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The effects of media exposure and language attitudes on grammaticality judgments

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Abstract: While traditional 1st wave variationist sociolinguists resist citing media exposure as a source of language variation, this experimental study demonstrates that Mainland Mandarin speakers with reported exposure to Taiwanese TV were more likely to rate syntactic constructions found in Taiwanese Mandarin as grammatically acceptable. Data were collected through an online survey consisting of acceptability judgments, written-guise attitude tasks, reported viewing habits, and demographic questions. Principle Component Analysis was deployed to reduce data dimension, which allows for the identification of the key personality traits linked to Taiwanese Mandarin that contribute to the media effects. The results suggest an intertwined relationship in which the effects of media exposure on acceptability judgments are moderated by language attitudes.

Keywords: Media exposure, language attitudes, grammaticality judgments, Taiwanese Mandarin

1 Introduction

Whether media exposure has any effect on language variation has long been a contentious issue in sociolinguistics. The traditional view of 1st wave variationist sociolinguistics studies (Eckert 2012) is that the media plays limited or no role in systematic language change (Labov 2001: 228; Chambers 1998). Many variationist sociolinguists discounted the homogenizing effect of televised mass media for two reasons: (1) continuing diversification of non-standard English dialects (Labov 2001: 228; Chambers 1998), and (2) lack of live social interaction between the television and its audience. Although there is a large body of research on communication accommodation (e.g. Palomares et al. 2016; Giles et al. 1991), many variationist sociolinguists believe that speech accommodation only occurs in face-to-face interactions. The popular assumption that broadcast media would instigate widespread standardization was refuted by the persistence of local

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dialect diversity found in many sociolinguistic studies (Labov 2001: 228; Chambers 1998). Most researchers believed that exposure to standard language does not cause people to abandon their own dialects. As Trudgill (1986: 40) stated, “the point of the TV set is that people, however they watch and listen to it, do not talk to it (and even if they do, it cannot hear them!).” However, this view is being increasingly challenged as sociolinguists begin to approach media and language change from new perspectives.

Recent studies argue that those who watch TV can also accommodate to the speech they hear (Bell 1991). Audience membership implies approval of the communicator’s style because the audience has the power of choice over what they want to watch or hear. Subsequent studies (Stuart-Smith 2006, Stuart-Smith 2010, Stuart-Smith et al. 2013; Carvalho 2004; Sayers 2014) have also found that exposure to non-standard dialects via televised media can, in fact, affect people’s attitudes towards certain dialects and the speakers of these dialects. It is also possible that exposure to televised media can lead to the adoption of new linguistic features and serve as a useful stylistic resource, especially when these new features are not socially stigmatized. This, in turn, can contribute to linguistic variation as new features diffuse within social networks. Many of these studies (e. g. Carvalho 2004; Stuart-Smith 2007, 2013) draw upon production data to look at the correlation between media exposure and choice of phonological variants, but very few of the existing studies on media and language have looked at data on acceptability judgments, an early stage in the potential spread of new features.

Most of the studies on the effect of televised media only look at nonstandard accents, or phonological variation, but very little work has been done to investigate how televised media can affect individuals’ perceptions of whether a syntactic variable is grammatically acceptable. To bridge the gap in current literature, this study examines the effects of televised media on the acceptability of syntactic variables. The main hypothesis of this study is that a syntactic variable is more likely to be judged as acceptable if it is widely disseminated through televised media and stands out as a non-local feature with positive social meaning. Previous studies on language attitudes suggest that non-standard varieties are generally disfavored (e. g. Gluszek and Dovidio 2010; Pantos and Perkins 2012; Dragojevic et al. 2013; Giles and Marlow 2011). In this regard, Taiwanese Mandarin¹ (TM) is an

¹ This article derives from my doctoral dissertation work, the completion of which could not have occurred without the support of my committee: Cecelia Cutler, William Haddican, Michael Newman and Qing Zhang. I would also like to thank Chengshi Shiu for his help with statistical analyses. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 43th New Ways of analyzing Variation conference in 2014. I am very grateful to audience members at the event. Two anonymous reviewers provided very helpful comments. Any errors are my own.

unconventional case because it is viewed as nonstandard, but not socially stigmatized among Chinese mainlanders. Many studies suggest that TM, despite being a non-standard variety, is actually viewed quite positively among many mainland Chinese (see also Zhang 2005; Ling 1991).

This study tests the premise that increased media exposure to TM will affect Chinese mainlanders' acceptability ratings of TM syntactic variants, but only to the extent that those speakers have positive attitudes toward that variant. In other words, there is an intertwined relationship in which the effects of media exposure on acceptability judgments are moderated by language attitudes. I will draw upon acceptability judgment data to test the following two hypotheses: (a) the local form in general will receive higher acceptability ratings than the non-local form, and (b) increased exposure will improve acceptability ratings only to the extent that people have positive attitudes.

2 Language attitudes and the spread of innovation

The study of language attitudes has received much scholarly attention in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and the social psychology of language. Central to this interdisciplinary investigation is the social evaluation with respect to linguistic variation which can be conceptualized as a process of social categorization and stereotyping (see Edwards 1999; Giles and Marlow 2011; Ryan et al. 1982). Experimental work on language attitudes depart from an intergroup perspective (e. g. Ryan et al. 1982; Dargolevic 2016). These studies examine evaluative reactions toward different linguistic styles with two major factors: status and solidarity (e. g. Newman et al. 2008; Dragojevic et al. 2016; Giles and Marlow 2011; Ryan et al. 1982). Status, or more precisely socioeconomic status, reflects the intragroup relationships. For instance, the social evaluations elicited by standard vs. nonstandard accents can be rather different and speakers' status within the group (e. g. Dragojevic et al. 2016). Solidarity, on the other hand, is concerned with intergroup relationships as people tend to identify more closely with people who share their own accent. More recent work on language attitudes

In previous literature, Taiwanese Mandarin (a.k.a. *guoyu*) is a term conventionally used to refer to the mainstream Mandarin variety spoken in Taiwan. Taiwanese Mandarin, also known as Taiwanese accented Mandarin, usually refers to the Mandarin varieties spoken with noticeable Taiwanese influence. This is stereotypically associated with members of older generations and less educated rural residents (Su 2008).

is dedicated to investigating the social meanings of phonological features and thus provided the solid framework for research of this kind. Many recent models of language attitudes focus on the sense making process during which people retroactively understand their past interactions and relationships with other people, such as the interactive model and interaction-based model (Giles and Marlow 2011; Giles and Rakić 2014). As Giles and Rakić (2014) point out, language attitudes are not just a mental output, but are a socially meaningful input that guides one's behavior. Positive attitudes are more likely to promote convergence toward speakers perceived to have a relatively higher group vitality in one's in-group (Giles 2016; Palomares et al. 2016). Media has been found to be an important agent that contributes to the socialization of language-based attitudes (Dragojevic et al. 2016).

Most of the arguments against the effect of broadcast media on language variation are based on the evidence that exposure to Standard English through broadcast media has not resulted in the leveling (e. g. Milroy and Milroy 1985; Chambers 1998; Labov 2001). Most sociolinguists adhere to the idea that the social and regional dialects undergo a range of language changes catalyzed by social factors in various local speech communities. However, these studies (e. g. Milroy and Milroy 1985; Chambers 1998; Labov 2001) were conducted in social contexts where the standard variety is usually associated with social prestige whereas the non-standard variant is socially stigmatized. The story can be different if a non-standard variety connotes prestige. Naro's (1981) study of spoken Brazilian Portuguese indicates significant positive correlation between the use of subject/verb agreement and reported exposure to popular dramas, motivated by the desire to associate with higher socioeconomic classes. Another study of Brazilian Portuguese by Carvalho (2004) claims there is no significant correlation between media exposure and the spread of innovative palatalization from Brazilian to Uruguayan Portuguese despite the fact that her informants attributed the spread of this feature to Brazilian television shows. Carvalhos claims that this process was indirectly accelerated by broadcast media exposure. Although in both studies there is not enough evidence to show a causal effect of media exposure on the production of certain linguistic features, media exposure may serve as a secondary factor at the perception level. Stuart-Smith et al. (2013) investigates the rapid proliferation of TH-fronting and L-vocalization in Glaswegian English with respect to exposure to a London-based TV soap drama. Their findings suggest that popular TV dramas can act as additional accelerating factors in linguistic change. Again, due to the absence of live interaction, exactly how media exposure interacts with language use is subject to debate. To date, evidence has shown that, at the perceptual level, media may play a role in raising awareness of innovative forms (e. g. Naro 1981) and/or accelerating linguistic change (Carvalho 2004; Stuart-Smith 2013).

Broadcast media may have, in some way, contributed to the spread of the ‘global linguistic variant’ quotative *be like* (e. g. ‘she was like, no way!’) among teenagers across English-speaking countries. The rapid diffusion of quotative *be like* among teenagers across continents in such a short period of time supports the role of broadcast media in linguistic diffusion. Buchstaller (2014) associates the spread of this innovative linguistic form to broadcast media, positing that, as adolescents across continents do not have the opportunity for live interaction with each other, broadcast media is a possible conduit for the global propagation of innovative quotatives. However, the effect of media – especially television – on language use is still controversial. Buchstaller suggests that broadcast media may be viewed as a possible source for the spread of attitudes, stances, and ideologies, given that the effect of media consumption on the non-linguistic social behavior of consumers has been empirically attested (Strasburger 1995: 13; McQuail 2000: 436).

Sayers (2014: 203) proposes a ‘mediated innovation model’ (Figure 1) where the conventional roles of personal contact are largely replaced by media engagement, which allows for creative and emotional involvement without face-to-face contact between the disconnected source and adopting communities. Mediation is viewed as the transmission process from the source speech community to the media text where non-standard vernaculars are (re)produced (Coupland 2009; Sayers 2014). In other words, when Taiwanese characters are represented on TV shows, TM is entering media texts through mediation. These features are then broadcast to the audience which is the potential speech-adopting community in Sayers’s model (see Figure 1). The ovals in the diagram represent language inventory. The dotted background represent social networks through which diffusion occurs. The social network is denser within speech communities than outside of it. The dots do not permeate either the media texts or the processes of

Figure 1: Sayer’s (2014) hypothetical mediated innovation model.

mediation and broadcast. Again, this model – as well as studies on media influence – does not suggest the idea of “blanket transmission from media source[s] to passive speakers/viewers” (Sayers 2014), nor is it meant to suggest that the homogenizing effect of media will make people’s speech more similar. Instead, Sayer’s model focuses on broadcast media as a new line of enquiry to account for non-local innovations in low-motility speech communities.

From an anthropological perspective, Agha (2011) suggests that mediatized experiences are preceded by non-mediatized ones. Mediatized representations of cultural practice presuppose shared understandings of sociological types or memberships, which Agha (2005) refers to as *enregisterment*.² Such experiences, or semiotic encounters, will subsequently be invoked in real life (Agha 2011). That is to say, the audience will not adopt all the features they hear from televised media, but rather only those features useful for projecting some aspect of identity, and that these features are often assigned new situated meanings (e. g. sophistication, erudition, urbanity, etc.). Therefore, mass media plays the role of facilitating the formation and dissemination of register (i. e. the process of *enregisterment*) that connects communicative signs to other non-linguistic signs (Agha 2007). Instead of taking this process as either convergence or divergence, it should be conceptualized as a process of *bricolage* in which variables from different sources are combined to construct new social meanings (Eckert 2008). In Zhang’s (2005) study, young working professionals in Beijing adopt non-local features to project a new social identity as opposed to wanting to sound like, or “pass,” as someone from elsewhere. The subjects only pick up certain features that can be used as a stylistic resource (Stuart-Smith 2006, 2013). These are usually features that have been assigned social meanings with which the speakers can project a different persona.

Other than adopting a different style to project a new social identity, what is also commonly observed in broadcast media is *stylization*. A speaker’s style is defined by the use of both linguistic and non-linguistic features to construct their own social identity, while *stylization* is the development of culturally familiar styles that are not associated with the current speaking context, using linguistic features to mimic or put on another’s identity (Coupland 2011). Stylization often takes place in specific communicative contexts and at specific linguistic or semiotic levels, where its effects are created and experienced much more locally. It can also be viewed as a process of “de-authentication” that involves performing noncurrent-first-person personas (Coupland 2011). For

² Agha (2005) defines *enregisterment* as “a social regularity of recognition whereby linguistic (and accompanying nonlinguistic) signs come to be recognized as indexing pragmatic features of interpersonal role (persona) and relationship.”

example, Coupland (2001) looks at data from English-language national radio broadcasts in Wales. In the morning light entertainment show “The Roy Noble Show,” the hosts play with the monophthongal and diphthongal variants of (ou) and (ei), where monophthongal forms are considered “non-standard.” These two phonological variables serve as a stylistic and semiotic resource for the host to be linked to Welshness. Such linguistic practices have also been adopted by some Chinese TV show hosts on the mainland. They participate in both styling and stylization by using linguistic features associated with Mandarin varieties spoken in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Zhu 2008), which in a way draws attention to the language attitudes that underlie such linguistic practices.

Taiwan was disconnected from Mainland China since the end of Chinese Civil War in 1949 until late 1970s when China launched the economic reform and participated in the global market. At the time, cultural products (e. g. pop music, film, and TV dramas) from overseas Chinese communities such as Hong Kong and Taiwan flooded the fledgling pop culture market due to their linguistic and cultural proximity (Zhang 2005; Zhu 2008; Gold 1993). To many young Chinese mainlanders, these cultural products represent a prosperous modern cosmopolitan lifestyle and a new urban identity (Zhang 2005: 437). TM has since been valorized with positive social connotations. Some mainland TV show hosts even participate in both styling and stylization by employing linguistic features associated with Mandarin varieties spoken in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Zhu 2008). Zhang (2005) also identifies some of the TM features as the ‘cosmopolitan’ variables, such as the replacement of neutral tones with full tones. Morpho-syntactic features of TM, on the other hand, have been relatively understudied by sociolinguists. Some of these features have, in fact, been indexically linked to social types or attributes (e. g. softness) by many Chinese northerners. In what follows, I will introduce the two morpho-syntactic variables in question for this study.

3 Linguistic variables and their indexical meanings

This study questions whether exposure to Taiwanese televised media might influence the acceptability judgments of speakers’ ‘standard’ Mandarin for sentences containing two syntactic variables: the postverbal *gei*-phrase (see example 1) and completive marker *you* (see example 2). These two variables are more observed in southern varieties of Mandarin (e. g. Taiwanese Mandarin and Guangdong Mandarin). Example (1a) is the preverbal variant, and (1b) is the postverbal variant.

- (1) a. 我等一下给你打电话 (Preverbal)
 Wo dengyixia gei ni dadianhua (Standard Mandarin)
 I later to you make phone call
 'I will give you a call later.'
- b. 我等一下打电话给你 (Postverbal)
 wo dengyixia da dianhua gei ni (Southern Mandarin)
 I later make phone call to you
 'I will give you a call later.'

Previous work (Peng forthcoming) involving a survey of 404 informants from different areas of Greater China with various different dialect backgrounds, demonstrates that the placement of the *gei*-phrase is regionally conditioned. Northern Mandarin speakers prefer the preverbal over the postverbal *gei*-phrase, which is consistent with the placement of the phrase in their home vernacular: northern vernaculars allow only for the preverbal variant. Speakers of southern dialects³ (e. g. Min, Yue and Hakka) favor the postverbal variant for the same reason, as southern dialects favor the postverbal *gei*-phrase. Since many northern Mandarin varieties allow for the pre- and postverbal oscillation of the *gei*-phrase, postverbal *gei* does not always stand out as a salient southern feature to many northern Chinese.

As noted in previous studies (e. g. Kerswill and Williams 2002; Labov et al. 2006, Labov et al. 2011; Levon and Fox 2014), social salience – broadly defined as the relative ability to evoke social meanings – is an important factor in eliciting individuals' reaction to linguistic variables. Levon and Fox (2014) showed that despite how TH-fronting, a traditional Cockney feature, is largely associated with the speech of the lower social classes, no significant correlation was found between the quantitative distribution (i. e. the frequency of TH-fronting occurred in the stimuli) of the variable and perceived professionalism. However, when they separate the northern and southern listeners, there appears to be a downward trend of perceived professionalism as the frequency of TH-fronting increases. As I will show later in this article, due to the lack of social salience (i. e. not associated with southern speech), postverbal *gei* does not display the same effects on acceptability judgements as does the other target variant, aspectual *you*.

The use of the aspectual morpheme *you* (marking completion) is another variable commonly found in many southern Chinese dialects, such as Wu (e. g. Shanghaiese), Hakka, Min and Yue, and is also often used by speakers of these

³ The term “dialect” is used here to reference non-Mandarin Chinese languages, following the “lay definition” used by study participants, popular media, etc.

dialects in Mandarin (see 2a). However, northern Mandarin speakers often exclusively associate the aspectual morpheme *you* with TM, even though it is also widely used by other southern Mandarin speakers on the mainland.

- (2) a. 我有看过这部电影 (Taiwanese Mandarin)
 wo [you] kan guo zhe bu dianying
 I ASP see-ASP this-CL movie
 ‘I have seen this movie.’
- b. 我看过这部电影 (Northern Mandarin)
 wo kan guo zhe bu dianying
 I see-ASP this-CL movie
 ‘I have seen this movie.’

Peng (2016) shows that northern Mandarin speakers prefer sentences without aspectual *you* (as in 2b), but no preference is given to either the pre- or the postverbal variant of *gei*-phrases. Although the postverbal *gei*-phrases and aspectual *you* are both contact-induced variables commonly observed in many southern varieties of Mandarin, they are perceived very differently by northern Mandarin speakers in terms of their acceptability and indexicality. The use of aspectual *you* is often associated exclusively with TM, whereas the postverbal *gei*-phrase either does not have a regional association or is associated with southern speech in general. In other words, aspectual *you* stands out as a socially salient, or indexically linked with TM, whereas postverbal *gei* does not come across as a non-local feature for many northern Mandarin speakers.

Silverstein (2003) terms an indicator in variation an “ n^{th} order index”, which indexes a speaker’s membership in a population. However, if a linguistic form becomes a marker of social evaluation, it becomes an “ $n+1^{\text{st}}$ ” order index. Silverstein’s use of the term indexical order does not imply temporal order. Order is in the sense of social order or level of consciousness, referring to the relation among elements of a system (Eckert 2008).

Following Silverstein (2003), n^{th} order indexicality is defined as the association of a linguistic form with a place or a group of people. For example, aspectual *you* has taken on $n+1^{\text{st}}$ order indexicality since it is often exclusively associated with TM speakers by Chinese mainlanders. Postverbal *gei*, on the other hand, may be undergoing the process from n^{th} indexical order to $n+1^{\text{st}}$ order indexicality. When a feature is taken to the next level and is associated with a range of non-linguistic aspects (e. g. low intelligence, laziness, educated elite status, etc.), the feature becomes a $n+1^{\text{st}}$ order index.

4 Method

In order to examine the interrelation between media exposure, language attitudes, and acceptability judgments, or more specifically how exposure to Taiwanese TV programs together with pertinent language attitudes affect acceptability judgments of northern Chinese regarding aspectual *you* and postverbal *gei*, I have adopted several experimental methodologies, including: an acceptability task, a written-guise attitude task, a qualitative attitudinal questionnaire, and a demographic questionnaire.

4.1 Participants

For the present study, native northern Mandarin speakers were recruited through a colleague who was teaching at a university in Tianjin. Most participants were college students, who were between the ages of 18 and 22. The participants were asked to complete an online survey in Standard Mandarin housed at Wenjuan.com, a China-based survey website, which provides paid data collection service. Participants were paid fifty RMB (about \$7.5 USD) after their responses were validated by manually looking at each participant's answers, IP address, and response time. I use a counter-balanced research design, and each participant was randomly assigned to one of two groups (A or B). A total of 234 participants completed the survey ($N = 234$). The online survey,⁴ consisted of the following four tasks: 1. a grammatical acceptability task, 2. a written-guise attitude task, 3. an open-ended attitudinal questionnaire, and 4. a demographic questionnaire.

4.2 Procedure

4.2.1 Task 1 – acceptability judgment

Participants were first asked about their dialect backgrounds. Only people of northern dialect background were selected for the acceptability judgment task. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two groups (Group A or B). Both groups were presented with the same sentences except that the variants were swapped (see Table 1). This is to make sure that the results were

⁴ <http://www.wenjuan.com/survey>.

Table 1: Examples of tokens used in the acceptability task.

Group A	Group B
我打電話給你。 (Postverbal)	我給你打電話。 (Postverbal)
I make a phone call to you	I to you make a phone call
我給你倒杯水。 (Preverbal)	我倒杯水給你。 (Preverbal)
I to you pour CL-water	I pour CL-water for you
我有吃過這道菜。 (with aspectual <i>you</i>)	我吃過這道菜。 (without aspectual <i>you</i>)
I <i>you</i> eat-ASP this CL-dish	I eat-ASP this CL-dish
我看過這部電影。 (without aspectual <i>you</i>)	我有看過這部電影。 (with aspectual <i>you</i>)
I see-ASP this CL-movie	I <i>you</i> see-ASP this CL-movie

independent of the sentence themselves as acceptability judgments can potentially be affected by lexical items or pragmatics (Sprouse 2007; Henry 2004). For example, a grammatical sentence could be rejected because of a lexical variant instead of the target syntactic variant (Henry 2004). Therefore, the grouping of subjects is to make sure that each stimuli sentence appears with both variants an equal number of times. In addition, the experimental design is not either within or between subjects as it does not compare the results of groups A and B. This study is only concerned with the differences in acceptability between the standard and non-standard variables, not between the two groups of subjects.

In the first task, participants were asked to rate sentences with the target variables on a 7-point Likert scale.⁵ There were 40 sentences in total, 10 for the *gei* variable (i. e. 5 preverbal and 5 postverbal), 10 for the *you* variable (5 with the aspectual *you* and 5 without), and 20 fillers of varying levels of acceptance. A regression analysis was conducted to examine if there was a correlation between the amount of media exposure to Taiwanese TV programs and the level of acceptability to the variables associated with TM.

4.2.2 Task 2 – written-guise attitude task

The written-guise attitude task is a modification of the classic Matched-Guise Technique (MGT). The MGT was first introduced in Lambert et al. (1960) seminal

⁵ Here is the instruction for the acceptability task: In this part of the survey, you will be rating sentences under a given context. Based on how natural they sound to you and what you would say in your everyday life, please rate the following sentences on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being extremely unnatural and 5 being perfectly natural. Please note that the criterion for this judgment is ‘how natural would the sentence sound in your own speech?’ Please respond to the sentences based on your personal use of the language and native intuition.

study where listeners were presented with utterances in different languages produced by a bilingual speaker. Not knowing the utterances were produced by the same speaker, the listeners were then required to rate the utterances on a variety of social attributes. The MGT has been adopted by many subsequent studies in various forms (e.g. Campbell-Kibler 2010; Buchstaller 2006b). Following Buchstaller's (2006b) study of attitudes regarding quotative *be like*, the present study employs a similar attitude task with written stimuli in order to control for phonological variables that trigger regional associations. If the matched guise carrier material contains phonological variables that trigger regional associations, the informants might react to these and therefore potentially be biased in their judgments (Buchstaller 2006b). When testing for attitudes towards certain features as opposed to attitudes toward the variety in general, it is important to control for the lexicalization (or textual carrier) in which the target feature occurs. Therefore, as in the acceptability judgment task, participants were randomly assigned to two different groups, with the same lexicalization but different variants (i.e. swapping the stimuli tokens between texts in the two groups). Thus, Group A participants were given a sentence with the pre-verbal *gei* variant and Group B was given the exact same sentence with the post-verbal *gei* variant. The written stimuli were presented in the form of a dialogue where the target variables appear densely throughout the dialogue. Each participant was presented with four short dialogues, two for the *gei* variable (pre- and post-verbal) and two for the *you* variable (with and without *you*).

4.2.3 Task 3 – attitudinal questionnaire

All four dialogues consisted of a conversation between two friends. In one of these dialogues, two friends discuss inviting a friend to see a movie where the *gei* variable occurs repetitively (see appendix). After reading each dialogue, respondents were asked to rate the written utterance on eleven personality traits such as “rustic” or “refined” using a 5 point Likert scale (0: not at all, 5: very) as in Buchstaller's (2006) study. These selection of these traits was inspired on those used by Zhang (2005) (e.g. cosmopolitan, business-like) and Su (2008) (e.g. refined), as well as what the author – a native speaker of TM – perceived to be the common associations that northern Mandarin speakers hold regarding mainland Mandarin and TM. To reduce the dimensions of the attitude measures, Principle Component Analysis (PCA) was deployed. PCA is a method that uses lower dimensional data to represent higher dimensional data. The purpose of PCA is to find a fewer number of uncorrelated principal components that can capture almost as much variance as the original eleven adjectives. Without this

approach, all of these items would need to be entered into the model separately, increasing the risk that individual measures would correlate with each other. The collinearity can potentially compromise the robustness of the model.

For each dialogue, the participants were also asked to identify where they thought the speaker was from after rating all the personality traits. This is because the ratings of the personality traits only represent how the participants think of the variables but not how they think of the people who actually use those variables, as participants may have different opinions about who or what varieties the variables are associated with. This question helps to identify with which speech communities the northern Mandarin judges associate the variable as well as whether or not they make a connection between the attitudes and their corresponding speech community. A similar concept was also pointed out in Preston's perceptual dialectology study (2003). Thus, even if someone from California judges a voice from New England to be 'intelligent,' 'cold,' and 'fast,' we cannot make the connection between these associated social traits and the Californian's opinions of the New England speaker, because the Californian judge may not necessarily associate the voice with New England.

4.2.4 Task 4 – demographic questions

Finally, respondents were asked to answer a set of demographic questions. The questions were mostly concerned with participants' television viewing habits as well as other social factors that may influence their adoption of linguistic variants, such as gender and age. Demographic factors were entered into the model as covariates. In addition to the demographic questions, participants were also asked explicitly about their attitudes towards TM at the end of the survey. Self-reported data on participants' media exposure to TV programs from Taiwan were collected through the following questions:

- a. Have you ever watched TV programs from Taiwan? Yes/ No
- b. How long have you been watching TV programs from Taiwan? (Please provide your answer in months)
- c. How often do you watch TV programs from Taiwan? (Please provide your answer in minutes)

5 Data analysis

First, in order to test whether the participants differed in their ratings of standard and non-standard forms, paired-sample T-tests were used for both syntactic

variants (*you* and *gei*) because the ratings were all derived from the same sample. Second, in order to test the relationships between media exposure, attitudinal factors (AFs), and acceptability ratings, a random-effect model was used with acceptability ratings as the outcomes and media exposure and attitude scores as the main predictors. The level of media exposure was computed by multiplying frequency and duration,⁶ while attitude scores were based on the differences between TM and Putonghua. One unexpected result was that a large number of participants (N = 147) reported not watching any Taiwanese TV programs at all. Thus, in order to avoid a strong floor effect, the participants are divided into three subgroups based on the amount of exposure. People with no exposure to Taiwanese TV programs were categorized as one group (exposure = 0, N = 147), and the remainder consists of those with moderate (exposure = 0–999 hours, N = 47) and extensive exposure (exposure = 1000 + hours, N = 40). Thus, the total number of participants with exposure to Taiwanese media is 87.

The random-effect model focuses on the effects of the predictors and removes noise introduced by “random” fluctuations, i. e. the effects of different subjects and different lexicalizations (items). In the current study, a general model could be written as:

$$Acceptability_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 * Exposure_i + \beta_2 * Attitude\ Scores_i + \beta_3 * Covariates_i + U_i + W_{ij}$$

$Acceptability_{ij}$ denotes the acceptability ratings of person i on the item j ; $Exposure_i$, $Attitude\ Scores_i$ and $Covariates_i$ denotes the media exposure, attitude scores, and covariates, respectively, for person i ; α represents the population average of the acceptability of ratings, β_1 , β_2 and β_3 re are the coefficients calculated for exposure, attitude scores, and covariates; finally, U represents the deviation from the population mean for person i , and W_{ij} represents the error term for the person i and item j . In this parameterization, the random-effect model can illustrate the heterogeneity of the sample as well as the random fluctuation for each item. For the purpose of testing the interaction effects between media exposure and attitude scores, the random-effect model was used with additional interaction terms between media exposure and attitude scores. The variables *gei* and *you* fit separate models. Again, this study does not compare the results of groups A and B. The grouping in the attitude task only aims to reduce potential biases arising from lexical choices or pragmatics. Thus, the randomization of subjects serves to average out the potential effects of those confounding factors, and is therefore irrelevant to the model where the

⁶ Frequency is defined as hours/day, and duration is defined in terms of days over the number of years of watching Taiwanese TV shows.

primary focus is the intertwining relationships between media exposure, language attitudes, and acceptability ratings. To assist in statistical inference, a Huber-White robust estimator was used. All statistical analyses were conducted in Stata13.

6 Results

The results of the PCA analysis (see Table 2) show that there are three major components among the eleven items that can explain 56% of the variation, including Attitudinal Factor 1 (+ gentle, + polite, -tough, and + cosmopolitan), Attitudinal Factor 2 (+ sincere, + reliable, + humorous, and + low-key), and Attitudinal Factor 3 (+ fashionable, + young, and + business-like). “Refined” was removed from analysis as it cross-loads substantively on all three components. For each component, a summary score is calculated by summing up the items.⁷ The results were entered into random-effect models to test the research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1

The results of the paired-sample T-tests (see Figure 2) show that the standard forms (pre-verbal *gei*, and Ø *you*), in general, are judged to be significantly more grammatically acceptable (“better”) than the non-standard forms (postverbal *gei*, and presence of *you*). Figure 2 summarizes the comparisons between standard and non-standard forms for both *gei* and *you*. The preverbal phrases receive higher acceptability judgment scores than the postverbal ones ($t(234) = -5.665$, $p < 0.001$), and sentences without aspectual *you* are also judged to be more acceptable than those without aspectual *you* ($t(234) = -14.91$, $p < 0.001$).

⁷ The overall Cronbach’s alpha of the eleven items in this sample is 0.76, while the Cronbach’s alphas of the three principle factors are 0.70, 0.64, and 0.67 respectively for the three Attitudinal Factors. The alpha coefficient 0.76 suggests that the items have relatively high internal consistency. Generally, a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered “acceptable” in most social science research situations. However, as also shown by many other researchers, Cronbach alpha is also influenced by the numbers of the items with more items often displaying higher levels of Cronbach alpha. See: Cortina, J. M. (1993). What is coefficient alpha? An examination of theory and applications. *Journal of applied psychology*, 78(1), 98. And Schmitt, N. (1996). Uses and abuses of coefficient alpha. *Psychological assessment*, 8(4), 350. It is not uncommon for a subscale with only a few items to display Cronbach’s alphas < 0.70 yet has reasonable reliability. Therefore, I believe that the three subscales also have reasonable reliability.

Table 2: Principle component analysis.

	Components		
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
Gentle	0.803		
Polite	0.787	0.310	
Tough	−0.691		
Cosmopolitan	0.587		0.315
Sincere		0.830	
Reliable	0.355	0.705	
Humorous		0.580	0.434
Low key		0.568	
Refined	0.321	0.472	0.343
Fashionable			0.863
Young			0.830
Business-like			0.344

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Figure 2: Mean scores for the four conditions & Paired-Sample T-Test (95% confidence intervals).

Hypothesis 2

Table 3 summarizes the model fitting results for random-effect models. Model 1 under both *gei* and *you* represents the model used for testing the main effects of

Table 3: Random effect models with *Gei* and *You* as the outcomes.

	Gei			You				
	Model 1		Model 2	Model 1		Model 2		
	β	(95% CI)		β	(95% CI)			
Media Exposure								
Moderate (vs. None)	-0.119	(-0.488-0.25)	0.793	(-1.544-3.130)	-0.429	(-1.477-0.619)	3.008	(-10.47-16.49)
Extensive (vs. None)	-0.278	(-0.659-0.103)	-0.169	(-2.638-2.301)	-0.343	(-1.03-0.344)	-0.579	(-3.396-2.238)
Attitudinal Factor 1	0.137	(-0.079-0.353)	0.152	(-0.124-0.429)	0.047	(-0.302-0.396)	0.143	(-0.232-0.519)
Media Exposure × AF1								
Moderate × AF1			-0.072	(-0.649-0.504)			0.148	(-2.094-2.39)
Extensive × AF1			0.256	(-0.391-0.904)			-0.52	(-1.381-0.341)
Attitudinal Factor 2	0.127	(-0.033-0.288)	0.225*	(0.034-0.416)	0.217	(-0.040-0.473)	0.064	(-0.214-0.341)
Media Exposure × AF2								
Moderate × AF2			-0.285	(-0.686-0.116)			-0.318	(-1.593-0.956)
Extensive × AF2			-0.471	(-1.101-0.159)			0.718*	(0.09-1.346)
Attitudinal Factor 3	0.026	(-0.147-0.198)	-0.011	(-0.228-0.205)	-0.076	(-0.314-0.161)	-0.02	(-0.299-0.259)
Media Exposure × AF3								
Moderate × AF3			0.124	(-0.338-0.587)			-0.72	(-2.553-1.114)
Extensive × AF3			0.184	(-0.26-0.627)			-0.063	(-0.628-0.503)
Gender	0.019	(-0.006-0.045)	0.197	(-0.091-0.485)	-0.148	(-0.632-0.336)	-0.124	(-0.61-0.363)
Age	0.164	(-0.145-0.473)	0.022	(-0.004-0.048)	-0.042	(-0.086-0.002)	-0.041	(-0.086-0.005)
Constant	3.652	(2.342-4.962)	3.179	(1.578-4.779)	5.841	(4.162-7.52)	5.750	(4.026-7.474)

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

media exposure while controlling for other factors. The results show that media exposure alone does not significantly correlate with the acceptability ratings for both *gei* and *you*.

Model 2 in Table 2 represents the model for testing the interaction effects between media exposure and attitudinal factors. As shown, for both the non-standard features, postverbal *gei* and aspectual *you*, Attitudinal Factor 2 (sincere, reliable, humorous, and low-key) emerges as the factor that best predicts the acceptability judgment results when interacting with media exposure. Surprisingly, Attitudinal Factor 2 positively correlates with the acceptability judgment of *gei* for participants with no exposure to Taiwanese TV programs (adjusted beta = 0.225, $p < 0.05$, 95%CI: 0.034–0.416). For all the other groups with exposure to Taiwanese TV programs, no significant results are found. In contrast, for aspectual *you*, Attitudinal Factor 2 is positively correlated with the acceptability judgment scores for participants with extensive media exposure (adjusted beta = 0.718, $p < 0.05$, 95%CI: 0.090–1.346), but not for participants with moderate or no exposure. Thus, for both postverbal *gei* and aspectual *you*, Attitudinal Factor 2 emerges as a significant predictor of the acceptability judgment results.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the marginal relationships between Attitudinal Factor 2 and acceptability ratings among different media exposure groups for

Figure 3: Adjusted prediction of aspectual *Gei*.

Figure 4: Adjusted prediction of aspectual *You*.

both *gei* and *you*. In the figures, the dotted lines represent the group of participants with no exposure to Taiwanese TV programs. The dashed lines represent participants with moderate exposure, and the solid lines represent participants with extensive exposure. The vertical axis represents the acceptability ratings of the postverbal *gei* or aspectual *you* phrase, and the horizontal axis represents the scoring of Attitudinal Factor 2. In Figure 3 for those who have no exposure to Taiwanese TV programs, acceptability ratings of postverbal *gei* increase in tandem with the scores for Attitudinal Factor 2. In other words, the higher the score the participants give to the four personality traits in Attitudinal Factor 2 (sincere, reliable, humorous, and low-key), the more acceptable the postverbal *gei*-phrase is to them. However, for those who had moderate to extensive exposure to Taiwanese TV programs, the effects of language attitudes are not found to be statistically significant (the dash-line and solid line in Figure 3).

In Figure 4, for the group with extensive exposure to Taiwanese TV programs, the acceptability ratings for *you* are positively correlated with speakers' language attitudes towards TM: the higher the attitude score, the higher the acceptability ratings for aspectual *you* (see Figure 4 solid line). For the groups with moderate to no exposure, language attitudes alone do not have a significant effect on the acceptability ratings of *you*. In summary, extensive exposure in tandem with Attitudinal Factor 2 contribute to the increased acceptability of aspectual *you*.

7 Discussion

To situate each AF in context, I labeled and discussed each of them as follow:

AF 1 Cosmopolitanism: ± gentle, ± polite, -tough, and ± cosmopolitan

Component 1 characterizes the way of communication among the urban middle class. As education is becoming increasingly accessible in urban China, + Gentle, + polite, and -tough seem to invoke a polite, well-educated, cosmopolitan persona that embodies urban valence (attractiveness).

AF 2 Meekness: ± sincere, ± reliable, ± humorous, and ± low key

As the Chinese economy is rapidly booming, the tradition social values have been drifting away from modesty to ostentation. What is often portrayed in mass media is the lifestyle of the ultra-rich, such as the Canadian-made reality TV show *Ultra-Rich Asian Girls*, which features China's Rich Second Generation living in Vancouver, Canada. These girls represent a highly enregistered social identity, and quantifiers such as showy, money-driven, and aggressive have become the demeanor indexicals (Goffman 1956; Agha 2007, cited Chen and Kong 2015) of this type of social identity. On the contrary, the past decade saw Taiwan's relatively slow or even stagnant economic growth. With relatively smaller poverty gap and much less competition for economic opportunities within the island, Taiwanese have developed what many Chinese mainlanders would perceive to be a sincere, reliable, and laidback temperament.

AF 3 Youthfulness: ± fashionable, ± young, and ± business-like

AF 3 refers to a modern youthful identity often associated with coolness and style. It is similar to Component 1 in the sense that both components pertain to a cosmopolitan lifestyle, but they also differ in that component 1 is more relevant to verbal communication whereas component 3 is more about non-verbal behavior.

The results show that when the non-local variable is salient to northern Mandarin speakers, as in the case of aspectual *you*, media exposure together with language attitudes are correlated with acceptability judgments of this variant. However, if the features are not salient to the individuals as non-local features, as in the case of post-verbal *gei*, media exposure and language attitudes do not exert a significant influence on the acceptability of the variant. In sum, media exposure and language attitudes make non-local features more

acceptable if the features are socially recognized or indexically linked with social meanings (e. g. *you*).

Here I draw upon the concept of indexicality to account for the differences between aspectual *you* and postverbal *gei* in the effects of media exposure and language attitudes. As mentioned earlier, televised media facilitates the dissemination of registers and enables connection to shared understandings of sociological types or memberships (Agha 2007). If a linguistic feature does not have a regional association and is not indexically linked with social meanings, exposure to the feature via televised media does not lead to higher acceptability. The data suggest that aspectual *you* has taken on n + 1st order indexicality because aspectual *you* has been associated with the social qualities (e. g. soft and gentle) commonly linked with TM.

The postverbal *gei*-phrase, on the other hand, has not achieved 1st order indexicality because northern Mandarin speakers are not aware that it is associated with TM, but they have assigned it similar social meanings – gentle and soft. One possible explanation could be that people do not usually regard it as a non-local feature because northern Mandarin speakers, while preferring the preverbal variant, also use *gei* postverbally. In fact, many northern Mandarin varieties (e. g. Nanjing Mandarin and Beijing Mandarin) allow for such oscillation, which may explain why exposure to Taiwanese TV programs does not affect the acceptability of the postverbal *gei*-phrase in their grammar. In other words, if a feature is not perceived as a non-local or enregistered feature, media exposure is less likely to have an effect on the acceptability of such a feature.

The different effects of media exposure on acceptability judgments of aspectual *you* and postverbal *gei* can be attributed to different levels of social salience of the two variables: aspectual *you* is highly salient among Chinese northerners whereas postverbal *gei* is not. In light of this interpretation, the fact that the effects of media exposure and language attitudes on acceptability judgments were only observed with aspectual *you* is predictable. Social salience is highly contextualized. Although aspectual *you* is a salient marker of TM for northern Mandarin speakers, it might not necessarily be the case for their southern counterparts, which merits further investigation.

Another noteworthy phenomenon is how media exposure and language attitudes do not have an effect independent of each other on the acceptability judgment ratings of aspectual *you*; nor do attitudinal factors alone may have much effect on these individuals' language use or perception. Only the interaction between media exposure and Attitudinal Factor 2 (sincere, reliable, humorous, and low-key) shows an effect on the acceptability ratings for aspectual *you*. Previous studies (e. g. Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 2003; Stuart-Smith 2007; 2013) also found that attitudinal factors may not always affect speakers'

language use and perception, and they are not always positively correlated with the amount of televised media exposure. For example, Stuart-Smith (2007) found that engagement with London-based TV programs does not lead to a positive evaluation of Cockney accents. In fact, London accents received mixed evaluations, while the innovations (i. e. th-fronting and l-vocalization⁸) themselves were considered by participants as ‘pure Glaswegian’ (Stuart-Smith 2007: 12). Subsequent re-analysis of the data (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013) showed reduced significance of attitudinal factors. Stuart-Smith et al. (2013) found that attitudinal factors emerged as the weakest of the four main theoretical categories. However, together with massive exposure to televised media, attitudinal factors do make highly salient, non-local features more ‘natural’ or grammatically acceptable, possibly because media exposure reinforces the semiotic link between ideologies and linguistic practices. TM’s relative prestige as a nonstandard dialect is also crucial to the results of this study. The fact TM is not stigmatized and is indexically linked with traits such as sincere, reliable, humorous, and low-key helps to internalize its socially salient features and ultimately contributes higher acceptability ratings.

Therefore, I argue that media exposure in tandem with language attitudes increases individuals’ awareness of features perceived to be non-local (e. g. *you*). In the case of the postverbal *gei*-phrase, speakers do not associate it exclusively with TM since it is ubiquitous in many of the southern varieties and occurs variably in northern Mandarin as well. As a result, the pre- and postverbal *gei*-phrases are judged to be equally natural. On the other hand, speakers do associate aspectual *you* primarily with Taiwanese Mandarin. With such awareness, media exposure plays a role in constructing the link between the variable and the social attributes. Therefore, for respondents with exposure to Taiwanese TV programs, the acceptability ratings of aspectual *you* are positively correlated with the adjectives linked to TM speakers like sincere, reliable, humorous, and low-key. The results suggest that media exposure on its own does not contribute directly to variation in the perception of variants. When exposure to Taiwanese TV programs leads people to form positive attitudes about TM speakers, they are more likely to accept non-local linguistic forms like *you* as grammatical. If the process were to continue, it is possible that the feature might eventually be adopted by northern mainlanders.

It must be noted that correlation itself does not necessarily imply causation, and that this study is solely concerned with identifying a correlation between media exposure and the judgment scores of sentences with aspectual *you*. The positive correlation between media exposure and the acceptability judgment

⁸ Th-fronting and l-vocalization are typically associated with the Cockney dialect of London.

score is not proof that media exposure is the direct cause of favorable acceptability judgments of *you*. However, the data does suggest that when media exposure triggers the formation of positive language attitudes towards non-local varieties like TM, syntactic variables that contrast with an individual's own variety are more likely to be accepted. In addition, there are methodological limitations that need to be addressed: the actual representations of the two syntactic variables in televised media were not measured. Therefore, it is not clear exactly how frequently the two syntactic variables are represented in televised media, nor is it apparent how to quantify the actual exposure of participants to the two syntactic variables.

In this study, media exposure is treated as a categorical variable rather than a continuous one, as there are too many extreme values (i. e. people who do not watch Taiwanese TV programs) in the data. Therefore, the results do not reveal whether additional exposure contributes to a more positive perception of the variable. It would be simplistic to say that non-local features become more acceptable with more exposure. The effects of media exposure on individuals' acceptability judgments are rather complex and multifactorial, involving the amount of media exposure, language attitudes, and individuals' awareness of the social salience of the non-local feature (i. e. whether a feature stands out to an individual as a 'non-local' feature). In order for media effects on acceptability ratings to be statistically established, there must be an extensive amount of media exposure, awareness of the non-local feature, and social meanings associated with the linguistic feature. With extensive exposure, a positive correlation can be found between the attitude scores and the acceptability ratings of the non-local feature. The limitation of this study is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge how frequently the two variables occur within the Taiwanese TV shows that the participants watch. However, since the two variables frequently occur in the quotidian speech of Taiwanese, they presumably also occur rather frequently in such TV shows.

8 Conclusion

This research serves as a preliminary effort to measure whether exposure to Taiwanese TV programs affects the grammatical acceptability of two syntactic variants of TM (postverbal *gei*, and aspectual *you*). Using acceptability judgment data in conjunction with attitudinal data, this study shows that the effects of media exposure on acceptability judgment can be empirically established. Televised media potentially creates and reinforces individuals' awareness of non-local

features and strengthens the indexical link between the social meanings of these features and linguistic practices. PCA provides a quantitative approach to convert social traits in the matched-guise task to three major “components,” which allows for the identification of the key personality traits linked to TM that contribute to the media effects. Using acceptability judgment data from an online survey of millennial mainland Chinese respondents (N = 234), it was shown that media exposure can increase the likelihood that non-local linguistic features (postverbal *gei*-phrase and aspectual *you*) are rated as grammatically acceptable. The data show that the effects of media exposure and language attitudes differ across these two variables: extensive exposure to Taiwanese TV programs leads people to form a set of positive attitudes about TM speakers, thus making aspectual *you* more acceptable to northern Mandarin speakers. However, for postverbal *gei* – a feature that already exists in northern Mandarin speakers’ grammar and one that they do not associate exclusively with TM – media effects were not observed.

The different outcomes of the two variables suggest that the effects of media exposure on acceptability judgments is rather complex and multifactorial: it takes an extensive amount of exposure, the formation of certain (positive) language ideologies, and, most importantly, enregisterment of the non-local variable to observe such effects. The quantitative data show that media exposure to TM affects people’s acceptance of a feature but only after they notice the presence of the feature, associate it with a particular demographic, and form positive attitudes about speakers of that variety. While a direct empirical link is usually not found between reported media exposure and grammatical acceptability, the effects *can* be statistically established when linked with language attitudes.

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