

Social class, language attitudes, and language use

A case study of Chinese university students

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Few previous studies have examined the impact of social class on language attitudes and language use in mainland China. A total of 215 questionnaires were collected from a university in China for this study. The participants were classified into four social classes: upper middle class, middle middle class, lower middle class, and lower class. Then an individual interview was conducted with 10 students. Findings show that the students from the upper middle class had significantly lower attitudes toward local dialects and they had the lowest percentage of current use of dialect at home. The study adds evidence to findings of previous studies that local dialects might face certain danger of maintenance. It also shows that this change would start from people from the upper middle class. The study also points out a possible future tendency that social class privilege will play a more significant role in English learning and education.

Keywords: language attitudes, language use, social class

关键词: 语言态度、语言使用、社会阶层

1. Introduction

1.1 Language attitudes and social class

There is nothing intrinsically beautiful or correct about any sound or any language. Yet whether *r* should be pronounced or not pronounced in English in New York City is related to speakers' social classification (Labov 1966). Labov is the best known exponent of bringing social class into sociolinguistic analysis (Block 2015). Following Labov (1966), pioneering researchers in linguistic variation such as Trudgill (1974), Milroy and Milroy (1978), and Cheshire (1978) also

analyzed the relationship between social class and linguistic variables. The major findings in their studies were that people from higher social classes used standard language forms more frequently, while people from lower classes frequently used vernacular forms.

Social class is also considered an influential trait in studies of language attitudes. Attitudes to language are strongly influenced by cultural, economic, and political factors, and people with different social statuses may have different language attitudes (Holmes 2013). Lai (2010) conducted a study examining the relationship between social class and language attitudes toward English, Putonghua, and Cantonese in Hong Kong. Ting and Pua (2015) investigated the relationship between social-economic status and language attitudes toward Chinese dialect and Putonghua in Malaysia. Peng (2018) found that the changing perceptions of Taiwan Mandarin by young mainlanders could be ascribed in part to social and economic changes on the mainland. Vaish (2008) qualitatively analyzed attitudes and identities of female students from the urban disadvantaged social class toward English and Hindi in India. Riagáin (2007) examined relationships between social class and Irish in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

However, few studies have examined the influence of social class on language attitudes in mainland China because it is a new concept here as compared with industrialized societies. Discussing or acknowledging social class used to cause discomfort, as the existence of class differences contradicted China's political tradition (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) that everyone is equal in a socialist country. Nevertheless, since the reform and opening-up policy was carried out in 1978, social class has become a familiar concept in society and academia due to the increasing gap between the wealthiest and the poorest in China. The polarization between the rich and poor in China is indicated by the fact that the Gini coefficient¹ has stayed at a relatively high level of between 0.47 and 0.49 during the past decade (Liu and Fu 2014).

Studies of social class in foreign language education and learning are attracting attention as well. López-Gopar and Sughrua (2014) discussed how social class impacted English-language education in Mexico. Shin (2014) explored the relationship between social class, English learning, and English teaching in Korea in the context of the global economy. Both studies showed that access to English education depends on social class as related to economics because English is perceived as conveying social-class prestige in these countries.

1. The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure that is used to represent unequal distributions, e.g. income distribution. It can take any value between 0 and 1. The closer the value is to 1, the greater is the inequality. 0.4 is the warning level set by the United Nations (Liu and Fu 2014).

An English fever took hold in China after the 1978 reforms. English proficiency can provide students with access to more prestigious forms of education, as well as highly desired positions in the workplace (Gao 2014). Students from lower-class families (especially from rural areas) do not have the same opportunities to get a good English education as students from higher-class families. With the growing social inequality, English education is becoming a site for the reproduction of social-class differences in China (Zou and Zhang 2011). For example, in developed cities, “bilingual (Chinese-English) education has become a form of elite education which is associated with family income, hence, privileged to higher social classes” (Tong and Shi 2012: 168). However, not many previous studies focus on the relationship of social class to English learning in China. In addition, results of previous research are not consistent. For example, Liu (2014) demonstrated through the data that middle school students from higher social classes showed higher English learning motivation to study abroad, to further personal developments, as well as stronger intrinsic motivations; while Xu’s (2008) study suggested that family background has a large impact on English learning motivation of university students for external factors only (going abroad and fulfilling parents’ wishes), but not to further personal developments, nor for intrinsic reasons. The current paper examines the impact of social class on language attitudes and language use of university students in mainland China. The results of the study will add knowledge to the research of language attitudes and provide implications for policy makers and language educators.

1.2 Previous research of language attitudes towards prestige

In sociolinguistics, prestige means high status (Holmes 2013). It is the respect granted to a language variety in relation to other varieties in a speech community (Magro 2016). Attitudes to the standard variety in a community are generally very respectful; however, attitudes to non-standard or vernacular variety are varied and often ambivalent (Holmes 2013).

There are generally two types of previous language attitudes studies concerning prestige. The first strand is that linguists investigate language attitudes toward English varieties. Speakers of standard English accents have been perceived to be more intelligent, and to have jobs with higher status, whilst speakers of non-standard English accents have been thought to be more honest, likeable, friendly and to have a better sense of humor (e.g. Cheyne 1970; Coupland and Bishop 2007; Garrett, Coupland and Williams 1999; Giles 1971; Strongman and Woosley 1967). In addition, L2 speakers of English generally report a greater ability to recognize, and greater familiarity with, standard English (RP) and standard American English (GA) than other varieties of English speech. For example, Jarvella

et al. (2001) found that the standard American and English varieties were most familiar to learners when investigating attitudes toward American, English, Irish and Scottish speech in Denmark. Evans (2010) found that UK English had more positive status than other varieties when exploring attitudes of mainland Chinese students toward English from US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand.

Another strand of language attitudes studies concerning prestige investigates the relationship between different languages/varieties within a speech community. For example, Lai's (2011) study indicated that secondary school students showed positive attitudes toward English, Putonghua, and Cantonese in postcolonial Hong Kong even though Putonghua was rated the lowest. When examining language attitudes among a group of university students toward Creole and French in the French overseas department and region (DROM) of Reunion, Oakes (2013a) found that Creole was not viewed negatively as in the past, suggesting Reunion was moving beyond diglossia.

1.3 Previous research of language attitudes and language use in mainland China

The Chinese language has a number of varieties or dialects; for instance, Xiang (a dialect spoken in Hunan Province), Gan (a dialect spoken in Jiangxi Province), and Min (a dialect spoken in Fujian Province) (e.g. Li and Zhu 2010; Zhou 2001). People from different areas may not understand each other when they speak their own dialects; therefore, Putonghua, or the common language of China, has been officially promoted to serve the functions of a standard language and the sole official language in China since 1956 (Cheng 1975; Ramsey 1987). Yet, for many Chinese people, dialects are still used with parents, relatives, and fellows from the same local area.

The sociolinguistic language situation² in China represents a diglossia (e.g. Li 2012; Li and Zhu 2010; Sun and Mao 2015; Wang and Ladegaard 2008): Putonghua is the high variety which is preferred in formal situations (e.g. in the classroom); the local dialect is the low variety which is preferred in informal situations (e.g. at home).

Because of the high prestige of Putonghua in mainland China, a few scholars have suggested that maintenance of local dialects by the young generation is under pressure (e.g. Fan 2005; Guo 2008). However, few studies have examined whether social class influences attitudes and maintenance of local dialects by the young generation. On the other hand, language attitudes in Guangzhou and

2. China is multiethnic and therefore has many ethnic languages used by minority groups. This paper limits its discussion on Chinese, excluding ethnic languages in China.

Shanghai in the literature differ from other places in that the local dialects³ in these cities have high covert prestige⁴ because of the advanced economic statuses of these cities (e.g. Bai 1994; Yang 2014; Zhou 2001). Moreover, Putonghua is based on the northern dialects, with the Beijing phonological system as its norm of pronunciation. Putonghua and Beijing dialect thus share many similar features and are highly intelligible to speakers of both varieties, which leads to Putonghua and Beijing dialect not being clearly distinguished by many people (Jing and Zhu 2014; Zhu 2012). In addition, people in Beijing have neither positive nor negative attitudes toward Putonghua, and there is not much promotion of Putonghua in Beijing due to the fact that Beijing dialect and Putonghua share many similar linguistic features (Jing and Zhu 2014). Therefore, the current study focuses on explaining social class and attitudes toward local dialects but does not include Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai cities due to the special statuses of the local dialects in these places.

The previous literature review shows that the study of the relationship between social class and language attitudes and language use in mainland China needs more attention. On the one hand, few studies have examined social class and language attitudes/use of Putonghua, and local dialects; on the other hand, studies on English learning and social class did not have consistent results. Thus the current study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does social class influence language attitudes toward Putonghua, dialects, and English by university students in China?
2. What is the relationship between social class and reported language use of university students in China?

2. Social class division

Karl Marx is considered to be the founder of economic history and sociology, and he developed the first and one of the most influential theories of social class. Marx's class differentiation model was based on the ownership of the means of production, i.e. ownership or non-ownership of property is fundamental in determining the life-chances of an individual or a class (e.g. 1867/1976). Max

3. In the study, the local dialect in Guangzhou refers to Cantonese; the local dialect in Shanghai refers to the one spoken in the urban Shanghai city.

4. Labov (1966) explains that prestige can be separated into overt prestige and covert prestige. For example, the standard variety in a community has overt prestige, and it is overtly admired by all the community regardless of the way they themselves speak. Covert prestige refers to positive attitudes toward vernacular or non-standard speech varieties.

Weber is the second classical theorist of social class. Weber (1922/1968) added the dimensions of power and prestige as interacting factors creating hierarchies. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) later advanced social class as a construct by denoting the status of individuals in a cultural/economic society in connection with educational systems of stratification. For Block (2012, 2014), social class is about a wide range of experiences in the day-to-day lives of people, constituting key dimensions such as property, wealth, occupation, place of residence, education, social networking, consumption patterns, symbolic behavior, spatial relations, mobility, and life chances. The working definition of social class in the current study is “a multi-dimensional construct... and that classes are not merely economic phenomena but are also profoundly concerned with forms of social reproduction and cultural distinction” (Savage et al. 2013: 223). According to Diemer et al. (2013), social class can be measured in two primary ways: (1) a socioeconomic status approach, which indexes individuals within a power hierarchy based on relatively objective indicators such as income, occupational prestige, educational level, or wealth; (2) a subjective social status approach, measured by one's perception of his or her social class, using more qualitative approaches.

The People's Republic of China has a different social structure than many other countries because it has been a socialist country since 1949. China's social structure and class structure have changed dramatically as the economy developed, and with the economic structural changes after the opening-up policy and economic reforms in 1978. Chinese sociologists have tried to establish a new social stratification in contemporary China (e.g. Li 2004; Lin and Wu 2010; Lu 2002; Wu 2004). One of the most influential and comprehensive systematic analyses is Lu's (2002) report. He defines social strata in China in terms of Chinese citizens' occupations and their access to organizational resources, economic resources, and cultural resources (Lu 2002). Lu employs a mixture of neo-Marxist concepts of ownership and control, the Weberian concept of authority, and Bourdieu's concept of capital (Gao 2014).

According to Lu (2002), there are ten social strata in China ranking from the highest to lowest: (i) state and social management, (ii) managers, (iii) private business owners, (iv) professionals, (v) office workers, (vi) individual industrial and commercial households, (vii) business service workers, (viii) manufacturing workers, (ix) peasants, and (x) rural and urban unemployed, and underemployed groups. Lu (2002) then further divides these ten social strata into five levels of social class in China: (a) upper class (including senior leading cadres, executives of big enterprises, senior professionals, and owners of big private enterprises); (b) upper middle class (including middle and lower-level leading cadres, middle-level management of big enterprises, managers of middle and small enterprises, middle-level professionals and technical, and owners of middle

private enterprises); (c) middle middle class (including junior professionals and technical, owners of small private enterprises, clerical personnel, individual industrial and commercial households); (d) lower middle class (including self-employed workers, business service staff, workers, peasants); and (e) lower class (including workers and peasants who live in poverty and with job insecurity, the unemployed, and the underemployed). Lu's (2002) model characterizes the density of market-driven social differences in contemporary China; furthermore, each category of social stratum embodies a diverse range of social positions with different degrees of wealth and power (Gao 2014).

The current study classifies Chinese students into different social classes according to the occupational status of both parents using Lu's (2002) ten social strata. As well as occupational status, Lai (2010) included a second criterion based on the education levels of each parent as an indicator of social class because secondary school students in her study might not be fully aware of their parents' occupations. The current study adopts Lai's (2010) second criterion as well because the university students in the current study often gave a general answer about their parents' occupations, and deciding the social class they belong to using parent occupation was not always possible. Adopting a second criterion about parents' educational levels helped to verify the initial information of occupational status provided by the participants, and this is illustrated in the methodology section.

3. Framework of language attitudes of this study

In line with previous studies (e.g. Lamb 2007; Li 2014; Nguyen and Hamid 2016; Oakes 2013b), Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) concepts of ideal/ought-to L2 selves are used as the framework to measure language attitudes in the current study. Derived from possible selves theory in social psychology (e.g. Markus and Nurius 1986; Higgins 1987), the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2005, 2009) is composed of three dimensions: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. The Ideal L2 Self refers to the image of the person speaking the L2 one would like to become in the future. The Ought-to L2 Self is the reasons that one is pressured to learn to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes. The L2 Learning Experience refers to motives related to the immediate learning environment/experience on learners' motivation to continue learning, such as the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, or grades. The current study investigates language attitudes to local dialects, Putonghua, and English. Chinese students do not need to learn dialects in the classroom; therefore, the Ideal L2 Self

and Ought-to L2 Self components of the model are adopted as the framework of measurement of attitudes in this study.

The integrative/instrumental dimensions (Gardner and Lambert 1972) have been widely applied in research on language attitudes (e.g. Chen, Warden and Chang 2005; Zhou 2001). The ideal/ought-to L2 selves were developed to broaden the interpretation of the integrative/instrumental framework because there have been debates on the adequacy of the model to explain the subtleties of language orientations and attitudes. One argument is that the integrative/instrumental framework cannot be applied to all language learning environments, for example, foreign language contexts (Dörnyei 1990; Oxford and Shearin 1994). Moreover, English is an international language and associated with a global culture, which has called for a more suitable model to explain the motivational basis of language globalization (e.g. Dörnyei and Csizér 2002; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011). As a result, the current study uses the ideal/ought-to L2 selves motivational constructs of language attitudes.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The study was carried out at a comprehensive university in Tianjin during the 2016–2017 academic year. Tianjin is a metropolis in northern China. It borders Hebei Province and Beijing Municipality. The university is a prestigious⁵ one in China, and it enrolls students from all over the country.

All of the participants were from non-English majors because attitudes toward English between English majors and non-English majors in China differ significantly (You and Dörnyei 2016). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The researcher approached teachers working at the university who were willing to help. Printed Chinese language copies of the questionnaire were personally delivered to participating teachers after they agreed to participate. The questionnaires were given to the students by their teachers during a regular class meeting, and the instruction language for the questionnaire was Putonghua. Answering the questionnaire anonymously took 10 minutes on average. The ques-

5. According to the Ministry of Education (1999), there are thirty-nine prestigious universities (they are also called '985 Project') in China. They are being developed into world-class prestigious universities by the government, and they receive more financial support than other universities.

tionnaires were collected by their teachers afterwards and delivered back to the researcher.

A total of 270 undergraduate university students with a mean age of 21.1 years were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Two hundred and fifteen valid questionnaires were collected because 55 of the 270 students did not complete the questionnaire, or fill it in properly, and had to be eliminated from the study. As noted earlier, participants from Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou were also eliminated. Distribution of the participants including their gender and major are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Information about participants in the study

Traits of students	Groups	No.	Percentage
Sex	male	90	41.9%
	female	125	58.1%
Major	science & technology	123	57.2%
	non-English liberal arts	92	42.8%
Social class	upper middle class	64	29.8%
	middle middle class	62	28.8%
	lower middle class	63	29.3%
	lower class	26	12.1%
	Total	215	100%

4.2 Questionnaires

In this study, the questionnaire was composed of three parts (see Appendix). The first part was designed to collect personal information such as major, age, grade, gender, home town, parents' occupations, and parents' levels of education. Using the social class division discussed in the previous section, the participants were classified into four social classes: upper middle class, middle middle class, lower middle class, and lower class. Four representative examples are illustrated below. Student A's father is an employee from a state-owned company, and her mother is an accountant. From this level of information, it is still difficult to demarcate student A's parents' social class. From the questionnaire, it is also known that her father's educational level is above college bachelor's degree (i.e. graduate school), and her mother's educational level is college bachelor's degree. Combining these two pieces of information, student A's social class was classified as upper middle class. Student B's father is an elementary school teacher, and his mother is a doctor in a town clinic. His father has a bachelor's degree, and his mother's education

is below middle school. Student B’s social class was therefore classified as middle middle class. Both student C’s parents are factory workers. Her father’s education is below middle school, and her mother has a college associate degree. Student C’s social class was therefore lower middle class. Both parents of student D are peasants. Both of their educational levels are below middle school, so student D’s social class was classified as lower class in this study. Numbers and percentages of social class distribution of all participants are shown in Table 1.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on information such as parents’ language use at home, student’s language use at home/in school, and what languages he/she expects the next generation to speak. Part III contained 18 statements adapted from Dörnyei’s (2010) questionnaire. The attitude targeted by these statements included six domains: (a) ideal self toward local dialects, (b) ought-to self toward local dialects, (c) ideal self toward Putonghua, (d) ought-to self toward Putonghua, (e) ideal self toward English, (f) ought-to self toward English. All Part III statements were constructed on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each domain of the questionnaire were calculated, as shown in Table 2. The three domains of ideal L2 selves and the entire part of the questionnaire achieved satisfactory reliability threshold (>0.70).⁶ The three domains of ought-to L2 selves achieved acceptable reliability threshold (>0.50).⁷ Thus, the questionnaire had adequate internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability coefficients for the language attitudes domains

Domains of ideal/ought-to L2 selves		
1.	Ideal dialect	0.765
2.	Ought to dialect	0.680
3.	Ideal Putonghua	0.846
4.	Ought to Putonghua	0.582
5.	Ideal English	0.800
6.	Ought to English	0.683
Entire questionnaire of part IV		0.851

6. According to Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1987), any alpha values (α) greater than 0.7 would indicate a high internal reliability within the same category.

7. However, Cronbach Alpha coefficients for items concerning attitudes, motivations or emotions would be acceptable if they are at least 0.5 (Field 2013).

4.3 Interviews

After completion of the questionnaire, an individual interview was conducted with 10 volunteers (5 males and 5 females) selected from the participants. The ten participants' answers in the interviews covered different situations of language use needed for the study's purpose. No more participants were recruited for the interviews. The purpose of collecting qualitative data is to confirm accurate and robust analysis of the paper-based questionnaire results. The interviews were carried out as informal conversations to ensure a relaxed atmosphere, and the interviewees were interviewed in Putonghua by the researcher. Interview questions were similar to the second part of the questionnaire, with the request of more explanations of the subjects' choices of language use. Each interview lasted for about 10 minutes. The interview data were recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed into Chinese before being translated into English. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

5. Results

5.1 Language attitudes

Table 3 presents the results of a comparison of the six factors in the ideal/ought-to selves of dialect, Putonghua, and English across social classes. One-way ANOVAs were run and composite means, standard deviations, F values, and P values were calculated. Given the large sample size of this study, effect size values (eta-square) were also calculated to show the realistic differences.

As revealed from the effect size values⁸ in Table 3, there is one factor that showed moderate differences across social classes: composite means of ideal self toward dialects of students from middle middle class and lower middle class were significantly higher than those of students from upper middle class. Two other observations about the figures in Table 3 can be made. First, composite means of attitudes toward dialects (ideal/ought-to) of students from upper middle class were the lowest compared with those of students from the other social classes. Second, composite means of ideal English attitudes of students from upper middle class and middle middle class were higher than those of students from lower middle class and lower class. Table 3 also shows that attitudes to ought-to dialect were the lowest among all the attitude factors. Of all the factors, the participants

8. Any effect size values between 0.06 to 0.14 indicate medium differences, and those ≥ 0.14 are considered large for one-way ANOVAs (Cohen 1988).

Table 3. Comparison of language attitudes toward dialects, Putonghua, and English across social classes (UM=upper middle class, $n=64$; MM=middle middle class, $n=62$; LM=lower middle class, $n=63$; L=lower class, $n=26$; Total=215)

Factors	Mean: UM/MM/ LM/L	SD: UM/MM/ LM/L	F (3, 211)	Effect size	Post Hoc
1. Ideal dialect	4.39/4.98/5.04/ 5.00	1.31/1.15/0.97/ 1.11	4.365 [*]	0.06 [#]	MM>UM, LM>UM
2. Ought to dialect	3.67/4.18/4.17/ 4.19	1.27/0.99/1.06/ 1.05	3.136 [*]	0.04	
3. Ideal Putonghua	6.16/6.22/6.12/ 6.38	0.99/0.85/0.82/ 0.62	0.644	0.009	
4. Ought to Putonghua	4.72/4.82/4.98/ 5.01	1.02/1.01/1.08/ 0.92	0.913	0.01	
5. Ideal English	6.23/6.26/5.96/ 6.06	0.88/0.72/0.94/ 0.72	1.714	0.02	
6. Ought to English	4.86/4.85/4.86/ 4.82	1.22/1.10/1.12/ 1.28	0.009	0.0001	

^{*} $P<0.05$ [#] moderate to large differences

had more favorable attitudes to ideal dialect/Putonghua/English than ought-to dialect/Putonghua/English.

5.2 Language use

Table 4 describes percentages of participants’ reported language use at home and their expected language use for the next generation across four social classes. Every student in the study could communicate in Putonghua and all of them used Putonghua in the classroom. In order to examine the inferential relationship of social class and language use, Kendall’s tau-b correlation was calculated. The result shows that the relationship between social class and language use was lowly correlated ($\tau=-0.260, p<0.01$),⁹ and the relationship between social class and expected language use by the next generation was also lowly correlated ($\tau=-0.186, p<0.01$). Nevertheless, the following tendencies can be observed from Table 4.

The highest percentage of participants in the study who used Putonghua at home were those from the upper middle class ($68.8+4.7=73.5\%$), with the mid-

9. When the absolute value of a correlation coefficient is less than 0.3, the correlation is considered low (Field 2013).

Table 4. Reported language use across social classes (UM=upper middle class, $n=64$; MM=middle middle class, $n=62$; LM=lower middle class, $n=63$; L=lower class, $n=26$; Total = 215)

Language use at home	UM		MM		LM		L	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
dialect	15	23.4%	33	53.2%	37	58.7%	18	69.2%
Putonghua	44	68.8%	24	38.7%	23	36.5%	6	23.1%
dialect + Putonghua	3	4.7%	5	8.1%	3	4.8%	2	7.7%
dialect + English	2	3.1%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Expected language use next generation	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
dialect	2	3.1%	11	17.7%	9	14.3%	4	15.4%
Putonghua	46	71.9%	29	46.8%	29	46%	16	61.5%
dialect + Putonghua	7	10.9%	10	16.1%	17	27%	6	23.1%
Putonghua + English	5	7.8%	9	14.5%	7	11.1%	0	0
Putonghua + dialect + English	3	4.7%	3	4.8%	1	1.6%	0	0
English	1	1.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0

dle middle class the second highest ($38.7 + 8.1 = 46.8\%$), the lower middle class the third ($36.5 + 4.8 = 41.3\%$), and the lower class the fourth ($23.1 + 7.7 = 30.8\%$). The highest percentage of participants who used dialect at home were those from the lower class ($69.2 + 7.7 = 76.9\%$), with the lower middle class the second highest ($58.7 + 4.8 = 63.5\%$), the middle middle class the third ($53.2 + 8.1 = 61.3\%$), and the upper middle class the lowest ($23.4 + 4.7 + 3.1 = 31.2\%$). Two participants from the data reported they used English at home and they were both from the upper middle class. To summarize, the higher the social class, the more Putonghua the participants used at home, while the lower the social class, the more local dialect they used at home.

The percentage of students who expected the next generation to be able to use Putonghua ranked first with those from upper middle class ($71.9 + 10.9 + 7.8 + 4.7 = 95.3\%$), with lower middle class second ($46 + 27 + 11.1 + 1.6 = 85.7\%$), lower class third ($61.5 + 23.1 = 84.6\%$), and middle middle class fourth ($46.8 + 16.1 + 14.5 + 4.8 = 82.2\%$). Students who expected the next generation to be able to speak dialect the most were the lower middle class ($14.3 + 27 + 1.6 = 42.9\%$), followed by the middle middle class ($17.7 + 16.1 + 4.8 = 38.6\%$), then the lower class the third most ($15.4 + 23.1 = 38.5\%$), with the upper middle class the least ($3.1 + 10.9 + 4.7 = 18.7\%$). Students who expected the next generation to be able to use English the most were

from the middle middle class ($14.5 + 4.8 = 19.3\%$), then the upper middle class ($7.8 + 4.7 + 1.6 = 14.1\%$), followed by the lower middle class ($11.1 + 1.6 = 12.7\%$). In summary, the participants from the upper middle class had the highest expectation that the next generation will use Putonghua, and the lowest expectation the next generation will use dialect. More than ten percent of the participants from the middle middle class, upper middle class and lower middle class expected the next generation to be able to use English, while none of the participants from the lower class reported expecting the next generation to use English.

5.3 Interviews

During the interviews, the ten participants were asked to answer questions about their family background, their language use at home and what languages/varieties they expected the next generation to speak. Their answers were categorized into three groups: use Putonghua at home, use local dialect at home, and use both Putonghua and dialect (see Table 5).

Using Putonghua at home

All three of the students in this group had well-educated parents. Fang said that her parents used Putonghua with her because they went to university outside their home towns and they started to use Putonghua from then. Similarly, Yu said that her parents were university teachers, and did not want her to learn to speak the local dialect because it was not pleasant to hear in their opinions. However, Dong's parents spoke the local dialect with him at home, but he always spoke Putonghua with them. When talking about the languages they expected their children to learn, this group of students agreed that Putonghua and English were important and necessary skills, but dialects were not necessary to know.

Using local dialects at home

Four of the ten participants reported that they used dialects at home when talking with their parents. Two of them said their parents were farmers. Even when they migrated to other provinces to work, they still used their own dialects. The other two students' parents were educated, and they used local dialects at home. In discussing what languages they expected their children to learn, all agreed that Putonghua was necessary to learn; Hao and Jun also stated that English was necessary. Hao, Lin, and Jun said they did not think their local dialects were pleasant to hear. However, they hoped their children could speak the local dialect of the place they live in. Yuan hoped his children could speak his own dialect because he hoped they could communicate with their grandparents.

Table 5. Information and responses of the interviewees

Pseudonym	Grade	Gender	Major	Parents' occupations	Home town	Home language	Next generation
Fang	sophomore	female	media	reporter, doctor	Handan city, Hebei Province	Putonghua	Putonghua, English
Dong	junior	male	engineering	engineer, public official	Rizhao city, Shandong Province	Putonghua	Putonghua, English
Yu	sophomore	female	Chinese	university teachers	Tianjin city	Putonghua	Putonghua, English
Hao	freshman	male	economics	farmers	Henan Province	dialect	Putonghua, English, dialect
Yuan	sophomore	male	sociology	farmers	Xinyang, Henan Province	dialect	Putonghua, dialect
Lin	senior	female	media	clerks	Kunming city, Yunnan Province	dialect	Putonghua, dialect
Jun	freshman	male	computer science	engineer, nurse	Tianjin city	dialect	Putonghua, English, dialect
Yan	sophomore	male	economics	elementary school teachers	Jiaxing city, Zhejiang Province	Putonghua, dialect	Putonghua, English, dialect
Lei	sophomore	female	business management	translator, university teacher	Hubei Province	Putonghua, dialect	Putonghua, English
Xue	sophomore	female	computer science	engineers	Tianjin city	Putonghua, dialect	Putonghua, dialect

Using both Putonghua and dialects at home

All three of the students in this group had educated parents. Yan spoke dialect at home before he went to middle school in another bigger city. Then he started to use Putonghua at school and at home. He used his dialect when communicating with his grandparents. Lei's father communicated with her using dialect, while her

mother used Putonghua at home. Thus she used both Putonghua and dialect at home. Similar to Lei, Xue's mother used dialect with her, while her father used Putonghua at home. Therefore, she used both varieties at home. In discussing what languages they expected their children to speak, besides Putonghua and English, Yan hoped his children could speak his own dialect if his future wife was from his home town. Lei stated that Putonghua and English were important, and that local dialect was not necessary to learn. Xue hoped her children could speak Putonghua, and she also hoped they could speak some local dialect so that they could communicate with local people.

6. Discussion

From the results, it appears that social class plays a certain role in the language attitudes and use of the university students in China. The participants from the upper middle class had less positive attitudes toward local dialects. For the ideal dialect factor, the mean scores of the upper middle class students were significantly lower than the mean scores of the other social classes. In addition, the upper middle class students had the lowest percentage of current use of dialect at home, and their expectation for the next generation to be able to use dialect was also lower than other social classes. These results are reasonable considering the findings from the interviews. Parents of upper middle class students are usually well-educated. Many of them may leave their home town for higher education and better job opportunities, or they may get used to speaking Putonghua with their children because it has been the common language in everyday life. When the children cannot speak the local dialect, they feel less bonding with the local city and thus their attitudes toward the dialect become lower. On the other hand, parents of students from the other social classes are not as well-educated as those of upper middle class students. Many of them never leave their home town and always use local dialect to communicate with their children. Thus, their children have stronger solidarity with the local city or town and have higher attitudes toward the dialect. Policy makers and educators need to be aware that less than 50% of the participants of each social class expected their children to be able to speak dialect, even though the current use of dialect was over 60% for students from middle middle class, lower middle class, and lower class. This supports the findings of previous studies that maintenance of local dialects faces challenges (Fan 2005; Guo 2008).

The study found that there were no significant differences of attitudes toward Putonghua across the social classes. Participants from all the classes showed positive attitudes toward it, and the percentage of their expectation for their next

generation to be able to use Putonghua from each social class was high. The findings in the study further prove that Putonghua is the High variety in China. As for the current use of Putonghua at home, the results show that the higher the social class, the more Putonghua the participants used. This result is consistent with the above findings on dialects that the higher the social class, the less dialect they used at home. There may be three reasons why the participants communicate with their parents in Putonghua at home. First, their parents are from different places in China or they leave their home towns to work and study and settle down in a new place. Therefore, they communicate with each other and their children in Putonghua. In addition, some parents, especially school teachers, do not want their children to learn any local dialects because they think standard Putonghua is the symbol of good education (as indicated by participant Yu in the interview data). Also, the participants leave their home town at a young age for better education (middle school and high school). They then become used to communicating in Putonghua in school, and at home.

Finally, participants from all the classes showed positive attitudes toward English, yet no significant differences of the attitudes toward English across the social classes were found. The result is not consistent with previous findings in Xu (2008) and Liu (2014) that Chinese students from upper middle class families showed significantly higher English learning motivation in certain aspects. The reason for the inconsistency can be explained with the differences between the participants in this study and those in the two previous studies. The participants in this study are from a key university in China which means that the students are excellent in academics even though they are from families of lower social classes. Therefore, it is possible for them to achieve their personal development by themselves (such as studying abroad, or finding good jobs which needs good English in China). The finding of this study is not consistent with findings in English-speaking countries either. For example, in the United States, social class privilege plays a big role in ESL education (Vandrick 1995, 2011, 2014). A suggested reason is that the education systems in some western countries and China are different. For instance, in the United States, few students from working class or lower class families can afford the tuition in private schools or prestigious universities. However, the current education system in China makes it affordable for students who are from families of working class or lower class to enter prestigious universities. Therefore, prestigious universities in China consist of a high percentage of students from poorer families but who are academically outstanding. These students can realize their personal goals with good English.

At the same time, some differences across social classes should not be ignored even though they were not significant in this study. Means of ideal English attitudes of students from upper middle class and middle middle class were higher

than those of students from lower middle class and lower class. Furthermore, more than 10% of the participants from the middle middle class, upper middle class and lower middle class expected the next generation to be able to use English while none of the participants from the lower class reported that. These results may reveal a future tendency for policy makers and educators: as class solidification has become more obvious in China, similar to Western countries (such as the United Kingdom and the United States), the association between English learning attitudes and social class may become more related. Students from higher social classes have better life chances and they have more opportunities to travel abroad or take private English classes, which lead them to aspire to closer contact with foreign countries and cultures (mainly English-speaking countries and cultures) and professional careers that require high levels of English proficiency.

Previous research (Xu 2008) has indicated that university students from higher social classes had significantly higher English learning motivation of fulfilling their parents' wishes than lower social classes. However, the means of ought-to attitudes of English in this study were not high, and neither had significant differences between those of the four social classes. The inconsistency of previous research and this study suggests that Chinese students nowadays do not learn English for teachers, peers, or for their parents' expectations. In addition, the means of ought-to attitudes of Putonghua and local dialects in this study were not high. This result shows that university students today are more independent with their own opinions.

7. Conclusion

Combining quantitative and qualitative data, this study has tried to fill a gap in the field and reported the relationship between social class and language attitudes and language use of Putonghua, local dialects, and English (except local dialects in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou) in mainland China. The analysis reveals that the students from each social class showed positive attitudes toward Putonghua, thus it further proves that Putonghua is the High variety in China. The second point is that the students from the upper middle class had significantly lower attitudes toward local dialects and they had the lowest percentage of current use of dialect at home. Furthermore, less than 50% of the participants of each social class expected their children to be able to speak dialect, even though the current use of dialect was over 60% for students from middle middle class, lower middle class, and lower class. Therefore, this study adds evidence to findings of previous studies that local dialects might face certain danger of maintenance in China. The study also shows that this change would start from people

from the upper middle class. Finally, with regard to the influence of social class on language attitudes of English, the study has found no significant impact. However, the study points out a possible future tendency as class solidification becomes more obvious in China, i.e. social class privilege will play a more significant role in English learning and education.

It is necessary to point out that this study is based on a relatively homogeneous sample, and the participants were from a prestigious university in China. Although the participants represented different social classes, future studies should expand the scope of participants to represent students from different levels of universities in China, and then the whole picture of China's language attitudes by incorporating participants from all strata of society. Future studies should investigate social class using a subjective approach, and also examine cultural identities of Chinese people as language attitudes change.

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Appendix

We would like to ask you to help us by participating in a survey to better understand language attitudes. This is not a test, so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers and you don't even have to write your name on it. We are interested in your personal opinion. The results of this survey will be used only for research purpose, so please give your answers sincerely to ensure the success of this project. Thank you very much for your help.

Part I

Please provide the following information by writing your response in the space.

School year _____ Age _____ Gender _____ Major _____ Place of home town _____

Father's occupation _____

Father's level of education _____

Mother's occupation _____

Mother's level of education _____

Part II

Please provide the following information by writing your response in the space.

Father's use of language/dialect at home _____

Mother's use of language/dialect at home _____

Your use of language/dialect at home _____

The language/dialect you expect the next generation to speak _____

Part III

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by ticking (✓) on a number from 1 to 7. Please do not leave out any items.

		Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
1.	I can imagine myself as someone who is able to speak my dialect.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	The things I want to do in the future require me to use Putonghua.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	Learning Putonghua is necessary because my friends/teachers/ classmates expect me to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	I can imagine myself communicating with my family or people from my hometown in my dialect.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I can imagine myself as someone who is able to speak Putonghua.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I study English, because if I do not study it, I think my parents will be disappointed with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	Learning the dialect is necessary because my friends/teachers/ classmates expect me to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	The things I want to do in the future require me to use English.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	I learn the dialect, because if I do not learn it, I think my parents will be disappointed with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	I learn English because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	I can imagine myself as someone who is able to speak fluent English.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	The things I want to do in the future require me to use my local dialect.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
14.	I learn Putonghua because a Chinese is supposed to be able to speak Putonghua.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	Learning English is necessary because my friends/ teachers/ classmates expect me to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	I learn Putonghua, because if I do not learn it, I think my parents will be disappointed with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	I learn the dialect because a local person is supposed to be able to speak the dialect.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	I can imagine myself communicating with other people in standard Putonghua.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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