A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Popular "Plastic Mandarin" Among Contemporary Chinese University Students

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Abstract: *In recent years, some accented Mandarin Chinese words prevail among the youth in Chinese media, which are termed "Plastic Mandarin" or dialect-influenced Mandarin (DIM) words to indicate that they belong to a special variety of Mandarin characteristic of some regional accent or influenced by some Chinese dialects. This language variety used to be mocked as being nonstandard and thus subject to correction or improvement, for many scholars believed that it would hamper the national efforts for spreading the Standard Mandarin. Nowadays, however, DIM words like "Ya (Yang) Zi" and "zha (Zhang) Zha (Jia) hui" are on top of the searching list in Sina Weibo, and they are frequently used and widely broadcast from online to offline, especially among university students. In order to account for the popularity of such DIM words, this paper aims to first investigate the popularity of DIM words among the general public by conducting a questionnaire survey with the aid of Wenjuanxing, an online program, and then explore the social and psychological causes for the popularity of DIM among contemporary Chinese university students in light of some sociolinguistic theories, particularly the theories of Joseph Yendryès and Neil Postman. It is concluded that DIM words can be seen as a special type of neologism which not only reflects the technological progress in the Internet and mass media (especially we media) on the one hand, but are also a significant index of the development of the society and the social-psychological features of contemporary Chinese university students on the other hand.*

Keywords: *Dialect-influenced Mandarin Words; Contemporary Chinese University Students; Popularity; Social; Psychological Causes; Sociolinguistics*

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Dialect-influenced Mandarin (DIM), also called "Plastic Mandarin", is used to describe the nonstandard variety of Mandarin one speaks under the influence of his or her dialect. Recently, some DIM words are popular on the Internet. For example, the DIM word "Ya Zi", whose authentic Mandarin pronunciation is "Yang Zi" is a combination of Guangxi dialect with Mandarin, and since its advent on the Internet, the official Weibo of ***People's Daily*** has employed this word in their comments for 12 times within 5 months. This is only a small clue to the prevalence of DIM words, which are unexpectedly preferred by contemporary Chinese young Internet users and is introduced into offline conversations almost simultaneously.

DIM words basically is a kind of neologism which means a new word, usage or expression. Neologism is not a new phenomenon. According to Merriam-Webster, the phenomenon should exist even long before the 19th century. Now modern-day neologisms have their new features in terms of their broadcasting speed and width. The recent popularity of DIM words have proved that. In fact, such variation of Mandarin has also been existing for a long time, but previously many scholars viewed this kind of language as an obstacle in spreading standard Chinese, and studied it to eliminate it. Then why did it become so popular in recent months and how could it be liked and spread so quickly and widely among the youth?

As the French linguist Joseph Yendryès has illustrated in his book ***Le Language***, the change of language reflects the change of society[2] (Cen, 1986). Behind such an abrupt and sharp rising of DIM are social and linguistic reasons worthy of thinking. So this paper is trying to analyse the linguistic features of these DIM words and investigate the reasons of its popularity among Chinese university

students.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

The research is driven by three objectives. The first is to dig out the reasons behind recent fever over DIM. This variation of Mandarin has not only been popular on the internet but also penetrated into university students' daily talk. Anything happens for a reason, and so did this one. So I am to investigate into this sudden craze from sociolinguistic perspective. The second objective is to investigate and predict the future trend of the popularity of DIM. The third is to enrich or even correct some views towards neologism especially dialect-influenced ones. When browsing through some previous works related to neologism especially DIM, the majority of those works have been found having a less overall analysis or holding a negative view. So this research is to enrich those analysis and give a more justice explanation for this phenomenon.

1.3 Organization of the Paper

In the following chapters, this paper firstly organized the literature which have been consulted before or during the research. Based on the topics of those literature, they are categorized into two sections. One is about neologism; the other discussed a special type of neologism, that is DIM. Next, the paper introduced the idea of Joseph Yendry's which offered theoretical foundation to the research. Based on the knowledge of the predecessors and observation of the present usage of DIM, a scientific research is able to proceed. Then how the research is designed is displayed from four aspects. After that is the results of the research and discussion which are followed by conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociolinguistic Analysis of Internet-based Neologism

The term neologism was first attested in English in 1772, borrowed from French néologism. This means long before Internet was invented, neologism existed and was noticed by some predecessors. Wang (2019) analyzed a Chinese neologism "xx 族" using ICM, Cognitive Metaphor Theory, and Conceptual Integration Theory from cognitive linguistics' perspective[16]. Massie (2019) presented some genetic neologisms "that are really a type of collective noun for geneticists, but for which the average clinician is at a loss to understand"[8](p.1506). Liao and Li (2019) did research on Super-normal New Words And Expressions in Chinese and their Typicality and the Normalization[7]. Zhou (2018) discussed The formation of Neologisms in News English.

However, as Roig-Marín (2016) wrote, "As our world and ways of life keep on changing, so do words"[10] (p. 2). After the invention and development of Internet, neologism has its new forms and features as well. Therefore a number of scholars tried to analyze the phenomenon in condition of the digital media. Generally speaking, the factors contributing to Internet-based neologism can be categorized into users, language and society. As a result, previous works in this field can be divided into the following three sorts. In the first kind, the analyses have included users' and linguistic factors but less connected them with social elements as Wang (2019) in his dissertation Analysis of Conformity Behavior of College Microblog Users Based on Social Network Theory applying cognitive knowledge in analyzing a grow of words newly appeared on the Internet[16], and Shamne (2015) in her journal using ecolinguistic methods[11] and Tu[14] (2019) as well as Zhou Z.-Q[22] (2020) in a similar way. In the second kind, personal and social factors has been taken into consideration while the features of language was left behind. Analysis of Conformity Behavior of College Microblog Users Based on Social Network Theory[19] from Zhang (2015) is a representative. In the third kind, all the three elements have been mentioned, but the neologism they discussed is not specified into DIM, for example, Is the spreading of internet neologisms netizen-driven or meme-driven? diachronic and synchronic study of Chinese internet neologism tuyang tusen po[13] from Song (2019), Internet neologisms in the global web-based English corpus[15] from Tugiyanto (2015), and A brief discussion on Internet neologism "Confirmed the eyes"[18] from Ye (2019).

2.2 Previous Studies on Dialect-influenced Mandarin

Over the past years, many scholars have noticed the influence that dialects have brought to

Mandarin such as Cao[1] (2019) studied it in the view of language contact and Xie, Sui, Liu, and Wang (2015) used "Deep Neural Network Acoustic Modelling"[17] (p. 26) to approach for "Accented Mandarin Speech Recognition" (p. 26). And the majority studies in this filed particularly chose one specified dialect to analyze its impact on the Mandarin learning and speaking in this region. Fang (2019) discussed the usage of the so-called transitional language between dialects and Mandarin[5], which is defined in her work as a variation of Mandarin and is actually the DIM defined in this paper, by doing a case study on Huizhou Dialect. Ye (2012) set 6 levels of Shanghai accented Mandarin regarding how influential the dialect is in the process that Shanghai people took PSC. And Chang (2019) investigated the phonetics, lexics, and grammar features of Yuci DIM, and his investigation was helpful in making judgement about whether the speaker is from Yuci[3].

Although there are quite a number of scholars noticed and investigated the merges of dialects in Mandarin, for standard Mandarin is encouraged and promoted by authority, they who discussed the phenomenon that DIM exists have almost unanimously regarded it as a hamper in the penetration of standard Mandarin[12] (Shen, 2019) and tried to correct such language. They believed it was something that should be eliminated and Mandarin or Chinese could be purified. Then the soaring popularity of DIM recently has obviously went against their expectation and efforts, thus it provokes me to analyze this phenomenon under sociolinguistic perspective.

3. Theoretical Bases

3.1 Joseph Yendry ès' Theory

In observing and analyzing the newly prevailed DIM, this research has been enlightened by the ideas of the French linguist Joseph Yendry ès. He expressed the idea that a word is not defined by its abstract formula in dictionary. There is an emotional atmosphere floating around the logical meaning of each word. It surrounds the word and penetrated into the word. In other words, the studies of words and language should not only focused on the static sound structure, word formation or grammar, but also on the emotion and motion of the language users. He also elucidated in his works that language is social. Joseph held the view that the problem of the origins of language is the problem of the origins of human-being (Cen, 1986). The changes happened in a language or among languages is a reflection of the change in society. The above opinions enabled this research to decide on that to have a full picture of what, why and how a DIM word is created and used, it is crucial to count in the features of the society and the psychology of the people.

However, people is such a comprehensive concept that includes so many diverged groups. To narrow down and specify the research, what kind of people should be targeted needs to be carefully chosen. At this point, Joseph again inspired this research. One of his research proved that the usage of language is largely determined by the functions, occasions, reputations of the language[20] (Zhao, 2009) and the attitudes and perception of these two languages among people from different industries. And most importantly, he also considered age as an influential factor. This kind of view was also adopted by William Labov (2007) in doing researches and was also reflected in his works, for instance, Principles of Linguistic Change: Social Factors[6]. Thus, this paper aims at the DIM usage among contemporary Chinese university students which prescribes a limit to the age, vacation and nationality of the subjects.

3.2 Neil Postman's Theory

In explaining the university students' craze over using such language, Amusing ourselves to Death[9] from Neil Postman (2015) also helped me. Neil Postman strongly held the view that so often people were input ideas from the mass media and controlled by them without notice. He questioned the effects of some technologies as television and internet which were gradually penetrated into daily life and even into education. Although his criticism in some way was a little extreme, the point that mass media is quite often used by people for entertainment has been mirrored to some extend in the results of this research. Besides, he found that the media also influenced the language and mind of people in his book, because the speaker would take into consideration the features of their audience when deciding his diction. His point of view accounted for the wide spread of the newfangled DIM on the internet and its usage and popularity among university age students for such a short time.

While Joseph's theory helps to decide on choosing a special group of people who are of the similar age and the same vacation to be less interfered and more scientific, Neil's idea provides a direction of the possible explanation of such a popularity of DIM.

4. Research Design

4.1 Research Questions

The research attempts to address the following two questions: (1) What are the linguistic features of DIM words? (2) Why is this kind of DIM popular among contemporary Chinese university students?

4.2 Research Instruments

The research is designed on and conducted through Wenquanxing, a professional online app that allows the design and revision of all kinds of questionnaires, automatically and simultaneously collecting the answers. It could also display the results in bar chart, pie chart or other kind of forms. So the statistics of this research was also organized and displayed under the help of this platform. However, to widely sent out the questionnaires and control the age and vacation of the participants, the spread of the questionnaires is also under the help of Wechat and QQ, which are popular and widely used social platform in China.

The questionnaire consists of 9 questions: the first question listed 6 popular DIM words, of which 3 was influenced by south dialects and 3 by north ones to test the test the real popularity among the participants and to find if the popularity of DIM words have anything to do with the regions; the second question is to investigate the media through which DIM words were known; the third question filtered the participants who had not only heard of but also intentionally used it, because the ratio of users is the key in spreading the language; the fourth question asked the participants to evaluate the reason for their usage; the fifth question is to see whether they think about the features of their audience when using DIM words; and the sixth to ninth questions were designed to see their attitudes and predictions of DIM words.

4.3 Subjects

The subjects of this research is 140 contemporary Chinese university students. The choice is made in consideration of two reasons. The first is that media through which the DIM broadcasts is Internet, most frequently and masterfully used by the younger generation, especially contemporary university students. Secondly, the neologism which this paper focuses on is DIM, which is essentially a variation of Mandarin, so native Chinese is more likely to sense the delicate relation among standard Chinese, dialect and DIM and then use and broadcast it timely. Therefore, contemporary Chinese university students are designed to be subjects of the research. However, owing to the vast population of this group and limited resources, this research was conducted only among 140 randomly picked voluntary participants who meet the demand. And the following pie chart shows the distribution of the participants in the current research project.
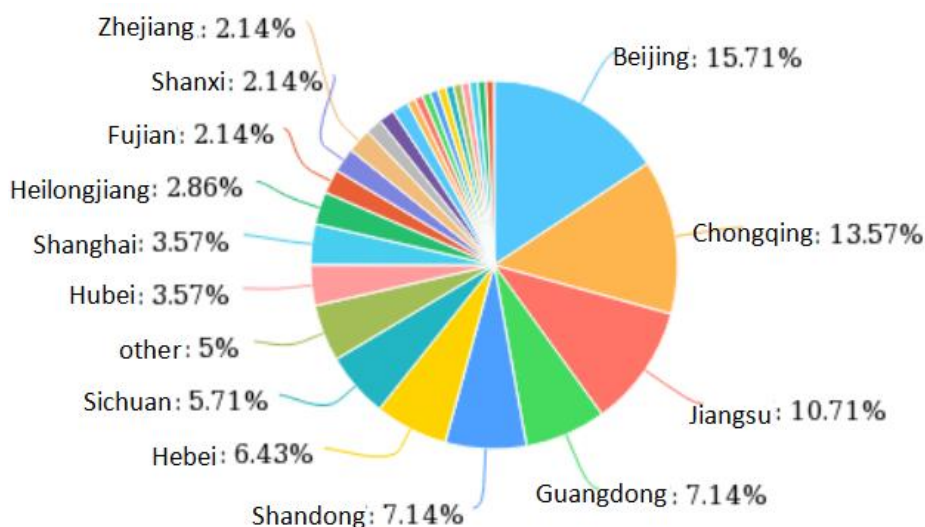

Figure 1: The participants in the current research project

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was designed on 8th December 2019. To make the design more logical, I first invited only a few university students to finish and give some suggestions to the beta version of the questionnaire. Based on their feedback, the optimized and revised version was released online and sent out through Wechat and QQ on the same day. On 9th December 2019, 140 questionnaires were answered and the data were collected simultaneously. On the basis of these answers, the system of Wenjuanxing automatically made out the figures. And considering their relativity, these figures were categorized into different groups in order to be orderly analyzed.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 DIM as a Special Type of Neologism

DIM words as a special type of neologism share some similarities with other neologisms but also have their own uniqueness in their birth, coinage and spreading process. In the following two sections, the research is going to give a clear explanation of how a DIM word is created and how people used and liked this language.

5.1.1 Origin and Coinage of DIM

As suggested by the term it self, DIM is a combination of two factors that are dialect and Mandarin. While dialects have long existed, Mandarin only became a legally official language of China in the early 20 century. So, it is possible that from then on, many Mandarin learners from all over the nation was speaking nonstandard Mandarin which were under the influence of their regional accents. But the nationwide promotion and education in teaching mandarin cost a span of years. And not until the late 20th century did some domestic scholars pay attention to this phenomenon. DIM as a nonstandard form of Mandarin has been used by speakers unintentionally for they have difficulty in pronouncing correctly. The recently popular DIM words , however, have been deliberately used by people and they even preferred this way of speaking and typing these words than using its correct and standard pattern. Then, how is a DIM coined and what is the relation among dialect, Mandarin, and DIM?

In Section 2.1, the paper has mentioned that DIM is a special type of neologism. According to Merriam-Webster (2019), neologism will usually be one of the following forms: a completely new word; a new combination of existing words ; a new meaning for an existing word; an abbreviation or acronym. And DIM words are usually completely new words.

It is generally known that a Chinese character is made up of an initial consonant, a final sound, and a tone. To form a DIM word, firstly, one should just find an existing standard Mandarin Chinese. And then change the pronunciation of one or some or even all of the characters in this expression. This change is a kind of homophone which sounds like the standard pronunciation but different for that it maintains the correct tone but alters the initial consonant or the final sound or both of them according to the character's pronunciation in the dialect. Finally find another character of which the pronunciation is in line with the remold sound and the meaning is totally irrelevant to the meaning of the correct form. Then both the oral and written forms of a DIM word has been given birth. For instance, the DIM word "与女无瓜" is derived from the standard Mandarin Chinese "与你无关". The speaker mispronounced the final sounds of the second and fourth characters in this expression, and certain netizen subtitled according to his pronunciation and changed it into a DIM word.

From the coinage process of a DIM word, it seems to be reasonable to say that a DIM word is a slightly different way of expressing an already existing meaning. However, the actual function and usage of a DIM word and its standard Mandarin form have enormous differences and could be easily distinguished. While the DIM word is still carrying the original meaning of its correct form, it is far more informal and funny than its standard form. Thus it is often used on the internet posts or online chatting or casual talks with fellows. And it leaks the user's intention in being less serious and shortening the distance between the user and the audience.

5.1.2 Popularity of DIM

When browsing the researches or articles related to DIM, the release date of most of them were from the 1990s till this year. And the study of DIM has not been quite systematic yet, for the Chinese term of the DIM discussed in this paper has even a number of versions which could be word for word translated into Plastic Mandarin, Dialect Mandarin, Accented Mandarin or a specific dialect plus

Mandarin. And the major purposes of these studies were to eliminate it and promote standard Mandarin.

Unexpectedly, recent years, especially since 2019, some clips of an actor unintentionally speaking DIM attracted vast and wide attention. And in no time, people started imitating his DIM way of talking in pronouncing several typical words and expressions in the video. And this is just a representative of dozens of DIM words that have been liked these days. But, the popularity of DIM is not in everywhere and by every person but has its features. And the most prominent one is that the dominant portion of users are the youth, particularly contemporary Chinese university students. Therefore, the following chapters will discuss and analyze the reason why this group of people have become DIM person.

5.2 Social-psychological Causes for the Popularity of DIM

The research presumed that popularity of DIM is a consequent of the highly developed online media together with the everyday-used offline communication, and some psychological motions of the university students. Based on such presumption, the research has investigated the function and performance of the online and offline media in making DIM known by people and the motivations of the university students who played an important role in pushing this kind of variation of Mandarin into the public sight. So the following two sections will analyze the data from these two aspects.

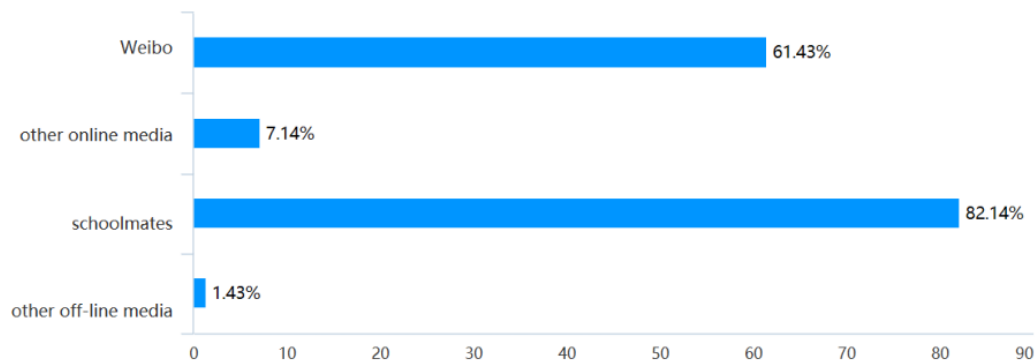### 5.2.1 Online and Offline Media

Figure 2: The media by which participants firstly knew DIM

To figure out the reason why DIM has won such kind of preference lately, the ultimate emergence of it is the key. In other words, where did people firstly see or hear of such kind of usage is in relevance to its spread. So as Figure 2 shows, among the 140 participants who have at least heard of one sort of DIM word given in the questionnaires, the majority knew about it through Weibo and schoolmates. Weibo is a social platform which will recommend the latest hot social events to attract browsers and get hits. As an application born in the Internet context in 2010, Weibo has more than 500 million users among whom over 50 % are under 25 years old. Consequently, this platform made it easy for information to be shared among the youth especially university age students. And as an online social media Weibo for sure is efficient in broadcasting anything. The data shows that 61.43% of the participants initially knew DIM throught Weibo. Thus the newly coined DIM is able to spread in no time and later became a common and frequently used way in university students' daily talks. That verified Joseph's view: the development of language is a reflection of the society[2] (Cen, 1986).

Apart from online media, 82.14% participants learned the DIM from their schoolmates. In most cases when we talk about efficient media, it would be media like Internet that comes to our mind. Actually, the research indicates that we ourselves is a fairly effective media, even more effective than Internet. Not everyone would visit Weibo or surf the Internet everyday, but everyone must talk each day. As for university students, their "interlocutors" are very likely to be their schoolmates. Some of some schoolmates of the participants are likely to have seen such kind of usage of DIM. And in later communication, these schoolmates may directly single out a dialect-influence Mandarin word as a subject or a topic, or use it naturally in their talks. In this way, the participants easily picked up a new the way of saying a word with little adjustment to its pronunciation and schoolmates made contribution to the distribution of DIM.

Figure 3: The number of people who have or haven't used DIM
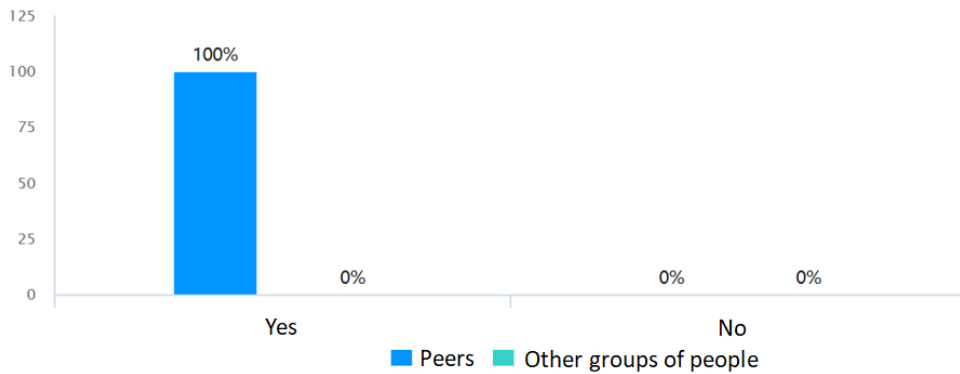

Figure 4: The group of people with whom participants used DIM

The questionnaire also investigated whether these participants themselves used any DIM after learning such kind of way of talking. The result is that 96 of them have used this kind of language in their later talks. These people composed 68.57% of the participants, which is more than twice as many as the people who knew it but never used it. In this way those participants were not only receivers but also promoters of such neologism. And this is vital for multiplying the speed and range of the spread of DIM. But what is shocking is that the data shows 100% of the participants who have used DIM only used it when talking to their fellows, and none of them have ever used it with people not from the same age group with them. Just as the conclusion that Joseph had made from his research and analysis, factors like vocation, occasion and so on definitely will have impact on the use of language[20] (Zhao, 2009). Initially DIM won attention on Weibo of which young users takes a dominant portion. These university age students could easily understood this language and willing to accept and use it in talks. But before using it, they have also made consideration and judgement about the occasion and the speakers they talk to. DIM words were up to date on the internet with unimaginable speed, which caused older people hard to comprehend each of them. And as standard Mandarin is the official language in China, DIM is more suitable for casual talks. Therefore, university students chose to use this kind of expression only in conversations with their schoolmates. And in this way, DIM is only possible to be widely spread out among those young people and it did quickly penetrate into university students' language system.
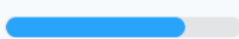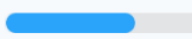
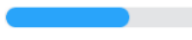### 5.2.2 The Motivation of the University Students

Figure 5: The motivation of the participants' using of DIM

Although the media discussed above provide external channels for the acceleration of the spread of DIM, the internal motivations are even more crucial. The research predicted that what drove these university students to use the newly emerged DIM could come down to four reasons: entertainment, resonance, conformity and fashion. The reasons for such design included the consideration of the opinion of Postman who believed that the aim of those social media was entertainment, the formation of the DIM which is the combination of Chinese dialect and standard Chinese, the group of the users and participants who are university students, and the indispensable feature of DIM as a neologism which is new, or in other word, fashionable. As the questionnaire still allowed other supplement reasons, none of the participants provided motivations outside the four options. In this question, owing to the fact that one person is possible to do a thing out of not only one reason, participants were permitted to tick more than one motives.

As displayed by the chart, there are two options chosen by over 50% of the 96 participants who have not only known but also used DIM in their daily conversation. One is for fun, the other is for having common topics with their schoolmates. And between the two motivations, the rate of the former one is 70.83% which is way ahead the others. This means that the majority agreed that they used DIM words in communication just out of fun. What is interesting is that the research in fact didn't expect that this motivation will even surpassed the conformity to be the largest chosen one. But the result undoubtedly verified Neil Postman's point of view in Amusing Ourselves to Death (2015). In his observation, entertainment became a target in many human activities nowadays under the influence of media especially Internet without people's awareness of it. He highly questioned and even denied any benefits that social media like Internet brought to teaching, to learning, or even to human-being. I do not totally agree with his fierce opposing to this way of teaching or of technology, but he did point out a fact which is that is in many cases, people's action and their use of Internet in only out of fun. That is actually understandable because people has their inborn need for entertainment and media could perfectly satisfy them. Language, as such a common element in our life, also need some seasons in order to add up fun to life. The appearance of DIM exactly meet such demand. It attached a tiny change to the pronunciation of some words, but such change is not totally irregular but derives from a Chinese dialect. In figuring out the meaning of these interesting words and even the culture bond to it and sharing them with fellows, Chinese university students have found delight.

The second largely chosen factor is that to have the same topic with schoolmates. Just as Zong[23] analyzed, in the use of internet-based language, one of the users' tends is to be in conformity with their fellows (2015). And as Joseph believed, language is social. Language is not only a reflection of the society but also is a tool in all the social events and human activities. That's why 51.04% used DIM for not being different and easily fitting in their fellows. Encouraged by herd mentality, they are willing to accept such variation of language in order to be gregarious.

The third agreeable motivation is that to keep up the fashion. The number of participants chosen this option is only 2.08% less than the second welcome one. To be fashionable means to be concerned with what is new and popular, to understand it and learn to use it quickly.To be up-to date, those university student use the internet to get and understand such usage and quickly find the right way and context to use it. In this way   DIM went viral among them.

Apart from their self-evaluation of their motivations, the results of the cases study of DIM reflects some features and reasons as well.
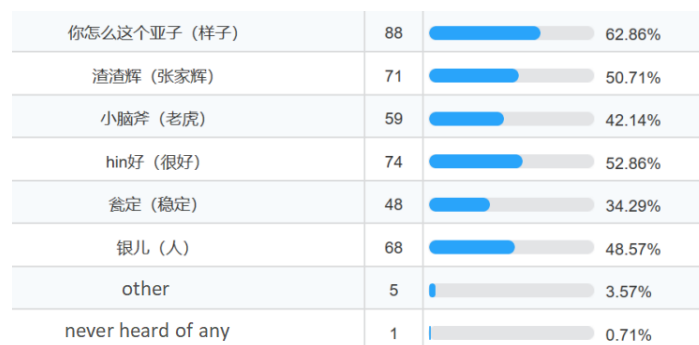
你怎么这个亚子（样子）	88	62.86%
渣渣辉（张家辉）	71	50.71%
小脑斧（老虎）	59	42.14%
hin好（很好）	74	52.86%
瓮定（稳定）	48	34.29%
银儿（人）	68	48.57%
other	5	3.57%
never heard of any	1	0.71%

Figure 6: Cases of DIM

Number	Supplementary Answers
1	雨女无瓜
10	国郭（国歌）
13	康康
23	你喜欢期啥子（吃什么）

Figure 7: Cases added up by participants

As suggested by its name, DIM is characterized by its combination of the dialect accent or pronunciation with standard Mandarin. To figure out dialects in which area are more well-known and influential among the participants, the research has listed 6 DIM examples which represented 6 provinces in China. Among them the first three are originated from Taiwan, Hongkong, and Hunan, which are in the southern part of China. The following three are derived from Shanxi dialect, Qinghai dialect and Shandong dialect, and these three are all northern dialects.

As is shown in Figure 6, generally speaking, the first three words are known by more participants than the following three. The most well-known one turns out to be Ya Zi, a pronunciation influenced by Southern Min, a branch of Min Chinese. This word came from an actor in a children's TV series. Born in Taiwan and having studed in Guangdong, this actor said Min Chinese, Cantonese and Mandarin. Influenced by the other two Chinese dialects, when speaking Chinese, he had some problem in pronouncing velar nasal. Therefore, Yangzi was pronounced as Yazi in his lines and was cut into short video and became popular on internet. Apart from the 62.86% people who claimed they have heard of and understood the usage of Yazi, 50.71% knew Zha Zhahui, which is actually Zhang Jiahui, name of a famous actor who mixed the Cantonese with Mandarin in introducing his name. Together with 42.14% participants knowing the Hunan DIM, the reputation of the southern DIM is relevantly bigger than the northern group. This is also affirmed by the supplements given by participants themselves. There are totally 5 participants who have known other DIM than the listed 6 examples. Among the 5 participants, 4 have specifically added the cases they knew. As is shown by Figure 7, number one added a word which had the same root with Ya Zi; number 10 added Guoguo which is also influenced by Cantonese and means national anthem; number 13 Kangkang derived from Taiwan dialect; number 23 Qi is a reflection of Hubei dialect in saying Chi which means to eat. Although these added examples are from different regions' dialects, they shared one thing in common that is they are influenced by southern dialects.

The possible explanation for such a result could be divided into three parts. Firstly, the economic growth and competitiveness of the southern cities of China generally speaking have been way ahead of the northern part[4] (Ding, 2019). The language and culture from the comparatively developed area are likely to be more attractive to the public. Secondly, southern dialects share less similarity with Mandarin compared with northern ones. Therefore they dialect-Mandarin derived from them tend to be more interesting. DIM is formed in the attempt to say Mandarin but in the process   is affected by dialects. This means the essence of DIM is Mandarin, which is understood and spoken by all around the nation. This means with a little explanation, a common Chinese is capable of understand and imitate a DIM word. On the basis of understanding, and the relatively more obvious differences and unusual way of pronouncing a familiar word enable southern DIM to be more funny and attractive. Thirdly, southern dialects are generally cuter and softer. Nowadays young people like to regard and call themselves as baby. The cuteness and softness in southern DIM may better suits this way of self-perception among the university students.

5.3 The Future of DIM

There have been quite a bunch of scholars who worried that such internet-born words or nonstandard Mandarin would contaminate Chinese and made a lot efforts to warn people of the negative impact these language could brought to our official language. According to the statistics (see Figure 8), however, most of the interviewees have been aware of the differences between this DIM and the authentic one as they understood and used such language. And 64.29% which is the majority of them even predicted that this kind of neologism is just a temporary craze and will fade away with time (see Figure 9). This prediction of the future trend of DIM are from university students who are the major creators, audience and users of Internet neologisms. As most of them already have the awareness

of the features of neologism and have an objective view of such language, there seems to be less necessity in worrying that neologism like DIM would contaminate and have bad influence on the youth's language system or on standard Mandarin.
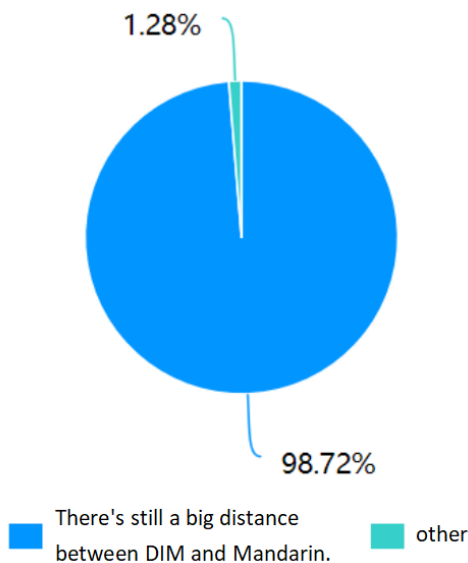

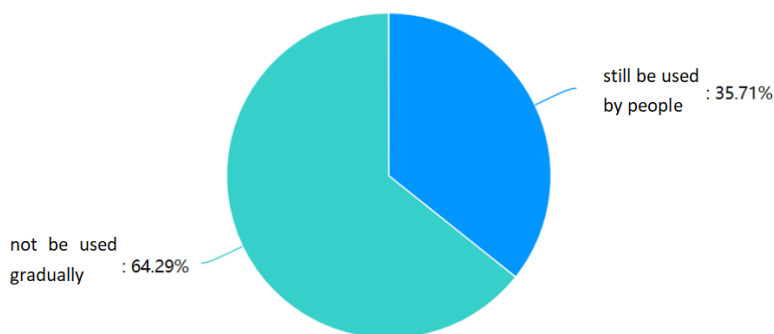*Figure 8: The disparity between DIM and standard Mandarin*

Figure 9: Participants' attitudes toward the future of DIM

6. Conclusion

The sound structure of DIM is characterized by a revised initial or final of certain Chinese character according to the dialect while remaining the correct tone. And its written form uses another character which is homo-phonic to the dialect-influenced pronunciation. While the DIM word inherits the meaning of its original standard form, it is more funny, daily, and casual but only widely accepted and understood among the youth especially contemporary Chinese university students. The spreading of DIM took advantage of the online platform and offline daily talk to quickly and massively influenced university students' way of talking. University students themselves is willing to accept this variation of Chinese in order to get fun, be gregarious and be in style. The future of this sort of neologism, however, should not be worried in that users clearly noticed its difference between standard Mandarin and the majority of them feel less likely to further use such language as time goes by.

The research is conducted and supported by the core idea that language is social from Joseph and media influences language and mind from Neil, and the results of the research reproved the two ideas correspondingly. It could help us to hold a less biased attitudes towards any neologism and to be less hasty denying the significance of its appearance and development.

This research has some outcomes as above, whereas it has the three biggest shortcomings as following. Firstly, the methodology is not objective and comprehensive enough. If possible, using an existing database rather than questionnaires as reference can be far more persuasive and scientific. Secondly, the theoretical basis is too general. And thirdly, the investigation and analysis of the motivation of the users contains so many aspects that they are not detailed enough. Defects listed

improved, the depth of the analysis is likely to be optimized.

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