

2020

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Recommended Citation

Chan, Josiah (2020) "Heritage Language Maintenance: Research Review and Reflection of One Family Case," *ECTESOL Review*. Vol. 3: No. 1, Article 5.

Available at: https://jagworks.southalabama.edu/ectesol_review/vol3/iss1/5

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Heritage Language Maintenance: Research Review and Reflection of One Family Case

Josiah Chan

ABSTRACT

Heritage Language maintenance provides learner tangible benefits in academic achievement, language acquisition, and career opportunity. Intangibly, it enhances the learner's self-esteem and cultural identity. The case here reflects the Mandarin Chinese learning experience of three children who were born in the United States of a migrant family from Hong Kong where the Cantonese Chinese dialect language is more predominant. The learning effort was complicated by the parents' native Cantonese Chinese dialect. The parents and children strived to balance the learning dynamics between Mandarin and Cantonese. The results of the study indicate that successful heritage language maintenance can be achieved with a robust language vitality environment, choosing the appropriate language school, and associating heritage language with a positive experience at home. Recommendations for parents are provided.

Key words: heritage language maintenance, L2 acquisition, cultural identity, self-esteem, language vitality, literacy environment.

Introduction

Bilingual language researchers study Yang inter-generational language maintenance have found that among migrant families who have moved to English-speaking countries, the heritage language typically is not maintained for more than three generations (Lee, 2013). Tse (2001) explored biliteracy development through two set of related factors: language vitality and literacy environment plus experiences. Language shift occurs across generations and from private life to public life. In the cross-generation context of migrants, the use of the heritage language can diminish from the first generation, who speak substandard English, to the bilingual second generation, and to the third generation who speak mostly in English (Fishman, 1976). Different theories and observations offer various explanations. Some researchers think that when an individual spends more time learning one language, naturally there are less resources and time available for the person to learn a second language. There are also external and internal pressures for a child to give up their heritage language (Wong- Fillmore, 1991). Young children are extremely vulnerable to the social pressures exerted by people in their school and community. They know that their families do things differently from their peers, therefore they must learn English if they want to be accepted. English is perceived as the high-status societal language, sometimes resulting in them giving up their heritage language.

The focus of this paper is the importance of language maintenance and is a reflection on the language maintenance in the children of a family originally from Hong Kong who speak Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and English. The experience covers a time span of around twenty years from birth to college

graduation as recalled by their mother and from interviews with three of the family's children. In the reflection discussion, we examine what strategies families use to support heritage language maintenance and the children's reactions.

Language maintenance brings the benefit of higher self-esteem, a stronger sense of cultural identity, family cohesiveness, and social relationship (Lee, 2015). Parents can also realize that heritage language is an important asset for career development in global business. While there are different research studies on methods to improve language maintenance in different culture and social settings, the subject family in this discussion is unique in that the family had a heritage language mix between Mandarin and Cantonese and moved from the United States to Singapore during the subjects' juvenile years.

Review of the Literature

As the number of children who speak, or are exposed to, more than one language increases in classrooms around the world, educators at all system levels and across varied settings strive to provide high quality, rigorous education to ever more linguistically diverse groups of students.

In basic L2 acquisition theory, the learner already knows one language learn a second language. The contributions of second language acquisition can be grouped in four major research areas: linguistic dimensions, cognitive dimensions, socio-cultural dimensions, and instructional dimension. Sociocultural theory views L2 learners as active participants by interacting with other people, culture, and environment (Lantolf and Beckett, 2009).

In a broad sense, language maintenance includes the preservation of an indigenous (e.g. Hawaiian), a colonial (e.g. French from earlier settlers in North America), or an immigrant language (Lee, 2013). Language maintenance is important to cultivate family relations and strengthen family communication. In a bilingual family, communication gaps can occur between different generations due to different proficiency levels of English and heritage languages. When the children are born in the United States, they tend to speak better English than the heritage language while growing up. Parents with limited English proficiency have a difficult time understanding the children's school activities if the child cannot communicate with their parents in their heritage language (Zhang, 2010). Overall family cohesiveness is also likely to be weakened if intergenerational communication is interrupted due to a lack of a shared family language.

When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences... When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop, and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings (Wong-Fillmore, 1991, p. 342). Parents also see language maintenance as a way to maintain a well-functioning system of supervision, authority, and mutuality which could shape the well-being and future outcomes of their children (Lin and Lu, 2006; Rodriguez, 2015; Suarez et al. 2010; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Bialystok (2016) grouped the benefits of language maintenance in tangible and intangible benefits for the parents and the children. The children receive tangible benefits at the early stages of bilingual education as there are reciprocal and flexible relationships between academic

achievement and the language of school instruction. Intangible benefits include better connection to extended family, global employment opportunity and enrichment from widened horizons in language, arts, and culture. The effects of inter-generational transmission can be strongly affected by cultural transformation and notions of biculturalism (Mills, 2001). Some parents would also like their children to have the flexibility to stay in the United States or return to their heritage country for business which requires heritage language skills (Budiyana, 2017). There are also a significant numbers of parents who do not want their children to maintain their heritage language and culture so that they will assimilate into American culture. Most third-generation immigrants do not know their heritage language. (Montrul, 2008; Lee, 2013). Nonetheless, research studies show that bilingual children can develop their heritage language ability if they are placed in a supportive bilingual learning environment. Parents, teachers, and community need to provide social resources for young second generation heritage language learners to enjoy and take pride in persistently learning the language (Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe, 2009).

Some argue that there is a subtractive effect on literacy, lingual, and cultural understanding when more than one language is learned. However, research shows that there is no subtractive bilingualism when two languages are learned simultaneously. Cummins (1979) found that,

there is lack of any simple relationship between instructional time spent through the medium of a language and achievement in that language. In bilingual programs for minority language children, time spent through the medium of L1 appears to have no detrimental effects on the development of L2 skills while in immersion programs for majority language children the grade level at which L1 reading instruction is introduced makes very little difference to L1 reading achievement (p.246).

More recent findings showed similar results that there are no negative academic, linguistic and development effects for children to learn more than one language. Early and high-quality multiple language education can lead to enhanced language outcomes in each of the languages (Bailey and Osipova, 2016; McCabe et al., 2013). In fact, many researchers found positive evidence that there are benefits in promoting literacy in a second language, since literacy skills in the primary language is useful in learning the second language, including bilingual and phonological awareness among young children (Lindholm-Leary, K. 2012; Bailey, 2016; McCabe et al., 2013). In the biculturalism aspect, Mills (2001) found that bilingual persons who have access to different communities tend to experience more features of a cultural environment

Bilingual education is not a simple task. It requires collaboration among stakeholders which include teachers, parents, institutions, and government. Rodriguez (2015) emphasized the importance of attitude and urged that stakeholders “should display a positive attitude toward the choices of language minority families by acknowledging, accepting, respecting, and promoting not only English but their native language, as well” (p.177). Zhang and Koda (2011) emphasized the importance of collaboration between parents and teachers to maximize the effects of parental involvement in children’s heritage language reading at home, which can help teachers to refine homework for students to promote an acquisition of heritage language literacy. Bailey and Osipova (2016)

further identified community as a third sphere of positive influence for students to continue learning activities and communication between home and school environments.

Families can use different strategies to support heritage language maintenance. McCabe, et al. (2013) offered ideas for parents which can be adapted from monolingual development. For infants under eighteen months old and cannot respond in language, parents can respond to the children's behaviour with language input. When the children turn two to three years old, parents can have conversational exchanges with the toddlers by asking questions. The children can learn words for things and events that interest them. They can learn advanced vocabularies when parents and children share interest and play with the same label object. Targeted vocabularies are important for both monolingual and bilingual education. Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca & Caulfeld (1988) observed,

...picture book reading is an activity that parents approach with an intent to teach language to their young children and that in so doing they use techniques such as asking questions, giving feedback, and adjusting questions to the developmental level of the child that might have desirable instructional functions (p. 6).

The same strategy can be used in both monolingual and bilingual learning activities. Uccelli (2018a), observed "Bilingual vocabulary acquisition followed a rate comparable to that of monolingual children when vocabulary is measured in both languages (Pearson, Fernandez, & Oller, 1993) and children are similarly situated socially" (p.13). Snow and Kim (2006, as cited in Uccelli, 2018b, p.10) found that vocabulary forms the base for the future study of spelling, phonemes, and letters in language structures. Parents can read stories to the children or relate to them their personal stories. This would expand the narrative capability and enhance grammatical development of the children, especially when the parents can co-construct the narrative with their children. Instead of talking to children in a commanding tone, parents can speak in a positive tone on wh-questions or open-ended questions, hence the children develop more nouns and adjectives than pronouns which build a rich vocabulary bank. For example, "Where would you like to go?" invites a conversational response than "Let's go." (McCabe et al., 2013, p 6). Parents can also use specific objects to enrich the children's background language and gesture to facilitate matching words to their referents. Even if the parents are not comfortable in reading, they can read wordless picture books with their children for them to reap the benefit. Parents are encouraged to use their most proficient language to speak to their children (McCabe et al., 2013). Although this technique is often mentioned in monolingual education, parents can also apply this to heritage language training. In bilingual learning, starting the child's bilingual education early is important. McCabe et al. (2013) found that children exposed to high quality input in two languages under three years old outperform those who started later in reading, phonological awareness, and competence in both languages. In the learning process of bilingual children, a caution is that the growth in heritage language decelerates when they become more exposed to English inside and outside their home. Parents can help to maintain the dual language input by conducting family activities and entertainment in the heritage language. Children are also encouraged to interact

and visit with relatives in the heritage country to assert their cultural identity. Parents can enlist the support of extended family and the community to “... send the message to young children that speaking the native language is important because it allows for interaction with extended family members and is valued by important people in their lives...” (Rodriguez, 2015, pp. 191). Lastly, parents are obliged to choose suitable heritage language learning programs to ensure the children have a positive learning experience.

Background and Methodology

Benhasat, Goldstein, and Mead (1987) found that a case study approach is most suitable for the explanation, classification and hypothesis development stages of the knowledge building process. The methodology for this study, employing questionnaires and interviews, was designed to be used in natural settings and contemporary events, as in the social events connected to heritage language acquisition. A longitudinal approach was adopted to examine in detail the language acquisition experience of three Chinese heritage language learners over a period of twenty years.

The data were obtained from four participants: three heritage language learners and their mother. Participants were Sue, June, Claire and their mother Yan. The participants were selected due to their diverse language learning experiences. Triangulating data provided by the participants and their mother, interviews and written reflections contribute to the validity and reliability of the study.

The Participants

Yan, mother

Yan grew up in Hong Kong and came to the United States as a college student. She studied sociolinguistics in universities. Despite some brief periods worked as an English teacher for migrants in a community centre in New York Chinatown, Yan had been at home raising the children. Yan sent the children mainly to Mandarin language school, as Cantonese language school was not available at that time. She spoke to the children in Cantonese and exposed them to both Mandarin and Cantonese language environment among friends, relatives, and community members.

Sue, first daughter

After Sue was born, Yan spoke to her in Cantonese from birth to four-year-old. Yan read her English children stories and nursery songs as Chinese books were not available at that time. Yan’s sister baby-sat Sue when Yan was busy. The aunt spoke in Cantonese to Sue. When Sue was two years old, her younger sister June was born. Yan spoken to the toddler and infant both in Cantonese, but also read them English children book. When Sue was three years old, she attended a Chinese pre-school in New York China town. Teachers there spoke mostly in Cantonese. When Sue was four, she attended Pre-K at a local elementary school and began to speak more English. In the Parent-teacher conference, the teacher commented that even though Sue had very little English, she was able to follow instruction and well behaved. In kindergarten, Sue did well in school and began to enjoy reading on her own. When she was in first

grade, she read one hundred and eighty English books during her free activity time in school. Sue continued to understand spoken Cantonese and was able to answer her mother in Cantonese until she was in first grade. She began to answer her mother in more English. When she was about 8 years old, she began to have some difficulty to respond in Cantonese and refused to respond to her mother in Cantonese. She began to avoid speaking to her mother. Finally, she cried that she could not speak Cantonese. Yan felt it was more important to communicate with her daughter than of having her daughter to speak Cantonese and began to let her respond in English.

When Sue was about ten years old, she began mandarin language lesson, an hour per weekend, in New York City Chinatown. However, she did not pay full attention to her lesson and did not make much progress. Then her sixteen-year-old cousin from Hong Kong came to stay with Yan's family for two years. Sue's cousin spoke Cantonese in the house. She was able to communicate with him with mixed Chinese and English. The family moved to Singapore when she was twelve years old. She attended an American international school. Among her school friends, one of them was a Hong Kong Canadian student. She spoke good Cantonese as her parents were from Hong Kong. Sue began to speak a little broken Cantonese with this friend occasionally, but they were mostly communicated in English. When she was 13th years old, she took Mandarin class in school for language requirement. Because of her Hong Kong Canadian friend, her attitude towards heritage language had become better. Because her parents spoke Cantonese at home, Sue was able to keep up her Cantonese listening skill but not much in speaking. After graduation from high school in Singapore, Sue returned to the United States for college. In one summer, she went with her father on a father-daughter bonding trip to Guilin China. She also went to Shanghai in another summer break to learn acupuncture and had a full immersion experience in Chinese language and heritage.

June, second daughter

June was two years younger than her older sister. While she was a baby, she already listened to English children story read by her mother, although her mother continued to speak Cantonese to her and her older sister. When June was two years old, her sister began pre-school and spoke English to her during playtime occasionally. June started her pre-K school when she was four years old. She seemed to be able to understand English instruction well. From this point on, she and her older sister would converse in English whenever her mother was not around. They spoke to each other in Cantonese only when her mother was with them. June was able to understand all her mother's instruction and teaching in Cantonese at home. When she was six years old, her older sister was not able to respond to her mother in Cantonese and that made June slowly also responded to her mother in English even though her mother spoke to her in Cantonese. June attended weekend Mandarin language program in New York Chinatown when she was eight years old. June responded to her parents mainly in English. Then, her cousin from Hong Kong came and spoke Cantonese at the house. June was able to communicate with him. When June was ten years old, the family moved to Singapore. June had several years of Mandarin lessons in American international school. She made friends with two bilingual Cantonese-English speaking girls and started to speak some Cantonese. When she returned

to the United States for college, June studied Mandarin for her college foreign language general requirement.

Claire, third daughter

Claire was born two years later than June. She was the one knew Cantonese the least. When her mother read English stories to her sisters, she was not able to sit still and often wandered somewhere else to play on her own. When she was four years old, she attended pre-K and had no trouble using English in school. She responded to her mother occasionally in very simple Cantonese but mostly in English. When she was six years old, she attended Mandarin language school in Chinatown New York, but she did not get much out from her lessons. At that time, her cousin from Hong Kong moved in to stay at our home. Claire liked this cousin and always wanted to play with him. This cousin spoke Cantonese to her. Before Claire turned eight years old, the family moved to Singapore. She became good friend with a Taiwanese American girl at school. When this girl moved away, all Claire's friends were English speaking students. Claire had taken Mandarin classes in middle school and high school. She had a few good bilingual Mandarin-speaking friends in school, although none were strong Mandarin or Cantonese speakers. Claire spoke English at home and outside. In college, Claire seemed not making many attempts to speak Chinese, although she did take mandarin class in her last school term.

When the family was in Singapore, the sisters went to Hong Kong visit and stay with relatives for a month almost every year. After the subjects returned to the United States for college, they returned to Singapore two times a year and visited relatives in Hong Kong occasionally.

Methods

In responding to the questionnaires and interviews and through introspection, the participants recalled their heritage language learning experiences. Responses were analyzed for the social, ethnic, and migrant structures that framed the L2 heritage language learning experience. They recalled their heritage language learning experience over a time span of twenty years from toddler to college education. Eight interview questions (see Appendix A) were posed to the participants. Yan, the mother, wrote freely on her recollection on the acquisition experience of her children for the same period.

The analysis began with the written responses. Since there was more than a ten-year lapse between the end of the focus period and the recollection was written, there were inconsistencies in the statements between the heritage language learners and their mother. In these cases follow up oral interviews were conducted for clarification purposes. A case study method was used to collect the information of the learning experience, in conjunction with subsequent competence assessment and performance assessment. The purpose is to reflect on the bilingual learning experience of the participants instead of addressing a specific problem.

The three sisters were born in New York City with two-year age interval. Their parents came from Hong Kong to the United States as international college students in the late seventies. The parents' heritage language was Cantonese, the dialect commonly spoken in Hong Kong. They were proficient in both Mandarin, Cantonese, (Mandarin and Cantonese shares the same orthography, although the spoken languages are different), and English. After university studies, the father

found employment and settled in the United States. All three girls attended public school in a middle-class, suburban, predominantly white neighbourhood in Long Island near New York City. The school did not offer heritage language programs. Over the weekend, the sisters attended a Mandarin language program in a private Chinese community center in Flushing, Queens, New York. Although the parents spoke Cantonese at home, they wanted their children to learn Mandarin which is the official Chinese language. Due to the father's employment situation, the family moved to Singapore when the subjects were at twelve, ten, and eight years old respectively. In Singapore, the commonly used languages are English and Mandarin. The sisters attended an American international school and took intermediate Mandarin classes in school. They were exposed to the cultures of local Chinese Singaporean and expatriate communities. Upon high school graduation, the sisters all returned to the United States for university education.

Findings and Discussion

This study examined language maintenance, cross-generation relations, identity, language vitality and literacy environment. It captured the societal dynamics, language development, and ethnic interaction of a migrant family and their children. The family used several strategies to support heritage language maintenance in their children: (1) Parents spoke in the language they were most proficient; (2) Parents provided early and high-quality language input and drew on personal experiences to provide narratives; (3) Parents created opportunities for shared book reading and used interactive strategies; (4) Parents enlisted the support of extended family and the community; (5) Parents created an environment for the children to use heritage language and provided continuous input and support for their children's language maintenance; (6) Parents helped children to strengthen their identity as heritage language users; and (7) Parents chose the right heritage language program for their children.

(1) Parents speak in the language they are most proficient

Parents who are proficient in the heritage language are always encouraged to speak the language. McCabe et al. (2013, pp. 8) found that "children acquire language best when parents speak with them in a language in which parents are proficient." Yan started early to talk to her children when they were born. She was proficient in both Cantonese and English, therefore, the language used was a mix of these two languages. The children tended to learn the language that was constantly exposed to them. June recalled that at home,

Whatever language I learned, if it was spoken at home it helped immensely. When parents kept talking to me in that language, I wanted to speak it. After my time as a small child, English was always my predominant language at home (since Yan used mix Cantonese and English while the children responded mostly in English).

Language maintenance was often a major goal for parents, but as children grew older, there were other socio-emotional needs and other ends that sometimes needed to take precedent over language policy environments. Yan was not persistent in speaking Cantonese to the children when they encountered difficulties responding in the heritage language. The mother then seldom used

Cantonese but planned to enrol them in Chinese language school. This led to the children's heritage language attrition.

(2) Parents provide early and high-quality language input and draw on personal experience to provide narratives

Yan read books to the children in their early ages. The children responded well and benefited as stated by McCabe et al. (2013, pp. 7) that “children who are exposed to high quality input in two languages before the age of 3 years ... outperform others who are first exposed after 3 in reading, phonological awareness” While Chinese books were not available, she related her personal experience to them as narratives. “Parents who talk at length with their children regarding past experience have children who excel in narrating, and this may in turn influence many other levels of language” (McCabe et al., 2013, pp. 6). With this exposure, Sue became an accomplished reader at a very young age. This attribute stayed with her to adulthood. In high school, a community leader commented that she knew many more vocabularies than her peers in a “word-game” activity.

(3) Parents create opportunities for shared book reading and use interactive strategies

Parents can read books with children together. Yan shared book reading with the children. Due to her prior training in education, Yan used gestures and visual aids in reading stories. She would also make up songs related to the stories to keep the children's attention. The children responded with different questions to further the conversation exchange. Whitehurst et al. (1988) found that,

...picture book reading is an activity that parents approach with an intent to teach language to their young children and that in so doing they use techniques such as asking questions, giving feedback, and adjusting questions to the developmental level of the child that might have desirable instructional functions. (p. 552)

The hindrance for Yan was that she lacked proper Chinese language books for reading to her children, hence the shared reading happened mostly in English. This reduced the children's learning opportunities in heritage language.

(4) Parents enlist the support of extended family and the community

The parents took advantage of the environment to expose the children to heritage language. Yan hired her sister to attend to the children and invited a Cantonese speaking cousin from Hong Kong to live with them for a few years. Educators had suggested that proper home support is important for a child to develop bilingual skills (McCabe et al., 2013). The parents also brought the children to visit their Chinese relatives and friends, attend Chinese language church and participate in Chinese community centre activities to enhance language vitality (Tse, 2001). The children were able to interact with others in listening, understanding, and speaking Chinese. They also applied the language in different social settings. Yan encouraged the children to interact and visit with relatives in the heritage country. Sue wrote to her relatives in Hong Kong regularly in simple Chinese especially during holiday seasons. Interaction with relatives helped to strengthen the heritage identity of the children. Rodriguez (2015) noticed that enlisting the support of extended family and the community can “... send the message to young children that speaking the native language is

important because it allows for interaction with extended family members and is valued by important people in their lives..." (p. 191).

(5) Parents create an environment for the children to use heritage language and provide continuous input and support for children's language maintenance

Peer support is very important in heritage language maintenance (Tse, 2001; McCabe et al., 2013; Zhang, 2010; He, 2008). After the family moved to Singapore, the children had school friends who were able to speak Chinese. Yan invited them to the house for activities and sleepover. This created an informal and interactive environment for the participants to speak the heritage language among themselves. Yan also showed Chinese comedies and action movies to raise the interest level of heritage language to her children.

During the family's stay in Singapore, the parents brought the children twice a year to visit Chinese relatives in the United States. They would also stop by Hong Kong to visit relatives and took excursion trips to China. The parents provided continuous support even after the children went to college. The father travelled with Sue to Guilin, China in her junior year for a two-week father-daughter bonding trip. The parents also sent Sue to Shanghai for a full summer break to learn acupuncture. In addition to medical training, Sue was able to be fully immersed in Chinese language and cultural activities for a few months. Peer support and continuous exposure to heritage language enrich the learning process of bilingual learners tremendously (McCabe et al., 2013; Zhang, 2010; He, 2008).

(6) Parents help children to find identity as a heritage language user

Language shift and identity change occurred when the children started to attend school (Tse, 2001; McCabe et al., 2013). Sue started to speak less Cantonese once she started elementary school. Yan was not able to maintain proper heritage language input and the situation worsened with the younger children. When June got older, she realized "walking around outside (the house) I knew that our family did not do things the way other people did around us and I sometimes felt unsure if I preferred to be Chinese or American." To compensate for this deficiency, parents are advised to expand the narrative opportunities to provide space for learning and thinking (McCabe et al., 2013). Sue commented,

I think part of the problem of stopping Cantonese, is I suspect that I had ideas in English that I could not express in Cantonese, and I did not have the maturity at age 8 or 9 to ask for help. At that point in time it was more important to me to get my ideas to mum rather than learn to express myself in Chinese. I wish I had the chance to go to a bilingual school, or at a young age go to after school activities in Chinese.

To address the identity issue, Yan arranged for Sue to perform charity service in the Chinese community. Sue recalled that she had thought of herself as American/white despite being comfortable in a Chinese language setting. While in Singapore, she continued to be "identified as being American, particularly when I was with other Caucasian students. However, when walking around Singapore, working in the Silra Leprosy Home, I did my best to be as Chinese as possible to assimilate." The other relevant finding was when the family took a vacation in Europe. Claire observed that,

The summers when we returned to the U.S. for home leave or went abroad to travel for vacations - I did recognize people had expectations for us to be

able to speak Chinese and to act a certain way. Specifically, when we travelled to certain parts of Europe, it was beyond just a language expectation but there were cultural stereotypes of what a Chinese person should look and act like.

These experiences helped the children to rediscover their identity and language vitality which were important to rekindle their interest in heritage language (Tse, 2001)

(7) Parents choose the right heritage language program for their children

Yan sent the children to Mandarin language school because Cantonese language school was not available. They also considered the Mandarin language as having a higher social language status since it is the official language in China. However, the school's curriculum was not well designed. The fellow classmates were mostly from Taiwan and had stronger Mandarin language skills. They did not mingle with the three sisters due to their different Mandarin language proficiency and socio-cultural family background. The subjects were put into a disadvantaged position and did not enjoy the schooling in Mandarin. When being interviewed, all three sisters used the word "dreadful" to describe their Mandarin learning experience in New York. Sue remembered that she, was very upset when we went to Chinese school because everybody already spoke Mandarin and I did not understand at all. It seemed unfair that everybody else already understood each other and only had to learn the written language and I had to learn a whole different language.... I wish we had kept speaking Cantonese at home and had gone to a Chinese school in Cantonese.

Claire commented that, "I found that the children at the Chinese school in New York were very unfriendly, and the teacher quite impatient." They also did not have much support at home since the parents spoke Cantonese. The situation would be different if the subjects could have attended a Cantonese speaking school. Yet, the one advantage of attending Mandarin school was the familiarity of the Chinese characters. The orthography of Mandarin and Cantonese are the same. The two languages can supplement each other in the learning and application process. As June later had formal training in Mandarin, she wrote, although Mandarin is more popular and useful at work, Cantonese is much more useful for speaking with other family members. Cantonese is useful in that it gave us a standard Chinese base to communicate upon when in more formal situations. My Cantonese is basically the level of a little child.

Conclusions

Challenges to heritage language learning for the participants were that they born of Chinese descent in the United States and moved to Singapore instead of Hong Kong (where their parents came from) for their juvenile years. Unlike residents in Hong Kong, Singaporeans with Chinese heritage speak Mandarin instead of Cantonese dialect. The participant's experiences elucidate the importance of Chinese immigrants' children developing their identity and culture through heritage language maintenance.

There are tangible and intangible benefits for heritage language maintenance. The tangible benefit is the cognitive advantage of bilingualism in academic achievement and language acquisition. Intangible benefits include

higher self-esteem, a stronger cultural identity, a better connection to extended family, increased global employment opportunity and enrichment from widened horizons in language, arts, and culture. While schools and community are essential in the process of language maintenance, parental involvement is the most important factor. Parents who are proficient in the heritage language should be encouraged to speak the language. Parents can read books with their children together or tell stories of their personal experiences. Family activities and entertainment can be conducted in the heritage language. Parents can enlist the support of the extended family by visiting those living nearby and telecommunicating with those in other countries. The family can visit the heritage country or receive visiting relatives from there for more frequent contacts.

Choosing the right school for the children to learn their heritage language is very important. Language should not be the only selection criteria in choosing a language school. The learners need to be comfortable with the learning environment both with the teachers and fellow students. For parents who want their children to be successful in bilinguals, continuous parental involvement is very important. Abundant learning experiences provided by parents both inside and outside the house are imperative in order to counter-balance the strong external English influence. It is very important that the learners feel good about the learning process. Falling behind or learning with the wrong student group or curriculum could be detrimental. Parents need to monitor the children's learning experience constantly. If the environment is not suitable, they need to seek change before the problem is exacerbated. Parents need to identify what the learning objective is and match it with resources. In this case, the parents spoke Cantonese but knew that Mandarin was more important as the formal Chinese language. As a hybrid solution, they could have spoken Cantonese at home with high proficiency. Mandarin could then be treated as a closely related language which could be learned in a high-quality school. Sue summed up in her heritage language learning experience stating, "overall, one thing that confounds this whole thing is the Cantonese/Mandarin quandary. I suspect that if Chinese school had been in Cantonese things might have been different." She also wished that parents could speak more Cantonese at home to reinforce the culture and family.

There are many other strategies that parents can use for heritage language maintenance of their children. This article mainly discussed those which could be used when children are in their formative years. While the recommendations are not comprehensive, they are focused on having a robust language vitality environment, choosing the appropriate language school, and associating heritage language with a positive experience at home and outside. Further research studies are warranted in mixing Cantonese and Mandarin in bilingual study and the experience of a third culture child in the learning process.

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Appendix A

(A) Interview questions (not all the responses are used in this paper)

1. In the stages as shown above of 4 time periods (in the United States, in Singapore, in college, at work) of growing up until now, have you felt your identity has changed as a bilingual learner (e.g. I am an American, an Asian, Asian American, or any other identity). In Singapore, how does a third culture kid (Third culture kids (TCK) are persons raised in a culture other than their parents' or the culture of the country named on their passport (where they are legally considered native) for a significant part of their early development years) affect you in the identity?
2. Have you notice any language shift (i.e. from naturally speaking Chinese to English etc.) during these stages?
3. How do home environment (parents, relatives, cousins, etc.), school education and school environment, community (e.g. Chinese church, Chinese language school, Chinatown), social peer (school friends and non-school friends etc.) affect your Chinese literacy?
4. How do you evaluate your Chinese literacy level (speaking, reading, writing) in each of these stages?
5. Have you found Chinese useful in any of these stages in your career, social life, and family relations?
6. Did you find Chinese learning fun or dreadful in these stages? Why?
7. In hindsight, how would you wish it was different in any of the Chinese learning experiences (of each stage)?
8. How does English learning experience affect your Chinese learning experience (positive/additive, negative/subtractive, or neutral)?