

Language and Gender: Investigating the Representation of Chinese Women in Mandarin Slang and Its Implications for Professional Communication (1970s-1990s)

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Abstract—This study highlights the role of language and slang in perpetuating cultural attitudes and gender roles and the need for a more positive and inclusive representation of women in language. This study examines the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang from the 1970s to the 1990s and its impact on business and professional communication. Employing qualitative methods, such as interviews and documents review, the research explores how the portrayal of women through Mandarin slang affected their participation and perception in the professional sphere. The findings reveal that most slang vocabulary used during this era carried negative connotations. Historical and cultural contexts, political events, and personal opinions and attitudes influenced the representation of women in Mandarin slang. The prevalence of negative expressions reinforced cultural expectations for women to conform to traditional gender roles and moral codes. In contrast, the limited use of positive and neutral expressions indicated evolving cultural attitudes. This study underscores the role of language and slang in perpetuating cultural attitudes and gender roles in professional contexts, emphasizing the need for a more positive and inclusive representation of women in language to foster greater gender equality in business and professional environments.

Index Terms—slang representation, gender roles, Mandarin language

I. INTRODUCTION

From the 1970s to the 1990s, Chinese Mandarin slang underwent significant changes, influenced by historical events, cultural contexts, and social attitudes (Zhou, 2016) and this period witnessed a shift in women's roles in business and professional communication, which was closely linked to their representation in Mandarin slang (Fang et al., 2017).

Sociolinguistics is a discipline that explores the relationship between language and society, examining how people use language in different social contexts and the social functions of language (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). In this study, we focus on Mandarin slang related to the image of Chinese women and its impact on their professional lives from the 1970s to the 1990s. This period was marked by significant economic and social transformations, which, in turn, affected the status and roles of women in the professional sphere.

Mandarin slang often encapsulates societal perceptions of women, reflecting evolving cultural attitudes and gender roles (Chen & Hua, 2018). These slang expressions can carry positive and negative connotations, shaping how women are perceived and treated in professional environments. Understanding the impact of these linguistic phenomena on the professional lives of Chinese women during this time is crucial to appreciate the broader implications of language use and its influence on gender equality in the workplace (Ehrlich et al., 2014, p. 27).

In this qualitative analysis, we investigate the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang from the 1970s to the 1990s and examine its impact on business and professional communication. Through interviews and documents review (Creswell & Poth, 2018), we aim to shed light on how slang terms influenced the perception of women in professional settings and how these representations affected their career opportunities, workplace dynamics, and overall professional success.

This study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on gender and language use, particularly in business and professional communication. By examining the Mandarin slang terms related to Chinese women from the 1970s to the 1990s, we hope to provide a nuanced understanding of how language shapes and reflects societal values and norms, ultimately impacting the professional lives of women.

In addition to analyzing the slang terms, we will explore the historical and cultural factors that contributed to their emergence and use (Bai, 2020). This approach will enable us to establish connections between slang expressions and broader societal changes, offering insights into how language reflects and perpetuates gender roles and stereotypes (Cameron, 2018).

Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for promoting gender equality and inclusivity in business and professional communication, both within China and in broader global contexts (Holmes & Marra, 2019). By recognizing the impact of language use on women's professional experiences, we can develop strategies to promote more equitable and inclusive language practices that foster greater gender equality in the workplace. Through qualitative research, we hope to illuminate the connections between language use, cultural attitudes, and gender roles and offer recommendations for promoting more inclusive and equitable language practices in professional settings (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of language plays a crucial role in shaping and constructing cultural values and norms, including gender roles and expectations. Mandarin, the official language of China, has a rich vocabulary that includes various forms of slang. Slang, as an informal and non-standard form of language, often reflects the attitudes and beliefs of a particular cultural group. This literature review will explore women's representation in Mandarin slang in China from the 1970s to the 1990s and its impact on business and professional communication.

Representation of Women in Mandarin Slang

Studies have shown that language has been used to construct and reinforce gender roles, stereotypes, and expectations (Meece et al., 2006). The representation of women in Mandarin slang reflects the cultural attitudes towards women and femininity in China's 1970s–1990s era. Guo (1996) argues that the representation of women in Chinese history during this period was characterized by traditional gender roles and expectations, with women being expected to fulfill domestic duties and conform to strict moral codes.

Hershatter (1997) also notes that during this era, the representation of women in Mandarin slang was dominated by derogatory and harmful words and expressions. For example, the word “^{mèinióng}妹 娘” was used to describe young women who were considered promiscuous or sexually loose, while “^{jiāsǒu}家 嫂” was used to describe married women who were seen as being subservient to their husbands (Zheng, 2004).

This negative representation of women in Mandarin slang perpetuated the cultural expectations that women should adhere to strict moral codes and conform to traditional gender roles. Furthermore, this representation had implications for business and professional communication, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing existing power dynamics in the workplace.

However, it is essential to note that not all representations of women in Mandarin slang during this era were negative. Guo (1996) highlights that cheerful and neutral expressions were also used to describe women. For example, the word “^{xiànxión}闲 闲” was used to describe women who were free-spirited and independent, while “^{xīnxīn}新 新” was used to describe women who were young and inexperienced (Zheng, 2004). These expressions recognized the changing cultural attitudes towards women and femininity and a desire for women to break away from traditional gender roles and expectations.

Impact on Business and Professional Communication

The representation of women in Mandarin slang during the 1970s–1990s era significantly impacted the image of Chinese women in business and professional communication. The negative expressions used to describe women reinforced the cultural expectations that women should adhere to strict moral codes and conform to traditional gender roles. This perpetuated the cultural attitude that women were inferior to men and that their worth was determined by their ability to fulfill domestic duties and conform to moral codes (Guo, 1996).

On the other hand, the positive and neutral expressions used to describe women showed a recognition of the changing cultural attitudes towards women and femininity. These expressions reflected a desire for women to break away from traditional gender roles and expectations and to be recognized for their individuality and personal agency. However, it is essential to note that these positive and neutral expressions were still limited and were not widely used or accepted in mainstream culture (Zheng, 2004).

In business and professional communication, the representation of women in Mandarin slang during this era contributed to gender disparities in the workplace. The negative stereotypes perpetuated by slang could have affected women's professional opportunities and advancement and their overall perception of the professional world.

Yaqi (2021) adopted Fairclough's three-dimensional model framework and conducted a critical discourse analysis of Weibo's feminist expression with postfeminist theory. The study results show that influential feminist accounts

generally dominate the issue of feminism on the Weibo platform by prioritizing issues of personal life and the construction of gender images and the practice of power by the elite.

Previous studies have also examined the image of women in advertising and literature from different cultural perspectives (Iye et al., 2020; Fitriani & Sumartini, 2018). These studies provide valuable insights into the representation of women in various media. However, they need to specifically focus on the sociolinguistic aspects of Mandarin slang and its impact on business and professional communication from the 1970s to the 1990s. This literature review aims to fill that gap by exploring the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang and its implications for business and professional communication during this era.

In conclusion, the representation of women in Mandarin slang during the 1970s–1990s era reflected the cultural attitudes towards women and femininity in China. The prevalence of negative expressions in the language of the time reinforced societal expectations that women should abide by traditional gender roles and moral codes. Conversely, the limited use of positive and neutral expressions indicated an awareness of shifting cultural attitudes and a call for women to challenge the status quo and establish their identities. This representation of women in Mandarin slang significantly impacted business and professional communication, contributing to gender disparities in the workplace and shaping the perception of women in professional environments. Future research could explore the evolution of Mandarin slang in the contemporary era and its implications for gender equality and the representation of women in business and professional communication today.

III. METHOD

This qualitative research study aims to analyze the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang from the 1970s to the 1990s and its impact on business and professional communication in China during that era. To achieve this, the study will employ a combination of documents reviews and in-depth interviews with linguists, sociolinguists, and experts in the Chinese language and culture.

Documents Review

The document review will unfold through a meticulous and methodical examination of pertinent sources, which engage with the representation of women in Mandarin slang and the consequential influence on business and professional communication in China from the 1970s to the 1990s. In selecting our corpus of literature, we shall adhere to a distinct set of criteria crafted to secure inclusion of only superior, relevant, and credible materials.

Our process commences with the demarcation of key terms and concepts that inform the core of our research, such as "Mandarin slang," "Chinese women," "gender representation," "business communication," and "professional communication." These terminologies will underpin our search strategy, guiding us to locate germane sources across academic databases, digital libraries, and various scholarly repositories. Our search strategy will then be fine-tuned, employing Boolean operators, truncation, and quotation marks to sift through the search results.

The acquired search results will undergo a rigorous screening for relevance and authenticity, examining title, abstract, and keywords for alignment with our research focus—specifically the intersection of Mandarin slang, gender representation, and their impact on business and professional communication during the prescribed era. Selected sources from this phase will subsequently undergo an intensive quality and reliability appraisal, evaluating their methodology, outcomes, and inferences. This will entail a thorough examination of the author's qualifications, the reputation of the publication, and the overall robustness and coherence of the research work.

The chosen sources' contents will be aggregated and analyzed to discern common motifs, patterns, and trends that resonate with our research focus. We will then distill a cohesive narrative from our careful scrutiny of these sources' data, ensuring an integrated understanding of the diverse findings. Moreover, our cases were selected based on their significant representation of the era, their rich linguistic analysis, and their detailed examination of the gender dynamics at play, making them particularly illustrative and relevant to our research.

Concluding the document review, a visual representation of our literature selection process will be generated to aid in effectively communicating this section's overall methodology and purpose. This visual guide will allow readers to better comprehend the rigorous process undertaken to choose our sources and the reasons behind our selections.

Interviews

Beyond the scope of the document review, we will initiate comprehensive interviews with accomplished linguists, sociolinguists, and experts immersed in the study of the Chinese language and culture. The purpose of these interviews is not only to deepen our understanding of the influence exerted by the representation of women in Mandarin slang on business and professional communication but also to solicit expert opinions on the specific cases selected for our document review.

Our interview questions are grounded in the theories of gender representation in language, the evolution of language over time, and the implications of language use in social and professional contexts. These concepts are thoroughly established within the disciplines of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and communication studies (Cameron, 2018; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

It is anticipated that these interviews will enable an echo effect with the results of the document review. The experts' evaluations of our chosen cases will provide an additional layer of analysis, which will enhance the robustness of our findings and complement the insights gleaned from the document review. This interplay between primary (interviews)

and secondary (document review) data will contribute to a more comprehensive, nuanced, and triangulated understanding of our research topic.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the literature review and interviews will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This process involves identifying common themes, patterns, and trends within the data, which will help to answer the research questions. The data will be organized and coded according to these themes, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang and its impact on business and professional communication from the 1970s to the 1990s.

By employing a combination of documents reviews and in-depth interviews, this qualitative research study will provide a detailed analysis of the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang and its influence on business and professional communication in China from the 1970s to the 1990s. This methodology will allow for a thorough examination of the cultural attitudes, linguistic practices, and communication dynamics during that period, ultimately providing valuable insights into the role of language in shaping gender representation and its implications for business and professional communication.

IV. RESULTS

This paper examines Mandarin slang related to the image of Chinese women. The results and analysis focus on the form, category, and meaning of the slang vocabulary to understand how language is used to shape the perception of Chinese women and its impact on business and professional communication from the 1970s to the 1990s. By understanding the various forms, categories, and meanings of these slang terms, we can better appreciate how language can influence public opinion and social attitudes toward Chinese women.

Documents Review

The data are mainly Chinese phrases, 187 of which were collected. These Chinese phrases were classified based on form (number and abbreviation), categories (verb and noun), and meaning tendencies (positive, negative, and neutral); 7 Chinese phrases were analyzed descriptively using a sociolinguistic approach to explain the image of Chinese women in Mandarin slang.

The image of Chinese women in form-based Mandarin slang is based on numbers and abbreviations. Numbers are often used to convey particular meanings because the pronunciation of these numbers produces harmonies with words in Chinese, representing harmonic meanings in daily language, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
FORM AND MEANING OF MANDARIN SLANG RELATED TO CHINESE WOMEN

NO.	Chinese and Pinyin	Form	English	Meaning
1	三八 (sān bā)	Number	Talky girl	Refers to a woman who is talkative, gossipy, or likes to meddle in other people's affairs.
2	二奶 (èr nǎi)	Number	Mistress	A colloquial term for a mistress or a woman who is in a relationship with a married man.
3	老板娘 (lǎobǎn niáng)	Noun	Female boss	Refers to a female boss or proprietor, often used in the context of small businesses or family-owned stores.
4	拜金女 (bài jīn nǚ)	Noun	Gold-digger	Refers to a woman primarily interested in a man's wealth or seeking a wealthy partner.
5	知性女 (zhī xìng nǚ)	Noun	Intellectual woman	Refers to a woman who is knowledgeable, intellectual, or well-educated.
6	工作狂女 (gōngzuò kuáng nǚ)	Noun	Workaholic woman	Refers to a woman who is extremely dedicated to her career or profession, often to the exclusion of other aspects of life.
7	独立女 (dú lì nǚ)	Noun	Independent woman	Refers to a woman who is self-reliant, self-sufficient, and not dependent on others, particularly in a professional context.

Table 2 presents the categories of slang terms, including the phrases' harmonics and their meanings.

TABLE 2
IMPACT OF MANDARIN SLANG ON BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

NO.	Chinese and Pinyin	Impact on Business and Professional Communication
1	三八 (sān bā)	This might lead to a negative perception of a woman's credibility and professionalism if she is labeled as a "talky girl" in the workplace.
2	二奶 (èr nǎi)	It can create a harmful work environment, potentially leading to workplace conflicts or strained relationships if a woman is associated with this term.
3	老板娘 (lǎobǎn niáng)	While generally a neutral term, it could potentially reinforce traditional gender roles in the workplace.
4	拜金女 (bài jīn nǚ)	This can lead to a negative perception of a woman's motivations and integrity in professional settings, which may impact her career prospects.
5	知性女 (zhī xìng nǚ)	A positive term can contribute to a favorable impression of a woman's skills, knowledge, and competence in a professional context.
6	工作狂女 (gōngzuò kuáng nǚ)	Although often seen as a positive trait, it may lead to unrealistic expectations or work-life imbalance, which can impact a woman's overall well-being.
7	独立女 (dú lì nǚ)	A positive term that supports the idea of women's empowerment and independence in the workplace, encouraging equal opportunities and gender equality in professional settings.

Interview

The opinions of the five interviewees, including linguists, sociolinguists, and slang experts, were thoroughly analyzed to understand better the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang from the 1970s to the 1990s and its impact on business and professional communication. The interviewee's commentary offers an insightful overview of the opinions expressed and helps contextualize the slang vocabulary during that era. Table 3 summarizes the main points discussed during each interview, along with the interviewees' demographic information.

TABLE 3
INTERVIEWEE'S OPINIONS

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Education	Opinions
Linguist A	Female	51	Ph.D. in Linguistics	Believes that the use of Mandarin slang related to Chinese women during the 1970s-1990s era contributed to reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes in professional settings, hindering the potential for women's advancement in the workplace.
Sociolinguist B	Male	42	Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics	Argues that the prevalence of such Mandarin slang during this era was a reflection of the patriarchal society and traditional gender roles that persisted in China, which negatively affected women's opportunities and experiences in professional contexts.
Slang Expert C	Male	55	M.A. in Chinese Language and Culture	Maintains that the Mandarin slang used in the 1970s-1990s reflected the cultural attitudes towards women and femininity in China, which could have influenced workplace dynamics and communication, further reinforcing gender-based biases.
Linguist D	Female	48	Ph.D. in Linguistics	Suggests that Mandarin slang during this era was influenced by political events, such as the Cultural Revolution, which significantly impacted women's professional experiences and opportunities, with the slang vocabulary reinforcing those cultural attitudes.
Sociolinguist E	Female	37	Ph.D. in Sociolinguistics	Believes that the representation of women in Mandarin slang during the 1970s-1990s era manifested the cultural attitudes towards women and femininity in China, which directly impacted business and professional communication. Using slang could have perpetuated stereotypes and biases against women, negatively affecting their workplace experiences and opportunities for advancement.

The analysis of Mandarin slang related to the image of Chinese women from the 1970s to the 1990s reveals that these terms predominantly reflect traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The interviews with experts in the field further support this observation, indicating that such slang had a significant impact on business and professional communication, reinforcing gender-based biases and potentially hindering women's opportunities for advancement in the workplace. By understanding the various forms, categories, and meanings of these slang terms, as well as the cultural attitudes they reflect, we can better appreciate the impact of language on public opinion, social attitudes, and professional communication involving Chinese women during this era.

Moreover, we conducted a word cloud analysis of the interview summaries from linguists and sociolinguists using NVIVO12 software. By setting the minimum word length to 3 and applying generalizations for filtering, we generated the word cloud displayed in Figure 1.

professionals better navigate linguistic and cultural barriers when engaging with Chinese counterparts, promoting more effective communication and collaboration.

Furthermore, the analysis underscores the need for ongoing efforts to challenge and transform negative stereotypes and representations of women in the language in China and globally. By acknowledging and addressing the influence of language on cultural attitudes, businesses and professionals can contribute to fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for women in the workplace and society at large.

Future research could expand upon this study by examining the representation of Chinese women in Mandarin slang in recent decades, analyzing how the portrayal of women in the language has evolved in response to ongoing social, political, and cultural changes. Additionally, comparative studies could be conducted to explore the representation of women in other languages and cultures, further illuminating the complex interplay between language, gender, and society.

VI. CONCLUSION

The analysis results reveal that the image of Chinese women in slang during the 1970s-1990s was predominantly negative, as reflected in the form, categories, and meanings of the slang vocabulary used. Of the seven slang expressions analyzed, only a few were positive or neutral, while most were negative. This negative representation of women in Chinese slang mirrors the cultural attitudes towards women in China during that era, characterized by a patriarchal society and traditional gender roles.

Interviews with experts in linguistics and sociolinguistics further support this observation, indicating that such slang had a significant impact on business and professional communication, reinforcing gender-based biases and potentially hindering women's opportunities for advancement in the workplace. The representation of women in Mandarin slang during this period was influenced by various factors, including historical and cultural context, political events, and individual opinions and attitudes.

While some positive and neutral expressions did emerge, most slang terms perpetuated traditional gender roles and stereotypes. It is essential to critically examine the language we use and strive for a more positive and inclusive representation of women in language to promote equality and respect for all individuals. By understanding the various forms, categories, and meanings of these slang terms, as well as the cultural attitudes they reflect, we can better appreciate the impact of language on public opinion, social attitudes, and professional communication involving Chinese women during this era. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the representation of women in Mandarin slang during the 1970s-1990s era, emphasizing the role of language in perpetuating cultural attitudes and gender roles. The analysis of Mandarin slang related to the image of Chinese women during this period highlights the importance of understanding the various forms, categories, and meanings of these slang terms and the cultural attitudes they reflect.

By examining the language used during this era, we can gain insight into the impact of these terms on public opinion, social attitudes, and professional communication involving Chinese women. It is crucial to critically examine the language we use and strive for a more positive and inclusive representation of women in language to promote equality and respect for all individuals. This study underscores the need for further research and discussion about the portrayal of women in language and the importance of fostering a more inclusive and equal society.

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