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Home Language Maintenance Among Second Generation Chinese American Children

Home Language Maintenance Among Second-Generation Chinese American Children¹

Donghui Zhang

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This qualitative study investigated attitudes about home language maintenance among Chinese American children and their parents. Specific attention was given to exploring (1) the extent to which participants believe home language has been maintained by the Chinese children who are born in first-generation immigrant families, and (2) what factors they believe are involved in promoting the children's home language maintenance, especially how Chinese parents make efforts to pass on the home language to their second generation children. Data for this paper are drawn primarily from interviews with 18 Chinese immigrant families from Philadelphia conducted from September to December 2003. Analysis of the data indicates that with Chinese parents' strong commitment to home language maintenance, most second-generation Chinese children do maintain the home language to a certain degree, but they show preference for and shift to English in key social contexts from an early age.

Introduction

The United States is a linguistically and culturally diverse nation with immigrants, refugees, and temporary workers from different parts of the world who are constantly remaking the fabric of American society. In the process of such geographical relocations, language becomes the foremost issue that the linguistically different immigrants have to confront in coming to terms with their new surroundings (Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Research has documented that language competence and preference constitute the most important elements of a minority individual's acculturation in the host country (LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton 1993; Phinney 1990; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). On the one hand, the act of immigration places immigrants in a

¹This paper is part of a larger ethnographic project that the author is conducting for her dissertation research: "Home Language Maintenance and Acculturation Among Second-Generation Chinese American Children."

new environment that requires them to quickly learn a new language: that is, they sense the need for language shift. On the other hand, immigrants seek to maintain the language of their home because this language is one that gives them a sense of familiarity and self-worth: that is, they feel a desire for language maintenance. This study targets one of the most prominent, but largely neglected, post-1965 immigrant groups in the United States: Chinese immigrant families. It intends to examine their attitudes and perceptions surrounding home language maintenance in the English-dominant US society.

Language Maintenance and Language Shift

Mesthrie (1999: 42) defines language maintenance as "the continuing use of a language in the face of competition from a regionally and socially powerful or numerically stronger language." It is usually presented as the reverse side of language shift: that is, change from habitual use of one's minority language to that of a more dominant language under pressures of assimilation from the dominant group (Fishman 1966; Hornberger 2002). Overall, past research has consistently shown that language shift is a much more common phenomenon among immigrant children than language maintenance (Fishman 1966; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Fishman (1966) and Veltman (1983) describe the structure of linguistic shift as a three-generation process. That is, the first generation learns as much English as it can but speaks the mother tongue at home; the second generation may speak the mother tongue at home but shifts to unaccented English at school and in the workplace; by the third generation, English becomes the home language, and effective knowledge of the parental tongue disappears.

Portes and Hao's (1998) analysis of longitudinal data on 5,266 second-generation immigrant children in the school systems of Miami-Fort Lauderdale and San Diego in 1992-1993 further shows that although the vast majority of the new second generation had at least some knowledge of their home language, a majority of children from every language group already preferred English at this early age and they all had a superior command of English relative to their parents' language. As a result, Portes and Hao (1998: 269), citing Lieberman, Dalto, and Johnston (1975), poignantly pointed out that "the United States is a veritable cemetery of foreign languages, in that knowledge of mother tongues of hundreds of immigrant groups has rarely lasted past the third generation. In no other country has the process of language assimilation and the shift to monolingualism been so swift."

Such widespread language shift continues to take place in spite of research findings over the past 40 years concerning the positive effects of home language maintenance and bilingualism. Research has consistently demonstrated linguistic, cognitive and psychological advantages of

bilingualism over monolingualism (Cummins 1978; Diaz 1985; Hakuta 1986; Peal & Lambert 1962). This beneficial association for individuals is coupled with the increasing demand for language skills in the labor market. Portes and Stepick (1993), for example, documented that business leaders in Miami consistently complained about the lack of fluent bilinguals among the second-generation offspring of Latin American immigrants who could help the companies conduct business transactions in Spanish. These sentiments echo Ruiz's (1984) "language-as-resource" orientation, according to which the minority language is seen as a resource to be developed rather than a problem to be overcome. Failure to maintain home language among the second-generation children has also caused intergenerational conflicts and family tie disconnection between many monolingual English-speaking children and their first-generation immigrant parents (Hones & Cha 1999; McKay & Wong 2000; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Therefore, maintenance of children's first language (L1) in a second language (L2) environment and development of their bilingual skills have become an increasingly salient issue in immigrant families.

Facing the dilemma of language shift versus language maintenance, immigrant parents express diverse language attitudes and ideologies. Some parents urge their children to shift to English as quickly as possible in order to assimilate and succeed in the mainstream society, whereas other parents would like to take on the challenge of maintaining the home language in the next generation. These different language ideologies directly impact the second-generation children's language maintenance. Fishman (1991), for example, emphasized the connection between language ideologies and language maintenance/shift. He argued that reversing language shift requires reversing the resistant attitudes towards the threatened languages among both dominant language speakers and minority language speakers. In a study on Chinese Canadians, Young and Gardner (1990) also highlighted the role of language attitude in the development of minority language skills. The Chinese in the study who identified with Canadian culture thought that their Chinese language skills were weak so their desire to improve these skills was weak, too. However, participants who had a positive attitude toward their home culture and language were proficient in both Chinese and English or were eager to improve their skills in the Chinese language. These results suggest that language attitudes and beliefs affect eventual language maintenance and shift.

Although literature on language maintenance and language shift has been extensive, most of these studies focus on Spanish-speaking immigrants and the issues of Spanish language maintenance and bilingualism. To date, there has been little research directly dealing with the maintenance of the Chinese language in large Chinese communities in the United States. The paucity of research has to do with the status of

Chinese Americans as a new immigrant group. Although the first appearance of Chinese immigrants in the US dates back to the early 1840s (Zhou 1992), Chinese Americans have only recently (after 1965) emerged as a substantial minority group in terms of population size and political and economic status. Another factor might be attributed to the linguistic diversity among Chinese speakers. There are many different local dialects spoken by immigrants from different places in China such as Cantonese, Hakka, Fujianese, and Shanghainese. All these are mutually unintelligible and at the same time distinctly different from Mandarin (sometimes called "National Language"), the official Chinese language. Such multiple varieties make research on Chinese language maintenance a complicated task and prevent many researchers who are unfamiliar with the Chinese languages from undertaking such a venture. So despite the influx of newcomers from Asia, the contribution of Chinese languages to cultural and linguistic diversity in the US, and the fact that these languages are frequently spoken at home (McKay & Wong 2000), few research efforts have been focused on Chinese language maintenance. This lack of research is made especially striking in light of Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) disturbing finding about home language maintenance status across different immigrant groups: a greater percentage of Asian-origin children reported a poorer retention of their parents' languages than Latin American groups. "Mexicans are most prone to retain their parents' language as primary, second-generation Cubans and other Latinos are most prone to become fully bilingual, and second-generation Asians are most prone to shift to English monolingualism and lose their parents' language" (Portes & Rumbaut 2001: 281-282). The present study intends to close this gap by providing more in-depth knowledge of families' experiences with home language maintenance among second-generation Chinese children.

Research Methods

Preliminary Research

Before this project formally started, a preliminary study was done as part of the Asian household project with Dr. Grace Kao, Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, under the funding of the Population Aging Research Center (PARC). In this study 40 elderly Chinese immigrants were interviewed on their household composition, intergenerational relationships, and household language use. The interviews were conducted in Chinese by the author of this paper and later transcribed and translated by the same. The participants were all from the Greater Philadelphia area and their ages ranged from 48-93 years old. The findings from the preliminary study indicated that serious communication problems existed between these elderly immigrants and their

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US-born grandchildren. Some of the preliminary data are also cited here.

Participants

The current study employed qualitative interviews and participant observation with 18 Chinese immigrant families in Philadelphia. Due to the difficulty of tracking the elderly Chinese families in the preliminary study, different families were interviewed. The 18 Chinese families were selected largely from two important Chinese communities in Philadelphia, West Philadelphia (including suburbs), and Chinatown (including South Philadelphia). These two communities are vastly different, but representative of two significant subgroups of the Chinese population in US urban areas: West Philadelphia and suburban residents are mostly well-educated university students or professionals working in high-tech companies, while Chinatown residents are typically manual laborers with little formal education who work either in restaurants or garment factories. Regardless of their educational and socioeconomic

Table 1
Summary of Child Participants

Child	Gender	Age (grade)	Area	Dominant Home Language
1(a).	F	10 (5 th)	W. Philadelphia	Mandarin
1(b).	M	8 (3 rd)	W. Philadelphia	Mandarin
2.	F	7 (1 st)	W. Philadelphia	Mandarin
3.	F	7 (1 st)	Suburb	Mandarin
4.	F	8 (3 rd)	W. Philadelphia	Mandarin/English
5.	M	7 (2 nd)	Suburb	Mandarin
6.	F	13 (7 th)	Chinatown	Fujianese
7.	M	14 (8 th)	Chinatown	Fujianese
8.	F	11 (6 th)	Suburban	Mandarin
9.	F	5 (K)	S. Philadelphia	English
10.	F	8 (2 nd)	W. Philadelphia	Mandarin
11.	M	10 (5 th)	Northeast	Fujianese
12.	F	13 (8 th)	Suburb	Fujianese
13.	F	6 (1 st)	W. Philadelphia	Mandarin
14.	F	8 (3 rd)	Suburb	Mandarin
15.	F	7 (2 nd)	Chinatown	Fujianese
16.	M	10 (5 th)	Chinatown	Fujianese
17.	F	14 (7 th)	W. Philadelphia	Mandarin
18.	F	6 (1 st)	Suburb	Mandarin

Note: 1(a) and 1(b) refer to two children in one family who both participated in the study. For the other families, I only interviewed one child.

backgrounds, the Chinese parents are invariably first-generation immigrants; in other words, they grew up in China and are newcomers to the US. Their children are either born in the US or came to the US at an early age to attend US primary schools. I define them as "second-generation Chinese children." More information about the children participating in the study is included in Table 1.

Setting

From May to December 2003, interviews with the Chinese families were conducted by the author in a variety of settings, such as participants' homes, children's schools, my home, and other public places, such as restaurants, churches, and bookstores. Most of the participants selected the interview site that was convenient for them. Some of them wanted me to go to their homes, which allowed me to have a glimpse of their home environment and what language was being used in their home setting. In most cases, the mother of the family was interviewed, and sometimes the father, as well. Several of the children were interviewed along with the parents due to various reasons.

Interviews with the Chinese families at different locations familiarized me with the West Philadelphia community and Chinatown community and facilitated the participant observations that followed. Participant observations not only took place in two neighborhood schools where the Chinese children spend most of their day, but also in the Chinese communities and churches where the children stay for after-school programs and weekends. During the participant observations, special attention was given to what languages were being used in different social settings by the Chinese children and their parents. However, this paper draws primarily from the interview data, with the observational data to be discussed in the larger ethnographic project.

Methods

Being a native Chinese speaker and fluent in English, I took advantage of my bilingual skills and conducted the interviews either in Chinese or English, depending on the participants' preferences. For the parent interviews, all but one was conducted in Chinese (Mandarin). Most of the parents were more comfortable speaking Chinese than speaking English. According to some participants, speaking Chinese gave them a sense of familiarity and closeness, and allowed them a wider space to express themselves freely. It is to be noted, however, that although most of the parents speak Mandarin, several speak Fujianese as their home language and speak Mandarin as a second language, not without difficulty. These parents were largely working class parents from Chinatown. Their proficiency in spoken Mandarin was enough for me to understand, although their vocabulary was limited. Interviews with the children were more often in English because most of the second-generation chil-

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dren selected English as their interview language. Only a few China-born newcomer children used Chinese during the interviews.

The interview process was semi-structured. An interview protocol was prepared, but during the interview I tried as much as possible to follow up on the participants' thoughts to make the interview flow naturally. The interviews were audio taped, and later transcribed and translated by me. The translation was done with the aim to be as accurate and faithful as possible to the original discourse.

Discussion

Chinese Children's Home Language Maintenance

Struggle With Two Languages. All but two of the children in the interviews use Mandarin, or in some cases Fujianese or Cantonese, as their dominant home language. Most started with Chinese as their first language before school. That is, before they went to school, they spoke only Chinese, and they later learned English in school settings. Some of them have been to ESL classes at the beginning of the school year, while others naturally picked up English in the regular school programs.

It is to be noted, however, that although these children's first language was Chinese, most of them shifted to English as their dominant language by the end of one school year, and they now speak Chinese only at home or in limited social settings. The following is a conversation I had with an eight-year-old girl, Nancy,² in which she talked about her experience learning English and her language preference.

Excerpt 1³

DZ: Okay. I see. So when do you start learning English? Do you remember?

Nancy: When I was in pre-school, I was like crying and shouting because I don't know what...what they are doing, because my mom just dumped me and left me there (unintelligible), and I am crying, and I am like saying in Chinese: Why are you dropping me down because they always teased me? They didn't understand, but they keep talking in the strange language which is English. And I am like, ahhh...keep on talking in Chinese, then...

DZ: Then you picked up.

...

Nancy: Then I was like three...

DZ: Three. But did you learn English very fast?

Nancy: Yeahhh...I really learned a lot. Eh...I just...after a few days, I knew what they were talking.

²All the names are pseudonyms. Some children's real names are Chinese names, while others' are English names. I changed them accordingly.

³In the excerpts, speech translated from the Chinese appears in italics, while any words originally in English appear in regular typeface. This excerpt has not been translated.

DZ: Oh, good. This is fast. And so...what language, English or Chinese, do you speak more?

Nancy: I...I eh...I speak English more because I speak English almost every day, mostly at school and every day, so that's mostly. But every weekday, when I come in...in ahhh...to my grandma, I speak Chinese. (Interview 4, 10/10/03)

Nancy's experience is similar to that of other Chinese second-generation children. Coming from a linguistically different family background, they experienced difficulty learning English at the beginning. They struggled with the sudden downpour of the new language in the school setting and did not know what was happening. To make the situation worse, some second-generation children are foreign born and are therefore confronted with the even more challenging tasks of language adjustment and cultural adjustment at a young age. The following conversation took place in a new immigrant family where the 7-year-old girl, Tracy, was raised in China and had come to the US only two years ago. The parents described the child's painful experience of learning English in her first year in the US.

Excerpt 2

DZ: Then she has never been to language class?

Tracy's Father: Right. At the time when she got there, they said, the Kindergarten don't go to ESL. Just play with the children. It will be okay.

DZ: Then at first, wouldn't she have any language problems?

Tracy's Father: In fact, she had. Only she didn't tell us. She also didn't know how to tell us. You see, when she first came, just imagine, she didn't know a word and was placed in that...that totally American environment. I think, I think she should have met with a lot of frustration. Only she, one thing is because she had been separate from us for so long, she was not close with us and didn't tell us. Second, she didn't know how to say, I think the child she...didn't quite know the words with which to express her own emotions.

Tracy's Mother: The child was too small. Still she was limited in expressing herself.

Tracy's Father: Right. So...

DZ: So she didn't tell you in Chinese either?

Tracy's Father: Not in Chinese either.

Tracy's Mother: Sometimes she would cry.

Tracy's Father: Sometimes occasionally she would cry.

Tracy's Mother: Occasionally, that is, if something else led to a series of discomforts in her, she would then say: I don't know English. I don't want to go to school.

(Interview 2, 8/31/03)

Language Preference From an Early Age. But in spite of the pains and struggles, the young children seem to be able to learn the mainstream lan-

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guage in a short period of time and to continue to use it. A preference for English is already evident in some children who have learned English in a painful process with no outside help and who have only been immersed in the English environment for a short time.

Excerpt 3

DZ: Three family members....then when do you speak Chinese at home?

Tracy's Mother: We almost speak Chinese all the time.

Tracy's Father: We all speak Chinese.

DZ: Ahhh...you speak Chinese. Then when do you speak English if occasionally?

Tracy's Mother: Like speaking with her, sometimes we seem to use English, because she likes using English. Chinese and English mixed.

DZ: Ahhh...Chinese and English mixed. Then are there any special occasions that you have to use Chinese or have to use English?

Tracy's Father: Like when we are in the church, we have to use Chinese. Because our church is a Chinese congregation. Others have no...in my family, there is no special rule to force...but we try our best to speak Chinese so that she will not...forget.

DZ: (Laughing)

Tracy's Father: But she still feels like speaking English.

DZ: Oh, like this.

Tracy: I like speaking English. I don't like speaking Chinese.
(Interview 2, 8/31/03)

Excerpt 4

DZ: Does he speak Chinese?

Grandfather 21:⁴ He can understand it and also can speak if you push him. But he doesn't like to speak Chinese.

(Interview 21 from PARC Project, 01/26/03)

Language Use Patterns. In addition to the clear language preference, the second-generation children use English at an early age as their primary language of communication in key social contexts. This is vividly shown by the Chinese children's unanimous demand for using English in interviews with me, compared with their parents' language choice of Chinese while talking with me. To most second-generation children, Chinese becomes the language to speak only at home or on special occasions.

Excerpt 5

John's⁵ **Mother:** At home, we generally...speak both Chinese and

⁴The interviewee here is from the preliminary study with elderly Chinese people (PARC Project). The elderly are identified as "grandfather" or "grandmother", but they are not the grandparents of any children in the current study (unless otherwise indicated). They talked about their own grandchildren's home language abilities. Unfortunately I had no opportunity to interview their grandchildren.

⁵John is a seven-year-old boy.

English, but that is, as much as possible, like when the parents begin...to talk, most often we speak Chinese. That is, we use both Chinese and English, but Chinese more. Chinese is still our main language, like when they respond, they will also use Chinese, but sometimes when we talk a little deeply,⁶ as we talk and talk, they may not know the Chinese, so they turn to English to answer. So when we still use Chinese to ask them, they already use English to answer.

...

John's Mother: If I speak Chinese to him, his answer may be in Chinese or in English. But if the conversation was started by him, it would be definitely, he speaks English. He speaks English out of his mouth without thinking, while I speak Chinese out of my mouth without thinking.

DZ: Right.

John's Mother: (Laughing)

DZ: Like when he plays with other kids, generally, or with his brother,

John's Mother: English. When he talks with his brother between the two of them, you wouldn't hear any Chinese.

(Interview 5, 10/25/03)

Excerpt 6

DZ: Okay. Ahhh...so when you talk with your friends, do you speak Chinese or English?

Nancy: Well...

DZ: Well, let's say your friends at school.

Nancy: Ahhh... I talk to them in English.

DZ: How about if they are also Chinese children? In English?

Nancy: I needn't speak with them in Chinese, but sometimes, no, no, I don't speak, but if I want to say something I don't want anybody else to know, I will speak Chinese.

(Interview 4, 10/10/03)

At home, the Chinese children still communicate with their parents and grandparents predominantly in Chinese. But with their peers, siblings, and classmates, they tend to use English both at home and outside home. In this respect, this study reinforces Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) finding that Asian second-generation children preferred English to Chinese and that their English proficiency is higher than that in Chinese. It is interesting to note, however, that Nancy (Excerpt 6) uses Chinese on the playground as a tool to convey special messages to her playmates who understand Chinese. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

Unbalanced Bilingualism in Chinese Written and Oral Skills. On the other hand, despite the widespread language preference for and shift to English, all the Chinese children in my interviews can be said to be bilingual speakers to a certain extent, with a wide variation in home language

⁶"Talk deeply" is a Chinese way of saying to be able to exchange deeper thoughts, emotions, and ideas in addition to merely everyday, routine communication.

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proficiency among them. A majority of the children understand Chinese when they are spoken to and some of them are fluent Chinese speakers, but most of them have a low level of literacy in Chinese. This has to do with the characteristics of the Chinese written system: the Chinese characters are regarded as difficult and hard to remember by most of the children. Moreover, children complain about the Chinese way of learning as boring: rote drilling instead of a creative and fun activity. Although the children have a high level of oral language skills, this will not help them much in learning written Chinese because the written Chinese words have no association with their pronunciation. As a result, the parents worry most about the maintenance of Chinese written abilities among their second-generation children, as shown by the following interview excerpts:

Excerpt 7

Grandmother 4: I am worried about his Chinese. He can speak, but I don't know whether he can write.

DZ: Do you have any plan for his future education? For example, try to train his Chinese reading and writing ability.

Grandmother 4: Of course.

Grandfather 4: That is our STRONG wish.

DZ: Oh, STRONG wish? (laughing)

Grandmother 4: Chinese is difficult to learn, isn't it?...I think, at least now he can speak well. I think there is no problem for him to speak. He is 2, er, 27 months old. The problem is about writing...

(Interview 4 from PARC project, 12/16/02)

Excerpt 8

DZ: Then eh...that is to say your child, he can speak both English and Chinese?

Mother 39:⁷ Right. He can speak both English and Chinese, but he can't read Chinese. He only knows several words.

DZ: Umm. Then you feel this...his ability of ...keeping Chinese, continuing to keep Chinese, is important or not important?

Mother 39: Right. Really important, but to our regret, he cannot read and write. Ay. Then we can only wait and see in the future, see if he himself wants to...I taught him PinYin, he understands it and I am thinking if he can use a computer in the future. He is definitely not able to write. If he has this interest, he can continue studying. When I taught him, I taught him up to second-, third-grade textbooks, but he is now, that is to say, if he takes up a first-grade Chinese textbook to read, he cannot do it. He only knows those several words.

(Interview 39 from PARC Project, 04/13/03)

If good speaking and listening skills do not help the Chinese children

⁷This is also a PARC interview. But here the elderly interviewee was reflecting upon the home language learning process of her son when he was young, not that of her grandson.

develop strong biliteracy, weak written skills in turn seem to hurt the second-generation children's speaking fluency and vocabulary. For example, when I asked the Chinese children to comment on their oral Chinese proficiency level, younger children tended to rate themselves higher. The older they are, the less confident they are about their Chinese. As children become more involved in school and peer culture and less attached to home and parents, home language maintenance among bilingual children may decline. The oral skills of the older children in my interviews are not necessarily more limited than those of the younger children, but they are still shy to speak their home language and are more unsure about their bilingual abilities.

Excerpt 9

DZ: How well do you speak Chinese?

Lulu: Don't know.

(Interview 1, 7/19/03)

Excerpt 10

Nina: When I talk with my grandma who is in China over the phone, I will have to ask my Mom together with me, in case when I don't know how to say it in Chinese, I can use mixed and let my Mom help with the translation.

(Interview 8, 11/16/03)

The above two children are in fifth and seventh grades respectively. It seemed to me they spoke perfect Chinese, but later they explained to me that they felt more comfortable speaking English because they knew more vocabulary in English and they had age-appropriate reading and writing skills. As they acquired more vocabulary and syntax in English, they felt their Chinese remained at a child's level without advancing to the age-appropriate level of sophistication. For example, although they can handle everyday routines very well in Chinese, they can't express themselves with as much depth or detail. This makes them reluctant to speak the home language and even feel embarrassed sometimes with the primitive "baby talk" that their home language seems to be to them. Such a view is further validated by a parent who observed the following:

Excerpt 11

DZ: Do you think that he should maintain his Chinese ability?

Father 37:⁸ Sure we think so. If he spends more time at home, his Chinese is better. We hope his Chinese can be OK. His Chinese speaking is good, but bad in writing.

DZ: Do you think you have trouble to talk with him in Chinese?

Father 37: Yes, we can't talk deeply. His logic of thoughts is different from mine.

⁸See Footnote 7.

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DZ: With his mother?

Father 37: The same, not deeply.

(Interview 37 from PARC Project, 04/12/03)

This finding is powerful because it points to the importance of biliteracy in achieving true bilingualism. In the efforts to promote home language maintenance and bilingualism among second-generation immigrant children, we should bear in mind the interrelated relationships between oral and written skills of the minority language.

Stories Behind Bilingualism

The above discussion presents us with an overall picture of the Chinese second-generation children's home language proficiency and maintenance levels: although the second-generation children generally prefer English to Chinese and English has become their dominant language, most of them maintain their home language to a certain degree, especially in speaking and listening skills. As we all know, bilingualism does not happen automatically. My interview data show that the Chinese families play an essential role in passing on the home language to their second-generation children in such an English-dominant environment as the US.

Home Language as a Resource. Most of the Chinese parents I interviewed value their home language very much and also make great efforts to maintain the home language in their children. Their positive attitudes towards the home language come from different sources, though. Some Chinese parents view their home language as an important resource from which the children can benefit academically and cognitively. For example, the mother in the following interview regards Chinese as a commonly accepted second language in the US that the children can learn for their academic advancement.

Excerpt 12

Lulu's Mother: But as far as we are concerned, we are mainly concerned, that is, that the children shouldn't forget this language. We try hard to instill in them, that is to say, if you, if you go to college, or Ph.D., you are required to have two to three...that foreign language (English), you can use your Chinese, when the time comes, you can very easily take a test, you don't need to spend time learning it, right? Just like this. Moreover, we also tell them that there is a large percentage of Chinese population all over the world.

(Interview 1, 7/19/03)

From the above interview excerpt, it seems that the home language maintenance effort within this immigrant family is closely related to the parent's high expectations for the children's education. Asian parents' expectations of the children's academic achievements have been well

documented by past research. Built on this, minority language educators would often argue that success-oriented Asian parents would like their children to shift to English as soon as possible in order to achieve success academically and in their future careers. The idea of looking at the home language maintenance as a way for advancing children's education is new to mainstream society, but it may come naturally to the immigrant parent because she is clearly aware from her own immigration experience that people are no longer confined to one place: "Moreover, we also tell them that there is a large percentage of Chinese population all over the world" (from Excerpt 12). Bilingualism is often beneficial to the individual in the job market, especially with globalization.

Home Language and Ethnic Identity. Another commonly cited reason why the Chinese parents attach great importance to the home language is the perceived connection between the home language and ethnic identity, as shown by the following two interview excerpts.

Excerpt 13

Nancy's Grandmother: Then we ourselves are, are...you often, Nancy, I often talk to her, I said, you are not...I said you are belonging to Chinese Americans, you are not Americans, you are belonging to...you are American citizens, but you are Chinese American. I said you must remember this, so you have to learn Chinese. You must, must learn. That is, you Chinese see you are yellow skin, black, black eyes, right? Black hair, but you can't speak Chinese, if you go back, you couldn't, no way to communicate with your family.

(Interview 6 from PARC Project, 01/17/03)

Excerpt 14

DZ: Ahhh...You speak Chinese most of the time.

Tracy: I speak English most of the time.

DZ: (Laughing) Then do you think, that is, Chinese is important to the child?

Tracy's Mother: I think we feel it very important.

DZ: Umm. Why so?

Tracy's Mother: This...Chinese people feel that we have our roots there. After we go back, whether we stay here and it is easier to go back, a second thing is, in terms of language, since we are Chinese, if we don't learn Chinese, it seems as if really, it seems as if it's not, not very good.

(Interview 2, 8/31/03)

Parents who are more concerned with developing ethnic identity and pride in the second-generation tend to emphasize the home language as an indispensable part of ethnic identity. Their logic seems to say: without the Chinese language, you are no longer Chinese. Although there are many other aspects of Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, that the parents can cultivate in their children, they somehow turn to the Chinese

language as the key distinguishing characteristic of their ethnic group. This may have to do with the implicitness of the Chinese cultural traits and the explicitness of the language itself. Ethnic group members can have obvious and immediate identification with those who speak the same language. On the other hand, it also points to the reality that the Chinese parents keenly realize the power of language in negotiating social relationships in a multicultural society.

Home Language and Family Cohesion. Still other parents regard home language as important out of a concern for family cohesion. In an informal chat with an immigrant father who was not very comfortable with English, he said: "Our English can't keep up with hers. If she speaks a little faster, we can't understand. We won't be like one family. We have to raise her as an American." In a three-generation household with grandparents speaking no English, home language maintenance by children becomes even more crucial.

Excerpt 15

Tracy's Mother: Moreover, we have a very big concern. That is, later on, if our English...our English has not been up to a very high level, if in the future we want to talk to her deeply about her development in her growth, we are concerned whether we can handle this very well.

DZ: Right. Right. Umm.

Tracy's Mother: So...I don't know either which...probably we should continue to learn English well. We should also urge her to learn Chinese well.

(Interview 2, 8/31/03)

Excerpt 16

Maya's⁹ Father: The bilingual programs she is in are very helpful to the parents. She (Maya) can explain things to me and let me know what she is doing at school. If she only studies English, she will forget Chinese and she can't talk with the family. Moreover, she can translate for me when I need to talk with the teacher or other Americans who only speak English.

(Interview 15, 12/18/03, based on interview notes, not exact words.)

In Excerpt 16, the family was smuggled to the US from a poor Chinese village in Fuzhou and has lived in Chinatown ever since. The parents work in a Chinese restaurant and a garment factory, jobs commonly held by unskilled and undocumented Chinese in the US. Unlike the previously mentioned Chinese parents who have more formal education and speak some English, this group of Chinese parents has little interaction with the outside society as a result of their long working hours and little English. They live an isolated and marginalized life in the US. Chinatown is their whole world; it is where they live, work, and eat. To

⁹Maya is a 13-year-old girl.

them, having the children speak the same language as the parents do is not so much a luxury or goal in maintaining their ethnic identity, but really a necessity for the family to survive in the host country as a whole.

What Do the Chinese Parents and Grandparents Do?

As a result of the strong parental emphasis on the Chinese language, no matter what orientation it comes from, most of the Chinese families make great efforts to resist the language shift pressures from the outside and the school. They take specific measures to help the children maintain the home language. For example, many parents specify Chinese as their sole home language although everybody in the household possesses some knowledge of both languages.

Excerpt 17

Lulu's Mother: With her dad, because her dad definitely asks her to speak Chinese,

DZ: Umm.

Lulu's Mother: You see, in this regard there is a very interesting incident. Her dad squeezed the toothpaste and paying no attention, he just took it up and gave it a squeeze. And sometimes he even forgot to put back the lid. She then wrote a note in English to her dad and told him to "Squeeze from the bottom, please pay attention." Thus she wrote this to her dad. But her dad wrote back in Chinese: "If you write a note in Chinese, I will follow your advice. If you don't, I won't follow..."
(Interview 1, 7/19/03)

Some of the parents or grandparents also teach Chinese to their children not only through such conscious daily interaction in Chinese. They often rely on community resources and libraries for textbooks and teaching materials in the ethnic language. Some parents or grandparents even bring Chinese textbooks from China. With these textbooks, parents can assign Chinese homework to the child every day in addition to homework assigned at school. Lulu distinguishes the two as "school homework" and "home homework."¹⁰

Excerpt 18

Nancy's Grandmother: Moreover, the time (spent on this) is a lot, so as to Chinese, we are thinking about this recently, she couldn't quite learn traditional Chinese, but she still can learn simplified Chinese. Because the textbooks in our school are, are from Taiwan, but that is, bought from Taiwan. That is, Cui Fangguo and Aunt Jin they bought a set of these for us when they went back. In addition, it is that my husband just gives her...just gives her...that is, teaching her write, isn't it simplified words? So she...

¹⁰"Home homework" is not a set phrase in Chinese, but it is a term created by Lulu herself to refer to the homework assigned by her parents, which is usually Chinese homework.

HOME LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

(Interview 6 from PARC Project, 01/17/03)

In addition to the home teaching and learning, many parents also send their children to Chinese schools for them to receive more rigorous instruction of the home language. With busy schedules, the parents have to sacrifice their weekend time to take the child to the Chinese school in the early morning and come to pick them up at noon. In other words, they spend considerable time, money, and energy to help the children maintain Chinese. Although many people doubt the cost-effectiveness of such heritage language schools in the English-as-the-first-language environment, Chinese parents are persistent in sending their children there. As one parent said, "If we teach them, it's not systematic. If they go to Chinese school, they can learn it more formally and consistently" (Interview 10, 11/20/03). This may help account for the rapid increase of the Chinese weekend schools in the US in the past decade.

Children's Attitudes Towards Learning Chinese

Due to such serious parental efforts in home language maintenance, most second-generation children do acquire a certain degree of home language skill. In spite of that, however, the Chinese second-generation children demonstrate a clear language preference for English over Chinese from an early age, as I mentioned before. The Chinese parents often express disappointment and anguish about the limited bilingualism among their children. It seems that their efforts do bring about some home language maintenance in the children, but the effect is far below what the parents would desire their children to achieve. The reasons for this are multifold. For example, the complicated Chinese written system challenges the children's learning interest. Mutually unintelligible dialects in the Chinese community mean that even the co-ethnic adults from different dialect backgrounds sometimes cannot communicate with one another in the home language. They have to rely on English for communication. On the practical side, the children spend all their weekdays in school and learn English compared with the one weekend morning allocated to learning Chinese. These time constraints limit the children's home language development.

While acknowledging these obstacles, most Chinese parents say that the main difficulty lies in a lack of support for home language learning in an English-dominant US society, and this leads to children's negative attitudes towards maintaining Chinese. Generally the Chinese children regard their home language as hard, unnecessary, and most importantly, not worth the effort. In other words, they do not see the point of learning Chinese in the US. Therefore, they resist putting effort into Chinese learning. The following is a comparison of the language attitudes in two brothers who reacted differently to going to Chinese school.

Excerpt 19

John's Mother: Ahh..., this is different, hah! This is...like my first child, he didn't like it. He came here at 5 years old, he protested and said: On Saturday, other kids stay at home and watch cartoons. None of my friends go. Why should I go to Chinese school? Then I said to him: But you are different from them. They are Americans, you are Chinese. Since you are my child and I am a Chinese, you have to come with me to the Chinese school. So he was very unwilling...

DZ: So he did resist!

John's Mother: Oh, very strongly! So the beginning was hard. The first child was difficult. As to the second, he saw me take the brother and pick the brother up every day, like this. He came with me from an early age, coming back and forth. Afterwards, when he was 2 1/2, his brother was having class within, he played in the corridor with me. So he knew it. When he was 2 1/2, he still felt...it seems he didn't resist at all. He felt like...it's time for him, just like this. He just accepted. He didn't know that he had a choice: I can choose not to go.

(Interview 5, 10/25/03)

Another interesting observation related to language attitudes among the second-generation children was made by a mother who has two daughters, the elder sister growing up in the US, the younger born in the US, but raised in China before age 4. The common expectation would be that the second child would maintain the Chinese skills better than the older one. Research has also shown that length of stay in the US negatively affects the children's home language skills. Contrary to these logical expectations, the mother found that the second daughter resisted learning Chinese more strongly than the first. Her explanation for this anomaly was: "Maybe the second child came from China and could only speak Chinese at first. She had a painful experience of learning English at school. She treated Chinese as something that others would laugh at. So she refused to speak Chinese even if she could in order to be like everybody else. But her elder sister grew up in the bilingual environment: Chinese at home and English at school. She picked up English easily through watching TV and going to school. She didn't have a hard time socializing with other kids at school. At the same time, she was used to speaking Chinese at home and didn't feel there was anything wrong about it" (Interview 8, 11/16/03). The comparison between the two sisters who have different language experiences indicates clearly that social attitudes towards the minority language in children's surroundings, as represented by teacher attitudes and peer attitudes, etc., can either support or undermine the parental efforts in home language maintenance. It hardly needs to be said that environment plays a decisive role in shaping the children's language attitudes and therefore their home language maintenance levels.

Despite the dominant pattern of language shift among most second-

generation Chinese children, a few of them do enjoy learning the home language. Although they agree that home language learning takes time and effort, they regard it as worthwhile and rewarding. Nancy is a case in point. In the previous discussion, I mentioned that Nancy sees her home language as a resource that she can make use of to convey intimacy and confidentiality with her peers. Once her teacher said: "Nancy does the time tables faster than the other students in her class." Nancy replied, "My grandpa taught the time tables to me. It rhymes in Chinese. I can remember it immediately." I would assert that when the larger social environment values the immigrant children's home language in the same way as the parents do, the immigrant children can become truly bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. Nancy's success is promising evidence for Chinese parents as well as other immigrant families.

Conclusion

The above discussion presents us with a vivid picture of Chinese second-generation children's experience with and attitudes towards home language learning and maintenance. Overall, the second-generation children have Chinese as their home language, and in the first days of being in the US schooling system, they encounter difficulties in learning English unassisted. Being young and growing up in immigrant families, this language obstacle frequently causes their adjustment problems. However, once they master English, they prefer using English to Chinese, and they regard English as their dominant language from an early age.

On the other hand, in spite of the language preference and shift to English, most of the Chinese children I interviewed say they do maintain their home language to a certain extent. My interview data show that the Chinese families play an essential role in passing on the home language to the second-generation children who grow up in the English-dominant US society. They provide many kinds of support to the Chinese children in order to enhance their home language proficiency. Parents give various reasons for doing so, among which are academic advancement, ethnic identity, and family cohesion. But second-generation children's Chinese skills often remain at levels unsatisfactory to their parents, especially in reading and writing, and this weakens the children's confidence in speaking and using Chinese.

Although the Chinese parents value the home language and are willing to sacrifice their time and energy to help the children learn, the children themselves seem less motivated, or even resistant, to learning Chinese. Most of the parents explain that this unfortunate situation results from the lack of a supportive language environment and the lack of positive language attitudes in the larger society. More often, the children see no point in learning their home language since the environment is not supportive of it outside the home. Besides, some children who are

English language learners are often pressured to shift to English and forget their Chinese so as to fit in with their peers. I would argue that only when the parents, teachers, and society at large value minority languages and see them as a social resource rather than a disadvantage can the children start to enjoy and take pride in being bilingual. Parents alone cannot succeed in teaching their children the home language.

This study focuses only on the language issue of Chinese second-generation children. As can be imagined, home language maintenance is not an isolated phenomenon. Rather it is closely related to Chinese children's identity formation and development. Research remains to be done on how language shift and maintenance impact the identity formation and acculturation of Chinese second-generation children. The larger ethnographic project aims to answer these questions.

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