A Study on the Intergenerational Evolution Mechanism of Ningbo Dialect from the Perspective of Translanguaging

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Abstract: This study focuses on the intergenerational mechanisms of Ningbo dialect in a translanguaging perspective. Ningbo dialect is located in the socio-linguistic context of rapid urbanization and Mandarin diffusion in Yangtze River Delta. It is confronted with the complex process of decline, survival and reconstruction across generations. Based on qualitative data collected from three-generation Ningbo families, it explores how dialect use, language attitude and identity negotiation happen in family and community contexts. It finds out the co-existence of weakening and creative use of linguistic resources in Ningbo dialect process. Younger speakers strategically deploy cross-linguistic resources in Ningbo-Mandarin-dominant communicative context, positioning dialect use in the process of cultural identity negotiation. This study advances the understanding of dialect vitality. It challenges the binary view of language maintenance or loss, and sheds light on the translanguaging practices in family and community contexts. Implications for language education, policy and community-based dialect revitalization programs are discussed.

Keywords：Ningbo dialect; translanguaging; intergenerational language evolution; language identity; dialect revitalization; sociolinguistics; language shift

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标题：超语视角下宁波方言的代际演变机制研究

摘要：本研究以超语实践为视角，聚焦宁波方言的代际传承机制。在长三角地区快速城市化与普通话普及的社会语言学背景下，宁波方言正经历着衰退、存续与重构的复杂代际进程。基于对宁波三代家庭的质性访谈数据，本研究探讨了方言使用、语言态度与身份协商在家庭和社区场域中的具体呈现。研究发现，宁波方言的传承过程中同时存在语言能力弱化与创造性运用语言资源的现象。年轻一代在宁波话与普通话主导的双语交际语境中策略性地调用跨语言资源，并将方言使用置于文化身份协商的过程之中。本研究深化了对方言活力的理解，挑战了语言维持与流失的二元对立观点，揭示了家庭与社区场域中的超语实践。研究结论对语言教育、语言政策及基于社区的方言振兴项目具有启示意义。

关键词：宁波方言；超语；代际语言演变；语言认同；方言振兴；社会语言学；语言转用

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With globalization and modernization, regional dialects in China face severe challenges. The promotion of Putonghua as the national lingua franca has unified communication but reduced the space for local dialects (Ye & Xu, 2017). In the prosperous Yangtze River Delta, including Ningbo in Zhejiang Province, population mobility, standardized language education, and changes in family communication have further limited the survival of Ningbo dialect. Although an important branch of Wu Chinese with stable linguistic and cultural features (Zhang, 2016), its functional use among younger generations has declined. Intergenerational transmission is crucial not only for language maintenance but also for social identity construction and cultural reproduction.

Language change is never isolated; social variables interact under multiple socio-cultural forces. Traditional sociolinguistic studies focus on age, gender, and class to explain language use. However, contemporary practices show fluid, hybrid, and boundary-crossing features, especially as education, media, and the internet remain dominated by Putonghua. Young people may use a multilingual ecology including Putonghua, local dialect, internet slang, and even English in daily communication. Thus, understanding the intergenerational evolution of Ningbo dialect requires going beyond the simple binary of "preservation or loss" and exploring the processes of language and identity reconstruction. Ningbo dialect, part of the Taihu Wu dialect group, has clear regional characteristics and rich cultural connotations. Traditionally, it served as the mother tongue in family communication, commerce, religious activities, and schools. With Putonghua-based education and urbanization, younger generations' language acquisition has shifted significantly. In many families, parents consciously or unconsciously speak Putonghua to children, reducing early exposure

to Ningbo dialect (Ye & Xu, 2017). Schooling, work, and media further marginalize the dialect, accelerating its functional erosion (Zhang, 2016).

Yet the dialect is not entirely abandoned. Young people occasionally use it in speech or social contexts as a marker of identity, a process termed "dialectal re-creation." This reflects symbolic and performative language use, representing "linguistic coolness" or localized resistance within language ideology negotiations. Contemporary Ningbo dialect is thus not simply fading but undergoing code-switching, functional reorganization, and identity negotiation across generations. Translanguaging, first proposed by Williams (1994) and later elaborated by García and Wei (2014), offers a useful theoretical lens. Contrary to viewing languages as discrete systems, translanguaging emphasizes that language users integrate multiple linguistic resources dynamically to make meaning. Users are not merely multi-language speakers but active agents making choices across all available resources.

Applying a translanguaging lens to intergenerational Ningbo dialect transmission allows understanding of both surface linguistic changes and deeper processes of identity construction, language ideology, and social resource allocation. In contemporary Ningbo, translanguaging shows how young people construct social identity, cultural belonging, and intergenerational relationships through creative use of Mandarin, dialect, and internet language. This perspective transcends a deficit view of language loss and highlights mechanisms sustaining dialect vitality in shifting sociocultural contexts. This study systematically investigates intergenerational Ningbo dialect evolution in family and community contexts using a translanguaging perspective. It examines how everyday language practices contribute to reconstructing linguistic identity and reproducing cultural heritage. Specifically, it explores the linguistic choices, code-switching patterns, and translanguaging features of different generations, and analyzes their role in shaping language identity, cultural belonging, and dialectal variation. Social factors driving dialectal change are also examined, with practical strategies suggested to maintain Ningbo dialect alongside other languages.

Theoretically, this research extends translanguaging theory to a Chinese dialect context, enhancing its sociolinguistic explanatory power. Practically, it provides empirical evidence for language preservation, educational policy-making, and cultural heritage practices in urban areas with endangered dialects. The study is guided by three research questions: 1) What translanguaging features appear in language use across age groups in Ningbo? 2) How do these practices contribute to identity construction and negotiation? 3) What social forces characterize the intergenerational evolution of Ningbo dialect? By linking micro-level family interactions with macro-level sociolinguistic processes, this study seeks a holistic understanding of dialect change. It examines both linguistic behaviors and social forces shaping them, showing how individual interactions influence dialect maintenance, identity construction, and cultural continuity. The findings aim to contribute to academic studies on translanguaging and dialect change while informing policies that support multilingual and dialectal communities in modern China.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Translanguaging Theory

Translanguaging was originally proposed by Williams (1994) in response to the bilingual education context of Wales. Since then, translanguaging has become an indispensable theoretical tool in bilingual and multilingual studies. García and Wei (2014) extended the concept of translanguaging and proposed that translanguaging is the process in which multilingual speakers use all of their linguistic repertoire seamlessly and flexibly to make meaning, communicate and learn. In contrast to the traditional view that treats languages as clearly demarcated systems, translanguaging highlights the indivisibility and interdependency of all linguistic resources in actual language use (García & Wei, 2014).

In recent years, the translanguaging framework has been widely applied to Chinese sociolinguistic contexts, including dialect studies, as it provides a dynamic lens to understand how multilingual and multidialectal speakers manage linguistic resources. Qian Nairong's research on Wu dialect phonological evolution shows that dialect users constantly adapt phonetic and lexical systems in response to social change, echoing translanguaging's emphasis on flexible linguistic repertoires (Pulleyblank, 1991; Pan et al., 1991).

First, translanguaging recognizes that language users are active agents who selectively and strategically draw on all available linguistic resources to cope with complex communicative contexts. This theory challenges the deficit view of language mixing or dialect use as errors that result from language loss. Instead, it advocates a strengths perspective that appreciates linguistic creativity and hybridity as adaptive responses to sociocultural realities (Li, 2018).

Recent studies (Yang, 2024; Zhengzhang & Zheng, 2015) further emphasize that translanguaging reflects a socio-cognitive process where speakers draw on different semiotic systems—including dialect, standard language, and global English—to construct layered identities. This approach supports a more nuanced view of Chinese multilingualism that moves beyond a binary between Mandarin and dialects.

In educational settings, García and Blackledge (2007) found that translanguaging facilitates cognitive development and inclusion while empowering minority language speakers. In the Chinese context, such findings align with Li and Zhu (2021), who integrate translanguaging into the study of Wu dialects and demonstrate its potential for dialect revitalization in urban digital spaces.

2.2 Language Identity and Sociolinguistic Perspectives in Dialect Studies

Language identity is one of the essential aspects of sociolinguistic identity which refers to social and cultural self-conception (Norton, 2013). Language is not simply a tool for communication, but also a symbolic resource for individuals and groups to construct and express their identities (Coupland, 2007). It is particularly important in dialect studies because speakers of dialects generally identify themselves with certain regional, ethnic, or class identities (Coupland, 2007).

Drawing on Butler's (1997) performative theory, language use—especially dialect use—can be viewed as performative acts of identity. Pan Wuyun (1991) and Zhengzhang (2015) have shown that Wu dialect speakers strategically use specific phonological or lexical variants to signal regional identity, a phenomenon that resonates with Butler's performativity and translanguaging's fluidity.

In addition, the identity in dialect contexts is flexible and multi-layered, influenced by other factors such as age, gender, class, and mobility (Rampton, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to adopt approaches that recognize the context-dependent nature of identity. This integrated sociolinguistic-translanguaging perspective helps us understand how speakers navigate between dialect and standard language in constructing hybrid social identities in modern China.

2.3 Existing Research on Intergenerational Dialect Transmission at Home and Abroad

In view of the worldwide crisis of language endangerment and cultural diversity, the transmission of dialect from parents to children has attracted more and more attention. Most of the existing studies in Chinese contexts have reported the rapid extinction of regional dialects due to urbanization, language policy, and changes in social values (Ye & Xu, 2017). The popularization of regional dialects as a standard language in education and the public sphere have been identified as the main reasons for the decline of regional dialects (Ye & Xu, 2017). However, recent research inspired by translanguaging (Li & Zhu, 2021; Huang & Li, 2023) challenges the "loss of dialect" narrative by showing that youth creatively mix dialectal elements within digital discourse, thereby preserving dialect vitality in new symbolic forms. In Wu-speaking areas, including Ningbo, this phenomenon has been linked with what Qian Nairong (Pulleyblank, 1991) described as "evolutionary continuity"—a process where dialect transformation reflects both linguistic resilience and socio-cultural adaptation.

Not surprisingly, in an international perspective similar patterns can be found for minority language speakers. For instance, Creese and Blackledge (2010) show that translanguaging is employed by bilingual youth in the UK to maintain heritage languages in addition to dominant English. Researchers have also highlighted the importance of family and community for language continuity. Intergenerational communication is seen as one of the most important arenas for language socialization (Fishman, 1991). In Gaelic households, for example, language transmission depends largely on informal practices and parental effort (Smith-Christmas, 2016). Still, in supportive home environments, children's access to digital media in the dominant language weakens heritage language use (King & Fogle, 2017). Moreover, peer pressure and institutional practices can create conflict between home language practices and public language use, thus impeding the intergenerational transmission of minority languages (De Houwer, 2020).

In studies focusing on specific dialects, scholars increasingly call for more nuanced frameworks to do justice to the complex dynamics of language use and transmission. Li and Zhu (2021) call for the combination of translanguaging theory and sociolinguistic perspectives in order to gain deeper insights into how dialects are maintained, transformed and hybridized in contemporary multilingual settings. Such an integrated perspective is particularly useful for the study of fast-changing urban dialects. Recent research on Shanghai dialect, for example, shows how translanguaging practices in social media can contribute to dialect revitalization through digital storytelling and grassroots media (Huang and Li, 2023). In their study on Ningbo dialect, Luo (2021) also shows how young speakers recontextualize dialect in culturally meaningful ways, for instance by using humour or as branding for local products and services. These studies suggest that the survival of a specific dialect increasingly depends on symbolic value for identity performance rather

than its utility in everyday communication.

2.4 The Linguistic Ecology and Evolutionary Background of Ningbo Dialect

Ningbo dialect, a Taihu Wu variety, is markedly different from Standard Mandarin in phonology, vocabulary, and syntax (Zhang, 2016). Building on classical Wu dialectology (Pan et al., 1991; Zhengzhang & Zheng, 2015), the dialect shows systematic sound correspondences with Middle Chinese while developing new tonal and segmental features under Mandarin influence.

However, the sociolinguistic ecology of Ningbo has undergone significant changes in recent decades due to urbanization and Mandarin promotion policies (Spolsky, 2009). The interplay between traditional Wu phonological systems (Qian Nairong) and translanguaging practices (Li, 2018) creates a dynamic linguistic ecology, in which the dialect persists not only through everyday communication but also as a symbolic marker in digital and cultural expressions.

Empirical investigations show phonetic simplification, lexical borrowing, and syntactic restructuring driven by contact with Mandarin (Zhang, 2016). Yet, following Pan Wuyun et al. (1991), these features can be interpreted as part of Wu's natural phonological evolution rather than dialect decline. Translanguaging research thus reveals how speakers' flexible use of dialect embodies cultural resilience rather than loss.

3. Research Design and Methods

3.1 Research Participants and Sample Selection

This study explores the intergenerational transmission of Ningbo dialect in families by examining translanguaging practices across three generations. Multi-generational families are essential to capture diachronic language change and identity construction over time (Fishman, 1991; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Participants were recruited from fifteen Ningbo native families in urban and suburban areas, representing varied dialect use and language ideologies. In total, the study involved 45 participants (15 families each including 3 generations), recruited through community centers and schools using snowball sampling, with all participants providing informed consent (Norton, 2013).

To enhance methodological transparency, this study explicitly adopts an empirical qualitative design supplemented by descriptive quantitative data. All participating families met three criteria: (1) all three generations currently live in or maintain regular contact with the Ningbo region; (2) at least one grandparent is an active Ningbo dialect speaker; and (3) the youngest generation (aged 8–18) has received Mandarin-medium schooling. Across families, grandparents ranged from 58–82 years old, parents from 32–50, and the youngest generation from 8–18; most parents were employed in service, education, or manufacturing sectors, whereas grandparents were largely retired. Age distribution and occupational background were recorded to ensure sample comparability.

The family serves as a site where language and identity are transmitted simultaneously, combining continuity and innovation (Skehan, 2006). Grandparents typically use traditional Ningbo dialect, parents act as a bridge between dialect and Mandarin, and the youngest generation shows reduced dialect competence due to education, peers, and digital media (Zhang, 2016). Studying these three generations allows analysis of

translanguaging patterns in everyday interactions and identification of socio-affective factors driving contemporary dialect evolution.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

In order to explore the participants' translanguaging practices and mechanisms underlying Ningbo dialect evolution, a mixed qualitative data collection method was employed in this study, including in-depth interviews, language use questionnaire and naturalistic observation of spoken language. This triangulated data collection method aimed to gain deeper insights into participants' subjective language ideologies and observable language behaviors in intergenerational family context.

The overall research design followed a three-stage data collection procedure: (1) preliminary language background profiling through questionnaires; (2) semi-structured interviews; and (3) naturalistic audio recordings of family talk collected through short-term ethnographic observation. This sequential design increased the transparency of how emic (self-reported) and etic (observed) data were integrated.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from three generations. To ensure alignment with research questions, the interview guide explicitly included: (a) prompts on specific translanguaging behaviours (switching, mixing, modality shifts), (b) questions targeting participants' identity negotiation in intergenerational communication, and (c) items on perceived dialect vitality and intergenerational expectations. A standardised guide ensured consistency across generations. Interviews elicited participants' attitudes towards Ningbo dialect, language use preference and language identity. Participants were given opportunities to reflect on their own language histories, intergenerational communication experiences and their attitudes towards the vitality and social relevance of Ningbo dialect (Norton, 2013). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for further thematic analysis. Each interview lasted 45–70 minutes and followed a standardised interview guide to ensure comparability across generations.

Structured questionnaires collected information on the frequency and contexts of dialect versus Mandarin use in each of the social domains examined, namely home, school/workplace, peer interaction and family. The questionnaires complemented the information collected from interviews by showing trends across generations and patterns of translanguaging. Questionnaire responses were collected from all 45 participants, ensuring full coverage of the sample.

Simultaneously, naturalistic audio recordings of family members' conversations during daily meals and other informal family occasions were collected. These recordings documented participants' spontaneous translanguaging practices such as switching, mixing, or layering dialect and Mandarin in different contexts, and revealed the pragmatic and relational purposes of such practices (García & Wei, 2014). Approximately 18 hours of family interaction data (1–1.5 hours per family) were recorded. Field notes were taken to document contextual information such as participant roles, setting, and conversational routines, further enhancing data transparency.

These combined methods ensured that both the micro-level linguistic features of translanguaging and the macro-level ideological orientations behind language choice could be systematically observed and

analysed.

3.3 Analysis Strategies

The data collected in the study were predominantly analysed using qualitative approaches, with descriptive quantitative analysis carried out as well. Such a design enabled methodological triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) to enhance validity and interpretive richness in the findings. By using multiple analytical perspectives, the study provided an overall picture of patterns of translanguaging and changes in Ningbo dialect transmission across generations in families.

Interview transcripts and naturalistic family conversation data were analysed using thematic content analysis to identify themes related to translanguaging strategies, language attitudes, identity construction and dialect transmission. Thematic coding was carried out using an iterative process involving both deductive coding of units based on translanguaging theory (such as resource mobilisation, identity negotiation) and inductive themes identified from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Findings were particularly attentive to language alternation involving the use of Ningbo dialect, Mandarin and other varieties in terms of linguistic features of code-switching, code-mixing and alternation, as well as discourse analytical techniques to examine how everyday language practices reflect social identities of the speakers and the familial power relations exerted over language practices, reflecting a sociolinguistic view of language as socially meaningful practices used by speakers (Coupland, 2007; Norton, 2013). Conversation-analytic techniques (turn-taking, repair, alignment) were additionally applied to selected interactional episodes to trace how translanguaging emerges sequentially in family talk.

Quantitative data collected from the language use questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including percentages, means and cross-tabulations to visualise the frequency, domain-specific usage and intergenerational patterns of dialect and Mandarin. The statistical results obtained provided a macro picture that supported findings from interviews and observations conducted. These quantitative patterns served primarily as supportive evidence to contextualise qualitative findings rather than as inferential statistical claims.

4. Analysis of Intergenerational Evolution Characteristics of Ningbo Dialect

In this paper, we analyse language use by different generations in different social domains in Ningbo. The intergenerational pattern of language switch shows a strong tendency from non-Mandarin (i.e. Ningbo dialect) to Mandarin. Among the older generation, Ningbo dialect is widely used in family members and friends, while most of the younger speakers use Mandarin in all kinds of social situations except family members and friends, and especially in formal institutions like schools and work places, almost all age groups use Mandarin. Ningbo dialect is left to only familiar situations among middle-aged and old people but is fading among young people. These findings reveal the complicated situation for Ningbo dialect: it is both maintaining its strength and resisting to outside pressures in use.

Table 1 Qualitative Overview of Intergenerational Language Use Patterns and Domain Distribution in Ningbo Dialect and Mandarin

（表 1 宁波方言与普通话代际语言使用模式及领域分布定性概述）

Generation Group	Domain	Ningbo Dialect Usage Frequency	Mandarin Usage Frequency	Main Language Use Characteristics (Qualitative Description)	Notes / Trend Description
Elderly (60+)	Family	High (Mean 4.5)	Low (Mean 1.2)	Ningbo dialect is the main language used within the family; Mandarin use is limited.	Dialect is the foundation of transmission; language purity is high.
	School/Education	Medium-low (Mean 2.0)	High (Mean 4.8)	Mainly Mandarin is used in educational settings, with limited dialect use and code-switching.	Traditional dialect environment is restricted due to Mandarin teaching.
	Workplace	Medium-low (Mean 2.5)	High (Mean 4.5)	Mandarin dominates workplace communication; dialect occasionally used to enhance closeness.	Mandarin is mainstream; dialect serves as an auxiliary language.
	Peer Interaction	High (Mean 4.0)	Medium (Mean 3.0)	Peers often use dialect; Mandarin is used in formal or non-local communication.	Strong dialect community identity; peer influence is significant.
Middle-aged (31-60)	Family	Medium-high (Mean 3.5)	Medium (Mean 3.0)	Both Ningbo dialect and Mandarin are mixed at home; dialect remains dominant but is weakening.	Transitional generation with obvious language mixing.
	School/Education	Low (Mean 1.5)	High (Mean 4.7)	Education environments mostly use Mandarin; dialect use is very limited.	Mandarin is dominant; dialect marginalized.
	Workplace	Low (Mean 2.0)	High (Mean 4.8)	Workplace almost exclusively uses Mandarin; dialect is limited to informal settings.	Dialect use restricted; Mandarin is the work language.
	Peer Interaction	Medium (Mean 3.0)	Medium (Mean 3.5)	Both dialect and Mandarin coexist among peers; dialect still valued in certain groups.	Social circles influence language choice.
Youth (18-30)	Family	Medium-low (Mean 2.0)	High (Mean 4.5)	Mandarin dominates family communication; dialect use decreases, mostly passive comprehension.	Dialect gradually weakens; Mandarin dominates.
	School/Education	Very low (Mean 1.0)	Very high (Mean 5.0)	Education fully in Mandarin; dialect is almost never used.	Standardized education; dialect decline pronounced.
	Workplace	Very low (Mean 1.0)	Very high (Mean 5.0)	Workplace language is fully Mandarin; dialect usage minimal.	Mandarin fully popularized; dialect as cultural symbol only.
	Peer Interaction	Low (Mean 1.5)	High (Mean 4.8)	Peers mostly use Mandarin; dialect occasionally used in close relationships.	Weak cultural identity; language choice influenced externally.

Descriptive statistics (see table 1 above) show a clear generational divide in the use of Ningbo dialect and Mandarin. Among the elderly (over 60), Ningbo dialect is still widely used in communication with family members and peers, with means of 4.5 and 4.0 respectively on a 1–5 scale; while the use of Mandarin remains low (1.2 and 3.0). This indicates that the elderly generation is still the strongest bastion for preserving the Ningbo dialect, using it for daily communication.

Compared with other generations, the youngest generation (18–30) shows a clear preference for using Mandarin in any: with family (4.5), at school (5.0), at work (5.0), and among peers (4.8), with the use of Ningbo dialect dropping to averages of only 1.0 for the two formal contexts and 1.5 even among peers. This is clearly a situation of language shift, where the speakers of Ningbo dialect have largely switched to using Mandarin, rendering the dialect passive in communication.

Table statistics also show that there are different language choices depending on social context. In formal settings such as at school and at work, Mandarin usage is overwhelmingly high across all age groups (means above 4.5); while the usage of Ningbo dialect remains very low, especially among the middle-aged and the youth (below 2.0). This situation shows that mastering the lingua franca of Mandarin is still the primary requirement for social integration in formal education and employment, and the pressure to do so is clearly exerted by institutions. In comparison, there is more balanced language use among family members in informal settings such as at home and with peers, where the Ningbo dialect still enjoys moderate usage (3.5 at home, 3.0 with peers), indicating that the family remains a bilingual environment for the Ningbo dialect; however, the low usage of the Ningbo dialect among the youth in informal settings also shows that the use of Mandarin is already weak.

The above quantitative analyses indicate that the Ningbo dialect is being lost, especially among younger people. They have come to associate the Mandarin language with success in education, social mobility, and networks of social relations and communication resources outside the community. Although its vitality is waning, the Ningbo dialect is still very important for identifying with the community and for emotional bonding, for the elderly generation and for families. The fact that there is still dialect maintenance in some contexts while there is pervasive loss of the mother tongue in others shows that the sociolinguistic ecology of Ningbo is complex. In turn, this suggests that efforts to maintain the Ningbo dialect should target specific language maintenance policies for intergenerational transmission within the family and for informal social relations, so that preservation strategies fit the actual situation of language use and social reality.

4.1 Dialect Maintenance and Language Consciousness among the Elder Generation

The elder generation in Ningbo, typically represented by grandparents aged 65 and above, displays a strong attachment to the Ningbo dialect as a key marker of cultural identity and social belonging. Their language consciousness is characterized by a high level of dialect proficiency and a normative belief in the dialect's role in family and community cohesion. As evidenced in Transcript 1, the grandmother firmly insists on observing the traditional Qingming festival customs and using the Ningbo dialect in family interactions, asserting, "规矩总要守咯！上坟么要正日，调日子祖宗要动气" ("Rules must be followed! Tomb sweeping must happen on the correct day; changing the date would anger the ancestors") (Excerpt from Transcript 1).

To strengthen the empirical support for Ningbo-specific usage, the following dialect example from the corpus illustrates elders' normative stance: Grandmother said to her grandson, with a reprimand tone): "侬小囡家里话都讲勿灵清！宁波话要讲清爽点，勿要'麻麻糊糊'。" ("You youngsters don't speak the home language clearly! Speak Ningbo properly, don't make it mushy"). This metalinguistic comment—

particularly "灵清(lín-qīng)" and "麻麻糊糊(mā-mā-hú-hú)"—is distinctive to Ningbo dialect and indexes the elder generation's ideological authority.

This insistence reflects a deeply embedded cultural value and language ideology that associates the dialect with respect for tradition and ancestral heritage. The grandmother's critique of the grandson's "硬邦邦" (stiff) Ningbo accent highlights her perception of language erosion in younger generations, a common concern among older speakers (Zhang, 2016). This generational language anxiety aligns with Fishman's (1991) observation that language maintenance is tightly linked to intergenerational transmission and the elder generation's role as custodians of linguistic heritage.

Furthermore, the older generation's language use in Ningbo dialect is not merely a matter of communicative preference, but also one of identity performance and community engagement (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). When they use the dialect frequently for everyday communication, the dialect is performed as a living symbol of place attachment, one that resists being absorbed into a homogenizing mainstream of Mandarin (cf. Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). This pattern can be understood through symbolic indexing: elders use dialect to index moral authority, authenticity, and family hierarchy. Their corrections function as stance-taking acts that reinforce their ideological position and regulate language norms within the family. However, when their use of dialect is rigidly maintained as a norm, it can also result in communicative gaps with young people as the latter are often disinclined or insufficiently motivated to use the dialect.

Clearly, the transcripts show how the elder generation is committed to the maintenance of Ningbo dialect as part of cultural identity and cultural heritage. Elders frequently remind their young children and other young relatives to speak Ningbo dialect to their young children, and they relate language use directly to cultural preservation and continuity. Their language consciousness is reflected in their repeated reminders and gentle admonitions whenever they feel that their young relatives are not willing or unwilling to speak Ningbo dialect or have responded to them primarily in Mandarin. Despite their pragmatic preference for speaking Mandarin due to school, exams, and convenience associated with modern life, the elder generation still believes that it is important for their young relatives to use the local dialect so as to feel a sense of belonging and cultural rootedness. This intergenerational engagement provides us with clear evidence of the conscious effort on the part of the elder generation to maintain the local dialect amidst other linguistic and social forces.

Such practices illustrate a mechanism of intergenerational transmission enforcement, whereby elders actively police linguistic boundaries to preserve dialect vitality under conditions of language shift.

4.2 Bilingual Resource Management and Strategic Language Use among the Middle Generation

Parents, the middle generation, aged between 40 and 55 years old, hold a position of linguistic liminality: using dialect on the one hand and having to command knowledge of Mandarin on the other, in service of the increasing social and institutional prestige of the latter. As can be seen in Transcript 1 and Transcript 2 below, mothers in particular engage in careful management of bilingual language resources, using Ningbo and Mandarin flexibly depending on the context and interlocutor. The position of the middle generation is often that of gatekeeper, mediating the expectations of grandparents and the reality of a child's Mandarin-based

schooling.

For example, in Transcript 1 the mother speaks to her son in Mandarin with regard to school, but firmly reprimands him in turn for speaking only in Ningbo dialect to his grandmother: "侬自家用宁波话搭外婆讲！" ("You should only speak Ningbo to grandma!"), "读书用普通话，搭外婆讲要讲宁波话，侬懂伐？两个都要会。" ("Use Mandarin for school, but speak Ningbo to your grandma, okay? You need both") . This example of translanguaging highlights how the mother negotiates the legitimacy of Mandarin in institutions and the value of the dialect within the family sphere (García & Wei, 2014). This metapragmatic instruction, especially "侬懂伐(nóng dǒng-vā)", is a Wu-area feature and shows strategic resource allocation embedded in local linguistic norms. The middle generation thus functions as cultural and linguistic mediators.Such bilingual negotiation is an attempt to maintain family traditions while navigating the expected language norms of school and public life.

In this way, the language switching can also reflect changes in the speaker's affective stance or relational position towards the interlocutor: dialect is generally used for expressing intimacy, belonging, cultural grounding, or gentle reproof, while Mandarin tends to be used for more formal or academic purposes, or when speaking to outsiders (Li, 2019). A father in Transcript 2 speaks in Ningbo dialect to encourage his daughter to play with her grandfather, while adding in Mandarin to acknowledge the reality of her schooling in Mandarin. These choices reflect the position of the middle generation as speakers and managers of bilingual language resources, attempting to hold a knowledge of dialect despite structural pressures, and at the same time preparing their children to succeed in a Mandarin-speaking world (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

The mothers and father in the two transcripts above show a pragmatic and strategic management of bilingual language resources, switching flexibly between Ningbo and Mandarin to serve different communicative or cultural purposes. As educators and professionals, they stress the importance of the local dialect for cultural identity and heritage, and encourage their children to learn and use Ningbo, while also acknowledging the reality of Mandarin's centrality in formal education and in wider society. Again, these choices reflect the position of the middle generation as gatekeepers of language, attempting to hold a knowledge of dialect despite structural pressures, and at the same time preparing their children to succeed in a Mandarin-speaking world (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

Such patterned switching aligns with interactional accommodation mechanisms: middle-generation speakers adjust code choice to satisfy competing relational expectations—upward to elders (solidarity), downward to children (pedagogical guidance), and outward to society (mobility pressure). This strategic code distribution shows how the middle generation operationalizes domain-specific functional allocation as a mechanism to maintain the dialect while conforming to dominant linguistic hierarchies.

4.3 Dialect Weakening, Mixing, and Re-Creation among the Youth Generation

Among the four generations, the smallest and most likely to be comprised of teenagers and adolescents, are evident signs of dialect weakening accompanied by creative language mixing and re-creation. Their linguistic behaviour shows not only reduced fluency but also differentiated forms of dialect innovation,

which emerge across semantic, pragmatic and media-based dimensions. As shown in Transcripts 1, 2 and 3, this group generally uses Mandarin in most communicative practices except for parent–child communication and family gatherings, but uses dialect selectively and with less fluency in certain circumstances. This generation tends to display affective ambivalence towards the dialect, which is both distanced from and occasionally longed for.

Transcript 1 shows grandson speaking to his grandmother in Mandarin about his school exam, saying "我们高三要模考，老师说不能请假" ("We have mock exams in senior year, the teacher said no leave allowed") in most cases, this generation uses Mandarin in most communicative practices, especially in institutional settings and in relation to education, but uses dialect selectively and with less fluency in certain circumstances. His performance is accompanied by a sense of affective ambivalence, suggesting he is distanced not only from traditional language practices, but also from the values ascribed to them. His speech is described as "生硬" (stiff), indicating incomplete acquisition and lack of comfort with the dialect. His whispered aside, "反正去了也是玩手机" ("Anyway, if I go, I'll just play with my phone") shows disengagement not only from traditional language practices, but also from the cultural values ascribed to them. In Transcript 3, an adolescent girl replies to her grandfather's dialect explanation of a math concept with "反正考试又不考宁波话……" ("Anyway, the exam doesn't test Ningbo dialect…") showing that the dialect is marginalized in formal teaching, and the overall trend is a shift in perceived language utility (Fishman, 1991; Zhang, 2016). These instances show that the youth neither fully reject nor fully master the dialect; instead, they selectively mobilize dialect items as stylistic markers, reflecting contemporary hybrid repertoires.

Although there is a decline in fluency and domain relevance, this does not mean that the dialect is simply abandoned. This generation uses dialect creatively by mixing dialect features with Mandarin and digital slang to create new linguistic repertoires. Three observable types of innovation emerge: (a) Semantic innovation, such as weakening the traditional dialect word "戆大" (silly) into a light, teasing expression used among peers; (b) Pragmatic innovation, where dialect items are used as "discourse fillers" on social media to create humor or intimacy—for example, the frequent comment "伲宁波伢懂的" ("Only Ningbo kids get it") in short-video platforms; (c) Media-based innovation, such as embedding Ningbo dialect memes in stickers, short videos, and bullet comments, where expressions like "阿拉来哉" ("We're coming") are transformed into viral online templates. This become flexible identity markers that allow youth to simultaneously signal local roots and a modern, tech-savvy image (García & Wei, 2014; Li & Zhu, 2021). Such media-embedded innovations provide concrete evidence that dialect is being refunctionalized rather than passively eroded. The dialect is thus positioned as "authentically local" or "irrelevant" depending on the social setting.

From the above transcripts, we can find some clear signs of dialect weakening and mixing. The youth are trying to negotiate their local identity with the demands of a globalized society. Faced with school and exam pressures, as well as Mandarin used by their peers, they reply in Mandarin. However, there are occasions when they would like to use the Ningbo dialect, although it is limited and hesitant. This one-

dimensional use of the dialect shows that it is a process of re-creation for the youth: they pick some Ningbo dialect and Mandarin to re-create the use of Ningbo dialect. With these two components, the re-created Ningbo dialect shows different kinds of language practices. Facing the pragmatic use of Ningbo dialect as a tool for education and social advancement, against a strong insistence of elders to maintain the use of dialect, the language repertoire of the youth is a result of pragmatism and tension.

This selective usage reveals a mechanism of symbolic refunctionalization: the dialect shifts from a communicative code to a stylistic or affective resource, repurposed for peer-group performance rather than daily communication. By specifying the semantic, pragmatic and media-based dimensions of this refunctionalization, the analysis highlights that dialect "innovation" among youth is patterned, observable, and grounded in concrete linguistic and media practices rather than a vague notion of creativity.

4.4 Transitioning Functions and Affective Attachments of the Ningbo Dialect across Three Generations.

The above analyses show that the shifts in the three generations' use of the Ningbo dialect correspond to changing social functions and affective meanings attached to the dialect. For the elder generation, the Ningbo dialect is still a primary medium of everyday communication and cultural transmission as well as a moral authority. Being embedded in their personal and family histories, people's emotional attachments to the dialect are tied to local identity, family traditions, and regional belonging (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011).

For the middle generation, they use the Ningbo dialect in a more instrumental and strategic way. Although some of them also exhibit strong emotional attachments to the dialect, their use of the dialect is closely tied to the need to speak Standard Chinese for their children's Mandarin education and future social mobility. Their translanguaging practices of using the dialect and Standard Chinese according to social contexts help them to maintain ties with their families while gradually conforming to dominant linguistic norms. This makes them an ambivalent but active user of the dialect in limited spaces.

For the youth, the use of the Ningbo dialect becomes more episodic, symbolic, and performative. Different from a functional tool of communication, the Ningbo dialect is more likely to be used for stylistic effect, humour, or as a local identity token in specific peer or digital contexts. The emotional attachment to the dialect has been shaped by contemporary youth culture and new media practices. These contemporary forms of consumption and circulation of affect are reinterpreted and reshaped by young people (Li & Zhu, 2021). We can clearly see the above phenomena in the interactions of the grandmother and her grandson or the grandfather and his granddaughter in the video clips: the grandson does not care about the standard use of the Ningbo dialect; the granddaughter is annoyed by her grandfather's nostalgic phraseology. Therefore, language shift is not only linguistic, but also intertwined with values, identity negotiations, and social power (Fishman, 1991).

Across generations, the changing vitality of Ningbo dialect can thus be explained through layered mechanisms: (a) symbolic indexing among elders, (b) resource reallocation among parents, and (c) hybrid repertoire construction among youth. These mechanisms jointly reveal how social forces reshape the dialect's functions, meanings, and survival trajectory.
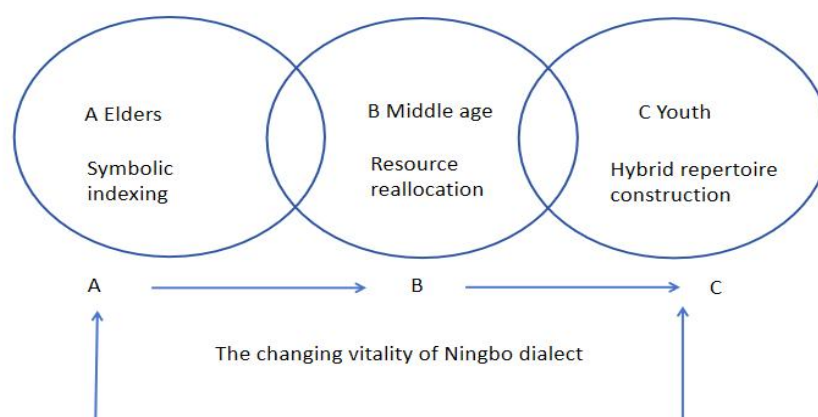
Figure 1 The Intergenerational Evolution Mechanism of Ningbo Dialect
（图 1 宁波方言的代际演化机制）

5. Language Identity Reconstruction from the Perspective of Translanguaging

5.1 Translanguaging Phenomena in Family Language Domains

The use of translanguaging, i.e., the ad-hoc and purposeful use of multiple language varieties in interaction, is particularly salient in the family domain of Ningbo dialect speakers. In close kin relationships, family members serve as an ideal context to examine how cross-linguistic mediation affects language ideologies and personal identities. Translanguaging is best understood as a normalized mode of linguistic practice that reveals underlying sociolinguistic realities in multilingual families.

Ningbo dialect family transcripts exhibit regular language switching between Ningbo dialect and Mandarin. Translanguaging serves to negotiate both multiple languages and interpersonal relationships. This bilingual coordination seems to be an intentional strategy to accommodate for differential language proficiencies while positioning dialect as a marker of family solidarity and cultural identity (García & Wei, 2014). What makes these translanguaging practices distinctive is their intergenerational mediating function—they not only reflect linguistic accommodation but also perform ideological negotiation between tradition and modernity. In other words, translanguaging in Ningbo families is not random code-switching but a patterned and culturally embedded strategy for maintaining dialectal presence within Mandarin-dominant interactions.

In addition to code-switching, translanguaging can also be viewed as a relational tool to bridge gaps between family members as well as broader linguistic and social contexts. The mother's language switch does double identity work: on the one hand, it tries to anchor her son in family traditions; on the other, it also subtly conveys to the son that grandma's school is a formal institution that speaks standard Mandarin. Across generations, this dialogic language use reveals the following ideological stance: first, the grandma's use of Ningbo dialect is to assert cultural transmission; second, the mother's bilingualism is to negotiate between tradition and modernity; third, the son's preference for speaking Mandarin is a reflection of external societal forces (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). All these patterns reveal how translanguaging is used as an adaptive mechanism to address the changing sociolinguistic ecology of multilingual families.

5.2 Embedding Dialectal Elements by Ningbo Youth

Although Mandarin remains the official language of education and government, Ningbo youth find ways to resist total dialect loss by embedding dialectal elements into their mostly Mandarin speech, thus reconstructing Ningbo identity. As shown in the transcripts, even the youngest generation of speakers might have "weak" dialect competence, but they will judiciously select some dialect words or phrases or prosodic features and use them in their informal conversations with family members in their home setting.

The above selective and strategic embedding of dialectal features supports the translanguaging perspective that language is no longer a fixed repertoire but a flexible resource pool that speakers use to construct identity in situated contexts (García & Wei, 2014). Speakers often construct a hybrid repertoire with dialectal, Mandarin, and digital/Internet slang resources to create a type of "third space" that reflects tradition and modernity (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). This flexible and creative language practice is distinctive because it demonstrates how youth reconstruct the dialect symbolically even without full fluency, transforming potential language decline into innovative hybridization.

Therefore, these translanguaging behaviors suggest that Ningbo dialect is not disappearing from everyday use, but rather evolving into a new linguistic form—one that coexists dynamically with Mandarin through selective appropriation and stylistic creativity.

5.3 Dialect as a Cultural Resource and Expression of Identity

Using Ningbo dialect is not only for expressing respect to tradition but also for serving as a cultural resource of belonging to Ningbo as home. This demonstrates how language acts as a vessel carrying the social and moral codes of a community across generations. Moreover, the dialect reinforces intergenerational bonds, allowing elders to transmit local wisdom and life experiences in a way that Mandarin often cannot convey. By choosing to speak in Ningbo dialect, individuals actively situate themselves within a historical and cultural continuum, asserting both personal and collective identity.

Distinctively, such practices show that dialect use in Ningbo families functions as cultural retention through everyday translanguaging rather than through formal preservation efforts. The dialect remains embedded in interactional routines, proverbs, and humor, sustaining its vitality as an identity resource.

Beyond the symbolic use, Ningbo dialect carries cultural embedded lexicon and pragmatic expressions which are hard to be expressed in Mandarin. For instance, the grandfather uses "三尺四股" to explain the Pythagorean theorem to his grandson (Transcript 3). This study shows how the dialect carries localized knowledge and context-specific meanings (Zhang, 2016). Such expressions often encode historical practices, folklore, and practical knowledge that are intimately tied to the Ningbo environment and lifestyle. These embodied and context-bound uses demonstrate that dialect vitality persists through situated knowledge transfer, even as broader societal forces promote Mandarinization.

5.4 Impact of "De-Purification" Language Ideology on Intergenerational Language Identity

The concept of "de-purification" or "destandardization" of language (i.e. the idea of language as not fixed, bounded and monolithic), increasingly shapes Ningbo speakers' particularly youth's language identity (García & Wei, 2014). That is, language is perceived as fluid and hybrid rather than "pure" dialect language

or "standard" Mandarin. This "de-purified" language ideology frees youth from clinging to an "exclusivist" linguistic identity of "pure" dialect or "standard" language use and facilitates them to accept mixed repertoires as authentic identities (Li & Zhu, 2021).

These pragmatic uses of dialect in the face of academic dilemma and peers' relationship show the dynamic negotiation process of language attitude. That is, younger speakers acknowledge the need to show respect for "tradition" in their language use but they also face communicative challenges in modern life. Their pragmatic choices reflect the sociocultural contexts. This 'post-pure' stance is distinctive in that it positions translanguaging as a sustainable model of dialect survival rather than decay. Instead of viewing dialect loss as inevitable, Ningbo youth reinterpret hybridity as authenticity. Dynamic views accommodate the hybrid and creative uses of language varieties and ongoing sociocultural context (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

Consequently, Ningbo dialect persists not as an isolated linguistic system but as a living, adaptive resource within multilingual repertoires. Its survival lies in transformation, not preservation—a finding that distinguishes this study's translanguaging perspective from traditional language maintenance frameworks.

The impact on intergenerational language identity is significant: while elders see dialect erosion as cultural loss, youth can construct their identity that is simultaneously local and cosmopolitan. It is mediated through translanguaging. It reflects the societal differences in terms of language, modernity and cultural identity in contemporary China.

6. Social Mechanisms and Challenges in the Intergenerational Evolution of Ningbo Dialect

6.1 The impact of educational policy and language ideology

Among speakers from Ningbo, school is clearly the strongest force that promotes the use of Standard Chinese. Consequently, students gradually prioritize Mandarin for academic and social purposes, which can lead to a weakening of their everyday dialect skills over time. Parents living under such sociolinguistic circumstances might be consciously or implicitly discouraging the transmission of their dialect and encouraging their children to acquire Standard Chinese, which is also shown in the observed bilingual parental mediation patterns. However, despite the structural disadvantages of dialect, it remains an important symbol of cultural identity for older generations. This intergenerational tension likely plays a major role in facilitating dialect change among urban Chinese populations (Li & Zhu, 2021; Zhang, 2016).

What is distinctive about the translanguaging practices in educationally constrained Ningbo families is that they embody a form of "resilient bilingualism." Even within a Mandarin-dominant school environment, parents and students continuously shuttle between dialect and Mandarin in family talk, using Ningbo expressions for emotional closeness and Mandarin for institutional alignment. This coexistence demonstrates that rather than being replaced, the dialect is being repositioned as a complementary linguistic resource. Thus, these practices suggest that the Ningbo dialect is not vanishing but transforming — surviving through functional diversification rather than total displacement.

6.2 Media Contexts and Digital Communication Reshaping Dialect Use

The proliferation of digital media and new communication technologies have created new battlefields where language use practices are renegotiated and Ningbo dialect use is newly influenced for better and worse.

When Ningbo youth group for using Ningbo dialect, they would rather play to the digital crowd, showing how online behavior can influence real world language use. At the same time, such online exchanges also preserve the dialect in an informal, playful context, showing that the dialect does live on in hybrid use among pervasive Mandarin. Distinctively, translanguaging in digital contexts demonstrates "networked dialect vitality." Ningbo youth embed dialectal expressions, emojis, and sound memes in their Mandarin-based chats or short videos, performing an online identity that is simultaneously local and modern. These creative recombinations show that the dialect has shifted from an exclusive communicative code to a symbolic and aesthetic resource. In this sense, digital translanguaging not only resists dialect extinction but redefines how Ningbo identity is enacted in virtual communities.

Therefore, while digitalization challenges traditional dialect use, it also provides novel affordances for its semiotic survival and symbolic capital in youth discourse. Ningbo dialect, instead of disappearing, is being remixed, stylized, and circulated across media ecologies.

6.3 Social Class, Gender, and Migration Background: What Structural Variability in Language Choice?

Transcripts show that language use and dialect transmission in Ningbo are not only influenced by top-down official policies and digital media but also by sociocultural structural forces at the macro level, including social class, gender, and migration background. These factors generate differentiated linguistic behaviors of individuals across social classes and communities. Social class exerts a decisive influence on language attitudes and linguistic resources. Generally, middle-class families are more geographically mobile with higher educational levels, and thus they emphasize Mandarin proficiency for educational and employment opportunities (Li & Zhu, 2021).

Compared to social class, gender exerts a more direct influence on dialect vitality because women are the main caregivers and socialization agents. That is, mothers and grandmothers play a significant role in language transmission. Mothers, however, face a dilemma when they see the cultural value of the dialect on one hand and that of Mandarin as a cultural capital and practical tool for communicating with middle-class people on the other. As a result, they might exhibit different attitudes and behaviors in the same family.

Migration also exerts a substantial influence on language use. With urbanization and economic development, a large population of internal migrants resides in Ningbo and uses Mandarin, which decreases the public visibility of the dialect. Conversely, Mandarin-dominant schools and peers in Ningbo native speakers who move out for education or work decrease their dialect competence over time. Overall, these structural forces generate stratified translanguaging behaviors. That is, elders construct dialect-rich repertoires because they are less exposed to Mandarin. The middle generation strategically uses both languages because they are exposed to both the dialect and Mandarin. Finally, youth build their repertoires based on school and peer influence and are also exposed to digital media. What is distinctive here is that

translanguaging reveals class- and gender-based differentiation in dialect vitality: working-class and female caregivers often serve as "dialect anchors," while middle-class bilinguals engage in strategic hybridity to balance identity and capital. These adaptive strategies across social groups constitute a dynamic ecology where Ningbo dialect continues to circulate, albeit in modified forms.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This research has examined intergenerational transmission of the Ningbo dialect through a translanguaging lens, revealing a more complex interplay of weakening and reconstruction processes. Given its evident decline in daily use (especially among young people), the Ningbo dialect is clearly being weakened by institutional language policies promoting Mandarin and changes in family language practices. However, this does not mean that the dialect is being lost altogether. Instead, it is being selectively used, adapted, and symbolically maintained in familial and communal use, rendering a nuanced picture of weakened language use. Family conversations reveal that grandparents have high dialect competence and consider it an integral part of being local and remembering home. The middle generation is caught between the utilitarian value of Mandarin and affection for the dialect, often employing strategic bilingualism to cater to both. In contrast, the youngest generation has low dialect fluency but engages in code-mixing and creative adaptation, reflecting a weakened rather than dead dialect use. These translanguaging practices are distinctive because they reveal how Ningbo speakers negotiate fluid identities across generations, treating language not as a static code but as an evolving resource that bridges emotional intimacy, cultural continuity, and modern communicative needs. Such dynamic hybridity demonstrates that the dialect is not on the verge of disappearing but transforming into a flexible identity marker sustained through daily bilingual interactions. Overall, these findings challenge the black-and-white picture of Ningbo dialect weakening and show that this is a complex, multidimensional language evolution process shaped by ongoing identity positioning and resourceful language use (García & Wei, 2014). Such complexity arises from sociocultural changes that are unfolding in modern urban China (Zhang, 2016).

This research has applied translanguaging theory to Chinese dialect studies, demonstrating its analytical value in describing nuanced language practices observed in multilingual and multidialectal use. Translanguaging weakens fixed language boundaries by positioning speakers as active agents who access their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning, position identity and function in social hierarchies (García & Wei, 2014; Li & Zhu, 2021). The distinctiveness of the Ningbo case lies in how speakers creatively embed dialectal forms within Mandarin discourse, using selective code-mixing as a deliberate identity performance rather than a sign of loss. By analysing Ningbo dialect use through a translanguaging lens, we can describe how speakers make use of dialect, Mandarin and other communication resources in their daily use, complicating the traditional binary of "dialect versus standard language". The strength of translanguaging also lies in positioning language ideologies, sociocultural environments and individual choices as forces that shape language practices and intergenerational transmission. Such everyday hybrid practices indicate that Ningbo dialect maintains vitality through transformation—its survival is ensured not by purity but by

flexibility, which distinguishes this case from dialects truly facing extinction. More importantly, this research has tried to localise translanguaging theory by placing it in the historical, social and policy context of Ningbo and the Yangtze River Delta. This has enabled a more culturally sensitive and nuanced description of language evolution in contemporary China and calls for more empirical research that bridges global theoretical perspectives with local language use.

Based on the above nuanced mechanisms of Ningbo dialect evolution, several applied implications can be drawn for language education, community transmission, and identity strengthening. Schools in Ningbo should include dialect awareness in language curricula and consider dialects as valuable cultural resources instead of linguistic barriers. By integrating local dialect history, literature, and oral traditions into language teaching programs along with Mandarin, educators can help students develop positive language attitudes and promote balanced bilingual abilities (Spolsky, 2009).

At the community level, intergenerational communication plays an important role. Dialect storytelling events, cultural festivals, and localized media productions can provide contextualized practice opportunities for using local dialects, which in turn can strengthen family and community bonds (Zhang, 2016). Furthermore, digital tools also provide effective means for revitalizing local dialects. Youth-oriented content such as social media challenges, short-form videos, podcasts, and dialect-based mobile apps can make learning local dialects more accessible and appealing to younger people (García & Wei, 2014). These digital translanguaging practices further illustrate that Ningbo dialect lives on as a hybrid communicative mode—expressed playfully, emotionally, and symbolically—ensuring its ongoing relevance in modern life. Such digital strategies should be accompanied by public campaigns to challenge dominant language ideologies that associate local dialects with negative social evaluations. By promoting local dialect use as a form of identity pride and cultural wealth, public campaigns and educational initiatives can help empower speakers of all ages to value and maintain their linguistic heritage.

Despite the insights provided by this study, there are still several limitations worth noting and exploring in future research. First, this research was conducted with a relatively small sample within Ningbo. The results may not be generalizable to other Wu dialect regions or the entire Chinese dialect area. Future studies should consider expanding the sample to include multiple regions for comparative analysis. Second, this study adopts a qualitative approach, which provides rich context-embedded information. However, future research should also collect larger-scale quantitative data to map more representative patterns of local dialect use and related sociolinguistic variables. Third, this study explores local dialect evolution primarily within the family context and local communities. Future research should also investigate local dialect evolution in institutional contexts such as schools, workplaces, and public spaces to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Finally, this study only tracks local dialect use practices within the same families or communities over time. Future research should adopt a longitudinal design to study local dialect evolution and identity reconstruction within the same families or communities over time. By capturing these evolving translanguaging patterns longitudinally, future research can more clearly reveal how Ningbo dialect persists through adaptive transformation rather than decline.

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