed were averaged across multiple speech samples, it is necessary to inquire about the consistency of user responses. Do speakers have different opinions on *usage*, *familiarity*, and *goodness* depending on which idiom they are exposed to? Table 7 summarizes the annotator agreement scores. Each row represents how consistent each subject’s responses were across the four idioms presented, and the final row represents how much agreement existed between the seven subjects. The table to the right, reproduced from Viera et al. (2005), gives a simple interpretation of Cohen’s Kappa statistic. The Fleiss’ Kappa reported for this data is the analogue of this for $n > 2$ annotators. The other two statistics monitor the same relationships, but via separate formulae that are not particularly enlightening to the analysis.

Subject Number	Fleiss’ Kappa	Krippendorff’s alpha	Scott’s Pi
6	0.46667	0.46667	0.45299
24	0.39203	0.38298	0.36716
20	0.30886	0.30318	0.28532
40	0.13242	0.08007	0.05649
9	0.12360	0.06801	0.04412
63	0.05579	-0.01239	-0.03835
60	0.02494	-0.09393	-0.12198
Overall	0.04647	0.02233	0.01883

Table 7: Degree of inter-annotator agreement

Kappa	Agreement
< 0	Less than chance agreement
0.01 – 0.20	Slight agreement
0.21 – 0.40	Fair agreement
0.41 – 0.60	Moderate agreement
0.61 – 0.80	Substantial agreement
0.81 – 0.99	Almost perfect agreement

Table 8: Interpretations of the Kappa statistic (Viera et al., 2005, p.362 *color added*)

Although a few subjects showed a modest level of agreement, most subjects were performing nearer to chance between the elicitations. In addition, the agreement between any two subjects was also low.

I surmise a few plausible explanations for the overall low agreement across the four idioms for any one subject. Since the task of listening to a speaker and answering metalinguistic questions is probably novel for subjects, it may be the case that it took time for them to habituate to the task. Since there were only four samples, any observed gradient between initial and subsequent samples may in fact represent how the subject adjusts to the elicitation task. This would explain the relatively high goodness score assigned to the first presented idiom compared to subsequent samples (see Table 9, below).

The nature of the idioms themselves may be contributing to the different responses. If a corpus were available to compare relative frequencies against, we may see that some of these idioms are more commonly observed than others. In this case, it is likely that speakers would assign more familiarity and higher usage to these samples, especially for subjects with limited exposure to Hoisanva, like Subject 60.

We may also consider whether the semantic content of the idioms is in some way influencing the gradient effect. Audio sample #1 (“horse dead drop ground walk/One walks after the horse died”), for example, is very difficult to contrive a realistic non-idiomatic usage for. In contrast, for sample #0 (“not cause ask Ol’ Gui/There’s no need to ask Gui”) it is not difficult to construct a situation where this sentence would be perfectly natural in a literal interpretation. Say, Gui already said that he didn’t want to go to market, for instance. Without further metalinguistic probing, this hypothesis is equally difficult to support.

Finally, it could be the the case that features of the dialect itself are contributing to the discrepancy. Leung (2010) notes that one of the features which makes Hoisanva phonologically distinct (and in some perspectives phonologically stigmatized) is the use of the alveolar fricative [ʃ]. Leung (2010) remarks that “it is not uncommon for Cantonese speakers to mock Hoisan-wa speech through the use of this sound, emitting salivary trajectories in the process” (p.41). Of the four idioms sampled, one contains this phone (#1). All other phones are present in both Standard Chinese and Cantonese (Lee and Zee, 2003; Zee, 1991), although

the consonant [ŋ] appears in an invalid position for Standard Chinese in audio sample #2 (Lee and Zee, 2003). If it is the case that subjects are recognizing these segments as phonological markers of the otherness of Hoisanva speech, then it may explain the disparate behavior. Table 9 shows the average score of “goodness” for each of the idioms.

Idiom	Average Goodness
1	5.500
2	5.821
3	5.875
0	8.393

Table 9: Score for each idiom for the assertion “This person speaks good Chinese,” averaged across all subjects

We can see that in fact #1 and #2 were rated as the least good by subjects. This would support the claim that these are phonologically marked. Within the subject pool, Subject 6 expressed the most negative opinion of these samples, assigning a score of 3.25 to each. Other subjects were fairly agnostic. There is nothing from Subject 6’s scoring and justification for the existence of better dialects that is telling of a possible cause of this judgment. However, Subject 6 did have the lowest usage scores overall, which suggests that their relative negativity is more closely related to their overall idiosyncratic sentiments and not an effect solely of the phonological properties of the idioms.

5 Future Work

5.1 Necessary Revisions

After having collected the data presented here, I have identified several revisions that would ameliorate difficulties in interpretation. First, subjects were asked to self-evaluate whether they understood what was being said for each idiom. This is inherently problematic precisely because of the choice to investigate idiomatic language. What if a subject reports a high understanding score, having only the literal interpretation? What if they base their usage scores on that the non-idiomatic reading? One solution to this concern that would help disambiguate the grounds on which they are judging their understanding while simultaneously obtaining a non-reported metric of understanding by asking subjects to provide a translation each idiom.

Another issue with this data is that each of the interesting phenomena is being interpreted using a single datum. For example, it is noted that [ʈ] is a distinctive phonological feature of Hoisanva compared to other Chinese dialects. However, there is only one occurrence of this segment in the sample audio. In a similar vein, all of the productions are from a single speaker (Stephen). If this single speaker happens to sound like a subject or someone in their social network, this would ostensibly effect the familiarity and goodness scores they assign. To fix both of these problems, it would be necessary to find multiple audio sources and test subjects on a larger number of idioms.

Finally, there is in general a lack of statistical power. Since the extralinguistic variables have been numerically operationalized, performing statistical analysis is an obvious next step. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that a sample size of seven can really provide meaningful numerical insight. The online nature of this study in theory makes it amenable to wider distribution; how exactly to promote studies within the community is a question I still don’t have a good answer to.

5.2 Age

Wu and Leung (2015) note that Hoisan-ngin associate the language as a cultural marker for the older generation only. Informants in their 20s and 30s in that study noted that people often remarked how surprising it was that they were fluent Hoisanva speakers, given their age. In the study presented here, all of the speakers were on the younger side of the older generation (55-74). How does this affect their linguistic security, or their language attitudes? They probably have a larger pool of possible interlocutors in

their social networks; a 20-something diaspora member is relatively unlikely to have peers or children with fluency in Hoisanva. We may expect then, a generational difference for usage scores because of the sparsity of available networks.

It could also be that for reasons outside of general demographics age of speakers results in variation among speakers in usage and attitudes. Sankoff and Blondeau (2007) noted several patterns of age-related variation besides generational change that could be at work here. For example, if we were able to recruit a range of speakers, especially if it were possible to complete a *trend*-style study, we might be able to observe age-grading effects.

5.3 Community

One question that I would have liked to consider but could not was the effect of community and social network. Most work on diaspora Chinese (e.g. Leung (2012a); Rohani et al. (2006); Wu and Leung (2015)) concerns speakers in communities in larger metropolitan areas supporting Chinatowns. It intuitively makes sense that speakers in these areas would be subject to notions of language stigmatization, since they live in communities where say, Cantonese is also likely to be spoken. What about speakers outside of these communities? What about those speakers living in areas where they may never be exposed to dialects other than their mother tongue? If we could, for example, probe the same subjects in the study of this paper about their exposure or experience in the diaspora community at large, we may see different perspectives for the respondents living in large Californian cities versus the two living in Utah, which has no Chinatown. For these speakers, the social sub-network in which they can speak Hoisanva would never ostensibly extend past familial relationship. It would be interesting to try and tease out any variation arising from the amount of community concentration.

It would also be interesting to consider whether there is a genealogical effect to attitudinal variation for Hoisanva. There is an effect of generation and bilingualism. Portes and Hao (1998) observe that the relative bilingualism of the second generation (those whose parents immigrated) is crucial in predicting whether the parental L1 will be maintained by subsequent generations. While subjects in this study all indicated that they “grew up” in the United States, from my personal relationships with several of the subjects I know that at some are first-generation immigrants, and at least one is a second-generation American. If there was sufficient ethnographic data available, it may be possible to see what variation exists between, for example, speakers with monolingual immigrant parents versus those with weaker linguistic ties to their Chinese heritage.

6 Conclusion

In this case study, there has been shown to be a relationship between speakers’ perceived use of language and interlocutor. As a trend, speakers are more willing to use idiomatic language with parents than siblings, and with these people more than friends, children, and others. Metrics of fluency and familiarity softly pattern with perceived usage, suggesting that there is an pairwise relationship of linguistic security and competence with usage across audiences.

It was observed that speakers view idiomatic language of Hoisanva and the dialect in general in an agnostic-trending-towards-positive light. Their ratings of the goodness of individual language samples seems to reflect the attested language attitudes towards certain phonological behaviors of the dialect. Speakers show metalinguistic awareness of the differences between Chinese dialects, and even push back against a notion of betterness in language. These findings can be contextualized within the lens of language attitudes towards stigmatized dialects, as well as the trends observed elsewhere towards Hoisan language pride and overt efforts towards language maintenance and revitalization.

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Appendix

A: Raw responses for Idiom 0

#	Understood	Talks like me	Talks like people I know	Good Chinese
24	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
20	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
40	Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral
60	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
6	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know
63	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
9	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Neutral

#	With Parents	With siblings	With children	With friends	With boss	With stranger
24	Very Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	N/A	Likely
20	Very Likely	Very Likely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	N/A	N/A
40	Very Likely	Very Likely	Likely	Likely	Neutral	Neutral
60	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	Neutral	Neutral
6	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
63	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
9	Very Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	Neutral	Neutral

B: Raw responses for Idiom 1

#	Understood	Talks like me	Talks like people I know	Good Chinese
24	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
20	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
40	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
60	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Agree
6	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
63	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
9	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree

#	With Parents	With siblings	With children	With friends	With boss	With stranger
24	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	N/A	N/A	N/A
40	Unlikely	Unlikely	Unlikely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
60	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely
6	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
63	Very Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
9	Very Likely	Very Likely	Likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely

C: Raw responses for Idiom 2

#	Understood	Talks like me	Talks like people I know	Good Chinese
24	Don't Know	Neutral	Neutral	Agree
20	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
40	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
60	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
6	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
63	Don't Know	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
9	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree

#	With Parents	With siblings	With children	With friends	With boss	With stranger
24	Unlikely	Neutral	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	N/A	N/A	N/A
40	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
60	Likely	Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Likely	Likely
6	Neutral	Neutral	Unlikely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
63	Likely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
9	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	Neutral	Neutral

D: Raw responses for Idiom 3

#	Understood	Talks like me	Talks like people I know	Good Chinese
24	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Agree
20	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know
40	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
60	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Don't Know
6	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
63	Don't Know	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral
9	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree

#	With Parents	With siblings	With children	With friends	With boss	With stranger
24	Likely	Likely	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
20	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	N/A	N/A	N/A
40	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
60	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	Neutral	Unlikely	Unlikely	Unlikely	Unlikely	
63	Likely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Very Unlikely
9	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	Neutral	Neutral

E: Raw metadata

#	Age	From	Languages	Some dialects are better
24	55-64	Los angeles	English, cantonese	Neutral
20	65-74	utah	chinese and english	Neutral
40	65-74	San Francisco	Taishanese, Mandarin, English	Neutral
60	55-64	Salt Lake City	EnglishVery little Toisan	Agree
6	65-74	Oakland	English, Toishan, Mandarin	Neutral
63	65-74	Novato, CA	English, Cantonese, ToiShanese, mandarin.	Neutral
9	65-74	San Francisco	Toishanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, English	Disagree

#	Why?
24	Its not a matter of better, just different dialects from different regions of China.
20	two many dialects of chinese and none are better than others because who ever speaks it will think that is the best dialect because they know it the best.
40	Neutral in the sense that Mandarin is China's national language and my family's dialect is Taishanese.
60	Depends upon the definition of "better". Better on what basis? Also the question of dialects does that also include Mandarin vs Cantonese? There is an advantage of Cantonese over Toisan.,And there is a much larger advantage of Mandarin over Cantonese. I am rating them better based upon being useful in the corporate business world."
6	There are many dialects of Chinese
63	Although the main language of China is mandarin, it doesn't mean it is better . I love Hearing and speaking Cantonese and toishanese.
9	Each region has its own dialect.

F: Screenshots from Questionnaire

Thank your for taking part in this survey. Your results will be anonymous, and the experimenters won't collect any data you don't freely provide. Please wear headphones and make sure your are in a quiet place. You will be asked to listen to some speakers of Chinese and answer questions about what they say. There are no right or wrong answers; we just want to know your opinions. If you can't answer a question, you can skip it. You may end the survey early at any time by pressing the "End Experiment" button at the bottom of the page.

End Experiment
Continue

Initial Instructions

Click the play button below to hear someone speaking:



Please answer the following questions. If you don't have an answer, you can select "Don't know" or skip it. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers; we just want to know your opinion.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I understand what this person is saying.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Don't know.

This person talks like me.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Don't know.

This person talks like people I know.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Don't know.

This person speaks good Chinese.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Don't know.

If the following people would understand it, how likely would you be to say this phrase to them?


	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely	N/A
Your parents?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your siblings?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your children?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your friends?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your boss?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A stranger?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End Experiment

Continue

Idiom Questions (4 in total)

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Skip any question you do not feel able to answer.

How old are you? 

Where did you grow up? For example, you can say 'Los Angeles' or 'Japan'.

What languages do you speak?

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Some dialects of Chinese are better than others.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Don't know.

Why do you feel that way?

Demographic Questions