The sociolinguistics of rhotacization in the Beijing speech community
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Chapter 4   Sociolinguistic Survey

4.1   Introduction

In sociolinguistic research, language attitude is considered to be an important factor in language choices, variation, and change (Garrett, 2010; Garrett et al., 2003; Labov, 1984; Smakman, 2018). The present chapter seeks to reveal the lay viewpoints of and attitudes towards the use and users of rhotacization, as well as the use of Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese and their users, in the Beijing speech community. As mentioned in Chapter 2, rhotacization in Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese, as well as Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese more generally, share many characteristics, while not being entirely the same. While Beijing Mandarin (BM), the regional dialect of Beijing, is the pronunciation model for Standard Chinese (SC), one of the biggest differences between them is that rhotacization in SC is strictly limited (Duanmu, 2007; B. Huang & Liao, 2017; Y.-H. Lin, 2007a). In the view of lay people, BM is sometimes still regarded as SC itself and Beijing natives are considered to speak "correct" SC (Dong, 2009, 2010), but little research has been conducted on the general public's actual perception of the differences between BM and SC and of rhotacization in the two varieties. Furthermore, when Beijing natives and (accented) Standard Chinese-speaking migrants are in contact in the Beijing speech community, the use and change of rhotacization and that of Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese more generally, as well as the attitudes towards them, are inevitably bound together.

Moreover, due to the nationwide promotion of SC and the status of SC education in compulsory school education, language use in China and people's accents are strongly impacted (Dong, 2009, 2010; S. Liang, 2015; Xu, 2019; M. Zhou, 2001). As a consequence, if Beijing native speakers speak a more standardized variety, they will probably produce fewer rhotacized words. This would allow us to gain insight into their language use and change by examining issues, such as the self-reported opinions about which Mandarin variety they use, as well as the self-perception of the authenticity of their own BM. This result can help explain changes in the nature and the use of rhotacization. Furthermore, migrants come to Beijing and make contact with both Beijing natives and other migrants in the Beijing speech community. Their attitude towards SC, BM, and rhotacization can influence their language behavior. As is well known, linguistic forms, varieties, or styles can influence the prestige of a language variety and the linguistic forms, varieties, and styles that people use can lead to assumptions about the status and other characteristics of these users (Garrett, 2010; Giles & Rakić, 2014; Labov, 1972a; Meyerhoff, 2011; Smakman, 2018). The use of Beijing Mandarin and rhotacization or manifesting an accent explicitly or not are probably issues that are relevant to the attitude towards the different varieties in the larger Beijing speech community. The attitude of members of this community towards the different varieties spoken in Beijing and towards rhotacization more particularly constitute the focus of this chapter.

The investigation into language attitudes reported in the current chapter mainly focuses on the following questions:

1) What are the lay viewpoints of the differences between Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese? Which Mandarin variety do Beijing respondents themselves report that they use?
2) What is the respondents' opinion towards the imitation of Beijing Mandarin and rhotacization by migrants?
3) Are there any advantages and disadvantages to speaking Beijing Mandarin?

This chapter is structured as follows. The method is described in detail in Section 4.2. In Section 4.3.1, the results of Beijing native respondents are presented, while those of migrant respondents are presented in Section 4.3.2. Section 4.4 concludes the chapter.

4.2   Method

Survey questions

The sociolinguistic survey was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews between the interviewer and the respondents. The interviewer simply asked respondents questions directly about their language attitude, perception, preference, and so forth. Such a "direct approach," together with word-of-mouth techniques, was applied in this survey.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a relaxing and unrestrained way. Before the interview, the respondents were told that there were no standard answers to the questions, and they were encouraged to freely give their answers, as well as their comments and opinions relevant to topics. Like the pair talking session, they were not told the exact research objects of this survey.

As shown in Appendix C and D, some of the questions are closed-ended questions,[11] which means respondents were presented with a limited number of simple options, such as "yes," "no," or "no opinion." Some of the questions were open-ended, and respondents could give their opinions and thoughts freely. The interviewers only interrupted them "inadvertently" by asking a question if the respondent wandered off onto other topics. The interviewers could also ask for clarification and ask follow-up questions. In addition, respondents sometimes talked about topics that were lower on the question list, as a result of which the interviewers needed to adjust the order of the questions, as well as the way they were asked.

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[11] A closed-ended question in a survey is a question that provides respondents with a fixed number of pre-defined and usually simple options to choose from as a response. An open-ended question is defined as a question type that respondents can answer in detail, elaborating on their opinions.

The focus of this survey study is to examine the respondents' attitude towards Beijing Mandarin, Standard Chinese, and the use of rhotacization by migrants. Opinions on the use of Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese were also involved. As can be seen in Appendices C and D, the surveys mainly involve five aspects, namely a) personal information, b) language background, c) language ability, d) language use, and e) language attitudes. The first four of these aspects are mainly aimed to obtain background information.

Depending on the dialect background of the respondents, two different versions of the sociolinguistic survey were used, as shown in Appendices C and D. One survey (Appendix C) was for Beijing native speakers, while the other (Appendix D) was intended for migrants. The questions in the two surveys are slightly different from each other, to align with the respondents' background as a local Beijinger or as a migrant (*Rhotic* or *Non-rhotic* dialect background). The two versions of the sociolinguistic survey were formatted and printed out on a sheet of A4 paper. The interviewers could refer to the questions on the printout in the interview.

Response categories and data process

As mentioned above, there were mainly two different types of questions in the interview: closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. For the closed-ended questions, the response categories were the limited options provided. Respondents could only choose one of the options as their answer. For the open-ended questions, no options were provided. Respondents could give their answers freely and openly, air their opinion, and talk more if they wanted to.

To be able to evaluate and compare the respondents' responses, they had to be grouped into measurable categories. The response categories were obtained by following the following steps:

a) We randomly chose the interviews with 36 respondents[12] as samples.
b) The author of this study listened to the interview recordings herself and grouped the answers to each question into different categories.
c) The author checked the categories she made with another four Ph.D. students in linguistics by listening to the interviews with the 36 respondents together, and the final response categories for each question were determined in the discussion with those four students.
d) As a final step, the author listened to the interviews with the remaining respondents and categorized their answers according to the categories that we established on the basis of the samples (see steps a–d at the

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[12] In this study, there are six Gender–Age groups per dialect background group and there are three dialect background groups. Thus, there are 18 Gender–Age groups in total. We randomly chose two respondents per Gender–Age group, resulting in 36 respondents as our sample.

beginning of this section). While listening to the recordings of the interviews, some of the spontaneous and emotional opinions relevant to topics were transcribed by the author.

Analysis

This research is primarily a qualitative study, combined with quantitative methods. There are mainly two types of attitude data in this research. Type I is the respondents' answers to the "language attitude" questions in the survey. Our focus is interpreting and analyzing these data. Type II is spontaneous and self-reported emotional attitudes from the respondents, triggered by the questions in the survey. It is used as complementary data, to supplement and support the analysis of the first type of data.

The number and percentage of responses to the categories of each question were calculated, and (stacked) bar charts were made using the ggplot2 (Wickham, 2016) package in R (R Core Team, 2020) to show the results of each question. Some representative excerpts were chosen and analyzed.

4.3   Results

4.3.1   Beijing native respondents

Differences between Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese

Beijing native respondents were asked about their opinions on the difference between Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese and their knowledge of the typical features of Beijing Mandarin. They indicated their opinions by answering two questions: "Do you think Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese are the same?" and "What do you think are the typical features of Beijing Mandarin?" The second question is an open-ended question and respondents could freely give their answers.

Q1. Do you think Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese are the same?

The respondents were presented with three options, YES, NO, OTHER, and NO OPINION. The results are shown in Figure 4.1.
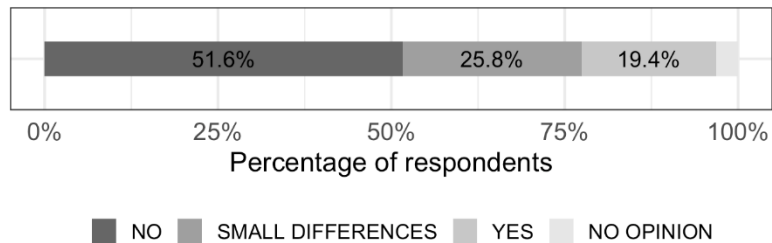
Figure 4.1 Response to the question (31 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

More than half of the respondents believed that Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese were different from each other (NO). About 26% chose OTHER, all of whom thought that there were only SMALL DIFFERENCES between the two. About 20% believed that the two were the same thing, while 3.2% had NO OPINION.

Q2. What do you think are the typical features of Beijing Mandarin?

The respondents were allowed to name one or more features of Beijing Mandarin. Their answers were grouped into six categories, namely, RHOTACIZATION, DIALECT VOCABULARY, FAST SPEECH, SWALLOWING SOUNDS & SLURRING, TONE & INTONATION, and NO OPINION. The results are shown in Figure 4.2.
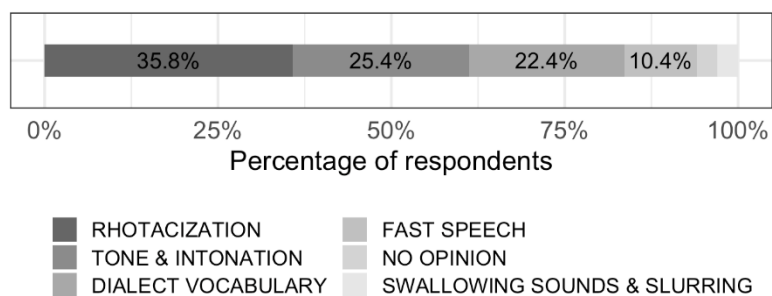

Figure 4.2 Response to the question (67 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

More than one third of the respondents reported that RHOTACIZATION is the typical feature of Beijing Mandarin which is the most reported feature. TONE & INTONATION (25.4%), DIALECT VOCABULARY (22.4%), FAST SPEECH (10.4%), and SWALLOWING SOUNDS & SLURRING (3.2%) were also believed to be typical. 3.2% of the respondents did not have an opinion (NO OPINION).

Variety being used

Beijing native respondents were asked to report their opinion on Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese used in the Beijing speech community and the authenticity of their Beijing Mandarin. Both questions are close-ended questions.

Q1. Which Mandarin variety do you think you usually speak: Beijing Mandarin, Standard Chinese, or something else?

The respondents were presented with three options, BEIJING MANDARIN, STANDARD CHINESE, and OTHER. The respondents could only select one option from the three. The responses to this question are in Figure 4.3. Respondents needed to clarify what the variety was if they chose OTHER. It turned out that the clarifications of OTHER came down to the same thing: 'I think I speak Standard Chinese, but it is Beijing-flavored'. Thus, in the figure, we replaced the response category OTHER with BEIJING-FLAVORED STANDARD CHINESE.
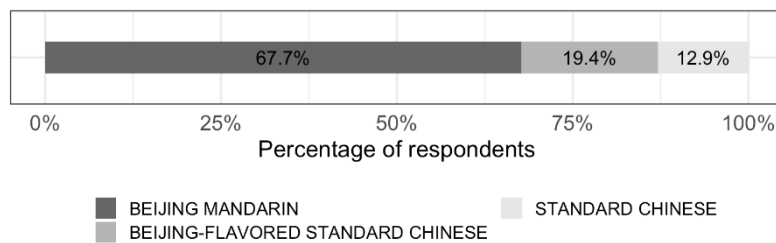

Figure 4.3 Response to the question (31 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

About two-thirds of the respondents believed that they spoke BEIJING MANDARIN. Almost 20% chose STANDARD CHINESE and about 13% specified that they spoke BEIJING-FLAVORED STANDARD CHINESE.

Q2. How authentic is your Beijing Mandarin compared to that of old Beijing native speakers?

The respondents self-evaluated the authenticity of their own Beijing Mandarin by answering this question. Four options were defined for the respondents to choose from: AS AUTHENTIC, SIMILAR,[13] NOT AS AUTHENTIC, and NO OPINION. The respondents gave one response only. Figure 4.4 shows the results.

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[13] The response category SIMILAR is an authenticity category between AS AUTHENTIC and NOT AS AUTHENTIC. For example, a respondent said: "I speak
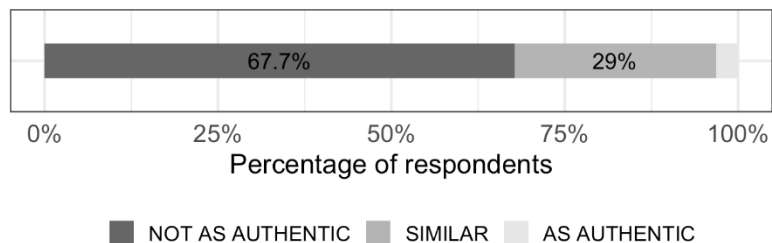
Figure 4.4 Response to the question (31 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

About 68% of the respondents believed that their Beijing Mandarin was NOT AS AUTHENTIC as that of the old Beijing native speakers. About 30% thought that their Beijing Mandarin was SIMILAR to that of the old native speakers, and only 3.2% of the respondents believed that they could speak AS AUTHENTIC a Beijing Mandarin as the old native speakers.

The two extracts below come from two native respondents' extra comments after they were asked about the four questions above.

> Extract 1: Respondent M33, Beijing native, male, young.
> **M33:** ...I spoke Beijing Mandarin before. I was not aware of it until when I was just in college. (My) classmates said that my Beijing accent was very strong. Since then, I spoke Standard Chinese, and the Beijing flavor I had became weaker.

> Extract 2: Respondent M29, Beijing native, male, young.
> **M29:** ...When I need this (Beijing) identity, I switch (to Beijing Mandarin). When talking to Beijingers, I emphasize my accent a little bit deliberately... like, rhotacization, intonation, etc... When taking a taxi, the driver might be friendly to locals, and he would not rip locals off. So, I show I have a stronger Beijing flavor than him, he can't fool me. So, when I need to let people know that I'm from Beijing, I just talk like that, but when I need to hide it, I hide it.

Respondent M33's response indicated that he was not aware that BM and SC were different until he had contact with non-native students and got comments from them on his accent. After having become aware of his accent, this respondent consciously avoided the Beijing flavor in his speech and chose to speak SC. It is not known when Respondent M29 found out that BM and SC were different, but in our fieldwork, he showed that he was very aware of the characteristic features of BM. As is clear from the quotation, he is aware of the

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in a way similar to the local old people, but there are some small differences. Like some words, I don't use them anymore, but I can understand them."

differences between BM and SC and he uses either the one or the other, depending on which variety suits him best at that particular time.

All in all, the answer provided by the Beijing native respondents to the four questions in 'Differences between BM and SC' and 'Variety being used', as well as in the excerpts provided, show that BM and SC were perceived to be different from each other and among others, rhotacization in BM was taken as its most typical feature. In addition, most native respondents reported that they no longer spoke as authentic BM as the old generation.

Migrants' imitation of Beijing Mandarin and rhotacization

Beijing native respondents were asked about their perception of migrants' imitation of BM and rhotacization and their attitudes towards the imitation. There are four sub-questions in this topic.

Q1. Did you notice that some migrants imitate Beijing Mandarin?

The native respondents were asked if they noticed migrants' imitation of Beijing Mandarin in the past. They could choose from three categories, YES, NO, and NO OPINION.
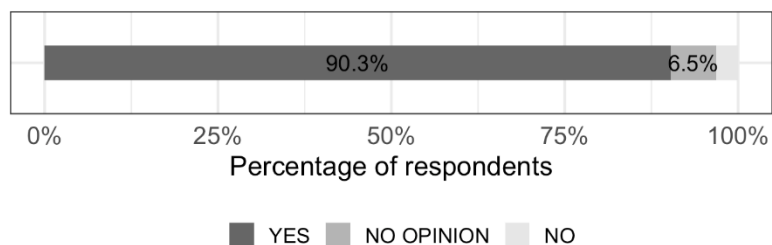

Figure 4.5 Response to the question (31 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

About 90% of the respondents reported that they noticed that migrants imitate Beijing Mandarin (YES). 6.5% of the respondents did not have an opinion (NO OPINION). Just about 3% of the respondent did not notice or hear the imitation by migrants (NO).

Q2. In what ways did they imitate Beijing Mandarin?

If the answer to Q1 was YES, respondents were asked to provide extra information about migrants' imitation strategies by answering this question. This was also an open-ended question, and respondents could indicate one or

more ways of imitating that they have perceived. Their answers to this question were grouped into five categories, namely, RHOTACIZATION, DIALECT VOCABULARY, TONE & INTONATION, NO OPINION, and NO IMITATION. The results are in Figure 4.6.
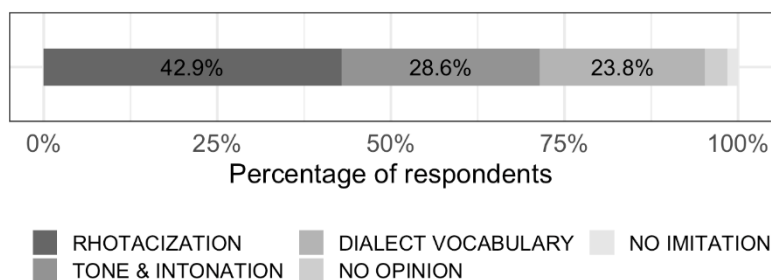

Figure 4.6 Response to the question [63 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents]

Almost 43% of the respondents reported that migrants noticeably imitated RHOTACIZATION in Beijing Mandarin. The second and third are TONE & INTONATION (about 30%) and DIALECT VOCABULARY (about 24%). The other respondent(s) reported either NO IMITATION or had NO OPINION (about 5% in total).

Above all, the results of the two questions show that most native respondents have noticed that migrants speak some Beijing-flavored Mandarin and that they frequently adopt rhotacization in their speech. Compared to other features in Beijing Mandarin, rhotacization imitation is probably more frequent and perceptually very salient. This may be because migrants may not produce sufficiently authentic rhotacizations, which may make them more easily noticed. Subsequently, native respondents were asked about their perception of what those imitated rhotacization sounded like and their attitudes towards the imitation.

Q3. What does the imitated rhotacization sound like?

This is an open-ended question, and respondents could give multiple answers. Their answers were grouped into six categories, namely, UNNATURAL, AWKWARD & STIFF, NOT LIKE, FUNNY, OTHER, NO OPINION, and NO R-IMITATION. The responses to this question are in Figure 4.7.
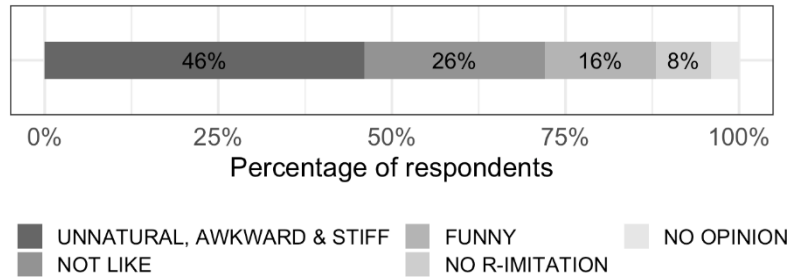
Figure 4.7 Response to the question (50 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

Almost half of the respondents reported that the migrants' rhotacization sounded UNNATURAL, AWKWARD & STIFF. About a quarter of the respondents reported it NOT LIKE, and about 16% said that it sounded FUNNY. 8% did not notice the rhotacization imitation (NO R-IMITATION), and the rest had NO OPINION.

It is obvious that if an imitated rhotacization sounds UNNATURAL, AWKWARD & STIFF, it is also NOT LIKE. However, the latter sounds neutral while the former sounds like a quite negative comment. Also, respondents especially emphasized the former.

Q4. What is your attitude towards the adoption of rhotacization by migrants?

Respondents were asked whether they hold a POSITIVE, NEUTRAL, or NEGATIVE attitude towards the migrants' imitation of rhotacization, while NO OPINION was an additional option. They were only allowed to choose one option. The results are in Figure 4.8.
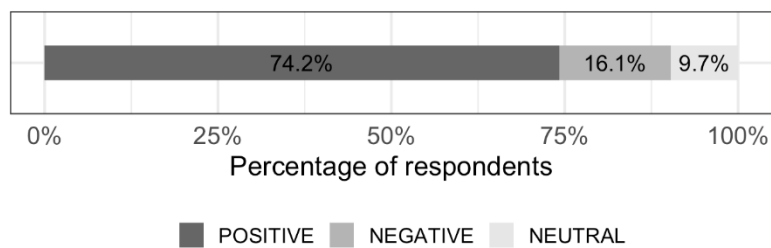

Figure 4.8 Response to the question (31 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

All respondents reported their general attitude towards the adoption of rhotacization in Beijing Mandarin by migrants. About three-quarters indicated that they had a POSITIVE attitude. About 16% did not support the adoption of

rhotacization (NEGATIVE), while about 10% were NEUTRAL towards it. None of the respondents chose the response category NO OPINION.

Here are two excerpts from two Beijing native respondents' extra comments after they were asked the questions about migrants' imitation of rhotacization and their attitudes towards it.

Extract 3: Respondent M37, Beijing native, male, young.
M37: ...it sounds far-fetched to add *r* to words. Sometimes there is a strict distinction between words with *r* and without *r*. Rhotacization is a very natural thing, but they say it deliberately, especially southerners. ...no need to learn Beijing Mandarin. Some migrants think that it's very important for them to learn Beijing Mandarin and acquire a Beijing identity. Actually, I don't think it's necessary.

Extract 4: Respondent F7, Beijing native, female, middle.
F7: ... some people think they are Beijingers after some years in Beijing. ...we can tell if the rhotacization is spoken by migrants or by native Beijingers. Their imitation is not like native speakers' speech. Especially southerners sound quite funny. ... but I am very happy and welcome that they want to learn. Beijing is my home. You're a guest, and you want to learn our language. I'm very proud.

Both respondents gave negative comments concerning migrants' imitated rhotacization. According to them, they can easily recognize the non-native rhotacization, which sounds unnatural and farfetched and is used in the wrong words. They mentioned that southerners, who are migrants from Non-rhotic backgrounds, did especially badly. However, the two respondents had different attitudes towards the imitation of rhotacization by migrants. As a Beijinger, Respondent F7 took pride in it, while Respondent M37 thought it unnecessary because rhotacization is difficult to learn and having the accent would not bring them the Beijing identity anyway.

Above all, among all different means of imitating BM, the migrants' rhotacization imitation was reported to be the most noticeable, probably due to incomplete acquisition and the use of rhotacization in the wrong words. However, most respondents still thought it acceptable and had a positive attitude towards the imitation.

Advantages or disadvantages?

Q1. Do you think speaking Beijing Mandarin brings any advantages or disadvantages?

To answer this question, native respondents needed to choose whether Beijing Mandarin brought advantages (ADV.) or disadvantages (DISADV.) or brought no

advantages or disadvantages (NO ADV./DISADV.) to themselves. The NO OPINION category was also included. The results are in Figure 4.9.
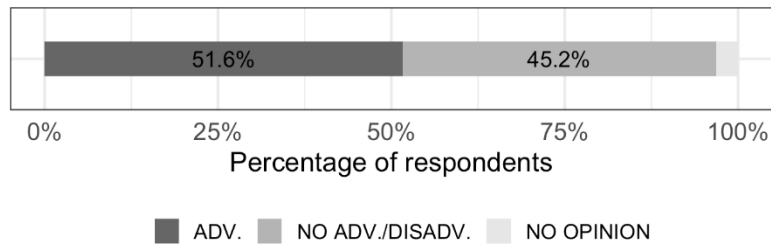

Figure 4.9 Response to the question (31 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

More than half of the respondents reported that they perceived that speaking Beijing Mandarin has at some point in time brought them advantages (ADV.). Almost half of the respondents believed that speaking Beijing Mandarin brought them no advantages or disadvantages (NO ADV./DISADV.). The rest had NO OPINION about this question. No respondent reported disadvantages (DISADV.) of speaking Beijing Mandarin.

It can be seen that the differences in the percentages of ADV. and NO ADV./DISADV. was small and that no respondent chose DISADV. However, when respondents supplemented their answers with their self-reported and emotional comments triggered by this question, a different story was told. The excerpts below come from four native respondents who chose the option NO ADV./DISADV.

> Extract 5: Respondent F31, Beijing native, female, young.
> **F31**: I don't think there are advantages. The characteristics of Beijing Mandarin are very similar to those of Beijingers, not being positive and upwards, but just muddling along, and doing so in the comfiest of ways.

> Extract 6: Respondent F1, Beijing native, female, old.
> **F1:** … We do admire migrants. You migrants work harder than Beijing kids. Beijing kids are quite lazy. However, some Beijingers hate and exclude migrants. Because … they put Beijingers under a lot of pressure.

> Extract 7: Respondent M15, Beijing native, male, middle.
> **M15:** No advantages or disadvantages. For quite a long time, I was reluctant to admit that I'm a Beijinger. Most people here are migrants, not Beijingers…. I was afraid that we would not be able to integrate into the group. … It's already great if we're not discriminated against. I don't think it's good to speak Beijing Mandarin anymore. I had that idea [i.e., that speaking BM is good] when I was in my 20s, but now in my 30s, I don't think so anymore.

Extract 8: Respondent M16, Beijing native, male, old.
M16: What advantages can Beijing Mandarin bring?! Beijingers are the least capable in this city, and all those who are capable are migrants.

It can be seen that neither the chosen option to the question or the extra comments directly indicated that speaking BM brought disadvantages to them. However, respondents intuitively connected BM or speaking BM with speakers' characteristics and capability and their social status. For instance, respondent F31 believed that BM carries the features of local Beijingers, such as enjoying being "comfy" and not being "upwardly mobile." Respondents F1 and M15 mentioned that migrants worked harder and were more capable, in contrast to "lazy" Beijingers. Respondent M15 used to feel good to speak BM but not anymore, due to the pressure from migrants. Though respondents did not explicitly declare disadvantages (DISADV.) of speaking BM, their supplemented comments showed that in their minds, speaking BM is not prestigious and brought them no advantages.

Q2. What are the advantages?

Respondents who chose ADV. to the question above were asked to clarify the advantages. This is an open-ended question, and respondents could also give further information regarding to this topic. Their answers were grouped into four categories, namely, EASIER TO COMMUNICATE, SENSE OF SUPERIORITY, OTHER, NO OPINION, and NO ADV./DISADV. The responses to this question are in Figure 4.10.
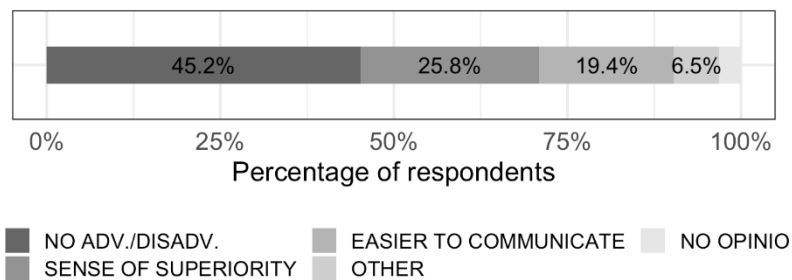

Figure 4.10 Response to the question (31 responses from 31 Beijing native respondents).

None of the respondents gave more than one response. Besides the 45.2% of the respondents who chose NO ADV./DISADV in the previous question and 3.2% who had NO OPINION, 25.8% reported that speaking BM gave them a SENSE OF SUPERIORITY, 19.4% reported that speaking BM made it EASIER TO COMMUNICATE with people, and 6.5% reported OTHER.

Below are excerpts from respondents' self-reported comments who reported SENSE OF SUPERIORITY and EASIER TO COMMUNICATE as their answer to this question.

Extract 9: Respondent F33, Beijing native, female, middle.
F33: My husband is a migrant. ... When we had parties with his old friends in his hometown, they recognized my speech immediately and then asked: "Is your wife a Beijinger?" They realize that I'm from Beijing, from the capital, not from some other place. I can feel that ... they think that's awesome. I do have a sense of superiority. ... I also feel pretty good being a Beijinger.

Extract 10: Respondent F15, Beijing native, female, middle.
F15: When I was serving in the army in Anhui, there were people from everywhere. They were not Beijingers. They had accents, but I didn't. They said, 'Wow, you're from Beijing, that's great!' Actually, outsiders really envy us Beijingers. That made me feel pretty good.

Extract 11: Respondent F16, Beijing native, female, middle.
F6: When we're on holiday in other places, people from everywhere can understand us, as long as they can speak SC.

It can be seen that the advantages of speaking BM reported by Beijing respondents were made mostly made manifest outside the Beijing speech community. Respondents F33 and F15 felt a SENSE OF SUPERIORITY when they had contact with non-Beijingers in a place other than Beijing. By reporting that speaking BM makes it EASIER TO COMMUNICATE, respondents mostly meant that due to the relatively small linguistic differences between BM and SC, they were intelligible and that they could easily understand other SC speakers.

4.3.2   Migrant respondents

Differences between Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese

Like Beijing native respondents, migrant respondents were also asked about their opinions about similarities/differences between Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese and the typical features of Beijing Mandarin. Both questions were open-ended.

Q1. Do you think Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese are the same?

The respondents' answers to this question can be grouped into four categories, YES, NO, SMALL DIFFERENCES, and NO OPINION. The results show in Figure 4.11.
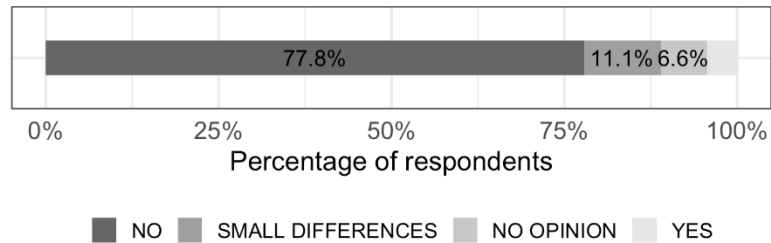
Figure 4.11 Response to the question (45 responses from 45 migrant respondents).

About 78% of migrant respondents believed that BM and SC were different from each other (NO). About 11.1% thought that there were only SMALL DIFFERENCES, and 6.6% had NO OPINION. 3.2% (who were from Non-rhotic dialect backgrounds) said that BM and SC are the same.

Q2. What do you think are the typical features of Beijing Mandarin?

Respondents were allowed to name one or more features of Beijing Mandarin. Their answers to this question were grouped into six categories, namely, RHOTACIZATION, DIALECT VOCABULARY, SWALLOWING SOUNDS & SLURRING, TONE & INTONATION, FAST SPEECH, OTHER, and NO OPINION. The results are shown in Figure 4.12.
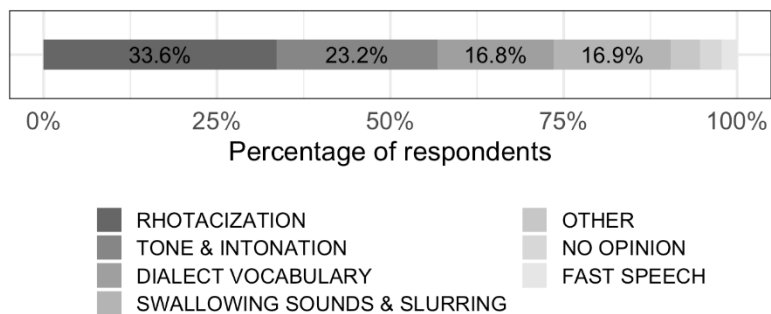

Figure 4.12 Response to the question (95 responses from 45 migrant respondents).

About a third of the respondents reported that RHOTACIZATION is the typical feature of BM. Features, like TONE & INTONATION (23.2%), DIALECT VOCABULARY (16.8%), SWALLOWING SOUNDS & SLURRING (16.9%), and FAST SPEECH (5%) were also believed to be typical. The rest reported OTHER features or did not have an opinion (NO OPINION).

The extract below is a migrant respondent's extra comment after she was asked what the typical features of BM are.

Extract 12: Respondent F6, rhotic speaker, female, young.
F6: …Rhotacization. … It seems to me that no word in Beijing Mandarin is not rhotacizable.

The comment of this respondent indicated that BM rhotacization is very salient in the perception of migrants. This comment may sound exaggerated—in actuality, not every word can be rhotacized—but in this way, the respondent showed that rhotacization in BM is used extensively.

Above all, most migrant respondents reported that BM and SC are different, and BM is characterized by its rhotacization.

Imitation of Beijing Mandarin and rhotacization

Q1. Did you adopt some Beijing Mandarin after you came to Beijing?

The respondents indicated whether they themselves imitated BM or not. They could choose one of three categories, YES, NO, and NO OPINION. The results are in Figure 4.13.
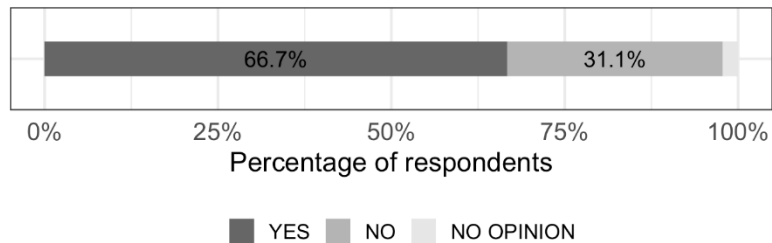

Figure 4.13 Response to the question (45 responses from 45 migrant respondents).

About 67% of the respondents reported that they noticed that they themselves imitated Beijing Mandarin (YES). About 31% did not notice or hear the imitation (NO). The rest did not have an opinion (NO OPINION).

Q2. Some people say that they rhotacize more words than before, and you?

As mentioned in Section 4.3.1, Beijing native respondents perceived different ways in which migrants imitate BM. Among them, imitation of rhotacization was reported to be the most salient way. Migrant respondents were asked if they

themselves imitated the rhotacization of BM. They were provided with three options: YES, NO, and NO OPINION. The results are presented in Figure 4.14.
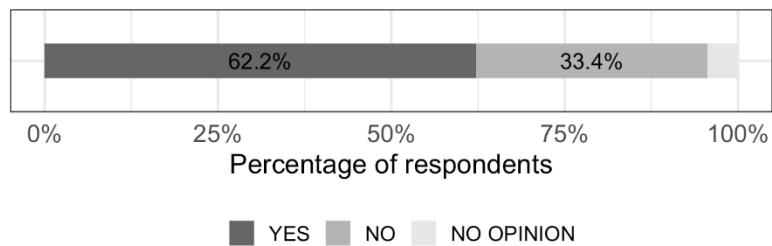

Figure 4.14 Response to the question (45 responses from 45 migrant respondents).

More than 60% of the respondents reported that they themselves rhotacized some words that they previously did not (YES). About 33% reported that they did not rhotacize more words in their speech (NO). The remaining respondents had NO OPINION.

Here are two excerpts obtained from the comments of two migrants after they were asked this survey question.

> Extract 13: Respondent F24, rhotic speaker, female, young.
> **F24:** 'Let's go to Xizhimenr!' sounds natural and smooth. In the beginning, rhotacization sounded annoying. However, after using it often, I feel the word is not natural, comfortable, and smooth until it is rhotacized. I use it when I feel it's smooth to use.

> Extract 14: Respondent M53, non-rhotic speaker, male, middle.
> **M53:** When I just started working, I wanted to imitate rhotacization. I practiced for quite a long time but found that I still couldn't get up to standard, then I gave up.

Both respondents reported that after they came to Beijing, they attempted to use (more) rhotacization. Respondent F24, a Rhotic speaker, had a negative perception of rhotacization in the beginning but then still used it more and found the rhotacized form of some words word "smoother." However, respondent M53, a Non-rhotic speaker, did endeavor to use it but gave up when he failed to master it.

Q3. How does the rhotacization by other migrants sound?

These respondents then indicated their opinions about the imitated rhotacization of other migrants. This is an open-ended question, and they could give more than one answer. Their answers were grouped into four categories,

namely, UNNATURAL, AWKWARD & STIFF, NOT LIKE, OTHER, and NO R-IMITATION. The responses to this question are presented in Figure 4.15.
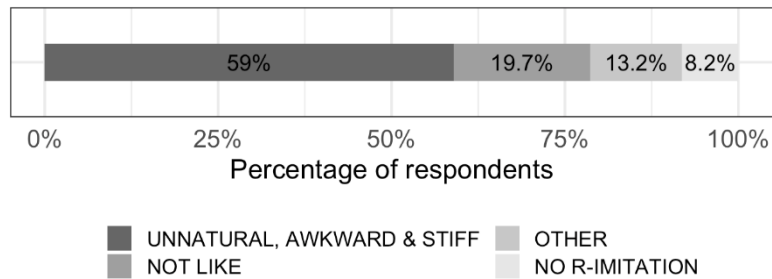

Figure 4.15 Response to the question [61 responses from 45 migrant respondents).

Almost 60% of the respondents reported that migrants' rhotacization usually sounds UNNATURAL, AWKWARD & STIFF. About 20% of the respondents felt it NOT LIKE and 13.2% named OTHER. 8.2% did not notice the rhotacization imitation (NO R-IMITATION).

Q4. What is your attitude towards the imitation of rhotacization by migrants?

Subsequently, respondents were asked whether they hold a POSITIVE, NEUTRAL, or NEGATIVE attitude towards migrants' imitation of rhotacization, and NO OPINION was another option. The results are in Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16 Response to the question (45 responses from 45 migrant respondents).

More than half of the respondents indicated that they had a NEUTRAL attitude. About 38% held a POSITIVE attitude towards the imitation. 8.8% had a NEGATIVE attitude and thus did not support the adoption. The remaining respondents had NO OPINION.

　　　The excerpts below were taken from the comments of three migrant respondents. They represent different attitudes towards rhotacization imitation.

Extract 15: Respondent F26, non-rhotic speaker, female, young.
F26: If you want to use some rhotacization, it's OK and it's natural, but don't use it too much. Otherwise, you sound pretentious. It feels like you're not being yourself.

Extract 16: Respondent M5, rhotic speaker, male, young.
M5: I think it's natural to be influenced by Beijing Mandarin, and I'm proud of the change...

Extract 17: Respondent F6, rhotic speaker, female, young.
F6: ... some people want to abandon their identity as a migrant. I don't think it's necessary. However, if their accent is naturally influenced by Beijingers, then it's fine. Like, you know, the Dongbei dialect can easily change people's accent.

The migrants' responses indicate that they held different opinions towards rhotacization imitation. Deliberately imitating Beijing Mandarin and changing their original accent was mostly not acceptable. However, if their accent was influenced naturally and unconsciously, then it was not taken as a problem.

Above all, the answers to the three questions above suggest that producing more rhotacization is a primary strategy for migrants to accommodate their speech, even though such rhotacization usually sounds UNNATURAL, AWKWARD & STIFF, and NOT LIKE. In addition, the majority of the migrants does not hold a negative attitude towards the rhotacization imitation.

Advantages and disadvantages?

Q1. Do you think speaking (some) Beijing Mandarin could bring any advantages or disadvantages to migrants?

The migrant respondents were asked if speaking (some) BM could bring any advantages (ADV.) or disadvantages (DISADV.) or bring no advantages or disadvantages (NO ADV./DISADV.) to a speaker. The NO OPINION category was also included. Respondents can only select one option of the four. The results are in Figure 4.17.
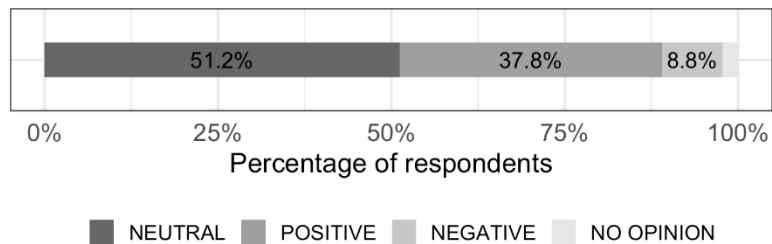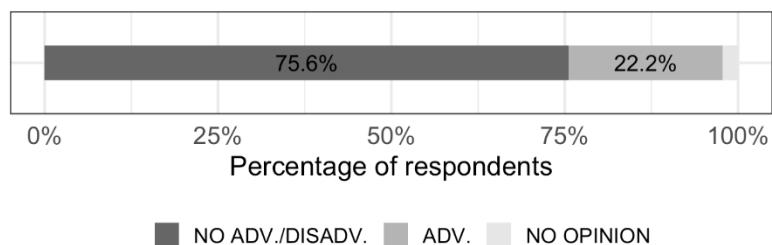
Figure 4.17 Response to the question (45 responses from 45 migrant respondents).

More than 75% of the respondents reported that speaking BM did not have any advantages or disadvantages (NO ADV./DISADV.). 22.2% of the respondents believed that speaking BM could bring advantages (ADV.), while 2.2% had NO OPINION about this question. No respondent reported there were disadvantages (DISADV.).

The extracts below were obtained from the self-reported comments of migrant respondents whose answer to this question was NO ADV./DISADV.

Extract 18: Respondent M3, rhotic speaker, male, young.
M3: No advantages or disadvantages. Beijing Mandarin is nothing more than a regional dialect. Big deal!

Extract 19: Respondent M55, rhotic speaker, male, middle.
M55: Beijing Mandarin sounds imperial-related and inherently arrogant. It sounds uncomfortable to me. There are no advantages or disadvantages. … Beijingers usually deliberately bring out their Beijing accent... just to show their status as a Beijinger. We all think it smacks of showing off. However, in fact, how many Beijingers are really capable?! … They probably feel that they're superior. Although some of them are nice people, I still have an aversion towards them.

Extract 20: Respondent F49, rhotic speaker, female, middle.
F49: No, speaking proper Standard Chinese is just good. Real Beijingers will not deliberately reveal their Beijing accent. My former boss is also a Beijinger, but he doesn't speak in that way. He doesn't deliberately show off his advantages as a Beijinger. However, some Beijingers are constantly saying that they're Beijingers. That's very annoying. Those Beijingers who are either loafers or seniors, often show off that they are native Beijingers. That's very annoying.

Extract 21: Respondent F8, rhotic speaker, female, old.
F8: No, I think a person who speaks Beijing Mandarin is at a lower level, while a Standard Chinese speaker sounds educated.

The comments of the respondents indicated that they had emotional and negative attitudes towards Beijing Mandarin and Beijingers, though none of them directly selected the option DISADV. as their answer.

Q2. What are the advantages?

Respondents who selected advantages (ADV.) to the question above needed to clarify what exactly the advantages were. This is an open-ended question, and they could name more than one advantage if applicable. The 10 respondents gave 12 advantages in total, the content of which was diverse and could not be grouped into a small number of categories. We then made a table, as shown below (Table 4.1). There were two main categories: Linguistic and Non-linguistic reasons. The social factors Dialect background and Age of the respondents are also shown.

Table 4.1 Responses to the question, 'What are the advantages of speaking Beijing Mandarin?' (12 responses from 10 migrant respondents)[14].

Category	*Speaking BM helps one to*	*Dialect background*	*Age*
Linguistic	Follow Beijingers' speech rate	Rhotic	Young
	Be intelligible	Non-rhotic	Old
Non-linguistic	Have high social status Integrate into Beijing society Gain new identity	Rhotic	Young
	Dispel stereotyping	Rhotic	Young[15] Middle
	Find a job	Rhotic	Young
	Not be excluded	Rhotic	Young Middle
	Show good upbringing	Rhotic Non-rhotic	Young Old
	Gain self-confidence Prevent one from getting ripped off	Non-rhotic	Young
	Shorten distance with Beijingers	Rhotic Non-rhotic	Young Old

[14]The three items from Old Non-rhotic respondents in this table were all from a single Old Non-rhotic respondent.

[15]This Young Rhotic respondent is also the one naming the advantage "Shorten distance with Beijingers."

Among the ten migrants, eight have a Rhotic dialect background and only two have a Non-rhotic background. Seven migrants are young, one is of middle age, and one is old. Also, seven out of nine young Rhotic speakers in this study believed that speaking BM has advantages for migrants.[16] Among the twelve reported advantages, eight are non-linguistic and only two are linguistic. The excerpts below are comments from three young migrant respondents who believed that speaking BM could bring advantages.

> Extract 22: Respondent M4, rhotic speaker, male, young.
> **M4:** ...with it I can acquire the Beijing identity, and it helps me integrate into Beijing society and helps to shorten the distance with Beijingers.

> Extract 23: Respondent F24, rhotic speaker, female, young.
> **F24:** ...it can shorten the distance with people and can dispel stereotyping. If you can use rhotacization, locals will think you're friendly, and their attitudes [towards you] will be different.

> Extract 24: Respondent F38, rhotic speaker, female, young.
> **F38:** Beijing natives tend to accept locals more, [so] speaking Beijing Mandarin would be better. If I can talk BM, taxi drivers won't rip me off. I also feel that I become confident when I talk like them.

Respondents' answers show that, for migrants, especially those newly arrived young migrants, speaking BM could bring various non-linguistic advantages. However, the older migrants who have been in Beijing for many years did not report such advantages. Furthermore, migrants from Rhotic background tend to approve of BM more than those from a Non-rhotic background.

4.4   Summary

The present study looked at the attitude of Beijing natives and migrants towards Beijing Mandarin (BM) and Standard Chinese (SC) in general and towards rhotacization more in particular. We looked at three aspects.

The results of *Differences between Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese* showed that rhotacization in BM is quite salient in the perception of both Beijing natives and migrants, as most of them agreed that BM and SC are different and that, compared to SC, rhotacization is a typical feature of BM. Thus, the common man's view is essentially identical to that of the linguist. The results of *Varieties*

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[16] As introduced in Chapter 3, there are in total 17 non-native Young speakers in present study, of which nine are from Rhotic areas and eight from Non-rhotic areas. They came to Beijing in the past one to two years to study or work at the moment of our fieldwork.

being used by Beijing native respondents showed that their BM is not as authentic as that spoken by elderly locals, though they still claim to speak BM.

The results of *Imitation of Beijing Mandarin and rhotacization* indicate that BM rhotacization imitation, among other ways to imitate speech, is salient in the perception of both Beijing natives and migrant respondents. Using more rhotacization is a primary method for migrants to accommodate their speech. In addition, most migrants hold a neutral or negative attitude towards rhotacization imitation of other migrants, while most Beijing natives have a positive attitude.

In *Advantages and disadvantages*, Beijing natives and migrants have mixed attitudes towards the advantages/disadvantages of speaking BM. They both reported linguistic and non-linguistic advantages of speaking BM. However, more than half of the respondents in the two groups reported that there are no advantages or disadvantages. However, in their explanatory comments, both groups made negative comments about the social status of Beijing natives, their incapability in work and life, and so forth. Thus, according to such comments, speaking BM could probably pose some disadvantages for the speakers.

Striking results

Interestingly, a majority of the young migrant respondents, especially those from Rhotic dialect background, believe that speaking some BM could bring them both linguistic and non-linguistic advantages, while almost all Middle and Old Rhotic and Non-rhotic migrants reported no advantages or disadvantages. As mentioned in Section 3.2, at the moment of our fieldwork these young Rhotic migrants had a one-to-two-year stay in Beijing. Compared to other migrants who had been living and working in Beijing for more than 10 years, that is quite a short period. As a result, the positive answers given by the young migrants can be related to the length of their time in Beijing, their knowledge of the city and its people, and their social status.

What is more, the acquired rhotacization by migrants is perceived as "unnatural, awkward & stiff, and not like" by both Beijing natives and migrant respondents. Adopting rhotacization is believed by both natives and migrants to be difficult, especially for southerners, whose rhotacization is often commented to be "funny" by Beijing native speakers. However, the general sentiment seems to be that it is not necessary to learn BM to be successful in the city.

Questions about acquiring BM and rhotacization and the advantages and disadvantages of speaking BM easily triggered emotions from Beijing and migrant respondents like. They all agree that migrants work very hard and manage to climb up the social ladder in Beijing, while local Beijingers tend to be "lazy," "resting on their laurels," and "muddling along." In any case, migrants are associated with upward social mobility. Importantly, some young Beijing native respondents, while being proud to be born and raised in the capital city, report that they switch between Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese, to hide their identity as Beijing natives if necessary or bring it out when it is advantageous.

The fact that there are circumstances under which it is wise to shy away from the local Beijing speech means that it is not in all respects a prestige variety.

In the following chapters we will see that the Beijing speech community as a whole is de-rhotacizing: we found that there were fewer tokens and fewer types of rhotacization in the speech of the younger Beijing natives than in older generations. In this chapter, we have discovered why that is the case. BM is not a prestige variety. Even in Beijing itself, newcomers don't see any advantage in acquiring it and only a subset of the native BM speakers think that speaking BM is advantageous. In short, this finding must be seen as an important factor in the reduction of the use of rhotacization in the Beijing speech community that is taking place, as we report in the following chapters.