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Articles

A study of Macao tertiary students' language attitudes after the handover

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates Macao tertiary students' language attitudes under the dynamic interplay of local, national, and global forces. The Portuguese established their settlement at Macao during the mid-sixteenth century and their colonial rule over Macao during the mid-nineteenth century. Macao's sovereignty was transferred to China at midnight on 19 December 1999 and the Macao Special Administrative Region was created. The push and pull between decolonisation, renationalisation, and globalisation are discernible in Macao people's language attitudes. A questionnaire survey was conducted in 2012 among freshmen of the University of Macau to investigate their attitudes towards Cantonese, Putonghua, English, and Portuguese. Results show that in terms of their integrative orientation to the four languages, students display the most integrative feelings to Cantonese, followed by English. Putonghua and Portuguese are ranked third and last. In terms of their instrumental

orientation to the four languages, students give the highest rating to English, followed by Cantonese and Putonghua. Portuguese receives the lowest rating. Significant differences are found among students' attitudes towards the four languages.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. The term language is used in this study as a cover term for language, dialect, etc. Chinese dialects used in this study should be understood in the popular sense, that is vernacular dialects, such as Cantonese, Hokkien, but excluding Putonghua (the common speech, the national language of the PRC), which is also known as Guoyu (the national language) in Taiwan, Huayu (the Chinese language) in Singapore, and Mandarin (an English term commonly used in Taiwan and Singapore).

2. Two different spellings, Macao and Macau, are used in Portuguese and English documents. In this study, the relevant names (e.g. the UM) are faithfully rendered

according to the spelling used in cited English sources, but Macao will be used elsewhere.

3. In addition to the questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted in July, 2013 among 17 UM freshmen.

4. The reliability of a psychometric instrument examines the extent to which a test produces consistent results when administered under similar conditions. In this study, reliability is measured by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient through SPSS, and an α value of .60 and higher is considered a sufficient reliability.

5. Factor analysis is a common statistical method employed in language attitudes studies. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is commonly used to explore the underlying dimensions of a construct, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) allows for testing the fit of models to the data. SPSS and Amos are used in this study to conduct EFA and CFA, respectively.

6. Descriptive statistics provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. They focus on three characteristics: the distribution, the central tendency, and the dispersion. The mean and the standard deviation are used in this study to describe the central tendency and the dispersion of each variable.

Additional information

Notes on contributors

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Xi Yan obtained his Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Macau and is currently an associate professor in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the Huaqiao University. His research interests include language attitudes, language ideologies, language planning and language policy in Mainland China and Macao. His recent publications include English ants are digging holes in the Chinese levee: Language ideological debates in the Chinese media (Language Problems and Language Planning, 2013, 37/1), A meta-discursive analysis of online comments of Chinese netizens on Huang Xiaoming's appropriation of English (Language, Culture and Curriculum, 2014, 27/2), "Macao has died, traditional Chinese characters have died": A study of netizens' comments on the choice of Chinese scripts in Macao (Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 2016, 37/6), etc.

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