

## **The Acquisition of Sociolinguistic Variation: Effects of a Short-term Study Abroad Sojourn on Second Language Learners of Chinese?**

Yanmin Bao

In the Chinese language, DE is the most widely used morphosyntactic particle, and the most salient feature of DE is its multifunctional and optionality. For example, in informal situations, DE is frequently omitted in genitive marker and adjective/noun-as-modifier environments by native speakers (Li, 2010). This study, with Chinese native-speaker data as the baseline, investigates the learning of the sociolinguistic variants DE by students in a short-term study abroad sojourn. Different from traditional views of language learning, which focus primarily on formal linguistic accuracy, studies on sociolinguistic variation investigate learners' acquisition of native-speaker sociolinguistic norms, the competence to understand and produce socially appropriate utterance. Though there have been a number of variationist studies on learners of French, Spanish and English (e.g., Mougeon, Nadasdi, & Rehner, 2010; Regan, 1995), few have been done in Chinese, and to my knowledge, it remains unexplored to what extent study-abroad affects CSL (Chinese as a second language) learners' acquisition of sociolinguistic variation.

The data consist of 40 audio-recorded sociolinguistic interviews, story-telling, pre- and post-test version of language contact profile, adapted mini-AMTB (Attitude/Motivation Test Battery) and WTC (Willingness to Communicate) scale. Two groups of participants are recruited: 12 Chinese native-speakers (6 females, 6 males) and 14 CSL learners (9 at beginning level, 5 at intermediate level). Native-speakers are interviewed once. CSL learners are interviewed twice, before and after their study abroad program, and they also complete all the questionnaires. 3117 tokens from CSL learners and 3759 tokens from native-speakers are submitted to multivariate analysis with GoldVarb X. The factors analyzed include DE function, prestudy vs. poststudy abroad, gender, Chinese proficiency, interview vs. story-telling, attitude/motivation, willingness to communicate in Chinese.

Findings of the frequency analysis show that both the CSL learners and native-speakers treat the lexicalized terms as DE prohibited context, that is, CSL learners already acquire the obligatory forms (Type 1 variation). However, learners differ somewhat from NS norms on optional use of DE. Through VARBRUL analysis, results reveal that both linguistic and extralinguistic factors under test play significant roles in the use of DE variants, and the general patterns are as follows: (a) DE tends to be deleted more in informal speech; (b) females tend to use DE more than males; (c) intermediate learners tend to use DE more in optional contexts; (d) positive attitude/motivation but relatively low willingness to communicate promote DE deletion, one explanation is that learners want to avoid making any mistakes, and they use more DE to achieve the accuracy and clarity of L2 use. Additionally, though the short-term study abroad sojourn does not promote learners' DE deletion in optional contexts, a further analysis on the length of abroad stay (12 weeks vs. 6 weeks) shows that the longer the learners stay in China, the more likely they are to omit DE in optional cases. Detailed explanations and individual learner cases will be presented and discussed in the presentation.

## References

- Li, X. S. (2010). Sociolinguistic variation in the speech of learners of Chinese as a second language. *Language Learning*, 60(2), 366-408.
- Mougeon, R., Nadasdi, T., & Rehner, K. (2010). *The sociolinguistic competence of immersion students*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Regan, V. (1995). The acquisition of sociolinguistics native speech norms: Effects of a Year abroad on second language learners of French. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp.245-267). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.