

A Study of the Mother Tongue Maintenance of Children (4-9 Years Old) in Chinese Immigrant Families in the UK

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Abstract

The UK is a culturally diverse country housing people from different ethnic backgrounds worldwide. While diversity is considered a strength in modern society, it also comes with shortcomings that, when investigated, reveal a decline in the cultural heritage of a people. In settling in the UK, Chinese immigrants must integrate with the local community to establish a life in the country for themselves. Communication is pivotal in the integration process and mainly relies on language. Culture is important in developing the identity of a child. In a diverse community where people from different ethnicities mingle, it becomes hard to maintain a cultural identity as there is a lot of borrowing from different cultures. This cultural mix-up, however inclusive it may be, tends to have adverse implications on certain cultures, especially for the minority. When a child grows up in an environment that tends to suppress their native culture, they are likely to develop a discouraging attitude toward their cultural heritage. Therefore, the level of language maintenance among Chinese immigrants is affected by various factors, all of which determine the development of the mother tongue spoken by the younger generations.

Keywords

Child Language Maintain; Immigrant Family Education; Language Cultural; Mother Tongue from Immigrant Families

1. Introduction

The initial settlements of the Chinese immigrants in the UK became more established during the Industrial Revolution, where they provided labor (Stearns, 2020). The immigrants who chose to stay in the UK during this time formed the basis of the British Chinese community. Recently there has been an influx of Chinese immigrants, with a major proportion being students. The previous census shows that approximately 400,000 Chinese nationals live in the UK, which accounts for 0.7 percent of the UK population (GOV.UK, 2022). Only 40 percent of this population was born in mainland China, which connotes that most Chinese immigrants were born in the UK and are more accustomed to the UK way of life compared to their cultural roots. Most people in the country are English speakers, meaning that the transactional language used is English, and the Chinese immigrants had to adapt and learn the language (Liang & Shin, 2021). On this basis, Children tend to acquire language by using it or by mimicking adults; this shows just how impactful the language policy is in language development among children (Plunkett, 2016).

In a study conducted on higher education students of Chinese descent living in the UK, the majority leaned towards concealing their identities by using their English names (Lu et al., 2022). The language policies in the education system do not help the case, with most of the schools adopting the one language policy that keeps out the native languages. While this policy ensures no discrimination in the learning institutions, it does not foster inclusivity, especially for the minority. Given that children spend a good portion of their days in school, it is bound that the language spoken at the school influences their language mastery (Zhou & Zhong, 2018). Chinese immigrant families find themselves in a situation where even though they wish to encourage the development of mother tongue speech in their children, the social-cultural and social-political realities present impendence to their efforts.

Additionally, the cultural adaptation of Chinese immigrants to the common practices in the UK significantly influences the language acquisition capacity of their children. Studies on language development theories show that children can be influenced by their immediate surroundings in speech development (Plunkett, 2016). However, exposure to the desired cultural environment is dependent on factors such as the family's socio-economic status. A family's income is paramount in deciding the schools or neighborhoods the children are exposed to in their early lives. Chinese schools tend to require a stable source of income to enable the family to afford to enroll their children in such institutions. Similarly, income level tends to change the parents' perspective regarding the importance of their native language in modern society (Chung et al., 2017).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech and Language Development Theories

Normal communication development takes the integration of anatomy and physiology in speech systems, interactions that foster attempts at communication, and neurological development (Plunkett, 2016). Despite that, Morgan et al. (2019) highlight that children have a fantastic ability to learn a language in their early stages of life. Children usually acquire all the necessary concepts for functional language within their first year. However, it still takes years to develop or refine these capabilities fully. This section recaps proposed theories in speech and language development in children, which is crucial in understanding the development of the mother tongue in Chinese immigrant children.

Skinner perceives language as a set of verbal behaviors acquired through operant conditioning (Plunkett, 2016). Operant conditioning is a behavioral change methodology that reinforces desired behaviors immediately after they occur. This methodology can be applied to aspects of human learning, including speech and language development in Chinese immigrant children, centering on the thought that these children are conditioned by their surroundings and communication reinforcement (Zhao & Flewitt, 2020). According to Morgan et al. (2019), the language behaviors of Chinese immigrant adults in the UK are crucial to the children's language behaviors because children tend to learn by imitating or copying the behavior of adults and subsequent reinforcement of the children's imitations. Besides imitation and reinforcement stimuli, Skinner also suggested motivating operations and discriminative stimuli in his four-term contingency, forming the basis of language development (Plunkett, 2016).

Nativistic theory by Noam Chomsky views language from a biological perspective. The theory regards language as innate, psychologically determined, and genetically transmitted (Plunkett, 2016). Chomsky explains that before their birth, children are 'pre-wired' to acquire language. He terms this innate ability as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Moreover, the children's predetermined linguistic mechanisms are activated when exposed to a specific language (Honig & Xu, 2017). Chinese children in the UK are 'not wired' to develop the native Chinese language, therefore, exposure to English as the first language compromises their acquisition of the Chinese Language. Chomsky perceives language as universal and unique to humans and can be acquired in early childhood unless a child has severe mental or physical complications (Honig & Xu, 2017).

The semantic-cognitive theory is a language development perspective emphasizing the interrelationship between language development and cognition. Honig and Xu (2017) highlight that this perspective is not unique to Chinese children in the UK. However, it is crucial to understand the development in their mother tongue. The theory explains that children showcase some cognitive abilities corresponding to the emergence of language behavior (Plunkett, 2016). The semantic meaning is crucial in mother tongue development as it determines the words and word order children use in communication. Chinese immigrant parents influence their children's development of their native language by subconsciously recognizing their children's cognition or desire to communicate and issuing current semantics to them (Zhao & Flewitt, 2017).

According to the social-pragmatic theory, communication is the primary function of language as visualized in interactions between infants and their caregivers (Plunkett, 2016). In these interactions, caregivers always respond to the sounds and gestures made by infants. Language development in this theory follows five prerequisites crucial in developing the Chinese language in children in early childhood. Following these prerequisites, children are usually near parents or caregivers who provide basic physical needs repeatedly, resulting in an attachment between them (Morgan et al., 2019). At

this point, the Chinese parents engage in verbal behaviors, usually in Chinese, to develop the language in their children.

Assimilation and accommodation is a theory of language development proposed by Jean Piaget. This theory argues that assimilation and accommodation techniques are essential for children in learning a language (Plunkett, 2016). Assimilation entails an environmental change that necessitates the uptake of new ideas and language, whereas accommodation entails changing the concept to adapt to the environment (Han et al., 2021). According to Zhao and Flewitt (2020), immigrants are influenced mainly by the desire to gain acceptance, compelling them to acquire the dominant language through powerful assimilative forces. This is the case for Chinese immigrants in the UK, forced into acquiring and teaching the English language to their children. In the long run, this assimilation results in the loss of the Chinese language in the younger generation (Plunkett, 2016).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a language development theory centered on social learning. ZPD is a level of language development acquired from a child's social interactions with others and represents the difference between the child's learning potential and actual language learning (Plunkett, 2016). Vygotsky developed this theory which can explain how Chinese immigrant children struggle to mature in their native language, especially when they attend English schools in the UK, where English is the prioritized language (Plunkett, 2016). Some Chinese parents try mitigating this situation by having their children attend Chinese schools in the K (Honig & Xu, 2017).

2.2 Heritage Language of Mother Tongue in Chinese Children

Wu (2020) defines heritage language as a language associated with an individual's cultural background regardless of its application in homes or local communities. In the UK's context, any language other than English relevant to an individual is considered the person's heritage language. Recent empirical studies showcase the relationship between the development of heritage language and the formulation of cultural identities of Chinese immigrants in the multilingual and multicultural UK (Yin et al., 2021). Few studies uphold contrary views on the mutual relationship between cultural identities and heritage language in Chinese immigrants. However, Wu (2020) states that it is clear that most Chinese immigrants desire to maintain their cultural identities, thus promoting positive attitudes toward teaching, learning, and passing on their heritage language to their children.

A study by Yin et al. (2021) expounds on the challenges facing immigrant families in implementing their language ideologies. The study highlights that the decision on home language use is primarily influenced by language attitudes and linguistic practices in school-going children aged five and nine who socialize with others in the English-dominated society. According to Plunkett (2016), immigrant children facing the use of different languages may start socializing in their parent's language. However, this is unsustainable whenever assimilative forces set in or the desire to gain acceptance in social settings away from home. Immigrant parents recognize the socialization struggles their children face and implement the use of the dominant language, English, in their homes, thus lowering the levels to which Mandarin is spoken (Dale et al., 2016). Dale et al. (2016) further highlight that some parents employ English monolingual policies in their homes to ensure language development consistency in their children.

2.3 Concerns about Heritage Language Maintenance

Wu (2020) highlights assimilative pressures that result in the loss of the Chinese language in immigrant families over generations. According to Zhao and Flewitt (2019), by 2016, only 11% of UK Chinese immigrants aged five and above spoke native Chinese in their homes. Despite the linguistic diversity brought about by immigration policies and globalization, the UK's linguistic environment has been rapidly singularizing over the years (Wu, 2020). This heritage language loss is attributed to socio-political pressures from mainstream society, which prompts most Chinese immigrants in the UK to accept the phenomenon's reality. The immigrants' heritage language, Chinese, is regarded as a lesser language and is usually substituted by the UK's native language, English, thus limiting the effectiveness of developing the Chinese language in young children.

As a minority population in the UK, Chinese immigrants experience the loss of their heritage language. This situation is especially problematic for young Chinese children transitioning from home to community and education environments (Honig & Xu, 2017). Language development in immigrant children between five and nine is severely impacted when they join mainstream early childhood education programs. These programs are dominated by the English language and thus compromise the efforts made at home to develop the native language (Han et al., 2021). The problem extends to Chinese parents trying to support their children to succeed in English schools. Chinese-speaking parents' efforts to help their children thrive in UK schools while maintaining their cultural traditions and language results in a direct intake of English, thus subduing their original objective (Honig & Xu, 2017).

Honig and Xu (2017) state that some contemporary early childhood settings in the UK grant immigrant parents the

opportunity to choose between monolingual and bilingual programs for children. The decision taken is crucial in shaping the language of the child. Children who attend monolingual programs are only taught in English, thus limiting their mother tongue-speaking capabilities. On the other hand, children attending bilingual programs learn both English and Chinese, improving their mother tongue speaking capabilities. Han et al. (2021) investigated immigrant parents' choice of programs, finding that most Chinese parents prefer monolingual programs to bilingual programs, citing their abilities to teach the heritage language to their children and the associated cost of bilingual programs.

3. Cultural Models of Parenting

Understanding the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultural parental models is crucial to fully comprehend how their stay has influenced Chinese immigrant parenting style in the UK and how it affects mother tongue development in Chinese children (Han et al., 2021). Studies have outlined a significant variability in parenting models in immigrant and native UK parents from cultural and historical differences, resources, opportunities, and current events. Chinese parenting culture is based on the Confucian philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of having a good moral character. The goals for children in the Chinese culture are anchored on Confucianism and categorized into knowledge, modesty, social norms, self-reliance, filial piety, harmonious relationships, and shame (Han et al., 2021). Confucianism extends into models of learning and socialization, thus directly impacting the acquisition of the mother tongue in Chinese children. Scholarly studies comparing Western and East Asian parenting highlight aspects of independence-prompting approaches in English or Western parents and a restraining practice on East Asian or Chinese immigrant parents. Honig and Xu (2017) attribute the lack of independence to the desire of Chinese parents to preserve their heritage and optimize their children's understanding of the native language.

Chinese immigrants in the UK are exposed to Western parenting values, which impact their parenting styles and goals for children. Honig and Xu (2017) highlight that Chinese immigrants in the UK have lost their restraining characteristics over time, compromising their initially strong influences that helped their children speak Chinese well. Native Chinese cultural values have weakened due to interference from Western cultural values (Honig & Xu, 2017). However, some studies contest this finding, stating that the native Chinese cultural values have heightened like in other immigrant communities in the UK, following efforts by members of these societies to save their heritage (Han et al., 2021).

3.1 Language Socialization

Language socialization is crucial to comprehending the linguistic development of Chinese immigrant children in the UK because it applies socio-cultural theory. Language socialization regards language as the socialization tool crucial in determining language development in immigrant children in early education. According to Zhang et al. (2021), Chinese immigrant children must adjust their early language to facilitate social interactions with their English-speaking counterparts. Chinese children end up mastering English conventions, pragmatics, and identities which compromise the development of their heritage language (Zhang et al., 2021). Children, active learners, are socialized in home environments in early childhood, with parents and caregivers utilizing language as the stimulus. Some studies highlight that children are not only recipients of language socialization. Instead, they also work as socialization agents in communicative practices (Zhao & Flewitt, 2017).

Dale et al. (2015) investigated language socialization and highlighted the adoption of ethnographic approaches to illuminate cultural differences in children's language development. The study also captures how ethnographic practices of Chinese immigrant parents ensure their children acquire the Chinese mother tongue language. Dale et al. (2015) further highlighted the mutuality in children's use of language and socialization and how they utilize language to become competent group members by mastering discourse rules and norms. The development of the Chinese mother tongue in children is hampered further by the desire to gain acceptance in English-dominated groups in schools (Wu, 2020).

4. Factors Affecting Mother Tongue Development

Mother tongue development is crucial in determining the levels to which Chinese immigrant children speak Mandarin. This literature review section explores previous studies' literature on factors like family language policy, bilingualism, gender and culture, Age of Acquisition (AOA), language input, community, and social factors, and school influences in determining the levels to which immigrant children speak Mandarin in the UK.

4.1 Family Language Policy (FLP)

Wu (2020) defines language policy as intentionally established guidelines to maintain or change current language

practices in a community or family because of reasons relating to the linguistic rights of a community. The term 'language policy' was first introduced in 1945 as many countries grappled with finding solutions to postwar problems and rebuilding societies. According to Dale et al. (2016), language policy was a fully developed concept by the start of the 21st century, citing its integration in various fields like public administration, applied linguistics, and many other social domains.

However, language ideologies entail beliefs in support of planning and coordinating language use in the community. Language practices represent the implementation of plans detailed by language ideologies. These practices include specific actions tried by people regarding language. Finally, language management entails efforts taken by people to adjust and influence actual practices in a language in particular speech communities. Chinese immigrants unknowingly utilize these elements to make changes in language policies in their homes to ensure their children's smooth transition and integration into the English-dominated society. These actions almost entirely result in English as the home language in most Chinese families in the UK (Liang & Shin, 2021).

Morgan et al. (2019) expounded on the concept of language policy to language socialization in immigrant children, explaining its significant impact on Mandarin language levels spoken by Chinese children in the UK. The study attributes the negative effect of monolingual language policies in Chinese homes to the decline in mother-tongue speaking among Chinese children. Additionally, Morgan et al. (2019) highlighted that standard language ideology in the UK continues to encourage a default linguistic behavior of learning and applying the English language only.

Zhou and Zhong (2018) regard parents as the most significant language-learning resource in early childhood despite the decreasing influence resulting from a child's growth. Parents make family the first language school for their children, and their attitudes toward the heritage language, FLP, and second language proficiency play a vital role in language development in immigrant families. Parental positive attitudes toward the heritage language through the implementation of heritage-only FLP births more positivity towards the native language, accelerating its acquisition process (Yin et al., 2021). In a study of first and second-generation Chinese immigrants in the UK, parental attitudes and cohesion with children are attributed to positive attitudes toward Mandarin among their children (Chen et al., 2021).

The use of heritage language among immigrant parents plays a critical factor that influences the level of mother tongue speaking and the extent of language maintenance across generations. Moreover, parental second language proficiency hugely affects the language ability in children. Plunkett (2016) investigated this hypothesis by studying 44 Mandarin-English bilinguals and found that parental proficiency in the second language correlated with the children's ability to speak it. Recent studies have shown that modern Chinese immigrant parents are highly proficient in the English language, thus instilling it in their children at the expense of their mother tongue (Honig & Xu, 2017).

4.2 Gender and Culture

Honig and Xu's (2017) study on the monolingual English-speaking population reveals the prominence of girls in language skills compared to boys, especially at an early age. The research explains that this feature signifies the significance of gender in language development in immigrant families with cultures showcasing stark differences in gender roles. Honig and Xu (2017) also reveal that sharp contrasts in gender roles shape Chinese immigrant families. Though it has not been proven through studies, Zhang et al. (2017) hypothesize that these differences could result in differences in the level of mother tongue speaking among Chinese children. On culture, Zhang et al. (2017) explain that the restraining nature of Chinese immigrants could be a good measure to improve the development of Mandarin in children. However, it limits the children's potential in language development, a feature that negatively affects Mandarin acquisition capabilities in the long run. Chinese culture's gender-based restraint extends to socialization, where girl interactions are significantly limited, compromising their language development capabilities and resulting in lower levels of mother-tongue speaking in Chinese children Zhang et al. (2017). Recent studies, however, showcase the shift in Chinese immigrant parents' restraint on girls regardless of cultural heritage beliefs. Wu (2020) expounds on this, stating that modern Chinese parents grant girls more opportunities to socialize by facilitating their access to education. Despite this move, Mandarin speaking levels remain low due to assimilation pressures in the English-dominated UK.

4.3 Language Input

Dale et al. (2016) define language input as the language to which children or young learners are exposed. The study further expounds that language input is crucial in driving vocabulary growth in children. A study on language input in the US by Zhou and Zhong (2018) marks differences in vocabulary abilities in young children, attributing the contrasts to the extent of maternal talk. Consequently, research on 1,600 Dutch monolinguals and bilinguals aged between four and seven reported a high correlation between the possibility of knowing words and the language input frequency by teachers (Zhou & Zhong, 2018). The researchers explain that there is no apparent relationship between amounts of language input and

syntax learning. According to Dale et al. (2016), the level of mother tongue speaking in Chinese immigrant children depends on the attention granted to them by their Mandarin-speaking parents. Children left in the care of non-Mandarin speakers tend to talk less of the Chinese language due to low language input levels (Dale et al., 2016).

4.4 Age of Acquisition (AOA): Effects on Phonology and Syntax

Liang and Shin (2021) define AOA as an age at which children start learning a second language. The study further highlights the attempts by linguists to determine a crucial age that renders the development of a second language virtually impossible. Liang and Shin (2021) hypothesize a critical age for which the first language acquisition must occur, stating the age between early childhood and adolescence, citing cerebral lateralization. Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle conducted tests to prove or disapprove the hypothesis in 1978 (Zhao & Flewitt, 2020). This study measured the English people's ability to acquire the Dutch language naturally and found that young children did not possess any advantages in developing a second language. Zhao and Flewitt (2020) explain in their study that this phenomenon partially applies to Chinese immigrant children in the UK because most speak English as their first language. However, in early childhood, these children are also exposed to Mandarin while already at the disadvantage of lowered capacity to acquire the second language, Mandarin. This feature results in lower Chinese mother tongue speaking levels in immigrant children, especially those with English as their first language (Liang & Shin, 2021).

4.5 Community and Social Factors

According to Honig and Xu (2017), social factors are crucial in language acquisition, especially in bilingual children. The community, schools, peers, and families affect children's language acquisition. Honig and Xu (2017) expound that children learn language from their communities invariably in every culture, even when their parents are not speakers of the dominant language. Consequently, the minority language always risks not being embraced by children and parents. The study cites De Houwer's study in 2007 on 4556 Dutch from 1889 families in a Dutch-dominated community where at least some parents spoke a minority language such as French, English, Italian, and others. The research found that the children spoke the predominant Dutch language rather than their native languages. Chinese immigrant children are in an identical situation, living in an English-dominated society, and thus tend to speak English more than Mandarin. The result is a lower Chinese mother tongue speaking level in immigrant children. Studies suggest that the children of new Chinese immigrants in the UK get immersed in a language environment that encourages the rapid acquisition of English as a second language (Zhao & Flewitt, 2020). Uptake of the second language, English, further limits the level to which they speak their native language. Further, the level of Mandarin speaking proficiency in Chinese children is affected by social and linguistic contexts like the community's language use and status, social class, and multilingualism in the UK (Honig & Xu, 2017).

4.6 School Influences

A study by Zhou and Zhong (2018) documents that schools and education act as catalysts of transition from minority to the majority language among children brought up in language-minority families. A study conducted in the US by Kuo in 2008 reveals a shift from Mandarin to the English language among Chinese children despite tremendous parental efforts to maintain the heritage language (Zhou & Zhong, 2018). Linguists argue that schools devalue the ethnic language of Chinese immigrant children by enforcing the English-only policy, leading to negative attitudes towards immigrant children's first language and culture (Honig & Xu, 2017). These attitudes increase the children's urge to learn the dominant language in another show of assimilative pressures. Moreover, schools play a significant role in the level of mother tongue speaking among children by fostering relationships between children and educators. These new relationships encourage the acquisition of a second language, English, thus minimizing the level to which children speak the Chinese mother tongue.

4.7 Family Literacy Practices and Socioeconomic Status

Chung et al. (2017) revealed the worry of some immigrant parents regarding their children's use of their heritage language at home because it could compromise their acquisition of English in later schooling. However, Pace et al. (2017) debunk this phenomenon, highlighting that English literary development is supported by early literacy experiences regardless of the language used. Additionally, a child's literacy development in vocabulary building depends on a family's socioeconomic status because it determines the availability and quality of relevant materials for literacy practice. High-income Chinese immigrant families in the UK tend to provide more material necessary for their children's development of Mandarin vocabulary resulting in higher levels of mother tongue speaking. However, middle and low-income immigrants

cannot offer the same resources, thus hampering their children's development of Mandarin. This leads to relatively lower levels of development in Mandarin vocabulary compared to children from high-income families and a lower level of mother tongue speaking (Chung et al., 2017).

5. Discussion and Recommendation

5.1 Establishing a Native Language-friendly School Environment

The school environment is pivotal in any child's language development, given that most of the language acquisition ages are spent at school. Therefore, the environment at school must enable the development of different languages, especially when the students come from diverse ethnic communities such as Chinese (Zhou & Zhong, 2018). Having multiple languages spoken in a school environment consequently requires educators with some level of understanding, if not full proficiency, in the languages the students tend to speak, such as Chinese. This understanding of language by educators is vital as it enables the children to communicate with the teachers in their native language, increasing the avenue through which they learn via social interactions (Plunkett, 2016). The school can also have learning materials about the languages the students tend to speak, which is helpful, especially for children coming from homes that do not adequately provide learning materials for various reasons, such as low-income levels. The relevant stakeholders can also adjust the school schedule to provide more time for after-school activities, which may include additional tuition in the native language.

5.2 Implementing Policies and Measures that Encourage Native Language Development at Home

Family language policies play an essential role in developing the native language used by Chinese immigrant children. The language used at home is vital in ensuring mastery of the language involved. For instance, most new Chinese immigrants in the UK tend to use English more to develop sufficient proficiency in the new language for communication with other people. However, this tends to be translated to the children of new immigrant families who have become bilingual to treat English as their primary language as the majority speak it in the environment (Yin et al., 2021). The adoption of English as the primary language by the children tends to adversely affect the acquisition of the Chinese language as it is learned from the perspective of being a second language. Therefore, the learning capacity of the language becomes reduced, and the children may find it challenging to communicate effectively in their native language. The parents implementing a language policy that prioritizes the Chinese language influences the child to develop a positive attitude towards the language, facilitating more effective language learning. Also, the parents can show more strictness in implementing the language policies to ensure maximization of the home environment in learning the Chinese language. Most Chinese immigrant families allow the use of English interchangeably by allowing the children to express themselves in English when using vocabulary, they do not know in their mother tongue. As per the study results, the families with stricter adherence to the language policy tend to have children with more proficiency in the native language.

Parents are similarly responsible for being their children's first language teachers (Zhou & Zhong, 2018). Exposing the child to the native language at a much younger age improves the probability of the child acquiring the language at their language acquisition age. As shown by the results collected by the study, the families interviewed introduced Chinese languages to their children at young ages to ensure they could master their native language. Parents must also increase their interactions and conversations with their children in their native language to facilitate language learning. For children, parents can choose the social circle they want their children to be associated with at a young age. Setting up the child in an environment that enables them to interact more with other Chinese children may benefit language acquisition through social interactions. Peer communication in the native language enables more effective development of the Chinese language among children (Plunkett, 2016). The parent can also engage the children in activities such as cultural events that strengthen the awareness of the child of Chinese cultural matters building their cultural heritage.

6. Conclusion

In a culturally diverse country, language plays an essential role in maintaining a community's cultural identity. Assimilation into the new environment has contributed significantly to the decline of language development among Chinese immigrant children. The school and social interactions offered by society discourage cultural heritage among the children (Honig & Xu, 2017). However, Chinese immigrant families can encourage the increase in the speaking level of native languages by creating environments, especially at home, that favor the use of the Chinese language. This environment sets the stage for language maintenance and ensures that the native Chinese languages are not forgotten and that future generations remain connected to their ancestral roots. A globalized world does not necessarily have to mean that everyone speaks the same language, but there is appreciation and tolerance for diversity. In maintaining diversity, it is essential that

the languages of different cultures are also preserved. Preservation of a language is only possible if there are people who use the language and pass it on to future generations. The ages between four and nine provide a perfect age for language acquisition; therefore, ensuring that children between these ages have a capacity for their native language guarantees the continuity of the Chinese language.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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