

# A Study on the Language Use of the Residents in Urban Villages in Zhengzhou City

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**Abstract:** *With the accelerated development of urbanization in recent years, the villages around the city have become a multitude of urban villages because of the expansion of the urban area. As the product during the process of urbanization, urban villages are experiencing dramatic changes, as a result, the language use of urban village is becoming much more complicated as well. The local residents and outsiders who live in the same urban village interact frequently and share the common public facilities. Taking the urban villages in Zhengzhou city as the research focus, this study tries to make a sociolinguistics investigation on the language use of Daxie New Village from the macro- and micro-viewpoint, which can help us better comprehend the language situation in urban villages and forecast the development of its dialect.*

**Keywords:** *Urban Villages; Speech Community; Language Use; SPSS*

## 1. Introduction

The urban village refers to a community of farmers in the urban-rural transition within the built-up area or developmental site of a city, and connotes "a peasant village in a civic urban society" <sup>[1]</sup>. The living environment of the residents in urban villages is dirty, poor and lacking in infrastructure, and the economic source is mainly low-end service industry and illegal business, which belongs to the form of slums. This phenomenon is very common in Chinese cities, especially in big cities. At present, there is no specific statistical data on the number of existing urban villages in China, and the data of urban villages are concentrated in the data of urban rundown areas. According to the current public statistics, the number of urban villages in China is about 50,000. In the coming years, with the acceleration of urbanization, a large number of people will move into central cities such as Zhengzhou, Chengdu, Chongqing, Hefei and Changsha, and the development of these cities and city clusters will enter the fast lane. In the past, cities with a population of more than 10 million were considered megacities, but now lots of provincial capitals and some economically strong cities are moving closer to this goal, forming a new batch of megacities.

Take Zhengzhou as an example. In the 40 years since the reform and opening up, Zhengzhou has continuously expanded its urban scale. In 1981, the built-up area of the city was only 65 square kilometers, at the end of 2007, the built-up area expanded to 294 square kilometers, compared to 1981 expanded 229 square kilometers. By the end of 2017, the city's built-up area of 500.8 square kilometers, 435.8 square kilometers more than 1981, an increase of 6.7 times, an average annual increase of 10.9 square kilometers. In the past 40 years, with the continuous expansion of the city scale, the city's urban population has increased significantly, and the urbanization rate has increased significantly. The urban population was 1.256 million in 1978 and 5.06 million by the end of 2017, an increase of 3.8 million over 1978, or an average annual increase of 95,000. The urbanization rate rose from 32.4 percent in 1978 to 72.2 percent in 2017, an increase of 39.8 percentage points. The construction of urbanization is first reflected in the transportation infrastructure, Zhengzhou has become the national transportation hub city. In addition, Zhengzhou Municipal government also vigorously promotes industrial upgrading and integration of urban spatial functions, and is committed to building a global regional central city supported by high-tech industries. However, with the rapid development of urbanization in Zhengzhou, the problem of urban villages is becoming more and more prominent. By the end of 2020, there were 47 urban villages in Zhengzhou, of which 20 had been completed and 27 were undergoing renovation, according to the city government. For the reconstruction of urban villages, Zhengzhou Municipal government has adopted a variety of methods, such as reconstruction, upgrading, and supporting construction, in order to improve the quality of life and urban image, and improve residents' living conditions. Since Zhengzhou became

a new first-tier city, a large number of migrants have poured into the city. The urban village has become the first stop for tens of thousands of graduates and migrant youths to settle down in Zhengzhou, a metropolis that used to be the softest part of the city. They generally do not have a high degree of education and have no skills. They rely on odd jobs and small businesses to make a living. The low rent of urban villages is very attractive to them, and the high population density of urban villages also creates certain conditions for them to do small businesses.

Language use is a crucial part of sociolinguistics. Scholars at home and abroad have made a lot of research on language use. After Labov completed his research on the r-tone at the New York department store, sociolinguists in western countries began to focus on the study of language situation and language variation<sup>[2]</sup>, for instance, language attitude, the relationship between language change and gender, language contact<sup>[3]</sup>. It is no doubt that these studies have laid the solid foundation for constructing the theoretical framework of speech community, language variation and code-switching. As for the study of the urban language in China, Xu pointed out that speech community should be judged from five aspects, including the population, the interaction, the identification, the region and the common public facilities<sup>[4]</sup>. The definition of speech community is put forward based on the theory of the community in sociology. Yang investigated the language use in Luoyang city, and studied the phonetic and lexical features of each urban area based on the previous research<sup>[5]</sup>. Fu investigated the language use of Mandarin among the residents in Nanjing city by means of questionnaires and believed that the promotion of Mandarin in Nanjing city was not in place<sup>[6]</sup>. Xue also conducted a survey on the language of the citizens in Shanghai city from the aspects of language use and language attitude<sup>[7]</sup>. As a special phenomenon in the process of urbanization, few domestic scholars have conducted some researches on the language use of residents of urban villages. It is extremely crucial to investigate the language use of residents of urban villages with the purposes of improving the communication ability of residents in urban villages, protecting and inheriting the local culture, and thus promoting the integrated development of cities. Consequently, this study chooses the urban villages in Zhengzhou city at the research site for a glimpse of the whole situation of language use of urban villages.

Urban villages in Zhengzhou are widely distributed, but the results of previous general surveys show that the population structure, lifestyle, living conditions and social interactions of urban villages are similar. Finally, Daxie New Village, which the author is familiar with, is selected as the focus of this study. Daxie New Village is located in the university town area of Zhengzhou High-tech Development Zone, surrounded by numerous residential communities and commercial sites. All the farmland of the village has been requisitioned by the state, making it a typical urban village. Daxie New Village has a total resident population of more than 2200 people, under the jurisdiction of three groups of residents, a total land of more than 2800 mu. Daxie Village has a long history and rich cultural atmosphere, is the traditional agricultural village since the founding of the People's Republic. Daxie Village was formerly known as Xishima Village (63 years ago). There were three surnames in the village: Shi, Xie and Guo, which were divided into three villages: Xishima, Guo Tang and Daxie. It is located in the core of the university town, with convenient transportation and complete living facilities. In addition, villagers have a large number of private houses, so it has attracted a large number of migrants to work here. According to incomplete statistics, the migrant population of Daxie New Village has reached 30,000 to 50,000, far exceeding the local residents. Daxie New Village is a typical urban village where local residents and outsiders live together. Therefore, it is representative to choose Daxie Village as the object of investigation, from which we can understand the language use situation of urban villages.

## 2. Theoretical Basis

### 2.1. Speech Community

The definition of speech community was first proposed by foreign scholar JJ Gumperz in 2008. It mainly refers to the community, which involves the linguistic similarities and differences among these sounds, and forms a system of non-spoken sounds used in a speech community. Then, Xu finally summed up five elements of speech community, including the population, the region, the interaction, the identification and the facility<sup>[8]</sup>. As a result, we can decide whether Daxie New Village is a typical community according to the five elements.

First and foremost, it is the population. Daxie New Village is an urban village with 500 households, 6 village groups and 2200 villagers. Due to the convenient transportation, about 20,000 to 30,000 migrants have been attracted to live in the village. Private house rental has become the main source of income for the local residents. The population of local residents in Daxie New Village is relatively stable,

mainly based on the nuclear family model linked by the blood, and the number of each family varies from three to six or seven. Although Daxie New Village is an urban village in Zhengzhou city, the migrant population is even much more than the fixed population of the village. It is admitted that these outsiders only rent in the urban village, once their conditions are slightly better, they mostly choose to have the unit house, or their own loan to buy a house. Then, it is the region. Daxie New Village is located in the junction between Zhengzhou University and Henan University of Technology, therefore, there are a multitude of residential communities and commercial outlets around it. The whole village covers an area of about 280 hectares and all of the cultivated land has been requisitioned by the state. Daxie New Village has existed for many generations with a relatively fixed area and it consists of Shi, Xie and Guo as the three largest family names so far. Moreover, it is the interaction. The local residents in Daxie New Village have lived here for many generations with a long history and they share the same ancestors, the same surname, the same language, and know each other. The most important is that they communicate frequently and many local residents with the same surname are even distant or near relatives. Because these outsiders have a renter-owner relationship with the local residents, therefore, they also have a close interaction with the local residents in Daxie New Village. In general, although Daxie New Village is an urban village composed of the residents with different language variants and backgrounds, the local residents and the outsiders have close and frequent interaction with each other. Furthermore, it is the identification. Obviously, the local residents in Daxie New Village have a strong sense of identification. Many of them shares the same surname, for instance, Shi, Xie and Guo are by far the three largest families in Daxie New village. It means that they share the same ancestors and a sense of identification is also reinforced by the fact that many local residents are close or distant relatives. In the end, it is the facility. The local residents share the same organization and facilities in the village, at the same time, they also have the common traditional culture and practices, such as the wedding ceremonies and the festivals. The outsiders in Daxie New Village also share the village's public transportation and facilities with the local residents.

To sum up, Daxie New Village has the relatively fixed population, region, frequent interactions among the local residents or between the local residents and the outsiders, and the common public facilities. Therefore, we can know that Daxie New Village is a typical speech community.

## **2.2. Code-Switching and Diglossia**

The code-switching refers to the alternating use of two or more than two different languages, dialects or styles in a bilingual or multilingual communication environment<sup>[9]</sup>. The concept of diglossia was first introduced by the American linguist Ferguson in 1959. His classic definition of it is that diglossia is a language, which includes the low variant and the high variant, and the high variant always used in written language and official spoken language is mainly from the written literature through the formal education and acquisition. Taking Chinese as an example, he believes that the classical Chinese is the high variant and the oral Mandarin is the low variant, in addition, there are also many regional low variants, which refers to the local dialects.

However, Xu believes that this is not in line with the current situation in China, because at present, the classical Chinese has given way to the vernacular and Mandarin has become the high variant with clear norms<sup>[8]</sup>, as a result, the occasion of using Mandarin is more formal. People usually speak their own dialect at home, which is regarded as the low variant.

In Daxie New Village, most of the local residents and the outsiders are bilingual speakers who speak both their own local dialects and Mandarin. For the local residents in Daxie New Village, the diglossia refers to the Zhengzhou dialect and Mandarin. For the outsiders living here, the diglossia respectively is their own local dialect and Mandarin.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Questions**

Through the quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study answers the following three key questions: (1) What is the basic situation of the distribution of residents in Daxie New Village? (2) How do the residents of Daxie New Village use language? (3) What main factors affect the language use of residents in Daxie New Village?

### **3.2. Judgement Sampling**

In this study, the research method of judgment sampling in sociolinguistics was adopted to do the investigation. Due to the large number of urban villages in Zhengzhou city, based on the previous investigation and research, a typical urban village is selected as the key research object by the method of judgment sampling. In addition, the structure of the village in the city is complex, and the number is large. If the random sampling is adopted, it is difficult to cover the residents from different backgrounds.

Consequently, Daxie New Village was chosen as the focus of this research in this study. Daxie New Village, which is surrounded by numerous residential communities and commercial outlets, is located in the zone of the junction between Zhengzhou University and Henan University of Technology and the whole farmland in the village has been requisitioned by the state. Certainly, it is a typical urban village. At present, there are about 2,200 local residents in the village which covers an area of about 280 hectares under the jurisdiction of three village groups and its transportation is very convenient. It is admitted that the villagers in Daxie New Village own a large number of private houses, thus it attracts lots of migrant workers to rent and live here. According to the incomplete statistics, the migrant population in Daxie New Village has reached about 10,000, far exceeding the local residents.

Therefore, it is representative to choose Daxie New Village where the local residents and the outsiders live together as the focus of this investigation, from which we can get a glimpse of the whole picture of the language use of the residents in urban villages in Zhengzhou city.

### **3.3. Questionnaire and Interview**

Questionnaire is one of the most popular methods in current social research, and its advantages lie in that it can obtain more effective information in a short time. Interview can be used to understand the inner thoughts and social behavior of interviewees through face-to-face communication with them so as to obtain the more detailed information related to this research.

This research designs two different questionnaires which are divided into two parts for the local residents and the outsiders in Daxie New Village. The first part is the personal information and the second part is their language use. It mainly investigates the language use of the local residents and the outsiders in Daxie New Village in Zhengzhou city.

With the help of the village committee of Daxie New Village, I randomly checked 100 local residents and then entered the survey of the questionnaire and the interview on the basis of the gender, the age, the education level, the occupation. The effective questionnaires of the local residents in the final statistics were 90, with an effective rate of 90%. While I did the survey of the local residents, I also investigated 100 outsiders, namely these tenants who rented and lived in the houses of the local residents in Daxie New Village. The effective questionnaires of the outsiders in the final statistics were 80, with an effective rate of 80%.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Language Use of the Local Residents in Daxie New Village**

Among the 90 local residents interviewed in this research, we can clearly know language use of the local residents from the Fig 1. When they talk with their elders, 50 local residents choose to use Zhengzhou dialect, while less than 5 local residents choose to use Mandarin; When they talk with their children, 36 local residents choose to use Mandarin, while only 4 local residents choose to use Zhengzhou dialect; When they talk with their colleagues who also come from Daxie New Village, about 50 local residents choose to use Mandarin; When they talk with their colleagues who come from other regions, most of them choose to use Mandarin; When they speak with their teachers, 35 local residents choose to use Mandarin, while only 8 local residents choose to use Zhengzhou dialect; When they speak with their classmates, 28 local residents choose to use Mandarin, while about 14 local residents choose to use Zhengzhou dialect; When they speak with their customers, 41 local residents choose to use Mandarin, while less than 7 local residents choose to use Zhengzhou dialect; When they are in public places, 44 local residents choose to use Mandarin, while only 3 local residents choose to use Zhengzhou dialect.

Consequently, language selection of the 90 local residents in Daxie New Village indicates certain regularity in using Mandarin and Zhengzhou dialect. It can be reflected in the following two aspects. When they speak to their elders, parents and spouses, Zhengzhou dialect is absolutely dominant, however,

in public places, such as shops, banks and hospitals, or when they speak to their customers, Mandarin is overwhelmingly dominant.

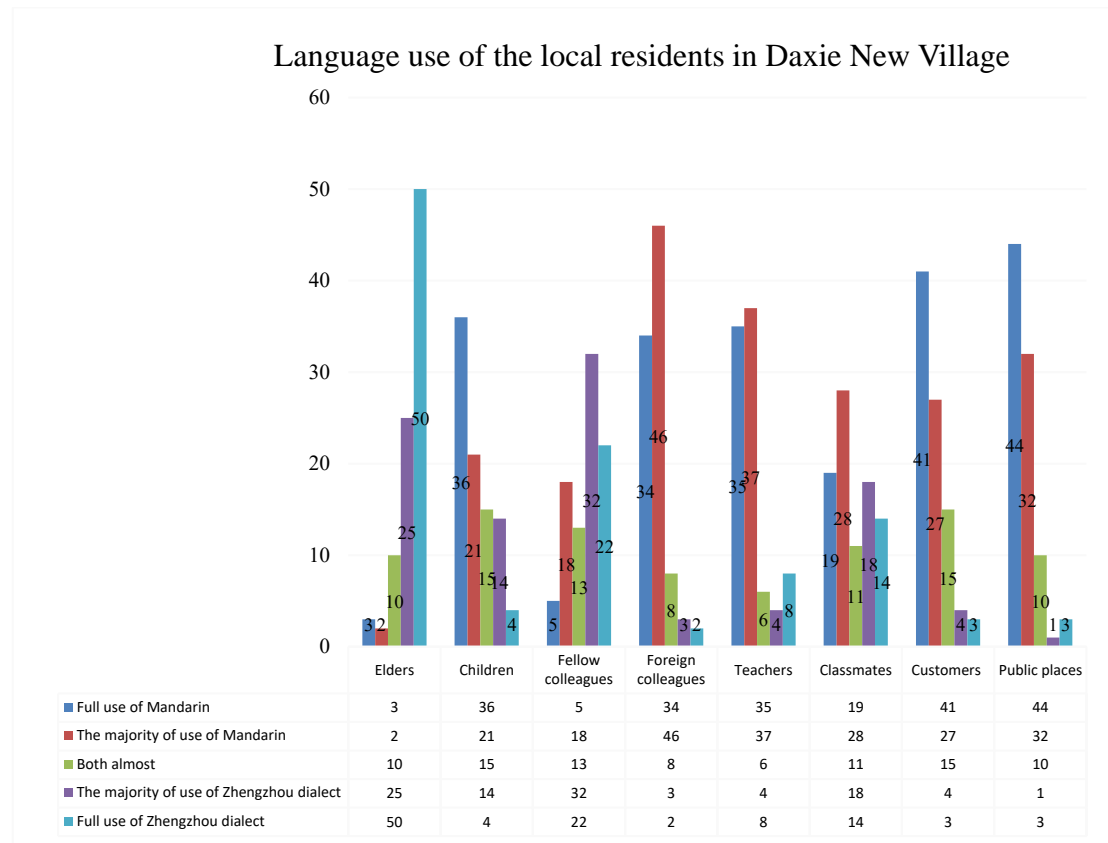


Figure 1: Language use of the local residents in Daxie New Village

Moreover, it is well known that there are amounts of factors that can determine people’s language selection and code-switching in the process of social communication, but social factors play a more important role, for instance, their conversational topics, their talking subjects and the occasion or the age, the education and the gender. To be more precise, do the social factors have an impact on the language usage of the residents in Daxie New Village? Furthermore, which social factors are likely to have a significant influence?

#### 4.2. Factors Influencing Language Use of the Local Residents

In this part, we will integrate these eight social factors including the education level, the gender, the age, the occupation, the income, the orientation of mobility, the beginning time of learning Mandarin, and the expectation for Mandarin by means of the software SPSS25.0 to conduct the analysis of the multiple linear regression on the statistical data. The following chart will present the results of the analysis. Therefore, we can study whether these eight social factors have any influence on the language use of the local residents in Daxie New Village according to the following table 1.

First of all, we need to observe the result of Sig in the chart, because the data obtained through the software is of statistical significance and its corresponding factor has the significant influence only if the result of Sig is less than 0.05. Therefore, we can eliminate some social factors with little significance, such as the gender, the income, the occupation and the orientation of mobility, because their results of Sig respectively are .074, .642, .069, .673 and they are more than 0.05, while other social factors have the significant impact on the use of Mandarin of the local residents in Daxie New Village, for instance, the age, the education level, the beginning time of learning Mandarin and their expectation for Mandarin, because their results of Sig respectively are .004, .000, .021, .001, obviously, they are less than 0.05. Among these four significant influencing factors, we need to observe the column of standardized coefficients in Tab 1 and arrange the absolute value of these four factors according to their size for judging the degree of their influence on the use of Mandarin of the local resident in Daxie New Village, so that we can get the following results .419>.238>.208 >.160. It is no doubt that the larger the number, the

greater their influence on the use of Mandarin, that is to say, the education level has the biggest impact on the use of Mandarin of the local residents in Daxie New Village, followed by their expectation for Mandarin, then the age, finally the beginning time of learning Mandarin. At the same time, we also can know that in addition to the age, the standardized coefficients of other factors, which include the education level, the beginning time of learning Mandarin and their expectation for Mandarin, appear positive, in other words, they are positively correlated with the use of Mandarin, but the age is negatively correlated with the use Mandarin.

*Table 1: Social factors influencing the language use of the local residents in Daxie New Village*

Coefficients (a)					
Model	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	Estimated value of B	Std. Error	Distribution of Beta		
Constant	1.886	.528		3.574	.001
Gender	-.213	.118	-.099	-1.807	.074
Age	-.215	.072	-.208	-2.983	.004
Education level	.498	.084	.419	5.896	.000
Occupation	.121	.066	.121	1.841	.069
Income	-.036	.076	-.035	-.466	.642
Orientation of mobility	-.048	.114	-.023	-.423	.673
Beginning time of learning Mandarin	.156	.066	.160	2.359	.021
Expectation for Mandarin	.269	.080	.238	3.351	.001
a. Dependent Variable: Use of Mandarin					

Therefore, as for the language use of the local residents in Daxie New Village, we can know that the older they are, the less frequently they use Mandarin, on the contrary, the younger they are, the more frequently they use Mandarin; The more educated they are, the more frequently they use Mandarin, on the contrary, the less educated they are, the less frequently they use Mandarin; The earlier they learn Mandarin, the more frequently they use it, oppositely, the later they learn Mandarin, the less frequently they use it; The higher their expectation for Mandarin, the more frequently they use Mandarin, adversely, the lower their expectation for Mandarin, the less frequently they use Mandarin.

### **4.3. Language Use of the Outsiders in Daxie New Village**

According to the following Fig 2, among the 80 outsiders interviewed in this research, when they speak with their elders, 57 outsiders chose to use their own dialect, while no one choose to use Mandarin; When they speak with their children, 26 outsiders choose to use their own dialect, while only 11 outsiders choose to use Mandarin; When they speak with their fellow colleagues, 43 outsiders choose to use their own dialect, while only 2 outsiders choose to use Mandarin; When they speak with their foreign colleagues, 41 outsiders choose to use Mandarin, while less than 5 outsiders choose to use their own dialect; When they speak with their teachers, nearly 30 outsiders choose to use their own dialect, while about 20 outsiders choose to use Mandarin; When they speak with their own teachers, they choose to use Mandarin; When they speak with their classmates, 27 outsiders choose to use their own dialect, while only 17 outsiders choose to use Mandarin; When they speak to their customers, 44 outsiders choose to use Mandarin, while no one chooses to use their own dialect; When they are in public places, 49 outsiders choose to use Mandarin, while only two outsiders choose to use their own dialect.

As a result, we can conclude from the above description that the language use of the outsiders in Daxie New Village is similar to the language use of the local residents in Daxie New Village, in other words, when they speak to their clients, customers in public places and their foreign colleagues, they generally use Mandarin, but when they speak to their family members, especially their parents and spouses, they use their own dialect. In addition, most of the outsiders in Daxie New Village begin to speak Mandarin when they communicate with their children with the enhancement of their awareness of Mandarin in recent years.

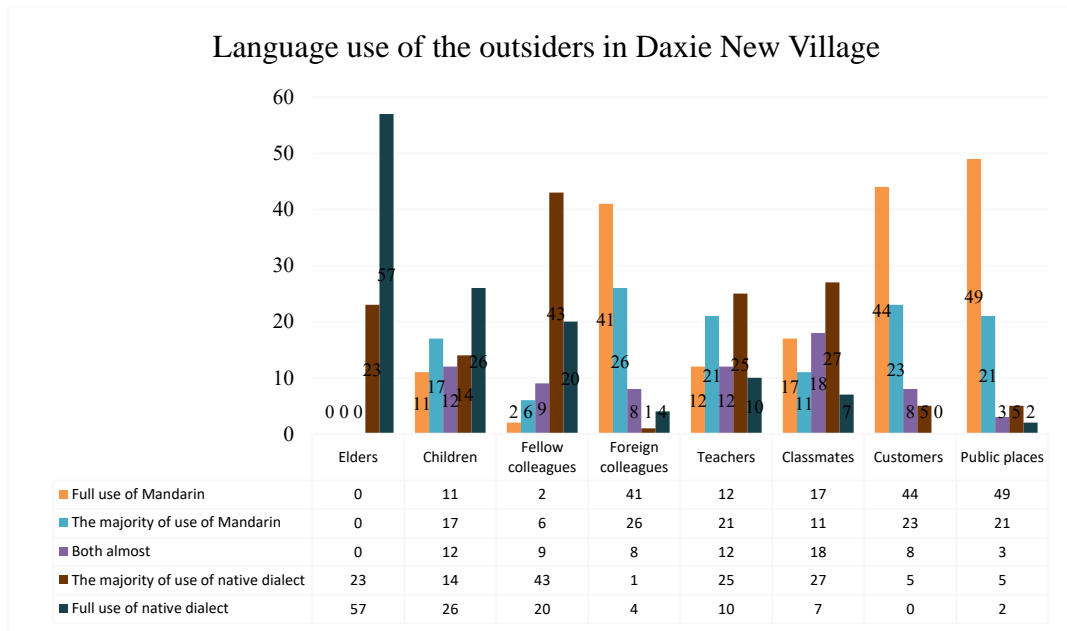


Figure 2: Language use of the outsiders in Daxie New Villag

#### 4.4. Factors Influencing Language Use of the Outsiders

With regard to the analysis of these social factors influencing the language use of the outsiders in Daxie New Village, we also make advantage of the software SPSS25.0 to conduct the analysis of the multiple linear regression on the statistical data. Nonetheless, we add another social factor called the residence of the time of the outsiders in Daxie New Village into this analysis on the basis of these eight social factors influencing language use of the local residents, such as the education level, the gender, the age, the occupation, the income, the orientation of mobility, the beginning time of learning mandarin, and the expectation for Mandarin. Consequently, we can know the results of the analysis in the following Tab 2.

Table 2: Social factors influencing the language use of the outsiders in Daxie New Village

Model	Coefficients (a)				
	Non-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	Estimated value of B	Std. Error	Distribution of Beta		
Constant	1.761	.599		2.939	.004
Gender	-.209	.134	-.094	-1.551	.126
Age	-.225	.079	-.218	-2.837	.006
Occupation	.108	.073	.107	1.486	.142
Income	-.027	.090	-.027	.302	.763
Education level	.489	.095	.399	5.131	.000
Orientation of mobility	-.011	.131	-.005	-.086	.932
Expectation for Mandarin	.298	.092	.266	3.254	.002
Beginning time of learning Mandarin	.153	.073	.456	2.090	.040
Expectation for Mandarin	.030	.084	.023	.351	.726

a. Dependent Variable: Use of Mandarin

According to the principle of SPSS, we can know that the age, the education level, the beginning time of learning mandarin and the expectation for Mandarin have a significant impact on the use of Mandarin of the outsiders in Daxie New Village, because their results of Sig respectively are .006, .000, .040, .002. However, we also can know that some influencing factors are of little significance, such as the gender, the occupation, the income, the orientation of mobility and the residence of time, because all their results of Sig is more than 0.05. If we would like to have a good knowledge of the degree of the influence of these significant factors on the use of Mandarin of the outsiders in Daxie New Village, we still need to observe the column of standardized coefficients in Tab 2 and arrange their absolute value corresponding to the age, the education, the beginning time of learning Mandarin and their expectations for Mandarin

according to their size. Therefore, we can get the following results  $.456 > .399 > .266 > .218$ . It is no doubt that the larger the number, the greater their influence on the use of Mandarin, in other words, the beginning time of learning Mandarin among these four significant influencing factors has the biggest effect on the use of Mandarin of the outsiders in Daxie New Village. And we can realize that only the standardized coefficient of the age in Tab 1 is negative, therefore, it indicates that the age of the outsiders in Daxie New Village is negatively correlated with the use of Mandarin, but, the standardized coefficients of the education level, the beginning time of learning Mandarin and their expectations for Mandarin appear positive, that is to say, they are positively correlated with the use of Mandarin of the outsiders in Daxie New Village.

## 5. Conclusion

Firstly, the population of these outsiders has surpassed the population of the local residents in Daxie New Village, but it doesn't have great influence on the life of the local residents and the organizational structure in Daxie New Village, on the contrary, it contributes to the formation of their common pattern of language use. For the local residents and the outsiders in Daxie New Village, they speak their own dialect when they speak to their elders in their family or their friends, but they will speak Mandarin when they are in public places or they need to have a conversation with their customers and clients. What's more, some significant factors influencing the language use of the local residents and the outsiders in Daxie New Village are also broadly homogeneous, for example, the beginning time of learning Mandarin, the age, the education level and the degree of their expectation for Mandarin, and the education level has the greatest impact on the use of Mandarin of the local residents in Daxie New Village, followed by their expectation for Mandarin, then the age, finally the beginning time of learning Mandarin, but the age has the biggest effect on the use of the outsiders in Daxie New Village. Moreover, it is admitted that the education level, the beginning time of learning Mandarin and their expectation for Mandarin are positively correlated with their use of Mandarin, while only the age has the negative correlation with the use of Mandarin among these significant influencing factors

In the end, it is noticed that the outsiders in Daxie New Village use Mandarin more frequently when compared with the local residents. For example, the bar chart of language use of the local residents and the outsiders in Daxie New Village can reveal that 61.25% of the outsiders use Mandarin in public places, while only 48.88% of the local residents use Mandarin in public places. It is extremely easy to understand that because these outsiders speak their own dialects, so they need to use Mandarin more frequently than the local residents do in Daxie New Village in order to communicate with others in public places.

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