

INTRODUCTION OF CHINESE AT UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS: A STUDY OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHINESE

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Abstract

Language attitude is the feelings people have about their own language or the language of others. Attitudes towards a language may show what people feel about the speakers of that language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitude may have an effect on second or foreign language learning. To find out the attitude of students learning Chinese at University of Lagos, a questionnaire is used as a method of data collection. The mentalist approach to attitude is the theoretical framework adopted in this research. The finding shows that students learning Chinese at University of Lagos have positive attitude towards Chinese language. This is a good omen for the future of Chinese language in Lagos.

Keyword: Chinese, University, Lagos, Student.

Introduction

A Chinese migrant in United State (US) who has been teaching Chinese (Mandarin) for nearly 20 years at China Institute says that there is an increase in number of US citizens learning Chinese. Chen said to the *China Daily USA* in an interview, "There was an English fever in China when I left for the US. Now we are seeing Chinese fever here". This statement is true because Chinese language is the third most popular language in the United States, behind English and Spanish. There are many people including prominent people in US who either speak or learn Chinese language. Facebook co-founder, Mark Zuckerberg; former president Obama's daughter and the grandchildren of president Trump are learning and speaking Chinese language. The 'Chinese fever' is not only in the United States of America. It has reached Europe and even Africa. Liu Xiaoming, the Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom, said to *Xinhuanet* during the 2017 'Chinese Bridge' that 'Chinese fever' has continued to heat up in the British Isles. During the Chinese language competition (Chinese Bridge), many students from European countries participated and displayed their ability in speaking Chinese language. According to Olander et'al (2016), "...in Africa, demand for Chinese classes is booming". This is quite true. The 'Chinese fever' in Africa seems too feverish maybe due to the newness of Chinese language in Africa. Unlike America and Europe, Chinese language is new in Africa.

China is the largest trading partner of Africa. The growing presence of China in the African continent is quite visible. Qi Li of *China Daily* in his article, 'The 'secrets' behind the success of China-Africa relations', opines:

The Chinese "footprints" in the African continent are so visible and welcomed that some people find it utterly unexpected and surprising...In fact, the successful and fruitful relations between China and Africa are not just of trade, but rather a combination of many important elements.

In other words, Chinese presence in Africa is not just in trade but also in other areas like education, health, military, and so many others. According to Li (2012), there are secrets behind the success of China-Africa relations. He summarized the secrets into three points. The first secret is mutual respect, which is the foundation for mutual trust between China and Africa. He believes that China and African countries enjoy mutual trust. The second secret is a sincere support and assistance. He says that China has long been standing by the side of the African people, beginning with their struggle for national independence. He equally accepts that China has also enjoyed strong and crucial support from African brothers including the successful restoration of its membership in the United Nations. The third secret is win-win cooperation. This, he believes, makes China-Africa relation sustainable and strong. Li says that it is fair to say that with the joint efforts, huge success has been achieved in the economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, both China and African countries have benefited from it. One of the areas African countries have benefitted from China-Africa relation is scholarship for African students. China provides thousands of scholarship annually to African students. Majority of these scholarships is offered to African students who are learning Chinese language up to doctorate degree.

In Nigeria, there is a growing interest to learn Chinese language among the citizens. The demand to learn Chinese language and culture is what led to the establishment of Confucius Institutes all over the world. As of now, there are two Confucius Institutes and other Confucius classrooms in Nigeria for teaching and learning Chinese language and culture. Florcruz (2015) says, "The study of the Chinese language has become increasingly popular among young students in Lagos, Nigeria. As the West African nation continues to foster economic relations with China, students say learning the language makes them more competitive in the job markets...". The popularity of Chinese language in Nigeria is not limited to Lagos but all over the country especially the southern parts. The first Confucius Institute in Nigeria was established in 2008 at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU). University of Lagos (UNILAG) is the second university in Nigeria to establish Confucius

Institute in 2009. In 2017 and 2018, UNILAG and NAU graduated first set of degree students in Chinese language respectively. In UNILAG, the degree in Chinese studies is housed in the department Linguistics, African and Asian Studies. There are only first year and fourth (final) year students. The second year and third year students study in China at Suzhou University. This research was conducted with the first and fourth year degree students in the above mentioned department in 2017/2018 session.

Language Attitude: definition and theoretical framework

Crystal (1997:215) simply defined language attitude as, "The feelings people have about their own language or the language of others". In other words, language attitude is one of the feelings people (learners, students) have towards their language or foreign language. Edwards (1994:97-98) explained that feelings people language about their language or other people's language by saying that:

The concept of attitude, a cornerstone of traditional social psychology, is not one about which there has been universal agreement. At a general level, however, attitude is a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of object. This disposition is often taken to comprise three components: feelings (affective), thoughts (cognitive element) and following upon these, predispositions to act in a certain way (behavioural element).

McGroarty (1996:5) supports Edwards (1994) thus, "In this reference, attitude has cognitive, affective, and conative components (i.e., it involves beliefs, emotional reactions, and behavioral tendencies related to object of attitude) and consists, in broad terms, of an underlying psychological predisposition to act or evaluate behavior in a certain way (Gardner, 1985)". Omdal (1995:85) states that the concept of attitude is widespread both in social psychology and other scientific fields and among lay people. However, there is no general agreement on the definition of attitude, not even in social psychology. Within the definition of language attitudes, it is also quite common to include attitudes towards language users, and not only attitudes towards language and language use.

In the study of language attitudes, two theoretical approaches: behaviourist and mentalist are distinguished. The behaviourist approach must be studied by observing the responses to certain languages, i.e. their use in actual interaction. The mentalist approach considers attitudes as an internal, mental state, which may give rise to certain forms of behaviour (Appel and Musysken, 1987:16). Fasold (1987: 147-148) opines that

The study of attitudes in general begins with a decision between two competing theories about the nature of attitudes. Most language-attitude work is based on a mentalist view of attitude as a state of readiness; an intervening variable between a stimulus affecting a person and that person's response. A person's attitude, in this view, prepares her to react to a given stimulus in one way rather than in another.

A typical mentalist definition of attitude is given by Williams (1974:21), "Attitude is considered as an internal state aroused by stimulation of some type and which may mediate the organism's subsequent response". This research adopts mentalist view or approach as a theoretical framework.

Attitudes towards a language may show what people feel about the speakers of that language. Expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitude may have an effect on second or foreign language learning. The measurement of language attitude provides information which is useful in language teaching and language planning. Since attitudes cannot be studied directly, the assessment of language attitudes requires asking such questions about other aspect of life. The responses reveal attitudes about people and their language. These language attitudes are developed in childhood. Brown (2000:180) states that:

Attitudes, like all aspects of the development of cognition and affect in human beings, develop early in childhood and are the result of parents' and peers' attitudes, of contact with people who are 'different' in any number of ways, of interesting affective factors in the human experience.

This is to say that children learn or copy attitudes from their parents or people around them. Also friends and peers can affect one's development of attitudes.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) studied the effect of attitudes on learning. After studying the interrelationships of a number of different types of attitudes, they defined them as a construct made up of certain attitudes. The most important of these groups is the 'attitude' learners have towards the members of the target language culture. Baker (1992) cited in Luo and Limpapath (2016) says that attitude is considered one of the most influential factors that affect second language learners' acquisition and learning process – efforts, desires, and affection towards learning a target language. The attitudes towards foreign or second language learning can also affect individual learner either positively or negatively.

Literature Review

In this section, we shall review works on existing research works on the attitude of learners of Chinese language.

Yu, (2010) carried out a research on 'Learning Chinese abroad: the role of language attitudes and motivation in the adaptation of international students in China'. The objectives of the study are to investigate the interrelationships of a number of affective variables related to studying Chinese as a second language (L2); to examine the relationships between affective variables in second language acquisition (SLA) and the indices of adaptation; and thirdly, to assess the changes over time in the attitudes and motivation of international students and their sociocultural and academic adaptation during their nine-month Chinese studies at a tertiary level. The results show that integrative motivation plays a very important positive role while language anxiety plays a very important negative role in both sociocultural adaptation and academic adaptation.

Luo and Limpapath (2016) explored the attitudes towards Chinese language learning of Thai senior high school students (Grade 10-12), at a private school in Bangkok, and examined the effect of gender and learning programs on those attitudes. Purposive and convenient sampling method were applied to a total of 493 students who were, then studying in two different learning programs, Chinese language major and English and Mathematics major with a minor in Chinese. Two hundreds and twelve subjects were obtained and questionnaires, with a reliability value of 0.83, were administered. A statistically difference found between gender and learning programs in that female students hold more positive attitudes towards Chinese language learning than their male counterparts, and that the students in Chinese language program hold more positive attitudes towards Chinese language learning than those in English and Mathematics with a minor in Chinese.

The Study of Chinese Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria, a doctorate degree thesis (2013) by Sunny Ifeanyi Odinye, Xiamen University, China, is the first detail research that covered Chinese language teaching and learning in Nigeria. In 2016, the work was published by LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, Germany. Odinye (2013) covers the teaching and learning of Chinese language at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Federal Polytechnic, Oko (both in Anambra State) and University of Lagos, Yaba; Fountain Height Secondary School, Surulere (both in Lagos State). He used Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in Anambra and Lagos States for his research areas. By the time, it was only these four institutions that had offered

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Chinese language for at least three years. From his work, it is found that Nigerian students have positive attitude towards Chinese language and its learning. It is also found that Nigerian students are extrinsically motivated in learning Chinese language. His work equally evaluated the Nigerian students' proficiency by testing the students and the result was good. Finally, Odinye (2013) categorized major and minor problems facing teaching and learning Chinese language in Nigeria. Some of the major problems are lack of adequate fund, teaching materials and teachers. Some of the minor problems are lack of local Chinese teachers, adequate scholarships for Nigerian students; short duration of volunteer Chinese teachers; few learning centers in Nigeria. He has many recommendations for Hanban, universities in Nigeria, Confucius institutes and classrooms in Nigeria, and Nigerian government. Some of the recommendations are an increase in funding, training local Chinese teachers, more scholarships for Nigeria students and teachers, sending more qualified teacher and an increase in teachers' duration of study, establishing more Confucius institute in Nigeria, and making Chinese language available for primary and secondary schools in Nigeria.

Odinye (2017) explored the attitude of Nigerian learners of Chinese using Nnamdi Azikiwe University students as a case study. The purpose of his research was to find out if the learners of Chinese language particularly at Nnamdi Azikiwe University has positive or negative attitude towards Chinese language. In 2013, the same researcher had found out from his research that Nigerian learners of Chinese language have positive attitudes using four schools in Anambra and Lagos States as case studies. Odinye (2017) also found out that learners of Chinese language at Nnamdi Azikiwe University have positive attitude towards Chinese language. The research was carried out using survey method of a structured questionnaire. Seventy questionnaires were distributed to the students learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. At the end of the exercise, sixty one copies of questionnaires were returned but only fifty two copies of the questionnaires were used for data analysis.

Research Methodology

There are many types of research. Quantitative and qualitative researches are two major types. Quantitative research starts with an experimental design in which a hypothesis is followed by the quantification of data and some sort of numerical analysis. Qualitative research is quite opposite of quantitative research in that it cannot be set up as experiments, the data cannot be easily quantified, and the analysis is not statistical rather interpretive (Mackey and Gass, 2005).

This study adopts survey research method. Survey research is one of the most popular and important areas of measurement in applied social research. The broad area of survey research encompasses any measurement procedures that involve asking questions of respondents. A survey can be anything from a short paper-and-pencil feedback form to an intensive one-on-one in-depth interview. Surveys are divided into two broad areas, questionnaire and interview (Trochim, 2006). Survey research is a commonly used method of collecting information about a population of interest. Shaughnessy, J. et al (2011) say that survey research is often used to access thoughts, opinions, and feelings. A survey consists of a predetermined set of questions that is given to a sample. With a representative sample, one can describe the attitudes of the population from which the sample was drawn. A good sample selection is key as it allows one to generalize the findings from the sample to the population, which is the whole purpose of survey research. According to Wikipedia, a survey is a list of questions aimed at extracting specific data from a particular group of people. Surveys may be conducted by phoned, mail, via the internet, and sometimes face-to-face on busy street corners or in malls.

Data collection

The choice of method of data collection is dependent on the research question and the theoretical framework within which the research is conducted (Mackey and Gass, 2005). Data collection in second language research is multidimensional. There is no single prescribed elicitation measure, nor is there a 'right' or 'wrong' elicitation measure. Questionnaire survey method is adopted for this research. The questionnaire survey method is preferred because (i) this method is suitable for empirical research; (ii) the data collected through this method is easily quantifiable; (iii) this method gives informants enough time to provide well thought out answer; (iv) this method offers greater anonymity to the informants; and (v) this method requires low cost and saves time.

One of the most common methods of data collection in second and foreign language research is the use of questionnaire. Brown (2001) defines questionnaire as "any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statement to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting them among existing answers". Questionnaires allow researchers to gather information that learners are able to report about themselves, such as their beliefs and motivations about learning or their reactions to learning and classroom instruction and activities – information that is typically not available from data alone. The popularity of questionnaires is due to the fact that they are easy to construct, extremely versatile, and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly in a form that is readily processable (Dornyei, 2003). In addition to

different varieties of questionnaires, two types of questionnaire items may be identified: closed and open ended. A closed item questions is one for which the researcher determines the possible answers, whereas opened-ended question allows respondents to answer in any manner they see fit. A closed-ended question is used in this research. Closed-ended questions are usually preferred in survey research because of the ease of counting the frequency of each response.

The objective of this research is to find out the attitudes of students learning Chinese language at University of Lagos, whether they have positive or negative attitudes towards Chinese language. The research question is thus: do students learning Chinese language at University of Lagos have positive or negative attitude towards Chinese language? In order to answer this research question, the question was further broken into four: do you like Chinese people, do you like Chinese language, do you wish to speak fluent Chinese, and do you think that Chinese is ease to learn. In the construction of the questionnaire, two important considerations were made in order to achieve the objective of the research. The first consideration was the choice and adoption of yes-no response. According to William (1982), a yes-no question is formally known as a polar question or a general question. It is a question whose expected answer is either 'yes' or 'no'. Surveys often use dichotomous questions that ask for a Yes/No, True/False or Agree/Disagree response. The use Likert response scale was not adopted in this research. The second consideration was the choice of words. The research was careful to construct the items of the questionnaire so that they could be easily understandable and quickly answered by the respondents (students) in order to avoid ambiguity and confusion. The questionnaire was constructed to be responded with 10 minutes. In an effort to convey a friendly and personal stance with respondents, these research questions were turned into statements using first person singular pronoun, thus: I like Chinese people, I like Chinese language, I wish to speak fluent Chinese, and I think Chinese is easy to learn. With this method, students are required to answer 'yes or no'. A questionnaire was administered, collected and analyzed.

Data presentation

This research was conducted in 2018 with the first and fourth (final) year students of department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies (Chinese Unit). Twenty students were selected from year one and year four students respectively, making the sample population to forty. The respondents (students) are all Nigerians who come from different ethnic groups, with Yoruba as a majority. The researcher is also a Nigeria. He is a senior lecturer at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and an adjunct senior lecturer at University of Lagos at the time of conducting the research. The research is a

pioneer in the study of Chinese language in Nigeria, having studied in China since 2005 and received a doctorate degree in Chinese language from Xiamen University, China in 2013. The researcher has been teaching Chinese language in Nigeria over a decade.

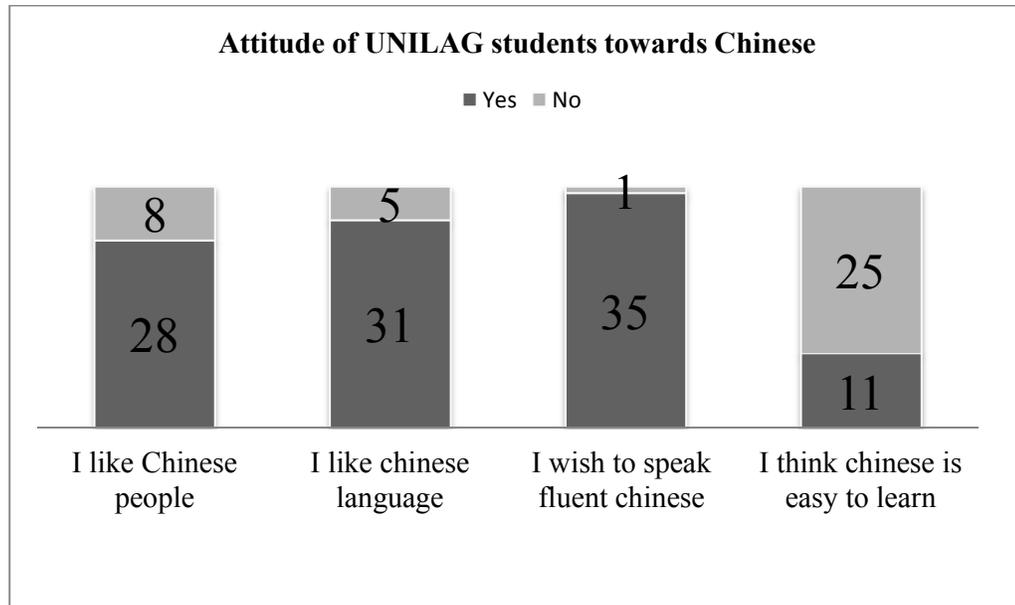
The survey was totally anonymous and their participation was voluntary. According to Lavrakas (2008), “voluntary participation refers to a human research subject’s exercise of free will in deciding whether to participate in a research activity”. *American Heritage Dictionary* defines anonymity as the quality or state of being unknown or unacknowledged. Lavrakas (2008) says that the concept of anonymity in survey is complex and open to interpretation by the various organizations that conduct survey. For him, anonymity refers to data collected unknown to anyone associated with the survey. That is, only the respondent knows that he or she participated in the survey and the survey researcher cannot identify the participants. More often, anonymity refers to data collected in surveys in which the respondents are de-identified and possible identifying characteristics are separated from the publicly available data.

The survey carried out within the usual class period. Before the survey was carried out, the respondents (students) were instructed to read carefully the notes and instructions by hearts while the researcher read them out. The exercise took about 10 minutes. Although 40 respondents (students) participated in the exercise, only 36 questionnaires were appropriately answered and subsequently used for the research. Out of the 36 respondents (students), 20 are female and 16 are male. Below is the result of the survey in a table and chart.

Table 1: Attitude of UNILAG Students towards Chinese

S/N	Survey items (Statements)	YES	NO
1	I like Chinese people	28	8
2	I like Chinese language	31	5
3	I wish to speak fluent Chinese	35	1
4	I think Chinese is easy to learn	11	25
	Total	105	39

Chart 1:



Data Analysis

A look at the table 1 shows different columns: 'S/N' – serial number, 'Survey items' – the breakdown of the research question which are turned into statements, 'Yes' – the first option of response, and 'No' – the second option of response. The respondents (students) were instructed to choose between 'Yes' and 'No'. Their responses were counted and calculated. The result was put in a chart for easy and clear understanding. Now, we will analyze the result based on the four statements in the questionnaire.

"I like Chinese people" is the first statement on the survey questionnaire instead of *"I like Chinese language"*. The researcher believes that the learner's attitude towards a foreign language is highly dependent on his attitude towards the owners of the language. From the table, we can see that 28 students like Chinese people while 8 students do not like Chinese people. We do not really know why these students hate Chinese people. This is another area of research. Their hatred may be from their personal experiences or beliefs. Also, we do not know why 28 students like Chinese people. The scope of the research does not cover it. It may be also because of their personal experiences and beliefs. Whatever is the reason for their likeness or hatred is not very important in this research. Judging from their responses in the table and chart, more students learning Chinese at University of Lagos like Chinese people. This shows that they have positive attitude towards Chinese people, invariably Chinese language.

"I like Chinese language" is the second statement on the survey questionnaire. This statement is usually the first statement on language attitude survey

questionnaire. Researches carried out have shown that the student's likeness or love for a language in general determines his performance. There is no motivation to study if a student does not like a language. This theory or belief system also applies to foreign language study. Students who like a foreign language perform better than students who do not like a foreign language. This research found out the more students like Chinese language. From the table and chart, 31 students like Chinese language and 5 students do not like Chinese language. Their reason for liking or not liking is queried and is not within the scope of this research. Comparing the responses with the responses of the first statement "*I like Chinese people*", we found out that more students like Chinese language than Chinese people. Judging from the students' responses in the table and chart, we can conclude that majority students learning Chinese language like Chinese language. In other words, they have positive attitude towards Chinese language.

"I wish to speak fluent Chinese" is the third statement on the survey questionnaire. The first two statements are on 'likeness' while this one is on a 'wish'. It is said that if wishes are horses, even beggars can ride. Almost everybody wishes to succeed in any adventure. Most students who embark on the journey of learning a foreign language wish to be fluent in the language. This is true with the responses we have at the table and chart. Out of 36 students, 35 students wish to speak fluent Chinese while only one student does not wish to speak fluent Chinese. We do not know his or her reason for not wishing to speak fluent Chinese. His or her reason may be because he or she believes that it is impossible to speak fluent Chinese. On the other hand, the reason why 35 students wish to speak fluent Chinese may be because they believe that the ability to speak fluent Chinese will create many job opportunities for them. We are only guessing. We do not really know why the students wish to speak fluent Chinese. Whatever reason they have, it shows that they have positive attitude towards Chinese language. It is said that what you wish is what you have.

"I think Chinese is easy to learn" is the fourth statement on the survey questionnaire. The first two statements are on 'likeness', the third one is on 'wish' and this one is on 'thinking/thought'. It is said that what one thinks is what one believes. It is also said that we are what we think. If these saying are true, then if a student thinks (variably believes) that a foreign language is hard; it turns out to be hard. A look at the table and chart show that majority of students (25) 'think' that Chinese is hard to learn. Only 11 students 'think' that Chinese is ease to learn. This confirms the earlier research carried out by Odinye (2013). This is to say that many Nigerian learners of Chinese think that Chinese is not ease to learn. This may be because of the differences between Chinese language and Nigerian languages.

Findings and Conclusion

The objective of this research is to find out the attitude of students learning Chinese at University of Lagos. To carry the research, a research question was raised which says: do students learning Chinese language at University of Lagos have positive or negative attitude towards Chinese language? In order to answer this research question, the question was further broken into four: do you like Chinese people, do you like Chinese language, do you wish to speak fluent Chinese, and do you think that Chinese is ease to learn. To find the answer to these questions, a questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire has four statements: I like Chinese people, I like Chinese language, I wish to speak fluent Chinese, and I think Chinese is easy to learn. The respondents (students) were instructed to either choose 'yes' or 'no' answer. Their responses (answers) were counted and calculated in a table and presented in a chart. The finding is that students learning Chinese language at University of Lagos have positive attitude towards Chinese language based on their responses and this is an indication that there is a bright future for Chinese language in Lagos and Nigeria in general.

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