

Regional identity, language attitudes and writing Cantonese as everyday lifestyle in Guangzhou
(Canton City)

Jing Yan
The Columbus Academy

A sociolinguistic survey is conducted in the present study to explore the correlations between the regional identity, language attitudes, and everyday writing in the local community in Guangzhou (Canton City). The subjects are 116 Cantonese-Mandarin bilingual speakers in Guangzhou who are biliterates of Standard Written Chinese (SWC) and Vernacular Written Cantonese (VWC). The data on their use of VWC, attitudes toward VWC, and regional identity as Guangzhou Cantonese, are collected for both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Two of findings from the study are presented here. First, a correlation study finds that the subjects who specify their regional identity as Guangzhou Cantonese tend to show positive attitudes towards the VWC written code. And, second, the distribution patterns of the VWC literacy practices of the subjects, based on their lifestyles as Guangzhou Cantonese, suggest that the regional identity of Guangzhou Cantonese plays a positive role in the divergence of VWC from SWC in writing VWC reflected in the general lexicon, the use of classifiers, and syntactic structures.

In addition, this study provides a critical analysis of VWC discourse to explain the power of Cantonese lifestyle in the maintenance of VWC in Guangzhou area under the current language policy in Mainland China. The analysis reveals that VWC has social value as a marker of cultural solidarity in Guangzhou city, a vital sign of its maintenance.