

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

6.0 Introduction

This study has been an attempt to assess Bai language vitality and the Bai people's attitudes towards their language, culture and related language development issues. In this study, a questionnaire was employed as the main instrument to elicit data from 252 subjects both from the county seat Jinhua and five villages. Based on the discussion in chapter 4 and chapter 5, conclusions of this study are presented in this chapter as well as the applications of the findings and suggestions for methodology and further study.

6.1 Conclusions regarding language use

Language use in seven domains was discussed respectively as well as domain groups. According to the use of Bai, seven domains were grouped into three main domain groups: the family domain, the unpredictable mixed-group domain and the predictable mixed-group domain.

It was revealed that the Bai language has absolute dominance in the family domain (see Figure 12). Over 95% of subjects only speak Bai in the family domain except when talking with children. Those who reported that they speak Hanyu to their children explained that they want to help their children learn Hanyu better so the children can become bilingual. This indicates the strong language vitality of the Bai language.

In the mixed-group domains, the use of Bai is not as dominant as it is in the family domain, but the use of Bai is still dominant compared to the use of Hanyu (see

Figures 13 and 17). More than half of the subjects reported that they only use Bai in these mixed-group domains.

In Fase et al. (1992:6), it is suggested that it has been commonly found that when the mother tongue of a minority language remains dominant in communication within the ethnic group, it can be said that the mother tongue is being maintained. If only intergroup shift occurs, the language situation within the community will evolve towards a form of stable bilingualism. One can conclude that the Bai language has very strong language vitality among the Bai people, and the phenomena of limited language shift is a sign of evolving towards a stable bilingualism.

In summary, it seems probably that the answer to the research question “Is the Bai language likely to be maintained in the foreseeable future?” is “Yes, the Bai language is likely to be maintained in the foreseeable future.”

6.2 Conclusions regarding language attitudes

Language attitudes of Bai people were investigated from the broaden sense including attitudes towards Bai language and related cultural issues, attitudes towards other Bai speakers and attitudes towards language development programs such as Bai literacy and mass media programs.

Discussions in chapter 5 revealed that most of the interviewed subjects had positive attitudes towards Bai language and culture, other Bai speakers and Bai language development programs (see Figures 27, 28 and 32).

It was clearly seen that the majority of the Bai people have positive attitudes towards issues related to the Bai language. Responses from questions concerning culture revealed that the majority of Bai people’s attitudes towards the influence of Hanyu on Bai culture and language are positive. They do not consider loss of language a danger to the culture or invasion of Hanyu a destruction of the Bai language’s purity.

Responses from questions concerning reading and writing Bai demonstrate that Bai people have positive attitudes towards reading and writing Bai.

It was revealed that Bai people's attitudes towards other Bai speakers differ from situation to situation. However, generally speaking, the majority of the Bai people have positive attitudes towards Bai speakers, while the minority showed neutral attitudes towards either Bai or Hanyu speakers. Only a very small proportion favored Hanyu speakers.

It was found that Bai people have positive attitudes towards literacy both in Bai and *zhōngwén*. Although more subjects showed positive attitudes towards literacy in *zhōngwén*, still, 56% of the research subjects have positive attitudes towards Bai literacy because: "Bai is Bai people's language." and "it is always good to learn more." It is also revealed that parents have very positive attitudes towards sending their children to literacy programs although they are not really keen about being literate in Bai themselves.

In summary, it seems probable that the answer to the research question "Do Bai speakers have positive attitudes towards the Bai language and such related issues as Bai culture, Bai speakers and Bai language development programs?" is "Yes, Bai people have positive attitudes towards the Bai language and such related issues."

6.3 Conclusions regarding the difference between results from the county seat and the villages

The third research question of this study concerned the difference between subjects from the county seat Jinhua and subjects from the villages in the language use and language attitudes.

Regarding the relationship between language use and location, it was found that subjects from the county seat Jinhua and the villages used Bai as their language of

communication in all domain groups. But it was noticed that subjects from the county seat Jinhua would use more Hanyu with their children than subjects from the villages in family domain. However, a chi-square test result showed no statistically significant difference.

Regarding the relationship between language attitudes and location, it was discovered that there was a difference. The chi-square test result demonstrated that the difference in the language attitudes between subjects from Jinhua and the villages was statistically significant with respect to Bai language and culture and Bai language development programs, but not with respect to Bai speakers.

Regarding proficiency in Hanyu, this study revealed that subjects from Jinhua have a higher reported bilingual proficiency than subjects from the villages to a statistically significant degree.

In summary, it seems probable that the answer to the research question “Do Bai speakers from the county seat differ from Bai speakers from the villages in their language attitudes, language use and proficiency in Hanyu?” is “Bai speakers from the county seat differ from Bai speakers from the villages in the language attitudes towards Bai language and culture, and in proficiency in Hanyu with statistical significance but not in their language use and attitudes towards other Bai speakers.”

6.4 Applications of the research results

It is shown in this study that Bai people have very strong contact with television. Over 80% percent of researched families have a TV. Half of the informants reported that they watch TV everyday and 23% of the subjects reported that they watch TV often. At the same time, very positive attitudes towards Bai television programs were revealed. The majority (over 80%) of subjects demonstrated the desire to have television programs in Bai. Also they were willing to commit to further involvement

in these programs. These findings indicate an easy access of language development program via television and potential success in these programs.

This study also revealed that parents have very positive attitudes towards sending their children to literacy programs although they are not really keen about being literate in Bai themselves. This indicates potential success in a children's literacy program, which can give impetus to adult literacy programs.

Another finding in this study is the difference in attitudes between subjects from the villages and subjects from the county seat. This finding indicates language development programs in villages are more likely to be successful. Thus a better strategy of the language development programs is to start from villages then to move towards the county seat.

6.5 Evaluation of the methodology

Generally speaking, the methodology employed in this study is good, but there are some changes could be made to improve future studies.

Regarding the questionnaire, it could be reduced in length by eliminating some of the questions that are not essential to answering the research questions. For instance, questions 4, 14 and 15 in part I may give important information for other social studies, but they are not directly related to the research questions of this current study. Some other examples can be seen from question 18f, and 20b in part III, which gave results that doesn't match with the original goal. Another revision of the questionnaire needs to be made to question 22 in part III. Although the religious domain is a classic domain in many other domain studies, it is not an everyday contact domain for Bai people. This is especially true with the activity of reciting dogma, since only a few people have experience with it. The questionnaire can also be reduced in its difficulty of understanding to prevent misunderstanding and non-

response. For instance, question 5 in part II C was difficult for some of the informants from the villages to understand. As a result, it took the surveyors extra effort to explain it.

Some questions could also be added to this questionnaire. For example, language use with grandchildren should be included in the language use of the family domain, thus language use of Bai can be studied over a three-generation span.

Regarding sampling, the 36 years old division line for age group seems somehow arbitrary, and it is better to have more age groups. It is better to set some informant age requirement ahead of time based on some preliminary study. For example, it was revealed in this study that most of the Bai female speakers above 45 refused to be informants. They think they are too old to think clearly.

6.6 Suggestions for further studies

Due to the length of the paper, such social factors as education, gender, age, occupation and travel experience were not discussed in this current study. Further studies are needed to discover correlations between these social factors and Bai people's language use and language attitudes.

In further studies, it is recommended that language use with grandchildren be included in the family domain. Thus the language use of the Bai can be examined in a three-generation range.

It is also recommended that follow-up studies be done with those children whose parents speak Hanyu to them but believe they will become bilingual later.

Two researched villages in this study (Xizhong and Shilong) have different levels of exposure to a Bai literacy program compared to the other 3 villages. Xizhong village has had a Bai literacy program on and off for more than fifteen years, while a Bai

literacy program is underway in Shilong village. Xinren, Fumin, and Xiangtu villages have no exposure to Bai literacy. It is worthwhile to compare Xizhong, Shilong and one out of the three villages without any literacy exposure and see whether there is a correlation between the exposure to a Bai literacy program and the attitudes towards it.

Some other methods such as SRT (sentence repetition tests) could be used to assess the bilingual proficiency of Bai people.

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