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Being Model Minority Means Being Alienated from the Ethnic Language? A Case Study of Chinese Americans

Abstract

The education of language minority children is one of the most important issues facing the United States and other countries where a great influx of immigrants arrive each year and constitute a considerable portion of the population. Under the immense pressure to be assimilated into the mainstream culture, ethnic minority children often chose to relinquish their ethnic language in their early years. As Olsen's (1997) remarked, "to be accepted as Americans means they first have to shift from their home language to English" (p.34). The advocates of ethnic language postulate that educational efforts should be dedicated to preserve this valuable linguistic resource (Cummins, 1981; García, 1983; Fishman, 1989; Trueba, 1993; August & Hakuta, 1998). In practice, however, mainstream institutions offer little or no assistance in maintaining and developing ethnic language as a written language despite the fact that in the U.S., in the 1980s, over 5000, community-based, ethnic language schools were attended by as many as 600,000 children (Fishman, 1989). In the 2000s, with the increasing number of immigrants, the number of ethnic language schools must have grown substantially.

The results presented here come from a year and half case study of the Chinese school located in the southwest, an urban high-tech city in the U.S. This study intended to achieve two major purposes: first, to shed light on the second-generation, American-born Chinese youths' perceptions of the Chinese language, the Chinese language school, and the Chinese language class; and secondly, to explore the intricate relationship between participants' situated social identity and their language use patterns. Therefore, this study, at the macro level, examined the demographic, socio-cultural, and linguistic contexts of current Chinese language school to illustrate how the wider community and its institutions influence language maintenance. The current study, at the micro level, incorporated the discourse-centered approach to explore how the participants' situated social identity and verbal interactions in a Chinese language class were interwoven with one another.

In summary, this study suggests that the experience of being Chinese in the American context has a profound impact on the retention of ethnic language. In other words, being Chinese American means being a high achiever in the academic realm rather than being ethnic Chinese American more closely affiliated with the retention of ethnic language. The informants readily adhered to the model minority identity. Under these circumstances, studying ethnic language became irrelevant and even hindered Chinese Americans' pursuits of being academic high achiever. The current study helps us gain insight into how a

community-based ethnic language school worked to maintain the ethnic language despite significant odds against it. The results may help the other ethnic language schools be structured in a way consistent with the linguistic and sociocultural characteristics of their intended learners. By looking into the classroom interactions, the study points out how ethnic language teaching is contingent upon the broader sociocultural context of schooling and the necessity of considering the forces of larger sociocultural contexts in the governance of patterns of classroom interactions.

Introduction

Background and Rationales

Increasing immigration rates for Latinos, Asians, and other people of color are changing the ethnic composition of the U.S. population. For example, demographic data from the U.S. Census indicate that, in 1945, the U.S. population was 87 percent white, 10 percent black, 2.5 percent Hispanic, and 0.5 percent Asian. Fifty years from now, in the year 2050, demographic projections suggest a remarkably different population profile: 52.8 percent of the population will be white, 24.5 percent will be Hispanic, 13.6 will be black, and 8.2 percent will be of Asian ancestry (Suarez-Orozco, 1998). It is most likely that by the year 2050, the U.S. will be a nation in which ethnic minorities constitute almost half of the total population. These trends suggest that educators will continue to face a challenge in addressing the linguistic and cultural needs of children of immigrants.

Under the immense pressure to be assimilated into mainstream culture, ethnic minority children often chose to relinquish their ethnic language, at least in their early years of formal schooling. As remarked in Olsen's (1997) book, "to be accepted as Americans means they first have to shift from their home language to English" (p.34). Theoretical accounts and empirical results suggest that maintaining one's ethnic language is intrinsically important to the ethnic minority children; however, they often do not perceive the significance until they have missed the opportunity to embrace it. In a multilingual society like the U.S., educators and parents often face important decisions in delineating the appropriate language programs that will further the development of language minority children in their ethnic languages as well as in English. As a way of preserving their languages, a number of ethnic communities have established schools that offer language programs outside of the formal education systems. Nevertheless, little is known about what contributions these ethnic language schools make to the lives of ethnic minority youth.

Purpose of the Study

Thus, this study intended to achieve two major purposes: first, to shed light on the second-generation, American-born Chinese youths' perceptions of the Chinese language, the Chinese language school, and the Chinese language class; and secondly, to explore the intricate relationship between participants' situated social identity and their language use patterns in the Chinese language class.

The Significance of the Study

The results of this study may help other ethnic language schools be structured in a way consistent with the linguistic and sociocultural characteristics of the intended learners. This study also contributes to our understanding of the complexity involved in the retention of ethnic language and the cultivation of ethnic identity. By looking into the classroom interactions, the study illuminates how ethnic language teaching is largely determined by the broader sociocultural context of schooling. The current study also points out the necessity of considering the forces of larger sociocultural contexts in the governance of discursive construction of social identity.

Review of Literature

I think that our generation will be like one of the first ones where in America we'll mainly be speaking English, and Chinese will be our second language. And like when we get older, instead of, all our parents speak Mandarin to each other, but we'll be speaking English to each other and then maybe once in a while, use a couple of Chinese words. (Ellen)

The parents of ethnic minority students often face a dilemma when concerning the role of ethnic language in the educational processes of their children. They may ask questions such as: Does the knowledge of ethnic language educationally hinder children by taking away the time and effort that the mastery of dominant language (English) requires in order to excel academically? Can the knowledge of ethnic language be exploited in a meaningful way to help the ethnic minority children obtain academic achievement? These immigrant parents may be less concerned about the identity confusion and poor self-concept associated with the loss of ethnic language than they are about their children's performance in public schools. Most studies on the maintenance of ethnic language are anchored in an assimilation perspective. Accordingly, the usual mainstream evaluation of the merits of ethnic language instruction is based on whether such instruction facilitates mastery of the socially dominant language (Fishman, 1989). Nevertheless, preserving ethnic language should also be considered for the ethnic minorities' own sake. That is, for its impacts on the psychological, intellectual, and self-defined development of the ethnic minority and the solidarity of the minority language community. Therefore, the review of literature begins with the discussion on two perspectives: language as a valuable resource and as a vehicle of ethnic solidarity.

Despite the suggested significance of ethnic languages to be maintained as resources and for the formation of ethnic identity, there are few institutional efforts in the U.S. to preserve and enhance these language resources except within the ethnic communities themselves. For the most part, ethnic language communities have undertaken a primary responsibility for the maintenance and enhancement of ethnic languages. Nevertheless, the contribution these ethnic communities can make to the preservation of languages other than

English is often overlooked. Literature concerning the Chinese language schools is also reviewed to provide an overview of what the community-based, Chinese language schools attempt to accomplish, how they operate, and what the outcomes are. Established by Chinese immigrant parents to revitalize Chinese language culture, the Chinese language schools constitute “calculated intervention” (Spinder, 1987) for the transmission of ethnic language and culture. Cultural transmission involves cultural discontinuity. Cultural continuities and discontinuities are the results of cultural transmission in a given historical context. In line with cultural discontinuities, the conceptualization of schooling as cultural transmission will be reviewed to illustrate their implications and applications for the maintenance of Chinese as an ethnic language.

Ethnic Language as a Valuable Resource

The advocates of ethnic language maintenance often see language as a valuable resource. They believe that educational efforts should preserve this resource for the benefit of an individual and a nation (Fishman, 1989; Cummins, 1981; Trueba, 1993; Garcia, 1992; August & Hakuta, 1997). Members of ethnic communities also often adopt a similar perspective. For example, the ethnocultural communities in Canada emphasized that heritage languages represent both an individual and a national resource that entails considerable economic and diplomatic benefits for the country as a whole (Cummins, 1992). In Gilhotra’s (1985) Australian study, the parents were asked why their children should learn their heritage languages. Some parents participating in the study replied that language is a resource. The literature reviewed here implies that the linguistic diversity found in the U.S. should be nurtured as a valuable national resource through ethnic language programs rather than being eradicated by the current education system. Nevertheless, the high level of language proficiency, in a variety of languages, brought to U.S. schools every year by linguistic minorities has not been preserved. Campbell and Lindholm (1987) pointed out, “There are few efforts to conserve and develop the language resources of linguistic minority students who enter our schools with oral-aural language skills that are greater than the proficiency levels of most graduates of foreign language programs in this country [USA]” (p. 5). Moreover, as Ovando (1990) described the US language policy, he suggested that we should treasure the linguistic gifts that children from non-English language background bring to our schools. Their bilingualism may help the study of foreign languages for English monolinguals. Currently, there appears to be a trend in the US to appreciate English speakers who learn a second language for national political and economic considerations. However, bilingual education programs to support ethnic languages have been controversial. The paradox seems to be a tendency to value the acquisition of languages while devaluing the language minorities who already have them. In addition to preserving ethnic language for educational benefits and as a valuable resource, previous studies indicated that ethnic language might be one of the most profound elements necessary to maintain a sense of

self-identity.

Ethnic Language and Ethnic Identity

A full command of one's own ethnic language is vital in sharing the fundamental common cultural values and norms and feeling affiliated within an ethnic group (Trueba, 1993). Losing identity is associated with the loss of self-esteem, not only for individuals but also for groups. In other words, if certain social segments lose their sense of self-identity by feeling they belong neither here nor there, the loss of identity would have detrimental effects on the individuals as well as on the society (Gilhortra, 1985). Similarly, minority parents often implicitly see the ethnic identity function of language as a major reason for preserving ethnic language. When asked why their children should learn their ethnic language, the majority of parents see the ability to function in their ethnic language as definitely an ethnic marker. Fluency in the ethnic language is expected of their children (Gilhortra, 1985; Trueba, 1993; Liao, 1998). Nevertheless, empirical studies have generated conflicting results. The debate over whether cultural or ethnic identity can be maintained without the preservation of ethnic language continues. There is no simple answer to this debate. The role of ethnic language in the formation/preservation of ethnic identity may vary with particular ethnic groups and within the cultural contexts that receive that ethnic minority. Researchers have argued that preserving ethnic language constitutes an important vehicle for the development of ethnic identity.

Chinese parents often perceive Chinese language as an important vehicle for ethnic and cultural solidarity. To preserve Chinese heritage, many Chinese parents feel that their offspring should be familiar with the Chinese cultures, traditions, customs, and language. Consequently, in the areas where Chinese population is concentrated, many Chinese American children attend weekend Chinese schools (Cited in Wong, 1997, p.303). Nevertheless, the research results remain inconclusive about whether cultural identity or ethnic distinctiveness can be maintained without the maintenance of mother tongue. A majority of the studies reviewed suggest that the maintenance of language is crucial in maintaining ethnic identity (Leclezio et al., 1986; Giles et al, 1977; Giles et al, 1976; Taylor et al., 1973) while the others conclude that culture does not rely essentially on language for its continued vitality (Caltabiano, 1984; Giles et al., 1979).

A qualitative study conducted with five U.S.-born ethnic and language minority adults indicates the prominent role of language in identity formation (Tse, 1996) Another study examining the linguistic consequences of Japanese settlement in Brazil suggested that ethnic identity switch is accompanied by mother tongue replacement with Portuguese by the third generation (Kanazawa & Loveday, 1988). Furthermore, Rumbaut (1994) studied the formation of ethnic self-identities during adolescence by examining the psychological adaptation of children of immigrants from Asian, Latin America and the Caribbean. The findings suggested that language is closely related to the formation and maintenance of

ethnic identity. Recent studies also revealed an associative relationship between the mother tongue literacy and ethnic identity (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Verhoeven, 1996).

In summary, previous studies suggest the important role of language in ethnic identity formation; however, language should not be considered in isolation in ethnic identity formation. The salience of language may vary with particular ethnic groups and different cultural contexts. Xia (1992) suggested that the current maintenance of the Chinese language represents a persistence of Chinese culture and ethnic identity. For Chinese, retaining their ethnic mother tongue is seen as a significant medium for maintaining their culture and ethnic identity.

The above reviews of literature indicated self-identification benefits of a strong ethnic language base and affirmed ethnic language and culture as a valuable resource at the national and individual levels. Yet policymakers across the nation are driven by social and political philosophies whose ultimate goals are the linguistic and cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities (Hernandez-Chavez, 1993). Examples of the political pressures affecting the American educational system are evident in the passage of California's Proposition 227, "English for the children," aimed at eliminating bilingual education programs and in a Texas courtroom where the home language issue became a child custody issue (NY Times, August 30, 1995). Despite the variety of language resources brought to the U.S. each year by immigrants, it is striking to see the American society's linguistic homogeneity and the degree to which ethnic languages are rapidly replaced by English (Fishman 1966). From the historical perspective, America cannot be credited for preserving linguistic resources. Instead, Lieberson, Dalto, and Johnson (1975) indicated that the U.S. is a veritable cemetery of foreign language, where knowledge of the mother tongue of hundreds of immigrant groups has rarely lasted past the third generation. What follow next is the language situations of the second-generation in the U.S.

Ethnic Language and the Second Generation

Fishman (1966) and Porter (1990) described the structure of linguistic shift as a three-generation process. That is, the first generation immigrants sustain their native language while learning English. The second generation becomes bilingual and begins the shift to English by using the native language with parents or grandparents and English in formal settings. Eventually, the third generation discontinues the use of the native language and becomes speakers of the majority language.

The parents of second-generation youth often intended their children to learn English quickly and adapt to the mainstream society without losing their ethnic language. Nevertheless, to the parent's disappointment and ultimately to the regret of the child, this goal is rarely achieved. A recent study (Portes & Hao, 1998) of patterns of language adaptation by over 5,000 second-generation students in south Florida and southern California found that among most immigrant nationalities, knowledge of and preference for

English is prevailing and that only a small number of participants remain fluent in their ethnic language. The study results indicated that among Latin American students, the most prone to maintain their ethnic language, less than half were fluent bilinguals. Among the Asian-origin students, less than 10 percent retained the fluency in their ethnic language. One contextual factor that might have had a negative effect on the Asian group was the community attitudes toward the retention of ethnic language. Portes & Hao (1998) pointed out, "Ethnographic accounts of an Asian immigrant community tend to stress their strong achievement orientation and entrepreneurship, but not their loyalty to their home language"(p.289). The early studies (Kuo, 1974; Li, 1982) of language situations among Chinese Americans also found the similar patterns of rapid language shift. These studies indicated that the shift to English was taking place at a fast rate in the Chinese American community.

Within the context of a rapid shift to English, many ethnic language groups throughout American history have established ethnic language schools to preserve their languages. The goal of these community language schools is full bilingualism (Baker, 1996). The ethnic language schools in the U.S. have been excluded from most national reports concerning language policy, language learning, and bilingualism. The last national survey of this type of schools was conducted in 1980 (Fishman) and little research on these schools has been conducted since. The current study focuses on a Chinese language school for the following two reasons. First, Chinese language schools have a long tradition in the U.S. and are continuously evolving as a great influx of immigrants continues from the greater China area. Secondly, the Chinese language schools have large enrollment in the U.S. A 1995 survey conducted by the National Council of Associations of Chinese language schools indicated that there were 82,675 students enrolled in Chinese schools (Wong, 1996).

Chinese Language Schools in the United States

The Chinese school has a history of more than 100 years in the U.S. with the first one established in San Francisco in 1886. To serve the needs of early immigrants, classes in Cantonese were offered for the residents of Chinatowns in a number of large cities in the United States. The common feature of the earliest Chinese school in San Francisco and its contemporary counterparts was that Chinese school was supplementary to regular school and took place after hours. Over the decades, the role the Chinese school played has varied depending on American attitudes and policies toward the Chinese and the changes in the composition of the Chinese American community. The functions of the earliest Chinese schools were more than linguistic and cultural in the sense of preserving a threatened language and way of life. Rather, in the era of Exclusion, the Chinese in America had few opportunities for integration into American mainstream and often faced harsh immigration restrictions. The national Chinese exclusion Act of 1882 halted the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years. As a result, the expectations of immigrants of returning to China

someday were very real. It was, thus, important to supplement an American education with a Chinese one. A post-1965 study of Chinese schools (Leung, 1975) showed that the number of Chinese schools had declined. Since the Communists took over power in 1949, preparation for returning to China was no longer a good reason to attend Chinese schools. In addition, with decreased discrimination and improved employment opportunities during the 1960s, Chinese Americans were more integrated into mainstream U.S. society. Therefore, knowledge of Chinese language became less necessary.

A survey conducted in 1995 showed that 85 percent of the schools hold classes on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday nights. Given the immense pressure of language shift into English, one might ask how well the Chinese schools can counteract societal influence and instill a functional proficiency in Chinese by offering classes two or three hours a week, out of which a portion is devoted to culture-related activities. A survey result cited in Wong's (1988) paper showed that 94 percent of the schools have not carried out any evaluation studies on the effectiveness of their programs. A current study of American-born Chinese studying Mandarin at the college level (Liao, 1999) shows that most of the students who attended Chinese school did so only because their parents made them. As a result, they did not learn much Chinese and forgot most of it after withdrawing from the school. Nevertheless, those who were graduates or former dropouts of Chinese schools frequently regretted that they did not learn more Chinese when they had opportunities to better master the language. The 1999 study also indicated that these subjects' desires to learn ethnic language at the college level resulted from a need to resolve an identity crisis. As Chinese American youth emerge from adolescence, many begin to shed the negative perceptions of their ethnicity and ethnic language and feel a need to incorporate the ethnic language into their evolving identity.

Reviewing the literature on Chinese schools suggests that little is known about the impacts of these language programs on the retention of Chinese language. Therefore, a systematic inquiry into the role these language schools play in maintaining the ethnic language and cultivating ethnic identity is needed. The current study employed an ethnographic approach to understand what is occurring at the Chinese language class, what definitions and explanations of the event the teachers/students in the Chinese class hold about these occurrences, and how interactions, explanations, and definitions contribute to the construction of ethnic/social identity among second-generation, Chinese American students.

Schooling as Cultural Transmission

Several ethnographers in the 1980s identified education as a process of cultural transmission, which, of course, requires cultural learning (G. & L. Spindler, 1982; Wolcott, 1982). These scholars were most interested in studying “a calculated intervention in the learning process” as an aspect of cultural transmission. For example, Spindler (1987) examined a variety of cultural groups across the world to illustrate different ways culture is transmitted and showed how techniques such as cultural discontinuity and compression come into play in transmitting and maintaining culture. He further illustrates the purpose of education in modern cultures to bring about cultural change. He also shows how schools serve a recruitment function to maintain aspects of culture and how they also serve as agents of cultural discontinuity geared to foster cultural change. According to Spindler (1987), cultural discontinuity refers to the abrupt and dramatic changes in roles that children and adolescents experience at certain points in their journey to adulthood. The discontinuity in cultural transmission as described by Spindler has the effects of maintaining and validating the culture. As a result, cultural continuity is resolved. In line with Spindler’s cultural discontinuity, the exploration of the schools as an instrument of cultural transmission was undertaken (Wilcox, 1982).

In a sense, the Chinese community to transmit the Chinese language and culture to the second-generation offspring initiated Chinese school. Cultural transmission involves a dynamic transactional process through which the meaning of values and their normative forces are reinterpreted and recreated by the members of the socio-cultural group as they pass cultural tradition on from one generation to the next (Spindler, 1987, p. 303-34). The Chinese school was established intentionally as a means to revitalize the language and culture of the ethnic minority youth that was gradually being eradicated by the hegemony of mainstream culture. In the context of Chinese language schools, in the transactional process of revitalizing the Chinese language and culture, cultural discontinuity may occur because these youngsters have been participating in American public schools for several years. The ways they act, talk, and think, and their cultural values are different from the traditional Chinese ways of acting, speaking, and thinking.

Discursive Construction of Social Identity

Language and identity construction has long been a popular research inquiry in linguistics, literature, social psychology, and anthropology. There has been a tendency to move away from seeing identity as a static, monolithic state of being to seeing it as a social construction from which several identities may be realized and which are contingent upon sociolinguistic resources. Researchers are currently investigating questions of who, where, and why identity gets realized the way it does. The early study of discursive production of identity could be traced back to Labov's (1972) study of "black English vernacular" in the stories of

Harlem adolescents. Labov's purpose of this study was to "see what linguistic techniques are used to evaluate experience within the Black English vernacular culture" (355). As a result, twenty-five years ago, though his main purpose was to observe phonologic variation, Labov and fellow variationists were paving the way investigations about identity construction in discourse. By the 1980's, researchers from several fields (psychology, anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism) were examining how individuals and societies linguistically construct themselves, shifting the focus from static identity categories to discursively produce, fluid identities (Wood, 1998)

In this study, I argue that all personal and social identities of Chinese American Youths are constrained by (but are not limited to) the available sociolinguistic environment (in this case, predominant English speaking plus limited Chinese communicative competence), including the dominant ideologies that surround a given social structure or social practice. The community of practice/social structure I discuss here is a group of second-generation, American-born Chinese at the community-supported, weekend Chinese language school. Part of this study deals with discourse analysis of classroom interactions and the experiences of being Chinese American these informants tell. Building on work in the area of language and identity, this study partially focuses on how one social group, 7th grade Chinese language class manages discursive identities amid prevailing "Model Minority" stereotype.

Methodology

Naturalistic Inquiry/Discourse-Centered Approach

By using the naturalistic inquiry, the current study intended to produce a holistic, thick description of the interactive processes involving the discovery of important and recurring variables in the Chinese language class as these variables relate to one another, under specified conditions, and as they affect or produce certain outcomes in maintaining the ethnic language. To better interpret the social meaning conveyed by the child's use of particular linguistic forms, a discourse-centered approach was used to examine interpersonal interactions in a Chinese school classroom in an effort to understand how the Chinese language is taught through classroom interactions. A discourse-centered approach (Sherzer 1983, 1993, Sherzer and Urban 1991) focuses on actual instances of language use to study the interactions of language, culture, and society. From this perspective, discourse represents the primary medium through which sociocultural meaning and perceptions are reflected, interpreted, created, and motivated. Sherzer argues that, "it is discourse which creates, recreates, modifies, and fine tunes both culture and language and their intersection" (Sherzer 1987:296).

Research Procedures

Research Site

This study was conducted at one Chinese language class at a Chinese language school located in an urban high-tech city in the U.S. southwest. The majority of the Chinese school's 140 students are children of Taiwanese immigrants and second-generation, American-born Chinese American children. In 1982, the school was established by Taiwanese parents to help their American-born offspring preserve ethnic language and culture. When the school first started, there were approximately 20 registered students. With the growing demands of high-tech industry in the city, many Chinese families settled in the area during the past decade. In 1998, it was estimated there were 140 students enrolled in the school.

Selection of Study Class and Participants

There were eight students in the seventh grade class for the fall semester, 1998. Five female and three male students, age 13 to 14 years, agreed to participate in the study. They were all second generation, American-born Chinese and had been studying Mandarin at the Chinese school for more than seven years. Students who had been studying their ethnic language at the Chinese school for extended periods of time were recruited since this study was aimed at exploring, from the students' perspectives, how Chinese schools help preserve the ethnic language and cultivate the ethnic identity of the second generation American-born Chinese. Given the fact that the older informants were more capable of articulating their own perceptions, the students studying Mandarin at the school's higher-grade level (7th) were recruited.

Data Collection

Data were collected from November 1998 through December 1999. This included videotaped observations of classroom interactions and in-depth, tape-recorded interviews with students and the teacher.

Participant Observation

To document the interactions in the seventh-grade class, particularly as these interactions varied in structure and content as the semester proceeded, participant observation was also carried out to examine the students' and teacher's actual use of language. During the classroom observations, I functioned essentially as a participant for the entire semester. I took on the role as a teaching-assistant while I was collecting field-notes, observing interactions among students and between the teacher and students, and describing the actual uses of language.

In addition, a video camera was used in conjunction with participant observation in the classroom. A video camera was set up in a corner of the classroom to accommodate

students' verbal interaction with one another and the teacher. The use of the video camera enables the ethnographer "to collect more live data--immediate, natural, detailed behavior" (Splinder, 1982, p. 7). The seventh-grade class was videotaped throughout a semester. Taping usually began as the bell rang at 1:30 on Sunday afternoons and ended as the students left the classroom. The seventh-grade class was videotaped for 28 hours across 15 class sessions. Videotaping was carried out continuously for the duration of each two-hour-long tape cassette. Two tapes in the whole corpus had technical problems viewing them. The data reported here came from repeated viewing of 13 tapes.

In-depth Interviews

Audio-taped, open-ended interviews were conducted with eight student informants to understand their perceptions of Chinese school and the school's role in the preservation of ethnic language and the formation of ethnic identity. The interview data also allow closer analysis of the classroom interactions in the Chinese class. The interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes. Five interviews were conducted at the informants' homes and two were carried out at my house during the spring break. These interviews were semi-structured. An interview guide was used for the initial interviews. The benefits of this approach are that the interviewees are provided with topic areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that illuminate that particular informant's own perceptions (Patton, 1990).

Group interviews were conducted during the Chinese class on the 9th of May, 1999. Seven students participated in this semi-structured interview. The interview lasted for an hour. The purpose of the group interview was to allow further elaboration, clarification, and verification on the interactional data obtained from classroom observations. In addition to interviews and observations, I collected existing sources of data, such as school documents, student essays and other student products, textbooks and teacher's supplementary handouts, and the school's scrapbook.

Data Analysis

My data analysis was aimed at producing detailed pictures of these students in the classroom context, and as individuals with personal experiences that they brought to the classroom interactions. The broadest level of analysis provides a general description of the social, educational, and linguistic context where these Chinese Americans were learning to speak and read their ethnic language. This analysis was based on the field notes taken during the school year of 1999. Secondary data came from the interviews with the community leaders, reading local newspapers about Chinese Americans, and demographic information about the church members. The next level of analysis provides a picture of the sociolinguistic environment of the classroom, relying heavily on the field notes and videotapes of classroom interaction during the year of study. In viewing the videotapes, I was interested in determining the overall picture of typical days and the variations in

contents and structures of classroom interactions as the semester proceeded. By analyzing the contents of interactions in the classroom, major themes were identified and interpreted in the frame of a larger sociocultural context as well as the participant's perspectives. In the analyses of language use patterns among the teachers and students, the attitudes and intents of the students were inferred. This analysis focused on attitudes conveyed, the kind of situation, the kind of act, what language is chosen (Mandarin vs. English), and what the differences convey about intent, or definition of the situation by the speaker.

Sets of interview data were analyzed through the following procedures: organizing the data; generating categories, themes, and patterns; testing the emergent hypotheses against the data; and searching for alternative explanations of the data. Tapes of the interviews were transcribed and each set of transcriptions was coded. Open coding was first used to identify a majority of the sub-categories. A list of the sub-categories was made to assist identifying major themes from the data. In the process of category generation, I paid attention to the regularities in the setting and participants chosen for study. As categories of meaning emerged, I searched for those that have internal convergence and external divergence (Guba, 1978).

Limitation of the Study

The research efforts did not go beyond the classroom to the interactions that occurred at homes of these informants. The information about language use at home among the participants is revealed through the interviews. Because of the unavailability of home discourse samples, the explicit comparison between the two settings cannot be made. Also, the current Chinese community is an upper-middle class perspective—not working class perspective.

Findings and Results

The Students

The informants' continuous schooling experiences in mainstream institutions play significant role in formulating their perceptions and attitudes toward the study of Chinese language. Therefore, the following section presents the major themes emerged from the interviews, in which the informants' identity as "Academic Achiever", embedded within the "Model Minority," stereotype was reflected. This identity is manifested in the informants' peer affiliation, language use patterns, perceptions of the Chinese language, and perceptions of the Chinese language school. The key themes form a linkage between the acculturation experiences of these Chinese American youth and the ways in which they interact with one another and with the teacher in the 7th grade Chinese language class.

To be Chinese Americans is to be “Academic Achiever”

Being “Chinese American”

Majority of the current informants did not encounter any dramatic racial discrimination as they grew up. Most informants are in the Academic Preparation track in public schools. Except for the Chinese language they spoke at home and their physical differences, these informants did not see themselves to be distinctive from their peers. Valerie remembered when she was a child; she did not pay much attention to racial differences. She explained, “I think when we were younger, it did not matter all that much because we do not look at that. When we were younger, we just looked at friends.” Having opportunities to learn another language and experience two cultures were considered advantageous. Several informants mentioned speaking Chinese to keep the things among Chinese Americans. However, the same advantage seemed to be problematic when children from the school asked the informants to speak Chinese and made fun of the way the Chinese language sounds. Most informants had been requested by their classmates to sound out certain words in Chinese and had been ridiculed afterwards. If the informants were not able to sound words out, their peers sarcastically responded, “I thought you were Chinese.” This kind of dilemma made informants feel awkward about their ethnic language. Physical differences, such as eye shape, eye color, or hair/skin color also made these Chinese American youths vulnerable to self-identification. Mary attributed her lack of self-esteem to the fact that when she was younger, she did not see many Chinese people in her surroundings, which scared her. Mary, however felt proud of being Chinese two years ago when she had opportunities to take part in a Chinese boot camp where she “felt really comfortable with Chinese and started to really like being Chinese.” Being with other children of similar ethnic traits and physical appearance strengthened Mary’s positive self-image by having others who were similar to her.

Clinging to the Ethnic Peer Group

Valerie and Nick mentioned that they had ethnic peer groups to cling to when they were in elementary school. The friendship of early peer groups usually grew into their adolescent years. Valerie clung to other Chinese children during her elementary years. They played together at recess, had lunch together, and selected each other for group project partners. Valerie mentioned that this group of Chinese girls were the only people she talked to frequently during her early years of life. They were her best friends and they are still very close. One of the informants, Ellen, was also in Ester’s group. They were close friends at school and went to the same church. Similarly, Nick mainly hung around with Chinese people. Most of his best friends are Chinese; however, they don’t purposefully exclude others. In middle school, Nick was placed in the top level of his class for several academic subjects and his Chinese friends were also in that level. Because of being in the same classes, Chinese students just naturally formed a group. Nick explained, “We didn’t really

do anything specifically as a Chinese only group. But we did basic activities, learning stuff like that with the class.” However, Nick admitted, “I guess since we’re all Chinese, we kind of all want to get together in a group. Because we are different.”

The formation of ethnic peer groups revealed by current informants is consistent with Steinberg’s (1996) finding that Asian students’ placed a great emphasis on doing well in school, whereas Black and Hispanic friends did not emphasize school performance as much as Asian students. Peer pressure among Chinese students and their friends to do well in school also prevailed among the informants. Valerie claimed that she never felt very different being Chinese-Americans since she went to the Chinese church on a regular basis and knew many other Chinese-American people. She never thought of herself as a minority. However, Valerie said, “at school, I guess for some reason, it’s a little pressure about being Chinese-American. Because people think you’re supposed to be smarter.” Articles that portrayed the academic success of Asian Americans began to appear in the public press in the mid-1960s. In December of 1966, U.S. News and World Report featured an article describing the academic success of Chinese Americans. Hence, the model minority stereotype emerged. It has been argued that Chinese Americans tended to define their cultural identity in terms of academic achievement. In other words, to be Chinese is to do well in school (Lee, 1983; Lau, 1988 cited in Siu, 1992).

Living up to the “Model Minor” Stereotype

The informants felt enormous pressure of being Chinese American because Chinese students were often expected to be smart, high-achievers in the academic realm. Several mentioned how they were perceived in school because of their Chinese ethnicity. Lisa explained,

Most people think that girls are smart and then to think that they're also Asian, too, they should get good grades and stuff. I know some people who say that the teachers judge by who you are and that's what your grade will be. They say like English people might be an 80 or whatever and an Asian girl might be a 90 and another Asian girl might be 100. So that's what they think.

The characterization of Chinese-Americans as high achievers seems positive compared with the stereotypes of other ethnic minorities. However, some informants perceived this seemingly flattering stereotype as another form of discrimination and the source of pressure among Chinese-Americans. When Valerie first started middle school where classes in various subjects began to be divided into different levels, everyone was pestering each other to see what class they had gotten into. There were four levels of math, including transition, talented & gifted, enriched, and grade level. Most of Chinese Americans were in the top level. Valerie was in the second level whereas most girls in her group went to the top level. She felt pressured to be able to keep up with the other Chinese-Americans in school, and she said, "I think people expect you to be smart. And they always think that we are in the highest class and stuff. But I am not."

Nick, one of the out-standing students in his school, described typical Chinese student as smarter and working harder for good grades. He seemed to willingly embrace the model minority stereotype and attempted to live up to the higher standard imposed by this stereotype. He continued to elaborate on how others perceived Chinese- Americans and how this perception affected the interaction between Chinese- Americans and other students in school. Nick stated, "A lot of times they refer to us as those Chinese smart people. And we're considered like way smarter, like too smart and stuff. A lot of times people make fun of us and then in class when they're having trouble, they always ask us for help too." Nick explained how this pressure to achieve affected him and his friends,

Well, like in school, most of the time we consider low A as a bad grade... I mean, I want straight As. And I prefer upper As, like 100s, 99, 98, 97, 96. When I get lower grades, it's, also most of my friends, we're also kind of competitive at school and most of my friends, we always get decently high grades.

Nick became ambivalent about being considered one of "those brainy people" when asked if he had ever been discriminated against because of his ethnicity. On the one hand, Nick tried to live up to the higher standard imposed by the model minority stereotype; on the other hand, he felt that he was discriminated against because of his ethnicity. Being Chinese American was equated with straight A students.

Chinese immigrant parents usually hold high expectations for their children's educational attainment, particularly the parents with a Taiwanese background. They pushed their children so hard that anything hindering the academic advancement needed to be eliminated. These parents often expected their American-born offspring to enter one of the Ivy League universities or pursue a graduate degree. For Instance, when asked what particular goal she wanted to achieve, Mary mentioned, "My mom wants me to at least get a master's degree but I don't know if I can. My dad said if I got into one of the really good colleges, he would buy me a car and if I didn't, he wouldn't buy me one."

Language Use Patterns

Rapid Shift to English as the Primary Language

To be accepted as Americans and to accelerate academically, the ethnic language was usually perceived as the first hindrance to be overcome. Thus, a rapid shift to English prevailed among the current informants. Because of the unequal status of English versus Chinese in the students' community, English was the predominant language while Chinese was mostly disregarded. The feasibility of preserving the Chinese language was not seen, and, indeed, several informants had reached a point of no return for revitalizing their ethnic language. Ellen's preoccupation with the loss of her ethnic language was indeed a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I think that our generation will be like one of the first ones where in America we'll mainly be speaking English, and Chinese will be our second language. And like when we get older, instead of, all our parents speak Mandarin to each other, but we'll be speaking English to each other and then maybe once in a while, use a couple of Chinese words.

The overall picture that has emerged from the current study is that the shift to English took place rapidly in this Chinese community. These informants all spoke Mandarin as their first language. Nevertheless, when they started pre-school, they gradually learned English. Eventually English dominated Mandarin and became their primary language. When these participants began elementary school, they were already fluent speakers of English since most of them learned English from pre-school at four or five years of age.

George also recalled that he spoke more Chinese when he was younger. He said, "I spoke mainly Mandarin until I was about five or six or seven. Something like that. Then I started speaking more English." When George began elementary school, he knew English too but not as well as Mandarin. However, his sister helped him in the process of acquiring English. "My sister would go like, 'how do you spell dog?' and then I'd go, 'd-o-g.' So I started learning like that. And then I started learning how to read and then I began to speak more English," George remembered. Alice spoke Chinese until first grade because she did not know any English. However, during her kindergarten year, she stopped talking for a whole year until she learned English. Alice remembered that year was very confusing to her, and she said, "I spoke Chinese to everybody but they didn't know what I was saying. And so I stopped talking... I felt confused because I didn't understand why they didn't understand me." Alice spoke less Chinese to her brother because she was surrounded by more Americans as she grew up. Ester's speech was a little delayed when she was in elementary school. Thus, her parents spoke more English with her to help her English development. As Valerie grew up, she spoke more English and nowadays her parents pushed her to speak more Chinese at home. Thus, she uses more Chinese at home now. As English became more and more predominant, both the informants' homes and the Chinese school became the shelter for Chinese language, where the parents and teachers fostered having their children speak as much Chinese as possible.

Common Practice to Speak Mandarin with Parents at Homes

Mandarin is the primary language the informants speak with their parents at home. For most of them, it is a common rule that they have to speak Mandarin with their parents at home even though they prefer speaking English. Several felt that they were forced to speak only Mandarin at home. Therefore, they switched to English immediately when their parents were not around. With their siblings, they spoke English most of the time. Only on rare occasions did they speak Mandarin with their brothers or sisters, such as when their parents insisted or their Mandarin-speaking relatives visited. For example, Mary says, "I don't have to speak Chinese with my brother, but whenever we're talking to our parents and they are

speaking to us, we have to speak Chinese to them.” For some informants, living with their grandparents offered opportunities to speak Mandarin, since Mandarin is the only language through which they are able to communicate with one another. In some families, the parents spoke Mandarin to their children; however, their children usually responded in English unless they were reminded to speak Mandarin. The types of conversations these subjects are engaged in when speaking Mandarin include dinnertime talk, daily routines, watching TV together, and other basic conversations.

These languages use patterns and types of conversations identified at home are similar to what was observed in the Chinese class. These informants felt constrained by their Mandarin competency when they had to talk about ideas or topics outside the home. It was quite challenging for these informants to communicate freely and efficiently in Mandarin. Mary pointed out, “I’m a good listener. I can understand what they’re saying. But I can’t really say it myself.” Peter also mentioned that when he tried to get some abstract ideas across, he used English. If his parents talked about something that he had never heard of, he just asked ‘what’s that’ in English. This echoes exactly what happened in the Chinese class.

Although the informants saw Chinese school as an opportunity to be around other Chinese peers, Mandarin definitely was not the informants’ peer language. They spoke only English with their friends, even those who spoke Mandarin at home with their parents.

Rationales for Attending Chinese Language School

As the children grew older, it became challenging for Chinese parents to motivate them to keep going to Chinese school and to continue studying Chinese language every Sunday. The main persuasion these parents used was a pragmatic one. Nevertheless, the informants were often able to come up with more pragmatic reasons to override their parents’ arguments. Most parents emphasized how beneficial it would be for the informants’ futures and careers if they were able to speak Chinese. Lisa’s parents told her that it was very important to learn Chinese because she would need it when she grew up. Other pragmatic arguments included telling their children to continuously study Chinese for SAT II preparation, college credit transfer, and because Chinese is the most spoken language in the world.

Communicating with Parents and Other Chinese-dominant Extended Family Members

In immigrant families, a language gap between parents and children is likely to emerge. Most current participants quickly acquired English proficiency and developed a preference for speaking English over Chinese. This finding is similar to the study of 2,660 first- and second-generation Latin American and Caribbean children in Florida. The study showed that 82 percent preferred to speak English and that 73 percent claimed to speak English “very well” (Portes and Schauffler, 1994). The danger of rapid linguistic assimilation is that it can cause the children to be unable to communicate effectively with their immigrant

parents. One informant mentioned that nowadays she spoke English so fast that her parents could not follow along. Mary felt frustrated when she said something important in English to her parents and they did not understand her. Mary did not appreciate her parents' efforts to help her maintain the Chinese language. Instead, she asserted, "I don't think it's really worth it. I mean, they're like giving up their chance of learning English and stuff. I don't know, I don't think it's worth it." Therefore, it is important for some informants to retain their Chinese languages to prevent the language gap from emerging, particularly for the parents whose linguistic assimilation was not viable. Ellen said, "I think Chinese language class is pretty good because we're learning how to speak our parents' language so we can communicate better." In addition, the current informants' communication needs extended beyond their immediate family. They also revealed their needs and desire to be able to communicate with their extended family members who could only understand Chinese.

Valerie pointed out that she felt obligated to be able to speak Chinese because most of her grandparents, aunts, and uncles were in Taiwan and only spoke Chinese. Another mentioned, "I want to be able to speak Mandarin with my grandparents and my cousins. Because I haven't met them in a long time, so I don't know how well they speak English. And I don't want; it'd be too hard for them to learn English. So it'd be easier for me to learn Chinese..." On top of communication needs with family members, Ellen pointed out other rationales for her to speak Chinese well. She said,

It's sort of important to me to be able to speak Mandarin for a couple of reasons. Like I want, since we're Chinese, I feel like we should be able to speak Mandarin at least some. And I feel like when I get older, I want my kids to be able to speak Mandarin. Even if they can speak better than me. I don't really care. It's just that I won't be able to help them on homework and stuff, so that'd be kind of bad. But I think, well, I want to be able to speak Mandarin well because I want to go to visit Taiwan and my grandparents and I want to be able to speak Mandarin.

In light of the various reasons claimed by the informants to study Chinese language at Chinese school, one may assume that these informants must come to the Faith Chinese school with great motivation to study Chinese language. Nevertheless, struggling with pressures to excel at public school and keeping up with the inherent complexity of the Chinese language muted the participants' intrinsic motivation to study the Chinese.

Parents' Desires for the Chinese American Youth to Study the Chinese Language

"They just say that it will benefit us when we grow up. But basically we just go because our parents have already paid and we kind of have to," Nick complained when asked why he attended Chinese school. The following conversation between the interviewer and Nick illustrates lack of interest in studying the Chinese language:

Nick: I know a lot of the kids in my class are quitting next year. And so there will probably be like four or five of us next year. But I guess they'll [Nick's parents] probably sign me up again, I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you mind?

Nick: I do mind, but I don't really have much say in it. Because they kind of, they just pay without asking me and then, because we already paid it, I guess I have to go.

At the end of this conversation, Nick told me that he just wanted to tell his parents, "Do not sign me up." Another student, George, was relieved that his misbehavior resulted in his parents' withdrawing him from Chinese school. He explained, "Nobody wants to learn it in my class." George felt that he had gained from his misbehaviors. Yet, despite parents forcing the participants to come to Chinese school, they looked forward to seeing their friends at Chinese class. In the seventh-grade class, four out of the eight people in this class have been together in the same class since the first-grade. The informants see Chinese school as a place where Chinese Americans can be with one another.

Language as an Important Attribute of Being Chinese American

Language emerged as one of the attributes that the current informants identified as a part of who they are and the specific ethnic descriptors they adhere to. When asked how they would describe themselves in terms of ethnic identity, several participants mentioned being able to speak Chinese language as the characteristic of being a Chinese American. For example, Mary believes that being able to speak the language and knowing the heritage was one way of being Chinese. Peter identified himself more as an American because he speaks English most of the time. He said, "[I am] More American than Chinese-American because sort of, I was born in America, I speak American. I attend an American school. What else do you have to do to be American? But it's the Chinese heritage again, so that makes me Chinese-American." For Peter, not having "the slightest hint of a single Chinese word" makes his sister "totally American." Similarly, for those who perceived language as an important marker of being Chinese, not being able to speak the language was associated with being more like Americans and less Chinese. Ellen mentioned how she felt about her Chinese friends at school who do not know any Chinese. She said, "It's kind of unusual...., they're more like American than Chinese. They're the ones who, I just feel like it might be kind of strange for them if they don't speak any Chinese and they don't understand [the language]." Lisa had similar concerns, "I'd feel kind of strange not knowing how to speak my own language. I kind of think that when you're Mandarin, you should be able to speak it." Mary described herself as Chinese American because she speaks two languages.

It is evident, according to the current participants, that language constitutes the single most characteristic feature of a separate ethnic identity. Mary said, "I kind of think that's pretty bad if you're Chinese and you don't know how to speak it. It's like if you're

American and you don't know how to speak English. That's pretty bad." Nevertheless, ethnic identity is often associated more with the symbol of a separate language than with its actual use by all members of a group (De Vos, 1975). Most of the participants cited Chinese language as the attribute of being a Chinese American; however, few of them spoke Mandarin on a daily basis. Most of them spoke less Mandarin, as they grew older. Home became the only place they constantly spoke Chinese, but they still identified themselves partially with the Chinese language.

Asked how they felt when they spoke the Chinese language, most female students felt positive that they were able to speak the language they were supposed to know. Lisa raised a very different perspective. She said, "When I speak Mandarin, I feel more like American, because I can't really speak Mandarin well." Lisa felt less Chinese since she was not able to function effectively in the Chinese language. Different from female informants, male students felt neutral about speaking Chinese. Nick said, "When I manage to get a sentence, that's it, it's nothing special. I just say it. It's just another language." Nick identified himself mainly as an American and he claimed that 80 percent of the time he spoke Mandarin with his parents at home. He strongly disagreed with his Chinese friends who were from Hong Kong and considered Nick Chinese. Nick explained,

Basically I'm just an American who looks Chinese. I have Chinese heritage but that's it. Sometimes at school we discuss how people will say that we are Chinese or that you're Chinese, but I just say I'm an American because I was born here. I dress like one, I talk like one, so I don't see why I should be, I mean I have Chinese heritage but that doesn't make me a Chinese person.

Nick continued to point out the redundancy of ethnic term 'Chinese-American' because, "The term American is really mixed races like Caucasian, English, German, African, Indian, so it's not really an accurate saying. American is all that, so Chinese-American is kind of redundant because Chinese people are part of the American culture and stuff."

The variations in the language use patterns identified at the informants' homes parallel the different ethnic identities they adhered to. For example, Nick and Peter who primarily speak English with their parents leaned toward American identification. Most female informants who mostly speak Chinese at home identified themselves as Chinese-Americans. This suggests that the informants' speech patterns at home are strongly associated with their ethnic self-identity. When Fishman (1989) described the geographic distributions and characteristics of ethnic languages schools in the U.S., he stated, "These schools must be recognized as fulfilling an important identity forming and identity-providing function for millions of Americans" (p. 454). Thus, in the next section, the informants' perceptions of Chinese schools in relation to their ethnic identity are examined.

Chinese Language School Does Help Retain the Language

The informants are ambivalent about whether Chinese school strengthened their identity as Chinese. Both male informants, Nick and Peter, strongly disagreed that Chinese school would help them become more Chinese. Nevertheless, as far as the linguistic function of Chinese school was concerned, Nick saw the relationship between the language that the Chinese school was teaching and their ethnic identity. Nick asserted,

I don't think it's making us be more Chinese. I think that's what the parents think, but it's not happening because we live in America but I think Chinese school will help us learn how to speak. And yeah, maybe a little bit. It's not going to make us think really totally Chinese or anything. It's helping a little, but it's not doing enough, that's what I'm saying.

Peter agreed with Nick and added, "I don't really see how it can make us more Chinese. There's no way really that we can be more or less Chinese. We're Chinese-Americans and that's just about it, I guess. I mean, we learn more about the culture that we came from but I don't see how that can make us any more or less Chinese." These students agreed that Chinese school helped them learn to speak the language and know more about Chinese culture, which may in turn help them identify more with their Chinese background

Female students felt that being physically surrounded by Chinese people and speaking and writing the Chinese language made them feel more Chinese. They, however, had doubts about how much the Chinese school would impact their lives in the long run because they were mostly around American people. They were also concerned about not being able to retain the written Chinese after they left the school. Ellen pointed out, "I don't really think it's going to impact us much because we're not going to be able to remember the words that much. It's not going to help us that much in the future, because we don't know how to write all of the words, so we won't be able to write some things." Ellen's anticipation that she would not be able to carry on the Chinese literacy confirmed her belief that the Chinese language would only have limited influences in their future lives.

Summary

The current informants' childhood experiences of being ethnic minority confirm the prevailing image of the American public school as the most powerful socializing agent, where the informants came to acquire American values, norms, and language. The American public school is also a place where these participants became aware of the stereotypes and prejudice toward themselves and their group. Through interactions with peers, the current informants came to realize the existence of two sets of norms and values, those of their own ethnic culture and those of the mainstream. In responding to these issues and conflicts stemming from their ethnic minority status, these informants might actively make decisions on how to deal with the conflicts or ignore and fail to deal with them consciously.

In a multiethnic society like the U.S., each individual comes to school as a member of a cultural group, and children with similar cultural characteristics tend to form peer groups. The current participants are no exception. Several have attended the same school for more than six years. They clustered together, did projects together, went to the same classes, and sometimes chatted in Mandarin to keep things among themselves. They also learned that, as a group, they were generally stereotyped as the successful and high-achieving minorities. This stereotype was reinforced among the Chinese American peers and their parents. However, this seemingly flattering stereotype was also accompanied with immense pressures among the informants themselves and from their parents to achieve in U.S. school.

Previous studies of Chinese Americans (Lee, 1996; Trueba, Cheng, and Ima, 1993; Siu, 1992) suggested that Chinese parents valued education and held high expectations for their children to achieve academic success. Most people attribute this to the traditional Chinese culture; this study suggests it is related to successful upward mobility. Informants readily embraced expectations to maintain straight A grades. Parents wanted their children to attend prestigious schools and obtain professional careers. Inadvertently, these pressures diverted students' attentions from Chinese language school and the maintenance of the ethnic language and culture.

To accelerate academically in the American school, the first and most important requirement was the mastery of English. The informants quickly became fluent speakers of English. However, as the informants grew older, they spoke less and less Chinese, unless their parents firmly regulated that Chinese language be the only language allowed at home. They were surrounded by English at school, in the mass media, and in commerce. Chinese was seldom heard, rarely seen, and barely used by the informants in the Chinese community. Under these circumstances, language shift was inevitable. Majority of female informants speak Mandarin most of time at home with their parents. However, for some male informants, English even encroached into the homes, "the final refugee of the ethnic language" (Hernández-Chávez, 1993, p.66). Parental attitudes constituted the key factor determining how much Chinese language will be spoken at home. Some parents, particularly fathers, began to accept English as a home language and communicated with children mainly in English. In some homes, there are no longer sufficient meaningful interactions in Chinese, and the Chinese language begins to slip away.

The Chinese parents recognized the problem of their ethnic language fading away. They found their children's knowledge of Chinese language deteriorating once English became their dominant language. They sent their children to the community-based, weekend, Chinese language school with the hope that Chinese language school would reinforce their home efforts to retain the ethnic language. When the informants first attended Chinese school, they enjoyed it because there was not as much vocabulary as in the higher levels and there were fewer homework assignments. As they grew older, the students resented Chinese homework and tests because they already had an enormous amount of assignments from the

regular school. Finishing up Chinese homework and preparing for Chinese quizzes took up time from doing the regular schoolwork.

As the informants reached the middle school age, it became challenging for the parents to persuade children to keep attending Chinese school. The most common reasons given by the parents were pragmatic ones, such as passing SAT II: Chinese, waving college foreign language hours, being more competitive for jobs, etc. Nevertheless, the informants themselves were mainly concerned about whether they would be able to communicate fluently with parents and other relatives. They were not concerned about the matters still three or four years ahead of them. When asked what differences it would have made if they had not attended Chinese school, several mentioned they would have had more free time on Sunday afternoons to do their regular school work or to hang out with their friends.

Despite all of the disincentives, these informants admitted that Chinese language school did help them learn more Chinese. Several mentioned if they had not attended Chinese school, their parents probably would teach them at home. However, they might not be able to read and write. Alice mentioned, "I wouldn't learn that much because even though my parents teach me, it's not the same as going every week and having homework and having tests. So my Chinese would not be as good." In addition, these informants saw Chinese school as a place to socialize with their friends and they enjoyed spending time with one another in the Chinese language school.

Current informants cite being able to speak Chinese as a major characteristic feature of being Chinese American. Most of them identified themselves as Chinese Americans because they speak both English and Chinese languages. Although the majority of informants cited the Chinese language as an attribute of being a Chinese American, few of them spoke Mandarin on the daily basis. Therefore, ethnic identity is often associated more with the symbol of a separate language than with its actual use by all members of a group (De Vos, 1975). Several female informants revealed their perceptions of other Chinese friends who could not speak Chinese as abnormal and non-Chinese. They pointed out that if you were Chinese, you should be able to speak the Chinese language because it is expected of you. Thus, the informants see being able to speak Chinese as closely related to their identity. On the surface, they did not see how attending Chinese school would strengthen their Chinese identity. However, as far as the linguistic function of Chinese school was concerned, they saw the connection between Chinese school and their Chinese American identity.

Major Themes Emerged from Six Vignettes

During the course of study, six vignettes representative of the typical Chinese lessons throughout the school year were derived from multiple viewing of video transcribes and observational field notes. Subsequent analyses of the vignettes were moved from initial impressions to more systematic procedures. Categories, emergent from the context and infuse outside of context, were used in analyzing videotape data several major themes emerged. Each theme will be discussed and analyzed by referring to the interactions and instances described in these vignettes and drawing upon the information that the informants revealed about the Chinese language class during the interviews. The following sections will illustrate the profound impacts the “Model Minority” stereotype have on the discursive construction of identity and the interaction patterns in the 7th grade Chinese language class.

Discursive Construction of “Academic Achiever” Identity

1. Mixed-form of Instruction as an Effective Pedagogy

The result of incorporating the interactional elements from non-mainstream culture into the classroom, is called a “mixed cultural form,” a combination of mainstream classroom and non-mainstream interactional practices (Erickson, 1984). For example, the research conducted by Au (1980) showed that the instruction in Hawaii was modified to partially resemble the Hawaiian children’s home speech event and the reading performance was enhanced. Erickson and Mohatt (1982) studied the implementation of mixed forms in two Indian classrooms, one with a non-Indian teacher who taught in the classroom for the first time and one with an Indian teacher experienced in the Indian classroom. It was found that throughout the year of study, the non-Indian teacher gradually adopted interactional practices that were congruent with Indian ways of classroom interaction. These studies indicated that a culturally mixed form might have great consequences for pedagogical effectiveness. Acknowledging the cultural characteristics that the children brought into the classroom and incorporating them into the classroom practice not only bridged cultural gaps but also paved the way for eliminating the culturally alienating learning.

The results of mixed-form studies have implications for effective Chinese teaching in an American context. The Chinese language teachers need to acknowledge that these students are bicultural, with some even leaning toward Anglo culture. These second-generation, American-born Chinese, in numerous aspects, are culturally distinctive from their parents or teacher. They have been attending American schools for several years and are accustomed to more creative, dynamic, and interactional instructional strategies. Mrs. Chen added some American teaching strategies into her instruction to teach Chinese language, such as competitive games and incentives. In the 7th-grade class, two American games, jeopardy and bingo, were played repetitively by the students to review and refresh the memory of

vocabulary words. When these two games were first introduced to the class, the informants were very excited about playing the games. During the games, the teacher moderated and kept scores. The students laughed, they hit the bell to answer, and they were eager to shout out answers. When they answered correctly, they cheered, whistled, and clapped. When they answered incorrectly, they pouted, sighed, and pounded fists on the table. When the game was over, the winning team cheered, “gave each other five,” and got to choose prizes from Mrs. Chen’s bag.

Several students pointed out that the current classroom activities did not really help them learn much Chinese because the games and homework only required filling in the words. Nevertheless, when asked why they did not tell the teacher. Nick admitted, “But then it causes extra homework.” The informants’ attitudes are ambivalent toward Chinese language studying. During the interviews, they revealed their interests in learning to communicate in Chinese. Definitely, Mrs. Chen’s emphasis on word recognition was not appealing given the fact that they had to sacrifice Sunday afternoons to sit in the Chinese language class. They felt that they could handle the current Chinese workload and get by without too much trouble. Therefore, they decided not to ask the teacher to modify the class contents but to negotiate collaboratively with the teacher and gain control over the class.

2. Students Controlled the Class

Students implicitly controlled the proceedings of the Chinese class by demanding constant compromise on the part of the teacher. These students exerted their persuasive power very effectively whenever they collectively requested an insertion or modification of the class activities. The students frequently initiated activities and tasks, which were not part of the teacher’s original lesson plan. Most of the time, the students successfully directed the class flow to their intended destination. The floor was taken easily from the teacher as these students collaboratively negotiated assignments and tasks with the teacher.

Not surprisingly, throughout the entire semester, two instructional events were incorporated into the classroom activities by student’s initiation and became classroom routines: telling jokes and “one last hint.” First, in the early January of 1999, when the class resumed after the recess, George initiated a request of telling a joke instead of going directly into the vocabulary review which was intended and announced by the teacher. George’s request was granted with the condition that he had to tell the joke in Mandarin. George stammered out his joke with an indecent ending. Whenever he stumbled over some phrases, classmates translated for him. The entire class laughed as he concluded his joke. Right after George finished his joke, Mrs. Chen announced that now it was her turn to tell a joke. Everyone seemed to understand the joke without any difficulties and laughed.

Moreover, students’ gaining control over the class proceedings was even more salient on quiz days. The students saw the homework and tests as the most troublesome area of the Chinese school. With the heavy workload from their regular school and immense pressure to

do well at school, these students hardly had time to prepare for the Chinese tests, which frustrated them. Therefore, the class always came up with some novel ideas to put off the test or to make the test easier. By the end of January, the students collaboratively convinced Mrs. Chen that they should be given one last chance to ask the teacher one unsolvable item on the quiz since that was the way they took their quiz when Ms. Monica was their Chinese teacher. Mrs. Chen showed reluctance to permit this, but she finally gave in.

3. Learning was Negotiated down throughout the Semester

The students in the 7th-grade Chinese language class constantly negotiated with the teacher to postpone the test, to make the test easier, to lower the trading points for the prizes, to enhance the money prizes, and to stop the activities in which they were tired of participating. Most negotiations were initiated in English unless students were reminded by the teacher to speak Mandarin.

The typical quiz day usually began with Mrs. Chen announcing it was time for the test and then it was followed by a sequence of requesting. Several shouted “No test.” The following excerpts illustrate how the students tried to negotiate with Mrs. Chen on a quiz day:

Teacher: (Look at her watch) 知道嗎從現在到break
有差不多半個鐘頭時間我先給你 考小考

[You know what, from now until the break, we have about a half hour, I first give you a small quiz.]

Students: Oooo, no no 不要,

[don't want it]

Teacher: 沒關係, 一定會考好的, 都是 homework 的.

[No problem, you will get good grades, all come from your homework.]

Students: No, No, I did not... (Several girls talked at once)

Nick: Just do not count it.

Teacher: (Handing out the quizzes) 我幫你們 review,
所以你們期中考會考得好

[Let me help you review, so you will do good job for your mid-term.]

Valerie: Could it be open-book test, ...

(several others objected about taking tests)

Valerie: In school, we have like open-note test.

Teacher: 這個不需要 notes

[This does not need notes.]

Alice: I don't know what that means

Nick: Make it as a pre-test.

Teacher: OK, 我們 make this one 一個 pretest 好不好,
如果考得好就算分考不好不算分。

[Ok, let's make this one a pretest, if you did a good job then it will count, otherwise it will not count.]

Ellen: Wait, wait, that is not fair, they always do good.

Nick: Yep, they always 考好.

[Yep, they always do good job on tests]

Teacher: Ok, majority 考好.

[Ok, majority do good job]

Nick: That's not good, because for those like me,

George: OK, 如果我考好 [raise his hand] then...

[Ok, if I did a good job]

Students: Laughs.

Teacher: 好阿, 如果張小民考好就算分

[Ok, if George gets a good grade, then it counts]

Students: George, please...

The students collaboratively negotiated with the teacher in an effort to make the test easier. Their initial attempt was to get rid of the test as they whined and shouted “No test.” Soon after they realized that there was no escape from the test, they asked to take it with the book open, making it a pre-test, and finally the test would count only if George got a satisfactory score. At this time, the teacher did not completely lose control over the intended classroom task, but she did compromise a bit. Students did not get their way but they were able to improve the test results if George did badly on the test.

When the students succeeded in their negotiation, the learning outcomes seemed to be lessened. When the students took advantage of their more advanced listening skills to recognize the Chinese words on the bingo sheet as the teacher pronounced the words for them, the intended purpose of reinforcing word recognition was diminished. Nevertheless, under the circumstances where the students did not have much time and motivation to get prepared for the classroom activities, they developed coping skills of manipulating the teacher to make the learning goals easier. Constant compromising and lowering expectations frustrated a well-intended teacher like Mrs. Chen. Given the fact that some of the informants have been in the same class for several years, they are interested and eager to interact with one another in the class.

Students' Perceptions of the Chinese Language Class and Their Language Use Patterns

To understand the ways in which the students interacted with the teacher and each other in the Chinese language class, it is important to gain insights into their perceptions of the Chinese language school. People acted according to what they had perceived in a given

context. Thus, the next three sections present the students' perceptions of the Chinese language school and discuss how these perceptions were reflected in their classroom interactions.

1. Chinese Class is “Extra” Learning

To the current participants, Chinese school was synonymous with extra homework and tests. “Chinese school takes up time and provides extra homework,” was the most revealing statement made by the Chinese school students. When asked what they disliked the most about Chinese school, informants unanimously pointed out the homework and tests. Alice explained, “Because in school, we already have a lot of homework and tests. And so it’s added on, it’s like extra work.” The informants, like many Chinese Americans, are high-achievers in their regular school. Most of them are in talented and gifted tracks for several subjects and participate in a variety of auxiliary learning activities, such as musical, art, and athletic extra-curriculum activities. Their parents also put great emphases on these auxiliary learning because they know that the complementary aspects of auxiliary learning activities will enhance their children’s opportunities to get into the best colleges. The amount of time and efforts required of students to be successful at public schools has been immense. On top of that, they still had to spend time doing the Chinese homework and studying for the Chinese quizzes on Saturday and Sunday. Alice contested, “...it takes up a lot of time to go to Chinese school and to do homework like on Saturdays and Sundays because you have a lot of regular school homework.” As a result, they perceived Chinese school as extra to their regular school. The homework and tests became the two major burdens that discouraged them from coming to the Chinese school. The next section focus on the language use patterns in the Chinese class. The Chinese teacher’s choices of language use will be demonstrated and analyzed in terms of how these strategies impact the students’ perceptions and learning of the Chinese language.

2. Not Used to Speaking Chinese

Whenever the teacher was not around or forgot to remind these participants to speak Chinese, these students fell back to English right away. Usually, when the teacher was late for class, several students began to chat in English. They chatted freely with one another. They seldom talked to each other in Mandarin. It seemed to the participants that speaking Mandarin is not a natural part of their lives, even when they are in the Chinese school. The following conversation between the teacher and students on the quiz day illustrates the typical code switching used by the participants to carry out the negotiation with the teacher. To convince the teacher that they don’t have to be tested, these subjects need to speak English eloquently to make their points.

1.

1-1 **Students:** (several girls whining) No, ...

1-2 **Nick:** Can we do it as bonus or extra credits?

1-3 **Student:** ... (said something in English but inaudible)

1-4 **Teacher:** 我聽不懂，甚麼？

[I don't understand, what did you say?]

1-5. **Lisa:** (Using textbook to cover her face and seemed to be frustrated.)

1-6. **Valerie:** 可不可以不要寫注音符號？

[Can we skip writing phonetic symbols?]

1-7. **Teacher:** 不要寫注音符號？

[Do not write phonetic symbols?]

1-8. **Student:** Can we take the test tomorrow?

1-9. **Teacher:** 講中文我聽不懂

[Speak Mandarin, I don't understand.]

1-10. **George:** Can we do it the other way around?

Episode 1 demonstrates that the teacher had to repeatedly pretend that she did not understand English so the students would be reminded to speak only Mandarin in class. Within one session, "Please speak Mandarin" or "I don't understand you, please speak Mandarin," was uttered by the teacher more than ten times to get these Mandarin-learners to speak Mandarin.

The following classroom interactions showed that Mrs. Chen intentionally and repeatedly reminded these students to speak Mandarin. After being reminded, they translated what they had just said into Mandarin. Nevertheless, after a few conversational exchanges between the teacher and the students, they returned to English. On one class day, the entire class was getting ready to play a bingo game by filling in the Chinese phrases in a bingo sheet. Mrs. Chen asked who didn't have a pen to write.

2.

2-1. **Teacher:** 誰沒有筆？

[Who didn't have a pen?]

2-2. **George:** I have one, I think.

2-3. **Teacher:** 張小民，請你講中文好不好

[George, please speak Mandarin, Ok?]

2-4. **George:** 喔我有一個鉛筆

[O, I have a pencil.]

2-5. **Teacher:** 好

[Good.]

- 2-6. **George:** Mechanical 鉛筆 [pencil.]
- 2-7. **Teacher:** 好, 很好 [Good, very good.]
- 2-8. **George:** 喔機器鉛筆 [O, Mechanical pencil.]
- 2-9. **Nick:** I think that's right.

After being reminded, George spoke in Mandarin right away. George also recognized that he had a mechanical pencil instead of a plain pencil, so he corrected his utterance in half English and half Mandarin (2-6). After receiving the teacher's positive responses, George modified the phrase again and changed the whole phrase into Mandarin. Mrs. Chen did not correct George's Chinese equivalent of mechanical pencil on (2-8) even though George did not say it correctly. Nick spoke English to comment on George's translation of mechanical pencil into Mandarin despite the fact that George has just been advised to speak Mandarin. The teacher's reminder to George seemed to be invalid to Nick. Thus, he chose English to offer comments. Not even one minute later, again, George talked in English about the Chinese phrase Peter had just written on his bingo sheet. This time, the teacher called on George's name instead of saying, "Speak Mandarin Please," and George translated in Mandarin what he had just said to Peter. A while later, when the teacher reminded everyone to pay attention to the characters they were writing on the bingo sheet, George raised another question in English.

The interviews with current participants suggested that after being reminded to speak Mandarin so frequently during the Chinese class these subjects felt frustrated and tired. Several of them agreed that they should speak the language they are learning in the Chinese language class. One girl mentioned that, "I didn't really mind speaking Mandarin in class since this is Chinese class. We should speak Mandarin. That's what we are learning. But sometimes I just don't know how to say what I want to say in Mandarin, so I have to choose either not to say it or just say it in English." Most times when the students had difficulties in expressing themselves in Mandarin, the majority of them decided to say it in English. Nevertheless, they felt frustrated when the teacher asked them to repeat it in Mandarin although they recognized "it is a way to motivate us to speak more." Because of their limited ability in speaking Mandarin, these students were frustrated when they were required to think about how to say in Mandarin sentences they just finished saying in English. Valerie contended,

When the teacher tells us just to speak Mandarin, sometimes, well I guess the amount of talking going on in the classroom goes down because we don't know Mandarin that well. But I guess that's what they want. Also, when she just says 'I don't know' whenever we ask a question in English, it gets frustrating after a while because usually when we do ask in English, that means we don't know how to say it in Chinese.

The interviews also revealed that these informants were not resistant to speaking Mandarin in the Chinese class. However, their limited proficiency in Mandarin was an obstacle in

having a conversation in the target language. Two-hours of Chinese language per week at the Chinese school was far from sufficient to preserve an ethnic language, which is seldom seen on the streets, is not heard in the mass media, and is not used in the students' daily conversation. The only place, other than the Chinese school, in which Mandarin is used, is in these students' homes. However, several informants mentioned that they speak little Mandarin at home. Both at home and school, many preferred speaking English because it is easier and they had more English vocabulary.

Discussions

Is There Any Way Out of This Dilemma?

The findings from the classroom study of a 7th-grade Chinese language class reveal numerous challenges to the Chinese language teachers in ethnic language schools. For example, the Chinese language teachers needed to consider the cultural background, the pragmatic needs, and the genuine concerns of the Chinese American youth when teaching the Chinese language in ethnic language school settings. It is equivalently important to be aware of the assimilation pressures the students are under to emulate the mainstream peer behaviors and attitudes toward the school.

In studying ethnic language loss among Spanish-speaking children, Hernández-Chávez (1993) pointed out that for the full-range of ethnic language to be developed, the ethnic language learners must be provided with opportunities to engage in cognitively, socially, and culturally meaningful interactions. However, the parents under current study did not provide strong support for the development of the Chinese language. These parents, similar to their children, consent to the "model minority" stereotype and inadvertently played a passive role in their children's study of ethnic language. For instance, they validated the extraneousness of the Chinese school by allowing their children to skip the Chinese language class, to neglect the preparation for Chinese quiz, and to show little respect for the Chinese teacher. It seemed that these parents relinquished their role as primary language mentor and expected the Chinese language school to take on the primary role in helping their American-born offspring retain their ethnic language. The lack of parental involvement and support undermined the strength the Chinese language school can exert in promoting a favorable language leaning environment.

The interviews with informants suggested that the home language use patterns identified by these subjects paralleled those adopted by the teacher and students in the Chinese class. Despite the fact that the communication styles adopted by the Chinese teachers are congruent with those that occurred at these subjects' homes, teaching Chinese at the ethnic language school took enormous efforts and perseverance. What is it that makes Chinese language teaching and learning so difficult that well-intended teachers like Mrs. Chen felt discouraged and frustrated? What motivated students to gain control over the class,

to negotiate down the intended teaching, and to construct their own meaningful instances? What are the contributing factors that hinder the teaching of the Chinese language? I argue that Chinese language learning is not compatible with the informants' pursuit of academic achievement.

The incompatibility of Chinese language studying with striving to be a "model minority" is even more salient when the informants approached this critical high school transaction time in their academic pursuits. Most of the students chose to focus exclusively on mainstream public school by withdrawing from the Chinese school. Interviews with current informants revealed that they are under immense pressures stemming from their images as high achievers. Some are ready to live up to the higher standards imposed by the model minority stereotype. Some are not confident about whether they would be able to achieve their parents' high expectations. The pressure of doing well at the regular school is prevalent in the current Chinese community. These parents are similar to the Taiwanese parents described in Trueba, Cheng, and Ima's book (1993) in that they are well informed about the American academic path and often exchange information on the resources available for their children's academic advancement. In addition to regular schoolwork, the informants took lessons in a variety of auxiliary learning activities such as musical instrument lessons, art instruction, dance lessons, sports, and community services. Their parents also put great emphases on these auxiliary-learning activities because they know that a straight A record and good SAT scores do not guarantee admission to the top universities. The complementary aspects of auxiliary learning will enhance their children's opportunities to get into selective colleges.

Under these circumstances, Chinese language learning hardly finds a place in the informants' academic pursuits. Most informants saw Chinese school as equivalent to extra homework and quizzes. Feelings of extra burden and a waste of time aggravate students' frustrations. To respond to the irrelevance of the Chinese language class, the informants negotiated down the classroom learning, gained control over the classroom proceedings, and perceived the Chinese school as extra learning. Being in the same Chinese class for several years, the informant enjoyed socializing with each other in the Chinese language class. Socializing with friends seemed to be the main reason motivating some of them to keep coming to the Chinese class. Increasing the opportunities for students to engage in genuine communication not only is pedagogically desirable for the full development of Chinese language but also takes the informants' communication needs into consideration. Wong-Fillmore (Cited in Trueba, 1993) pointed out the difficulties children have when they cannot fully express themselves to their parents, which often results in communication breakdown and misunderstandings.

Moreover, interviews with informants suggested that the ability to speak Chinese is seen as an important attribute of being Chinese American. Several informants pointed out that being able to speak Mandarin was part of who they are whereas not being able to speak

the Chinese language made them less Chinese. Mouw & Xie (1999) proposed that ethnic language use with parents indicates the extent to which culturally specific practices are transmitted to children. Thus, it is the active use of the ethnic language between the children and parents that contributes to the maintenance of ethnic identity and ethnic social capital. The Chinese immigrant parents often expected that their children's Chinese communication abilities would be strengthened and further developed through participating in the Chinese language school.

Recommendations

Previous research showed that many students' Chinese speaking abilities declined as they grew older (Gallagher, 1996). Therefore, for the full development of the Chinese language, it is pedagogically desirable to create a language-rich environment by incorporating more socially and culturally meaningful interactions. Four advantages will be gained from increasing the opportunities for genuine communications among the informants in the Chinese language class. First, the informants' communication needs with parents will be fulfilled. With the children's achieved stable Chinese-speaking competence, the communication gap between the parents and American-born offspring may be minimized. Secondly, the children will be able to access the parents' social capital. Parental involvement in children's schoolwork is also attributed as one of the reasons facilitating the academic achievement of Asian-Americans. These parents often tutored children on school subjects at home and closely supervised children's fulfillment of schoolwork. Third, with a balanced focus on speaking skill as the informants grew up, their speaking competence will not be weakened. Thus, efficient and balanced learning of all four-language skills can be ensured.

Finally, nourishing Chinese American youth's Chinese speaking skills may strengthen their ethnic identity as they approach adolescent years. As previous studies (Hinton, 1999; Liao, 1999) indicated, the college years are often a time when students began to search for their ethnic roots and make efforts to reclaim them. Students like Robert who regretted losing the ethnic language and wanted to relearn Chinese language are common. Many Chinese American youths who have lost or never attained Chinese fluency feel incomplete and regret losing that language. Those who are able to function efficiently in Chinese are inclined to have a more positive self-concept. Nourishing their Chinese communicative competence now may help them smoothly resolve cultural discontinuity as they begin to reclaim their ethnic identity. Otherwise, they will have a difficult time resolving ethnic identity because a part of who they are is gone forever. Those intimate relationships embedded in the ethnic language communication with parents in the early years of their lives can never be reclaimed. Or they may have to struggle hard when they are adults to reclaim their identity by relearning the Chinese language.

Conclusions

“I used to see myself as almost totally Chinese. And then like later on, I just became more American because I just attended so many American things and I had so many American friends by then, I just became a Chinese-American more.” (Peter)

This study points out the importance of recognizing that the teaching and promotion of the Chinese language and culture take place in the social and political contexts of this country. The Chinese American youth's lack of intrinsic motivation in studying the Chinese language needs to be understood from the immense pressures they are facing to be academic high achievers. This study suggests that only if the retention of the Chinese language can be made compatible with the Chinese American youth's pursuits of academic success, their struggles of maintaining ethnic language and being academic high achievers can be alleviated. In some places, the Chinese schools succeeded in getting public high schools to accept the grades and to grant credits to their students (Chen, 1996). The ethnic language schools alone cannot guarantee the continuity of ethnic language and culture. As Fishman (1989) pointed out, the ethnic language school's real thrust, at any time, depends on the contextual circumstances surrounding and controlling it. Therefore, an attitudinal and structural change in the larger society is needed in order for the ethnic community-based language schools to truly work. Through the mainstream recognition of the ethnic language and culture, these U.S.-born, second-generation Chinese American adolescents are more likely to take their learning in the Chinese language school seriously.

Retaining an ethnic language is more than preserving a valuable resource, passing the SAT II, or securing a decent job. Most of all, the psychological well-being of these ethnic minority youths is the ultimate concern. At this time of the informants' lives as they approach adolescence, they are under immense pressure to achieve academic success, and may soon face an identity crisis. The Chinese American youth need parental support and assistance to handle the anxiety and stress associated with striving to be a model minority and being Chinese American. One way the ethnic language school can contribute is to ensure the best quality of communication between the youths and their parents.

Despite the complex and emerging nature of language and ethnic identity, one of the most significant factors in the maintenance of the Chinese language, I found, was the informants' experience of being Chinese in the American context. Thus, to understand the language maintenance of current Chinese American youth, it is important to keep in mind that it is not only what the Chinese bring with them that shapes Chinese American language use patterns but also once here the experience of being Chinese in America has a profound influence on the retention of the Chinese language. Current Chinese immigrant parents chose, in terms of an adaptive strategy, acculturation without complete assimilation. This adaptive strategy is reflected in their attitudes toward their children's mainstream schools

and the retention of the ethnic language. The parents were concerned that their children acquire the English language upon entering regular elementary school because mastery of English is prerequisite for academic success. However, as seen in previous chapters, once the youths overcame language differences at school, they preferred speaking English rather than their ethnic language. In order to rescue the gradually degenerating mother tongue, the Chinese parents established the Faith Chinese school to ensure that their children's Chinese language would continue to develop aside English. Nevertheless, adolescents in this Chinese school neither saw the relevance nor had much motivation to study the Chinese language. Parental requests to attend the Chinese school were frequently cited as the exclusive reason that kept students coming to the school. Under immense pressure from their parents and their Chinese peers to excel in the academic realm, studying the Chinese language appeared to be extraneous, troublesome, and irrelevant to their identity as high-achieving Chinese Americans.

Regardless of which adaptive strategy is chosen, however, it is commonly believed that all individuals attempting to resolve cultural conflicts experience cultural discontinuity. I argue that the current second-generation, American-born Chinese wrestled with cultural discontinuities as they grew up. In the process of resolving these discontinuities, their language use patterns and identity evolved over time. Adhering to the model minority stereotype is one way of resolving cultural discontinuity by combining the two worlds of home/community and regular school. That is, living up to the model minority stereotype fulfills parents' expectations of them as well as peers' perceptions of what they should be. They strive to achieve the high standards imposed by the model minority stereotype. As a result, being Chinese American means being a high-achieving student.

Lee (1996) argued that the model minority stereotype is a hegemonic device because it maintains the dominance of whites in the racial hierarchy by diverting attention away from racial inequality and by setting standards for how minority groups should behave. Apple and Weis (1983) postulated "hegemony requires the consent of the dominated minority" (p.19). This is consistent with a cultural transmission thesis. A critical aspect of cultural transmission and maintenance relies on the fact that "people must believe in their system" (Spindler, 1987, p.303). The public school system is organized to foster recruitment into the existing dominant cultural system. Public schools are organized to socialize students to the values, beliefs, and attitudes crucial to maintaining the dominant cultural system. Chinese immigrant parents believed that the attainment of educational success was the only pathway open to Chinese American upward mobility. Thus, Chinese Americans who seek upward mobility in the dominant society may try to emulate model minority behaviors. The current study shows that these students and their parents willingly lived up to the model minority stereotype to the detriment of the ethnic language.

This study raises a number of questions that future research should address: 1) how do the Chinese language schools function in the retention of the Chinese language in areas

where the Chinese communities constitute a considerable segment of the population, such as in San Jose, Los Angeles, or Houston? Will the pressure to be a model minority continue to outweigh the other favorable factors for language maintenance, such as a large, Chinese-speaking community, the visibility of the Chinese language in the public domain, and the transferability of Chinese school credits to the local high schools? 2) How is the Chinese language retained at home? It is argued that home is the primary support for ethnic language maintenance. Exploring the home language uses can help the ethnic community and the ethnic language school work in concert with those in the home to better preserve the ethnic language. 3) How is the Chinese language maintained among the children from low SES background? Most of the informants in this study are from middle class, professional families, thus, it is equally important to explore the language maintenance situations of American-born Chinese who are affiliated with less affluent backgrounds. Will the children from low SES background have more facilitating propensity to retain the Chinese language because of the lack of English influence from the parents? Are low SES Chinese American children less pressured to conform to the Model Minority stereotype? What attitudes do these adolescents and their parents have toward ethnic language schools and the maintenance of the Chinese language?

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