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Mandarin-Chinese Dialects Code-Switching in Speech Communication

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ABSTRACT

Chinese dialects are diverse and have a long history, while the promotion of Mandarin has, to some extent, impacted the usage of dialects, creating a reciprocal relationship between the two. As a result, code-switching (CS) between Mandarin and dialects frequently occurs in daily conversations. According to Giles' (1991) Accommodation Theory, CS is not random but is influenced by convergence and divergence strategies. The TV program *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* serves as a linguistic program, in which both the hosts, who come from different dialect regions, and guests from various areas frequently engage in CS during their interactions. This study, focusing on episodes of *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* from 2013 episodes, identified CS between Mandarin and Wu, Cantonese, Min, Xiang, and Northern dialects. Among these, CS between Mandarin and Northern dialects occurred most frequently. The hosts tended to adopt convergence strategies to reduce the psychological distance with the guests, whereas the guests were more inclined to use their native dialects to highlight regional characteristics. CS between Mandarin and dialects serves multiple functions, including signaling the speaker's identity, mitigating negative effects of communication content, adding humor to conversations, and reducing the psychological distance between communicators. This research not only sheds light on the sociolinguistic dynamics of CS in Chinese media discourse but also contributes to a deeper understanding of how dialectal diversity is preserved and negotiated in a modern, Mandarin-dominant communicative setting.

Keywords: Chinese Mandarin; Chinese Dialects; Code-switching; Accommodation Theory

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1. Introduction

Mandarin, as the national common language of China, its promotion, popularization, and standardized use not only concern the linguistic and cultural life of the nation but also inevitably impact the usage of Chinese dialects^[1]. Since the 1990s, China has continuously conducted campaigns to promote Mandarin. In 2015, the Chinese Language Resources Protection Project was launched, and Mandarin and Chinese dialects, as essential resources of Chinese linguistic life, exhibit a relationship of mutual influence to some extent^[2]. This study focuses on the phenomenon of Mandarin-dialect code-switching (CS) in speech communication, specifically in spoken conversations, where CS occurs between Mandarin and various Chinese dialects.

However, collecting spoken data from everyday life for CS research has certain drawbacks. For example, unequal language proficiency and differing communication attitudes between interlocutors can significantly limit the occurrence of CS or affect its specific content^[3]. Television programs, particularly entertainment shows, are an important part of social language and culture, and they more directly reflect the current state of national language use. Additionally, TV programs undergo layers of approval by relevant Chinese language and cultural authorities, making them a representative reflection of the official status of the development of the Chinese language, and they are more typical than everyday spoken dialogues^[4].

This study examines Mandarin-dialect CS in speech communication, focusing on spoken dialogues where CS occurs between Mandarin and Chinese dialects. The TV program *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* is chosen as the data source for this study to explore which dialects are typically involved in CS with Mandarin, and to analyze the strategies that trigger CS based on the Speech Accommodation Theory^[5].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Accommodation Theory

Sociolinguistics posits that social factors can have a series of influences on language behavior, and due to different social characteristics, language produces various

variants. However, traditional sociolinguistics tends to emphasize the connection between linguistic variants and objective social variants, while downplaying the subjective factors such as the speaker's emotions, values, and motivations, which are also crucial^[6]. Giles et al. argued that when studying language variants, it was not enough to simply examine how linguistic variants were formed^[7]; it was also important to explore the reasons behind their formation. Both the participants' objective social characteristics and their subjective emotional factors played a vital role in the production of language variants and the determination of language behavior. To this end, Giles et al. proposed the Accommodation Theory^[7], which asserted that speakers sometimes adjusted their language or speech style to accommodate their interlocutors, either by aligning their speech to resemble the other person's language (Language Convergence) or by deliberately highlighting differences through divergence (Language Divergence). Convergence could be further subdivided into upward convergence or downward convergence. Various types of speech adjustment reflected a psychological phenomenon manifested in language, which could be seen in aspects such as phonetics, vocabulary, content, speaking speed, and language style shifts^[8].

The Accommodation Theory included four sub-theories^[5]. The first, the "Similarity Attraction Theory," held a dominant position. This theory suggested that people were most attracted to those who share similar beliefs, values, and attitudes toward things. Giles argued that "convergence" was the most used method for gaining social approval^[5], and the greater a person's need for recognition, the more likely they were to converge. However, whether a person chose convergence or divergence to maximize benefits and minimize losses was supported by the "Social Exchange Theory." When a listener noticed that a speaker converges or diverges from their language style, they would first evaluate the speaker's motives and then attribute the reasons for their behavior. This was the third theory, the "Causal Attribution Theory." However, in many situations, convergence might not necessarily yield beneficial results. Members of different social groups often compared their social value within the group, and they believed that racial groups could only gain more social prestige by maintaining their distinct characteristics. This

brought us to the fourth theory—the “Intergroup Distinctiveness Theory.”

2.2. Relative Research on CS

The phenomenon of CS gained the attention of linguists as early as the 20th century, with one of the earliest scholars to study it being Uriel Weinreich et al.^[9] Weinreich et al. regarded it as a deliberate marker signaling quotations to the listener^[9]. Since the 1970s, research on CS has mainly followed four approaches: **grammatical studies**, **psycholinguistics**, **conversation analysis**, and **sociolinguistics**^[10]. Most studies have focused on bilingual populations, with relatively fewer studies addressing multilingual or dialectal contexts.

Early research on CS was predominantly concentrated in the **grammatical studies**, focusing on two primary areas. First, the constraints on CS were explored^[11,12], examining factors that limit the scope of its usage. For example, Poplack discovered that such constraints mainly arise from the grammatical systems of the languages involved^[13]. Differences in these systems mean that CS often occurs at the surface structure of sentences rather than deeper levels. However, these studies were largely limited to the interaction between two languages and lacked broader linguistic generalizations^[14].

Second, researchers analyzed the grammatical characteristics of segments where CS occurs^[15]. For instance, Yang noted that written CS often adopts the syntax of the first language^[16], with only occasional use of complete foreign syntactic structures. Single-word switches typically involve content words, while function words rarely undergo CS. Zhang found that 58% of CS occurred between sentences^[17]. CS is not arbitrary; 76% of instances serve to clarify information, and the more frequent its occurrence, the greater the need for course-related technical term explanations.

The primary task of **psycholinguistics** is to reveal brain activity during CS^[5]. Comparatively, research on CS from a psycholinguistic perspective is relatively scarce^[18].

In **conversation analysis**, the focus is on the sequential structure of conversational behavior and the mutual influence between conversational turns. While this approach provides precise descriptions of linguistic phenomena, its explanatory power regarding the characteristics and causes

of CS is relatively limited^[19]. For instance, Wang and Zheng observed that CS often appears in the third turn of teacher-student dialogue sequences^[20].

From the perspective of **sociolinguistics**, research on CS often analyzes its causes through the lens of linguistic adaptability and appropriateness^[21]. Pragmatically, CS is one of the optimal choices for conveying information and expressing communicative intent, representing a form of inter-cultural communicative competence. Thus, from a pragmatic perspective, CS serves various pragmatic functions^[22]. The value of a code arises from its communicative functions, which can be categorized into semantic value, relational value, affective value, and stylistic value. For example, in the case of CS between Mandarin and a Chinese dialect, the semantic value is reflected in Mandarin’s function as a lingua franca versus the dialect’s confidentiality. Relational and affective values are evident in switches influenced by interpersonal relationships and psychological proximity, while stylistic value is demonstrated in switches driven by situational or individual expressive style factors.

In summary, the focus of CS research has primarily been on clarifying its definition and current major classifications^[5,23]. The conceptual definition of CS revolves around two main points: a. Whether to differentiate between inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching and whether to include inter-sentential alternation within the scope of CS^[24]. b. Whether the switching codes are restricted to languages or whether secondary language variants, like the dialects, can also participate in CS^[25].

The prevailing view in the academic is that CS encompasses any instance where a new code enters a linguistic fragment composed of an existing code. These codes can originate from any language variant and include formal or informal variants within a single language^[26]. This study specifically focuses on CS between Chinese dialects—considered secondary linguistic variants of Mandarin—and Mandarin itself, without distinguishing between inter-sentential and intra-sentential CS.

2.3. Research on CS in Dialects

The codes involved in CS can be numerous, and they may belong to different levels of the language continuum^[27], such as a language itself, regional dialects, or formal vari-

ants of a language^[28], as well as informal variants like jargon or female language^[29]. The phenomenon of CS in bilingual populations shares similarities with the alternation of dialectal variables within urban speech communities^[12].

Earlier, Ferguson examined four bilingual communities—Classical Arabic and Egyptian Arabic, Ancient Greek and Modern Greek, Standard German and Swiss German, and Standard French and Haitian Creole—observing that in each community, one language variant dominates another^[30]. The dominant variant is referred to as the “high variety,” while the subordinate variant is the “low variety.” High and low varieties differ in their functions, usage contexts, prestige, literary status, and methods of learning or acquisition, with members of the speech community treating them in markedly different ways^[31].

There is a distinction between high and low varieties, with the high variety rarely used in daily conversation. In contrast, in communities where standard language and dialect coexist, the standard language is very close to the underlying dialect, and its speakers may use the standard language to some extent in daily conversations. Therefore, the standard language only assumes the role of the high variety in speech communities that are distinct from the basic dialect community^[32].

Ferguson also argued that Chinese communities are a prime example of bilingual phenomena, with Chinese representing one of the largest instances of diglossia in confirmed cases^[30,33]. Mandarin Chinese (spoken) is considered a standard language in the low variety^[34]. Albirini confirmed Ferguson’s assertion by studying CS between dialects and standard language in religious speeches, political debates, and football commentary, showing that dialects and standard languages indeed serve as high and low varieties, respectively^[30,35].

Some research on CS between Mandarin and Chinese dialects, mainly focused on exploring the reasons for CS and the functions and significance of CS. In Chinese emigrant populations, migration often occurs at the family level, with native dialects typically maintained within the family domain. Research on CS in such immigrant groups often involves dialects. Huang explored the use of CS between the dialects, Mandarin, and Changshu dialect among female immigrants in the Changshu area through recordings and interviews^[33]. Huang found that the choice of

language in communication is closely related to their living environment^[33], and Mandarin is the preferred choice for communication in unfamiliar contexts. The unmarked CS between Mandarin and Changshu dialect is an essential skill in their work and daily life^[33]. Chang argued that CS between Mandarin and Manchu in literary works falls under the category of language divergence^[36]. The Manchu CS plays an important role in the protagonist’s identity construction, expressing the author’s emotional connection to their ethnic group and reconstructing and highlighting the ethnic identity of the protagonist^[36].

In addition to research on CS between Mandarin and Chinese dialects, there are also instances of CS between dialects and non-Chinese languages due to complex historical factors. For example, the research on Cantonese-English CS has mainly focused on the Hong Kong region, with more attention paid to bilingual speakers’ identity and ideological consciousness^[37]. Shan found that not only in Hong Kong but also among locals in Guangzhou, Cantonese-Mandarin and Cantonese-English CS occurs^[25]. Furthermore, younger people and minors tend to engage in CS much more frequently than the elderly. Cantonese-Mandarin CS often involves sentence-level shifts, while Cantonese-English CS tends to occur with proper nouns and specific terms, with very few sentence-level shifts^[25].

Television programs are often selected as samples for studying CS. Li selected 47 episodes of the program *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* in 2012 as samples and found three types of CS: Chinese to English (257 instances), Mandarin to dialects (76 instances), and Chinese to Korean (13 instances)^[38]. Li collected data from two television programs and argued that the Mandarin to Hunan dialect CS in *Yue Ce Yue Kai Xin* and Mandarin to Shanghai dialect CS in *A La Ping Pang Xiang* were caused by adjustments to language realities, social conventions, and the psychological motivations of the speakers^[39]. Shao analyzed three types of CS in the talk show *Jin Ye 80 Hou*^[40]. The Mandarin to dialect category included Mandarin to Northeast dialect, Mandarin to Wu dialect, and Mandarin to Cantonese dialect, while the other two categories involved Chinese to foreign languages and CS between different stylistic registers. The author suggested that CS serves as a pragmatic strategy in talk shows, with pragmatic values such as conciseness and indirectness.

The Mandarin referred to in this study is the contemporary standard Chinese, based on the Beijing pronunciation as the standard, using Northern Mandarin as the base dialect, and using the grammar norms of exemplary modern vernacular literature as the standard for the common language of the Han Chinese people^[41]. Dialects refer to the officially recognized Chinese dialects and their subcategories. There is still controversy regarding the classification of dialects, such as the “Ten-region theory” or the “Seven-region theory”^[42], but the “Seven-region theory” is more widely accepted, which includes Wu, Min, Yue, Xiang, Northern dialects, Gan, and Hakka dialects^[41]. This study uses all episodes of the 2013 *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* program as the source for language communication research, investigating the types of CS between Mandarin and dialects, and analyzing the reasons for the CS according to Accommodation Theory^[7].

Accordingly, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. In the *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* program, which dialects and Mandarin occur CS?
2. According to Giles et al.’s Accommodation Theory, what CS strategies did the host and guests employ, and what different effects did these strategies have^[7]?
3. What is the influence of CS on the atmosphere of the conversation and the conversation partners?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Procedure

First, using a qualitative research method, this study summarizes the types of CS forms in the *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* program from 2013 (52 episodes, each about 90 minutes long)—specifically, the different types of dialect CS in terms of their linguistic expression. Second, the researcher introduces Accommodation Theory^[7]. Using a quantitative research method, the frequency and proportion of different accommodation strategies corresponding to CS are calculated, illustrating that the occurrence of CS from Mandarin to a certain dialect is due to individuals employing either convergence or divergence strategies. Finally, the study explores the pragmatic value of Mandarin-dialect CS, attempting to summarize the roles or effects of such CS on the content of the conversation and the conversation partners.

3.2. Instrument of Study

The *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* program is very suitable as a source of Mandarin-dialect CS data, because it represents the dialects from all China. The program has the following characteristics: First, the host team comes from diverse regional cultural backgrounds and holds a positive attitude toward dialects. The five hosts of *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* each are proficient in different dialects, such as Wang Han (Changsha, Xiang dialect), Qian Feng (Shanghai, Wu dialect), Tian Yuan (Shijiazhuang, Northern dialects), Ou Hansheng (Taiwan, Minnan dialect), and Jin Ensheng (South Korea, Korean). All of them can speak fluent Mandarin and have strong expression abilities.

Second, the cultural backgrounds and industries of the guests are diverse, which enhances the generalizability of the study. In *Tian Tian Xiang Shang*, conversations between the hosts and guests are the most frequent and coherent. The guests’ self-introductions in the program often use dialect, and the content is more original. It is also of research significance to depict the occurrence and characteristics of CS.

Third, the program is widely recognized and influential, making the research findings of practical significance. *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* is a cultural public welfare talk show produced by Hunan TV, one of the flagship programs. The program focuses on topics related to national moral etiquette and features conversations between the five hosts and the guests. Research on CS based on this program can reflect the current phenomenon of CS in society, particularly the use and relative status of Mandarin and dialects, providing valuable reference materials for future research, reports, or policies.

The *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* began in 2008, with the hosting lineup undergoing continuous adjustments and changes. Since 2012, the five hosts mentioned above have been fixed. After a period of adjustment among the hosts in 2012, their collaboration became more harmonious in 2013, with clearer division of labor, making it more suitable instrument of this study. However, following this period, the hosting lineup underwent further changes. Therefore, this study will analyze 52 episodes of the *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* from 2013, spanning from episode 20130104 to episode 20131227.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study collects dialogues involving CS from *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* through replaying the episodes. First, the types of dialectal codes are identified and counted. Then, based on the preceding and following context of the CS, the study analyzes whether the CS is caused by convergence or divergence strategies, in accordance with Accommodation Theory^[7], and counts the occurrences. Typical examples of CS are extracted and analyzed as case studies in this research.

4. Findings

4.1. The Source of Dialect Codes in Verbal Communication

The results show that the dialect codes appearing in the program are diversified and cover a wide range. According to the classification by Huang and Liao^[41], the categories of codes collected in this study account for more than half of the seven major Chinese dialects, such as Wu, Min, Cantonese, Xiang, and Northern dialects. All the data in the following text are transcribed from videos, with the dialect code parts highlighted in bold and underlined to distinguish them from the Mandarin code.

4.1.1. Wu Dialect

Wu dialect is distributed in Zhejiang, southern Jiangsu, Shanghai, southern Anhui, northeastern Jiangxi, and the northern corner of Fujian in China. The Shanghai dialect is a variety of Wu Chinese. The host introduced guests in Shanghaiese in example (1).

(1) Wang Han: 今天 PK 的是哪两所学校呢? 一个是, 同济大学。上海同济大学。(Which two schools are competing today? One is, Tongji University. Shanghai Tongji University)

Tian Yuan: 另一支。(The other one.)

Wang Han: 西安交大。(Xi'an Jiaotong University.) (20130607)

In Example (1), the host Wang Han, while introducing the program's topic, mentioned Tongji University located in Shanghai. He immediately used Shanghaiese, which is a variety of Wu Chinese, to refer to the university's name. This not only highlighted the geographical

feature of Tongji University but also helped strengthen the connection with the guest from the university, expressing a warm welcome to them.

4.1.2. Min Dialect

Min dialect is primarily spoken in Fujian, but it is also found in southern Zhejiang, Taiwan, Guangdong, Hainan, and overseas. One of the hosts of *Tian Tian Xiang Shang*, Ou Hansheng, is from Taiwan, and the Taiwanese dialect belongs to the Minnan branch of the Min language family.

(2) Ou Hansheng: 妙阳兄, 你本身是出生在哪里?

(Miao Yang, where were you born?)

Guest: 新加坡长大, 然后 24 岁逃离新加坡。我父亲、爷爷都是福建人。(I grew up in Singapore, and then at 24, I left Singapore. My father and grandfather are both Fujian people.)

Ou Hansheng: 哦, 福建人啊, 你好你好。 (Oh, Fujian people! Hello, hello.)

(20130405)

In example (2), the guest was a returning overseas Chinese. He used CS to demonstrate his ability to speak Minnan and his love for his hometown. Meanwhile, the host from Taiwan switched to Minnan after confirming the guest's shared hometown identity, completing their exchange in the dialect.

4.1.3. Cantonese

Cantonese, commonly referred to as "Baihua," is one of the earliest Chinese dialects studied by foreign researchers. As a result, it has its distinct name in English, "Cantonese."

(3) Wang Han: 接下来给大家介绍下一位, 来自香港的, 张彦博。(Next, let me introduce the next guest, from Hong Kong, Zhang Yanbo.)

Ou Hansheng: 香港人, 你好哇。(A Hong Kong person, hello!)

Guest: 大家好, 我是张彦博。(Hello everyone, I'm Zhang Yanbo.)

(20130705)

The original forms of many proper nouns, such as names, come from the corresponding dialect phonetic systems. However, with increasing economic and cultural

exchanges, people from mainland China have also learned the Cantonese pronunciation of simple words, such as “hello.” Although Ou Hansheng is not from a Cantonese-speaking region, he still used Cantonese to bridge the gap and create a closer connection with the guest.

4.1.4. Xiang Dialect

Xiang dialect is the main language spoken by the Xiang people living in the Xiang River basin and its tributaries. “Xiang” is the abbreviation for Hunan province. Host Wang Han, who resides in Changsha, is very familiar with the dialects within Hunan. Many of the guests are also from Hunan, so it is common to have conversations in Xiang Chinese.

(4) Wang Han: 来一人一句证明自己是桃江妹子。(Let’s each say one thing to prove you’re a girl from Taojiang.)

Guest: hello, 大家好, 我叫邓维, 来自美丽的益阳桃花江, 就读于湖南艺术职业学院。(是) 08 级的学生, 谢谢。(Hello, everyone, my name is Deng Wei, I come from the beautiful Taohua River in Yiyang, and I am a student at Hunan Arts Vocational College, class of 2008. Thank you.)

Qian Feng: 哇, 太好了。(Wow, that’s great.)
(20131025)

Tian Tian Xiang Shang was on the local Hunan TV station, so most of the audience were from Hunan. It was quite common for both parties on stage to speak the local dialect of Hunan. This could be due to a desire to identify the program with its regional origin, or to enhance the show’s effect by assuming that the local dialect is the one most understood by the audience, making it easier for them to provide feedback. Taojiang is located in Hunan province, and the guest used the Taojiang dialect to highlight regional identity.

4.1.5. Northern Dialects

Northern dialects, also known as Guanhua, is the most widely spoken Chinese dialect in terms of the number of native speakers and geographic distribution. The name comes from the ancient Chinese term for the official standard language. The following three examples use Northern dialects:

(5) Guest: 大家好, 我是来自福建师范大学传播学院 2011 级的张容玮, 我是山东济南人。(Hello, everyone, I’m Zhang Rongwei from the 2011 class of the School of Communication at Fujian Normal University, and I’m from Jinan, Shandong.)

Tian Yuan, Qian Feng & Ou Hansheng: 山东人啊。(Oh, a Shandong person.)
(20130816)

(6) Ou Hansheng: 学语言最快的方法就是交当地的女朋友。(The fastest way to learn a language is to get a local girlfriend.)

Wang Han: 也不一定啊, 我就不是这样。涵哥懂那么多地方的方言。很危险啊! (Not necessarily. I don’t do it that way. Brother Han knows so many regional dialects. It’s dangerous!)

Qian Feng: 原来是这样。(So that’s how it is.)

Wang Han: 我讲得最好的是重庆话, 我跟你说话吓死人哦。(The one I speak best is Chongqing dialect, let me tell you. It’s really scary.)

(20130705)

(7) Guest: 大家好, 我叫王若璋, 是安徽合肥人。(Hello, everyone, my name is Wang Ruozhang, and I’m from Hefei, Anhui.)

Ou Hansheng: 我的个心肝脾肺肾啊。(Oh my heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys!)

Tian Yuan: 当了个当, 名字叫做王若璋。(So, your name is Wang Ruozhang.)
(20130816)

In example (5), the Jinan dialect of Shandong, in example (6), the Chongqing dialect, and in example (7), the Hefei dialect of Anhui, all belong to the sub-dialects under northern dialects: Jilu Mandarin, Southwest Mandarin, and Jianghuai Mandarin, respectively. In Example (6), when Ou Hansheng pointed out that the key to learning a dialect was having a girlfriend who speaks it, the host Wang Han (who was married with a Chongqing native) expressed “shock” and quickly clarified in authentic Chongqing dialect, emphasizing that his most proficient dialect was indeed Chongqing dialect. Through humor, he crafted an image of being devoted to his wife. In example (7), when Ou Hansheng and Tian Yuan met the Anhui guest, they immediately began speaking in the tone of Anhui Huagu Opera to get closer to the guest.

A count of the frequency of dialect usage shows that

Northern dialects appeared 248 times, far more than any other dialect. This is directly related to the diversity of its sub-dialects. The next most frequently used dialect was Xi'ang Chinese, with 64 occurrences; followed by Cantonese (48), Min Chinese (32), and Wu Chinese (12).

4.2. The Reasons for CS in Verbal Communication

Giles noted that a communicator's accent may change depending on the person they are communicating with. These changes in pronunciation can be categorized into two types: accent convergence or accent divergence^[43]. Giles termed the reduction of differences as accent convergence and the enhancement of differences as accent divergence^[43]. Giles then proposed speech accommodation strategies, which formed the core of the communication Accommodation Theory^[7,43]. Giles believed that whether a speaker adopts a convergent or divergent strategy in communication depends on their social motivations: whether they are inclined to please the other person or to distance themselves from the listener^[43]. Therefore, speech accommodation strategies essentially view CS as a model of marked choices.

This section includes both the guests' and hosts' verbal communication as part of the statistical analysis of CS accommodation strategies, identifying and counting the instances where hosts and guests adopt convergent or divergent strategies.

4.2.1. CS Triggered by a Convergence Strategy

Giles pointed out that in actual communication, when one party adopts a convergence strategy, the other party often reciprocates with a convergence strategy as well^[7,43]. This is demonstrated in examples (8) and (9):

(8) Guest: 我叫郜乐阳, 来自西安交通大学, 经济学专业, 本科二年级。(My name is Gao Leyang, I'm from Xi'an Jiaotong University, majoring in Economics, and I'm in my second year of undergraduate studies.)

Tian Yuan: 哪儿人? (Where are you from?)

Guest: 我是陕西人, 本地人。(I'm from Shaanxi, a local.)

Wang Han: 陕西人。美得很。(A Shaanxi person.

Very nice.)

(20130607)

Example (8) presents a simpler case. When the guest switched from Mandarin to their hometown dialect, Shaanxi dialect, taking an active divergence strategy, Wang Han noticed the change in the code and attempts to continue the conversation in Shaanxi dialect, thus adopting a responsive convergence strategy. Since the show often has multiple hosts and guests on stage, situations like the one in Example (9) with multiple communicators are common:

(9) Guest: 大家好, 各位主持人好, 我也是来自辽宁鞍山钢铁集团公司。热轧厂电器点检员。(Hello everyone, greetings to all the hosts, I'm also from the Anshan Steel Group in Liaoning, working as an electrical inspector in the hot rolling mill.)

Wang Han: 你笑啥, 你笑啥? (Why are you laughing? Why are you laughing?)

Tian Yuan: 我们鞍山人就这么说话。(This is how people from Anshan speak.)

Wang Han: 咋回事儿你? (What's going on with you?)

Qian Feng: 就都大舌头。(We all have a thick tongue.)

Guest: 许微有些紧张, 见笑。(A bit nervous, sorry.)

(20131004)

In Example (9), the guest's expression has a distinctive northeastern dialect accent and can't speak Mandarin. Fearing that the guest might feel embarrassed about his accent, all the hosts abandon Mandarin and switch to the northeast dialect to respond. In doing so, they reduce the language differences and close the distance with the guest. Example (9) should also be viewed as an instance of a convergence strategy.

A descriptive statistical analysis categorizes the accommodation strategies adopted by both the hosts and guests. Based on the number of occurrences, the two groups together employed convergence strategies 315 times (excluding 7 performances of dialect songs), accounting for about 77.8% of the total strategy occurrences (Table 1).

From a group perspective, the hosts' convergence attitude is more prominent than that of the guests, often expressing it by speaking in the guests' hometown dialects.

This suggests that the hosts actively cater to the guests in order to show warmth and care, reducing any sense of distance between them. On the other hand, guests do not need to accommodate the hosts excessively, unless the host uses the guest's dialect, after which the guest may also use the dialect to confirm the host's pronunciation is correct.

Table 1. Convergence Strategies Adopted by Each Group.

Speaker	Converging Toward	Frequency
Hosts	Guests	210
	Other Hosts	57
Guests	Hosts	39
	Other Guests	9

4.2.2. CS Triggered by a Divergence Strategy

China has promulgated policies and regulations in 2004, 2005, 2009, and 2014, emphasizing the standardized use of language in television media and imposing restrictions and requirements on the use of dialects and Mandarin. The “Notice on Further Reaffirming the Use of Standardized Language in TV Dramas” (Guangfa Juzi [2005] No. 560) states that “dialects and non-standard Mandarin should not be used in general.” Since Mandarin has been widely accepted by the urban population across the country, CS from dialects to Mandarin in TV programs is typically considered an unmarked choice, while switching from Mandarin to dialect is regarded as a marked choice. Therefore, this study excludes situations where a speaker uses a dialect and the listener responds in Mandarin, but includes instances where speakers switch from Mandarin to a dialect after initially speaking in Mandarin.

Example (8) in the previous section is a typical case of a divergence strategy. After the host asks a question in Mandarin, the guest responds in a dialect. This is also the most common way of using the divergence strategy. Since *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* is a talk show, portraying dialect speakers is part of the performance in the show. The following examples illustrate CS divergence strategies as part of role-playing, showing the individual's distinctiveness.

(10) Guest: 我来自山西。(I'm from Shanxi.)

Tian Yuan: 山西哪儿啊? (Where in Shanxi?)

Guest: 山西太原。(Taiyuan, Shanxi.)

Tian Yuan: 涵哥特别会学太原话。(Brother Han is especially good at learning Taiyuan dialect.)

Wang Han: 我是说大同话。我去过大同, 他们觉得天下只有两个问题。(I'm speaking Datong dialect. I've

been to Datong, and they think there are only two **problems** in the world.)

Tian Yuan: 什么问题? (What **problems**?)

Wang Han: 人生只有两个问题, 一个是吃饭的问题, 一个是喝酒的问题。只要解决这两个问题, 人生就没有问题。(Life only has two **problems**: one is the food **problem**, and the other is the drinking **problem**. As long as these two **problems** are solved, there are no **problems** in life.)

(20131004)

(11) Wang Han: 新疆朋友特别好客, 远道而来, 给我们现场很多朋友带来了礼物。就是新疆的水果, 大家要不要的吗? (People from Xinjiang are especially hospitable. They've traveled a long way and brought many gifts for our friends here—**Xinjiang fruits. Does anyone want some?**)

Ou Hansheng: 要。(Yes.)

(20131004)

In Example (10), the Shanxi guest didn't use the Shanxi dialect (Northwest dialect) to greet everyone, but host Wang Han, to highlight his proficiency in Shanxi dialect, integrated it into his expression, portraying himself as a local Shanxi man, making him stand out from the other hosts. In Example (11), after the host used Mandarin to explain, he switched to a dialect to ask the audience a question, role-playing as a person from Xinjiang. This was also a divergence strategy.

Based on the statistics from the five episodes mentioned above, the hosts and guests together used divergence strategies 89 times (**Table 2**). There was no instance where a speaker used one dialect while the listener used a different dialect for the conversation.

Compared to the hosts, the guests seem to use diver-

gence strategies more frequently. Most of the time, when a speaker adopts a divergence strategy, it is not necessarily to create distance from the interlocutor, but rather to highlight or mark a certain social identity for themselves or others. The identity most closely related to dialects is regional cultural identity, as seen in Example (8). The insertion of dialect code during a guest's self-introduction is a typical example. Many guests, at this point, have not yet started a conversation with the hosts, and their self-introduction is mainly directed at the audience, sometimes even featuring iconic phrases such as "Hello, everyone," as shown in Example (12):

(12) Southwest University Student: 鹤立西南，学

行天下。我们来自西南大学。“火炉”重庆，雄起！
(Standing out in the Southwest, studying and traveling the world. We are from Southwest University. “The stove”
Chongqing, let's go!)
(20130712)

In this example, the Southwest University student, during their introduction to the audience, briefly stated their identity as a student from Southwest University in Chongqing, intentionally switching to Sichuan dialect at the end of the sentence to emphasize this social identity. This divergence strategy was not meant to express dislike toward the audience or hosts, but rather to emphasize their identity.

Table 2. Divergence Strategies Adopted by Each Group.

Speaker	Diverging Toward	Frequency
Hosts	Guests	33
	Other Hosts	4
Guests	Hosts	46
	Other Guests	6

4.3. The Functions of Dialect Codes in Verbal Communication

4.3.1. Shaping the Identity of the Speaker

Language is a unique communication tool for humans, and its instrumental and subordinate status has long been recognized by the world. On the other hand, tools also shape people, and language, like clothing and behavior, influences its users in various ways during its use^[44]. Language, dialects, and other code systems not only serve as recorders but also as bearers. In particular, dialects, with their independence, stability, and regional characteristics, carry the developmental trajectory of local culture^[45]. Many folkloric cultural details, phonological information, collective cognition, and perception that failed to enter or were forced out of the macro historical vision are recorded in dialects. Language is the most direct and explicit marker of identity, which is reflected in two main aspects.

First, the diversification of code types leads to a richer representation of the speaker's identity. The direct result of CS is the introduction of new codes, which, whether in the form of new language fragments or not, reflect to some extent the speaker's life experiences or imprints^[46]. There-

fore, the diversification of code types due to CS enriches the depiction of the speaker's identity to the listener.

Second, the flexibility of CS signifies the duality and fluidity of the speaker's identity. Especially when CS occurs between Mandarin and dialects, it demonstrates the speaker's strong linguistic abilities and open linguistic attitude. The phenomenon of standard language and dialect formation in Mandarin and dialects, in terms of prestige, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, vocabulary, and phonology, aligns with most of the representations of bilingual communities summarized by Ferguson^[30]. The specialized functional pattern of Mandarin and dialects has been broken, largely due to the country's decades-long Mandarin promotion policies and measures^[47]. Under this premise, the number of fluent dialect speakers, especially among the younger generation, has sharply decreased. As a result, speakers who code-switch flexibly without affecting normal communication express their identification with and equal respect for regional cultural groups. For example, the diverse dialect ecology of *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* has become one of the program's features, which is loved by the audience. Especially, host Wang Han's proficiency in multiple dialects has received widespread praise from guests and the audience, being regarded as a highly adaptable host.

4.3.2. Mitigating the Negative Impact of the Content

When a speaker switches from Mandarin to a dialect to express criticism, correction, or other negative attitudes, they, to some extent, relinquish the authority to make public comments. This is because the spread of dialects is much smaller than that of a common language. When the listener needs to relay this part of the content to others, they will face limitations from the audience, their language abilities, or cultural conventions. Either the audience must also understand the dialect, or the person relaying the message will translate the original criticism into Mandarin. However, indirect quotations tend to carry less authority than direct ones, thus further weakening the impact of the criticism expressed in the dialect^[48].

When a speaker uses dialect to express praise or other positive evaluations, the range and intensity of dissemination are similarly weakened. Therefore, this study finds that when communicators want to express their positive evaluations, they are more inclined to switch to Mandarin. This not only helps expand the dissemination range but also enhances the impact through the relay of the communicator^[48,49]. By reducing the potential negative impact carried by dialect codes and amplifying the positive feedback that Mandarin codes may bring, the communicators can maintain the positive image of both parties involved in the interaction, effectively mitigating the negative impact of the conversation content.

4.3.3. Relaxing the Communication Atmosphere by Humor

The frequency of Mandarin-dialect CS is negatively related to the formality of the context. For instance, in formal settings such as foreign guest talks or public speeches, such CS is almost nonexistent^[50]. As a result, the expressive function of dialects gradually becomes associated with “informality.” The direct effect of this is that when someone switches codes, listeners may naturally assume that the speaker has abandoned Mandarin to briefly divert from the serious conversation, possibly to joke or casually vent. When a host switches from Mandarin to a regional dialect, such as Northeast Mandarin or Southwest Mandarin, the changes in tone and pitch are so noticeable that they easily

“raise alarms” and capture the audience’s attention, signaling that the upcoming remarks are not meant to be taken seriously, such as example (6).

Humor can also stem from the code itself rather than the act of CS. Thanks to language-based sketches during the Chinese Spring Festival Gala, Northeast dialect and Northern Mandarin have long been regarded as dialects with a strong comedic tone^[51,52]. In recent years, entertainment programs on Hunan provincial satellite TV have popularized the Xiang dialect, especially Changsha dialect, which is also increasingly seen as humorous^[53]. This humor arises partly from the stylistic characteristics of the dialect itself, but is also heavily influenced by societal trends, with the latter often having a greater impact.

4.3.4. Narrow the Psychological Distance Between Communication Participants

Through the Mandarin-dialect CS, after the speaker indicates their social identity, if the listener is from the same region, they will naturally feel that, beyond the superficial stage identity, there is another layer of commonality between them. Under the psychological “similarity-attraction” effect, the listener develops a sense of closeness to the speaker, thereby unconsciously narrowing the psychological distance between the two^[54]. Therefore, the effect of narrowing the psychological distance is, to some extent, achieved based on the effect of identity construction^[55]. In addition, the humorous effect created through CS can indirectly promote the reduction of psychological distance. The verbal humor, impromptu performances, and the relaxed and pleasant atmosphere created by CS gradually bring the psychological distance between the communicators closer as communication deepens^[56].

Relatively, CS from Mandarin to dialect has a more obvious effect of bringing people closer than the reverse conversion. This is particularly true when the speaker switches to dialect to express warmth. When the speaker intends to use marked code choices to “suggest” a new relationship of rights and obligations between the communicators, dialect codes typically represent a closer social identity or a more intimate emotional bond^[48,57,58], while Mandarin codes imply a more distant emotional relationship or the elimination of potential emotional ties^[59].

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study investigated Mandarin-Chinese dialect CS in 52 episodes of *Tian Tian Xiang Shang*. Regarding the types of dialects involved in switching, the study found that Mandarin was CS most frequently with Mandarin-based dialects, followed by Xiang, Cantonese, Min, and Wu dialects. CS between Mandarin and Gan or Hakka was absent in the 2013 episodes. This research addresses a gap in the study of Mandarin-dialect CS in television programs, contrasting with previous studies that have focused on CS between different languages, such as Thai-English^[60], Indonesia-English^[61], or Chinese-English^[62]. Leveraging the richness of Chinese dialects, some studies have explored CS between Mandarin and specific dialects^[63], distinguishing them from the comprehensive analysis of all Chinese dialects in this study.

Using Accommodation Theory^[7], this study analyzed the CS in *Tian Tian Xiang Shang* and found that convergence strategies accounted for 77.8% of total CS, significantly higher than divergence strategies. This aligns with Kang's findings^[64]. Convergence strategies were typically employed by hosts to establish rapport with guests, while divergence strategies were used by guests to showcase their individuality and regional characteristics. Other studies have indicated that convergence strategies are often adopted to facilitate task completion in conversations, but these studies typically lack statistical analyses^[65] or rely on researcher-collected data rather than public television programs^[33,66].

Besides, this study identified four functions of CS. First, CS shapes the speaker's identity, consistent with Feng and Liang^[67,68]. Feng^[67] also argued that CS constructs not only geographic but also gender and ethnic identities. Yu suggested that incorporating Chaozhou-Mandarin CS signs in tourist attractions reinforces regional identity and enriches the linguistic landscape^[69]. Second, CS mitigates the negative impact of communication content, similar to the "euphemistic expression" function proposed by Chen et al.^[70], where CS softens criticisms or opinions to avoid discomfort for the listener. Third, CS enhances humor in conversations, aligning with research emphasizing its positive role in humor and its frequent use in humorous programs like *Let's Talk* and *Talk Show Con-*

ference^[71–74]. Lastly, CS reduces psychological distance between communicators. Huang found that speakers often switch to the listener's dialect, even when Mandarin is mutually intelligible, to foster closeness^[33].

This study also has limitations. First, this study focused solely on the 2013 episodes of *Tian Tian Xiang Shang*, and it was possible that CS between Mandarin and dialects such as Hakka and Gan occurred in other years as well. Future research could expand the scope of the corpus to further test the Accommodation Theory and to explore more deeply the functions of Mandarin-dialect CS. Second, the classification of Chinese dialects was debated. This study adopted the seven major dialect groups, but future research could explore alternative classification frameworks for analyzing CS types in television programs.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Z.Y.L., Chew F.P.; methodology, Z.Y.L.; software, Z.Y.L.; validation, Z.Y.L.; formal analysis, Z.Y.L.; investigation, Z.Y.L.; resources, Z.Y.L.; data curation, Z.Y.L.; writing—original draft preparation, Z.Y.L.; writing—review and editing, Z.Y.L., C.F.P.; visualization, Z.Y.L., C.F.P.; supervision, C.F.P.; project administration, C.F.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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