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A Comparative Study of Cross-generational Language Attitudes in Guangzhou

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Abstract

This research investigates attitudes towards Cantonese, Putonghua and English among Guangzhou locals born in the 1960s and the 1990s by analyzing data collected from 200 questionnaires. The results show that both generations hold positive attitudes towards all the languages, but to different degrees. Both groups of respondents feel the most favourably towards Cantonese from both integrative and instrumental perspectives, which suggests that Cantonese remains dominant among all three languages. On the other hand, they favour Putonghua and English mainly for their pragmatic value, while their attitude to these two languages is different to some extent. The 90s' generation's instrumental affiliation towards English is higher than that of the 60s' generation, while the 60s' generation gives a greater weight to Putonghua. Both generations think that a multilingual society is better for the development of Guangzhou, particularly the younger generation, who claim that English plays an important role in the development of Guangzhou as an international city. Thus, it is likely that Guangzhou will continue to develop as a multilingual society with Cantonese supplemented by English and Putonghua.

Key words: language attitude, language choice, language frequency, language policy, Cantonese, Putonghua, English, integrative vs instrumental motivation, multilingualism, cultural symbol, socio-economic force

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