

Investigating factors that shape language identity among migrant workers in Hangzhou**Economic and Technological Development Zone****Zuo Cuiling^{1,2}, Cheok Mui Yee²**¹Zhejiang Guangsha Vocational and Technical University of Construction, China²Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNIRAZAK), Malaysia

Abstract

The Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone has become a key destination for rural-to-urban migrant workers looking for jobs in China's fast-growing economy. The influx of a large number of migrant workers has brought complex sociolinguistic dynamics to the region, and their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds have created a complex sociolinguistic environment for the region. This paper will state the problem around the theme of language identity, determine the research questions, objectives and scope, and explore the significance of the research.

Keywords: language identity, research background, problem statement, research objectives, research significance

1 Research background

Population mobility has always been an important social phenomenon in China, with millions of migrant workers migrating to urban areas in search of better job opportunities and improved living conditions. In recent years, the scale of foreign population inflow in Zhejiang Province is large and shows an increasing trend year by year, as shown in Figure 1.0. According to the forecast of Zhejiang Provincial Bureau of Statistics, by 2022, the inflow of foreign population in Zhejiang Province will reach 161.65 million, and will continue to increase significantly, compared with 2012 and 2002 increased by 4.3625 million and 12.4985 million, an increase of 36.89% and 338.78%. As a provincial capital city, the inflow of non-provincial population in Hangzhou shows a sharp rising trend, and it is also the city with the largest inflow of non-provincial population among all cities in the province, as shown in Figure 1.1. Among them, Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone (HETDZ) is a famous industrial zone in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, known for attracting a large number of migrant workers. Figure 1.2 shows the number of migrant workers in the region in recent years.

Figure 1.0: Population Inflow from Outside Zhejiang Province in 2002, 2012 and 2022

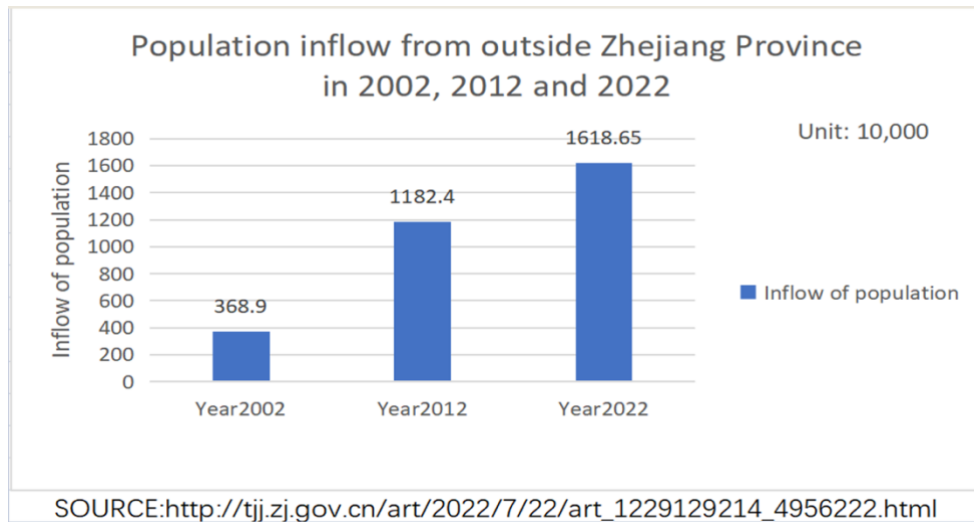


Figure 1.1: The inflow of population from outside the province and the proportion of Hangzhou in the province in 2002, 2012 and 2022

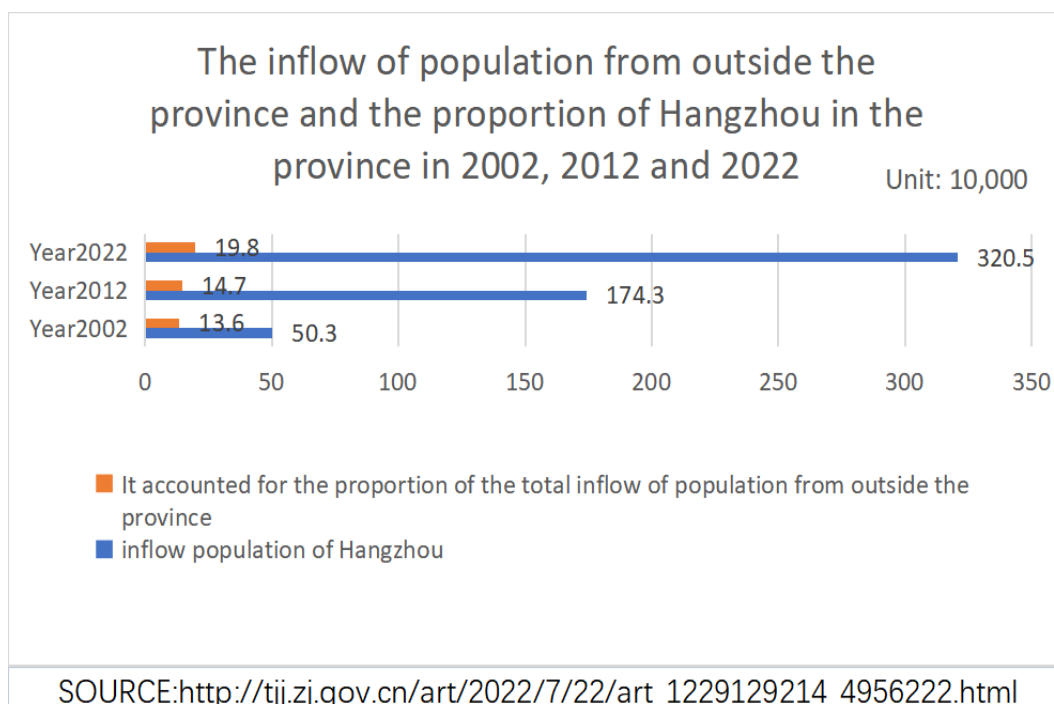
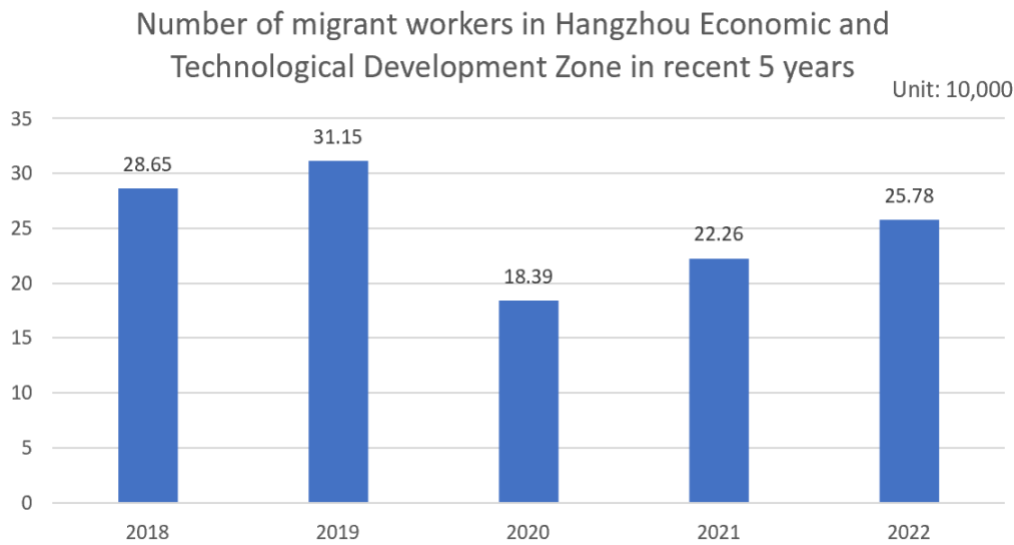


Figure 1.2: Data source: Statistics Bureau of Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone



(Data source: from researcher analysis based on Statistics Bureau of Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone)

Xu, D., & Wang, L. (2010) pointed out in their research that China is experiencing an unprecedented process of rapid urbanization, during which new social problems, including language problems, will inevitably arise. A key aspect of migrant workers' experience is their language identity. Language identity refers to how individuals perceive and relate to their own language use, proficiency, and the cultural context surrounding the language (Phinney, J. S., Berry, J. W., Vedder, P., & Liebkind, K. 2022). Migrant workers moving from rural areas into urban industrial parks such as the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone encounter a variety of linguistic challenges and opportunities, which have a significant impact on their linguistic identity.

In recent years, some scholars have studied the language problems of floating population. For example, Li Suqiong (2018) studied the language problems of population flow and Koine internalization, focusing on the language research of general population flow, rather than the special group of migrant workers. Zhan Haiyu (2019) studied the language interaction between migrant workers and left-behind children from the perspective of sociolinguistics, involving the language of migrant workers and left-behind children. However, the scope of the study was too large to conduct in-depth research on Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone; Sun Deping (2020) studies dialect contact and language change in emerging industrial zones. Most of the emerging industrial zones studied are old industrial zones established before the 1990s, while Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone is a new industrial zone established after the 1990s, which is not included in the research category. Previous research has explored language dynamics in similar immigrant contexts but has focused primarily on language acquisition and proficiency (Kosyakova, Y., Kristen, C., & Sporlein, C. 2022). Therefore, the language identity of migrant workers in Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone has not been comprehensively concerned by people. At present, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the factors affecting the language identity of migrant workers in this area.

Some potential factors that might influence the language identity of migrant workers in HETDZ could include:

1.1 Social communication and communicative objects. The degree to which migrant workers use their hometown dialect, local Hangzhou dialect, Mandarin, and foreign language when communicating with different people (such as other migrant workers, local residents, colleagues, fellow townsmen, parents, siblings, children, etc.) in public places and at home can shape their linguistic identity.

1.2 Language attitude. Migrant workers' perception and evaluation of their hometown dialect, Hangzhou dialect, Mandarin and foreign languages can affect their language identification from the aspects of language attitude such as friendliness, practicality and social status.

1.3 Language expectations. Migrant workers' expectations for themselves and their children's future mastery of their hometown dialect, Hangzhou dialect, Mandarin and foreign languages influence their language identity.

By investigating these factors, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the complexity of language identity formation among migrant workers in HETDZ. The findings of this study can have implications for language policies and support services to facilitate better integration and communication among the diverse linguistic communities in the economic and technological development zones in China. Additionally, it may contribute to the broader understanding of language identity in migration contexts worldwide.

2 Problem statement

In the rapidly evolving sociocultural landscape of the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone, the language identity of migrant workers has emerged as a complex and understudied phenomenon. The process by which these workers navigate linguistic integration and negotiate their identities within this unique environment remains insufficiently understood (Sun, J., Ling, L., & Huang, Z. J. 2020). As this zone attracts a diverse influx of labor from various backgrounds, it becomes imperative to comprehensively investigate the multifaceted factors that contribute to the formation and transformation of language identity among migrant workers. If there is no comprehensive quantitative research to systematically analyze the language identity of migrant workers, it will cause a critical knowledge gap (Sun, D., 2011). Without a clear understanding of the measurable outcomes of these programs, policymakers will not be able to develop appropriate interventions, potentially hampering the linguistic integration, social cohesion, and overall well-being of migrant workers in economic zones (Xu, D., 2020). It is crucial for industry stakeholders, policymakers and educators to integrate the language issues of migrant workers with the well-being of society (Xu, D., 2020). This study aims to explore the interaction of sociodemographic attributes, language use environment, interpersonal interaction and language cognition among migrant workers in Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone. By quantitatively examining these factors, the research seeks to provide empirical insights that can guide evidence-based interventions to enhance linguistic integration, social cohesion, and the overall well-being of migrant workers within this dynamic economic zone.

3 Research objectives

R01: To examine communicative occasions and communicative objects impact on language identity of migrant workers.

R02: To examine language attitudes impact on language identity of migrant workers.

R03: To examine language expectations impact on language identity of migrant workers.

R04: To investigate whether personal cognition moderates the influence of communicative occasions and communicative objects on language identity of migrant workers.

R05: To investigate whether personal cognition moderates the influence of language attitudes on language identity of migrant workers.

R06: To investigate whether personal cognition moderates the influence of language expectations on language identity of migrant workers.

4 Research questions

RQ1: Does communicative occasions and communicative objects impact on language identity of migrant workers (Adapted from Ji Fang,2021)?

RQ2: Does language attitudes impact on language identity of migrant workers (Adapted from Luo Yingqi,2021) ?

RQ3: Does language expectations impact on language identity of migrant workers (Adapted from Zuo Cuiling,2013) ?

RQ4: Does personal cognition moderate the influence of communicative occasions and communicative objects on language identity of migrant workers (Adapted from Fang Nanxiang,2023) ?

RQ5: Does personal cognition moderate the influence of language attitudes on language identity of migrant workers (Adapted from Fang Nanxiang,2023) ?

RQ6: Does personal cognition moderate the influence of language expectations on language identity of migrant workers (Adapted from Fang Nanxiang,2023) ?

5 Research scope

The study will focus on migrant workers who have relocated from different parts of China to the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone from different regions within China. The sample will be diverse, comprising individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds to capture the wide-ranging language identities present in the area (Brooks, J. A., Tzirakis, P., Baird, A., Kim, L., Opara, M., Fang, X., ... & Cowen, A. S. 2023) .

At the same time, we should study the identity of language in different contexts. Surveys will be conducted to examine the language choices and practices of migrant workers in a variety of contexts, including workplace interactions, social Settings, and interactions with locals and other migrant communities. (Gu, M. M., & Han, Y. 2021).

In addition, we need to study language attitudes and cognition. To investigate migrant workers' feelings towards languages (mother tongue, Hangzhou dialect, foreign languages and Mandarin, etc.), whether they think a certain language sounds good, whether it is useful, whether it reflects social status, etc. The participants' feelings of attachment, pride, or potential stigmatization related to their language backgrounds will be explored (Cherian, J., Gaikar, V., Paul, R., & Pech, R. 2021) .

Meanwhile, we should analyze the factors that affect language identity. This study will explore the factors affecting migrant workers' language identity, such as their gender, age, educational background, length of stay in Hangzhou, job, language used in the workplace and interaction with local people (Crocker, A. F., & Smith, S. N. 2019) .

In addition, the researcher can't ignore language shift and maintenance issues. The study will investigate whether migrant workers experience language shift towards the dominant language(s) or if they maintain their native languages. Factors contributing to language shift, such as the need for integration or better employment opportunities, will be examined (Tawalbeh, A. 2019) .

With the above research scope, this study aims to comprehensively explore the factors that influence the language identity of migrant workers in the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone, and will provide recommendations for policy makers, employers and community stakeholders to develop inclusive language policies, support mechanisms and cross-cultural programs to promote language integration and create a harmonious multicultural environment in the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone (Rubtsova, A. 2019) .

6 Significance of the study

The study on the language identity of migrant workers in the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone holds significant implications for various stakeholders, including policymakers, employers, local communities, and the migrant population itself. The research findings will contribute valuable insights to address the following aspects:

First of all, this paper provides a case study of China's emerging industrial zone for the study of language evolution in the period of accelerated world urbanization. In the 1960s, when sociolinguistics emerged, the accelerated development of urbanization in Europe and the United States had basically ended, and European and American linguists failed to observe the process of language evolution in this special period. China is in the middle period of industrialization and the accelerated development of urbanization. The massive flow of population leads to extensive and close language contact, forming an important language phenomenon. Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone is in the process of accelerating urbanization. The use of

sociolinguistic theories and methods to study its language identity can provide the latest cases of Chinese and enrich the research results of the world's immigrant languages.

Second, the study has implications for social cohesion and integration. Understanding the language identity of migrant workers is crucial for promoting social cohesion and integration within the community. By recognizing and respecting the linguistic diversity brought by migrants, local communities can foster a more inclusive and harmonious environment, reducing potential linguistic barriers and enhancing cross-cultural interactions. (Xu, D., 2020)

Next, the study is beneficial for language policy making and educational support. Research will provide evidence to develop effective language policies based on data. Policymakers can use these insights to design language programs that support language preservation, encourage language learning, ensure equal language rights for all residents, and provide targeted language support to promote better educational outcomes for migrant children and adults, thereby promoting equitable and inclusive societies (Coombe, C., Vafadar, H., & Mohebbi, H. 2020) .

Furthermore, this research could boost workplace communication and productivity. By examining language use in the workplace, the study can identify potential communication challenges faced by both migrant workers and local employees. Employers can then implement strategies and language training programs to improve workplace communication and productivity, leading to better job satisfaction and overall performance (Ji,F., 2021).

In addition, this research is conducive to the preservation of cultural heritage. The research can shed light on the extent to which migrant workers maintain their native languages and dialects (Kraft, K. 2019) . Preserving these languages is vital for maintaining cultural heritage and identity, and the findings can inform initiatives to support language maintenance efforts within migrant communities.

Beyond that, the research is good for the long-term economy benefits. A culturally diverse and inclusive community is likely to attract and retain a skilled and diverse workforce, leading to increased economic growth and development. By recognizing the significance of language identity in shaping a migrant worker's experience, the region can harness the potential of its diverse human resources effectively (Dávila, L. T., & Bunar, N. 2020) .

At the same time, the study serves to inform other immigrant communities. The findings of this study can serve as a reference for other regions facing similar challenges with migrant populations. The research can inspire other cities and regions to adopt inclusive language policies and support systems that value linguistic diversity and promote social harmony (Dennison, A., Lund, E. M., Brodhead, M. T., Mejia, L., Armenta, A., & Leal, J. 2019) .

In summary, investigating the language identity of migrant workers in the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone is vital for fostering a culturally enriched and socially integrated community (Kyremeh, E., Arku, G., Mkandawire, P., Cleave, E., & Yusuf, I. 2021) . The research's significance lies in its potential to inform policies, programs, and initiatives that celebrate linguistic diversity, and build bridges of understanding between diverse communities, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and prosperity of the region.

7 Summary

The Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone (HETDZ) has witnessed a significant influx of migrant workers seeking better opportunities and living conditions. With diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, these migrant workers bring a complex sociolinguistic dynamic to the region (Olesya, M., Veronika, P., & Artem, G. 2021). This study explores the language identity of migrant workers in HETDZ and its far-reaching implications.

The research aims to understand the language attitudes, preferences, and practices of the migrant population. It investigates factors influencing language identity, such as the duration of their stay, workplace interactions, and available language learning opportunities (Moore, A. R. 2019). Additionally, the study examines language shift and maintenance, addressing whether migrant workers retain their native languages or shift towards the dominant language(s) of the region.

Ultimately, this study contributes to joint efforts to build a culturally rich community that respects and celebrates linguistic identity, promotes future language planning and management in the region (Zein, S. 2020), builds a language ecological civilization, promotes the overall well-being and prosperity of migrant workers and local residents in the Hangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone, and sets an example for other regions facing similar challenges with migrant populations.

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