

Students' Parents' Attitudes toward Chinese Heritage Language Maintenance

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Abstract—The study aims to explore the Faculty of Letters' Chinese Students' parents' attitude toward heritage language maintenance and the ways they help their children maintain their Chinese heritage language. The participants of this research consist of 33 fathers and 35 mothers. The finding of this study suggests that students' parents' weak Chinese competencies hamper the communication in Chinese heritage language with their family members such as children, spouses, siblings, and parents for its maintenance. The findings from this study also indicate that the Chinese students' parents in the Faculty of Letters show positive attitudes toward their children's heritage language maintenance and development

Index Terms—language maintenance, heritage language, language shift

I. INTRODUCTION

This research is an attempt to study the maintenance of Chinese heritage language by the Chinese Indonesian students of the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang, in which there are a big number of Chinese Indonesians studying.

During the repressive New Order Regime, the government advocated the restrictions such as the bans on the use of Chinese language at schools and the celebration of Chinese New Year, and the nationalization of Chinese schools. However, during the era of President Abdurrachman Wahid, all the bans for forbidding the use of Mandarin and Chinese cultural traditions were lifted. In addition, President Megawati declared Chinese New Year as a national holiday. Now the Chinese Indonesians are able to learn Mandarin in public schools and enjoy Chinese news broadcasts and entertainment programs on televisions.

However, while this boom in Chinese culture is going on, so many young Chinese-Indonesians in this case those studying in the Faculty of Letters are slowly losing touch with their cultural heritage, particularly their ability in mastering their language heritage. When asked how much they know their heritage language, most of them could not speak Chinese. A similar phenomenon happens to Javanese children who cannot speak Javanese. Most young Javanese generation have lost their ability in speaking Javanese. Even they speak English better than Javanese (the case of the writer's children).

This condition raises such questions "Why are they slowly losing touch with their cultural heritage? How parents help their children maintain their heritage language?" In his research, the writer would like to explore the way the Faculty of Letters students' parents maintain their Chinese heritage language.

Parents play an important role in maintaining a language as it is from the parents that children learn their first words. Parents' decision to choose a language for family communication contributes to the maintenance of their heritage language. Once they shift their perspectives into the language choice for their family communication, there will be the consequences of the maintenance of their heritage language. The result of the interviews of ten randomly selected students shows that none of their parents speak Chinese. In spite of their inabilities in spoken Chinese, there is another question to raise "Do parents still consider it important for their children to learn their heritage language?"

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

In recent decades, scholarly interest on patterns of language maintenance among immigrant groups has steadily grown (Jeon, 2008 & Teachout, 2005). The study of Thai language maintenance in New York City and the preservation of Thai identity was further explored by Teachout (2005). In her finding, she highlights the respondents' identity construction done through language. It is a dynamic process where people involve themselves in such linguistics events as reading books and magazines and listening to music.

Similarly, Jeon (2008) in his research shows that the second-generation Korean Americans experienced the lack of intense exposure to the native language, in this case, Korean language and resources in America which results in the reduced use of the language and leads to loss of their heritage language. This condition inhibits children in the proper use of their native language in the families as they live in a bilingual environment.

III. LITERARY REVIEW

In an effort to understand language maintenance, it is worth discussing the relationship between language contact,

maintenance and shift and the role of family in language maintenance.

A. *Language Contact, Maintenance and Shift*

Language maintenance has been an issue debated whenever languages come into contact. As people move to different areas, or come to interact more frequently with those from other language groups, speakers may gradually replace one language by another as their primary means of communication. As a result, some native languages may be more severely endangered than others. Therefore, strategies that promote the intergenerational transmission of languages are required and need community support (Deumert, 2011). He further points out that a language is maintained if speakers effectively pass it on to the next generation. Heritage language maintenance and loss over generation is greatly influenced by the family language choice and use.

In the case that there is no active language maintenance of the heritage language, shift to the dominant language is almost unavoidable due to the exposure to the dominant language in all major institutional domains such as schools, TV, radio, newspaper, and government administration, court, and work. At first, speakers of the minority language seem to consider it important to learn the dominant language to achieve social and economic success. However, without any conscious maintenance of the heritage language, they unconsciously abandon their heritage language and lose it as they do not feel any threat of learning a new language toward their ethnic language (Holmes, 2001). The transmission of the heritage language from one generation to another may be hampered as parents rarely use the heritage language when speaking with their children and children are reluctant to use the language when they communicate with their parents.

In such a situation, the language itself is endangered. This implies that some other language is being acquired in its place. In short, language shift is as a result of a language which is not well-maintained. A community who has spoken one language comes to speak another language. Language shift is as a result of language contact (Ostler, 2011).

Before we further discuss this issue, it is worth defining what is meant by language maintenance. Language maintenance is defined as the survival of a language in a situation where it might be expected to be endangered (Deumert, 2011). However, language maintenance is difficult to characterize as a result of the difficulty to define the kind of threat that a language is facing (Fishman, 1997).

B. *Language Maintenance and Family*

There are several factors which contribute to the maintenance of heritage language as a linguistic resource in constructing ethnic identities (Holmes, 2001 & Fought, 2011). A language can be maintained and preserved when it is considered as an important factor in maintaining a minority's identity. The decision for the Chinese descents to choose Chinese names, to celebrate their cultural events and to speak Chinese reflects a key element in the performance and recognition of ethnic identity. From the previously conducted studies on heritage language by Jeon (2008) & Teachout (2005), the family has been considered as a strong contributing factor of language maintenance.

In addition, Holmes (2001) illustrates the important roles of families in language maintenance in that families in minority groups live near each other and see each other. The Greek community in Wellington, for example, belongs to the same church, the Greek Orthodox Church, in which the religious service is held in Greek. In addition, the shops where they use Greek to each other were established to provide the food products imported from Greece. It can be observed easily that *Pecinan* (China town in Semarang) becomes a centre of business activities, in which people speak Chinese. The code-switching between the majority language (Indonesian) and Chinese reflects a way to signal ethnic identity.

Another factor that leads to the heritage language acquisition and maintenance in the children of immigrant parents is staying connected to the homelands, by which children may learn more about their roots. In Indonesia, a regular stream of people from big cities during *Idul Fitri* to visit their home towns (Mudik) will keep the need for using the heritage language alive. The prospect of regular trips back home provides a similar motivation to maintain fluency for many groups. Javanese migrants also see a trip to their hometowns as a high priority of themselves and their family members (Syofyan, 2015). The sense of connection to the homeland is clearly seen as a very strong incentive to maintain proficiency in the heritage language.

Another factor is related to, in some ethnic groups, the concept of an extended family in those grandparents and unmarried relatives who live in the same house as a nuclear family (Holmes, 2001). The family members living in the same place tend to communicate in the same language and lead to language maintenance (Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2015).

When Chinese dialects are spoken by all family members, from grandparents to grandchildren, they are more likely to maintain the language. In this situation, there is a good reason for them to continue using their heritage language. Marriage within a minority group's members, such as the Chinese and the Greek, contribute to language maintenance (Holmes, 2001). Marriage to a dominant member of the group is another factor of language shift or maintenance the children experienced in the family. It is essential to highlight that groups who manage to ensure their language in such settings as schools and places of worships will increase the chance of language maintenance.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to focus on a quantitative aspect of parents' attitudes towards heritage language maintenance. The instrument developed to collect the data in this study was closed questionnaire. The subjects participating in this study

are the parents of the Indonesian Chinese Students who studied in the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang. Initially, 102 questionnaires were distributed but only 68 questionnaires were returned

A. Participants

The participants of this research consist of 33 fathers and 35 mothers. It shows a balanced proportion of participants according to gender. From education point of view, the majority of the respondents are senior high school graduates, the others are graduates of the diploma program (25%), of undergraduate program (16,2%), and junior high school graduates (5.9%).

B. Instrument

The data collection instrument used in this study is an Indonesian questionnaire distributed to the parents of the Indonesian Chinese Students who studied in the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang, Indonesia.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All the data were processed using the SPSS-17. Descriptive statistics were obtained to identify the Chinese Heritage Language Maintenance conducted by the Faculty of Letters' Chinese Students' parents and the ways they help their children maintain their Chinese heritage language. This section presents the results obtained from the statistical analyses.

A. Parents' Levels of Chinese Proficiency

Parents were asked to evaluate their proficiency levels based on a self-assessed scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating not at all and 5 indicating excellent (native-like) proficiency. The majority of the participants considered themselves incompetent in Chinese language, in that they perceived that their writing is very bad and bad (73.2%), listening (69.1%), reading (82.4%), and writing (85.3%). Only small number of participants considered their Chinese proficiency good and very good in speaking (5.8%), listening (8.8%), reading (5.8%), and writing (5.9%).

B. Communication as a Means of Maintaining the Chinese Language

In their research, Park & Sarkar (2007) mentioned that a close family relationship is more likely to maintain Korean language. In order for children to communicate with their grandparents, they must learn the language. The frequency and the quality of the talk in Korean language among the family members are likely to contribute to heritage language maintenance. Wong Fillmore (1991) cited in Park and Sarkar (2007) emphasizes the role of the extended family members in the heritage maintenance in their families.

As a result of the students' parents' incompetency in Chinese language, they never and seldom communicate with their children (86.8%), spouse (86.8%), brothers or sisters (88.2), and parents (88.2). This condition is considered a barrier in maintaining their heritage language as the use of a language as a means of communication is the best way to maintain a language.

Efforts to maintain the heritage language and culture normally occur through intense communication among family members and friends, language instruction at school, and church activities. Park and Sarkar (2007) shows that the Korean church played a role in maintaining the Korean language in Montreal and agreed on occasions of special church celebrations and feasts that unite the Korean people to speak the language. It is through these occasions that the second-generation children are likely to gain the language.

Students' responses to religious activities showed clearly that a small number of the respondents (4.4%) asked their children to participate in religious activities in Chinese. The small percentage is closely connected with the fact that not all churches hold religious activities like English mass and service in Chinese.

Praise is closely connected with effort and achievement. Parents praise their children when they accomplish something challenging or new. In addition, parents promote the use of praise to improve children's motivation and school performance. The use of praise as a teacher's approval is considered as an effective tool to motivate children to work harder and to maximize its positive impact on student academic achievement.

The finding shows that only a small number (5.8%) of the respondents praised their children when they spoke Chinese. The majority of the parents (79.4%) under investigation never and seldom praise their children when they spoke Chinese. The small percentage of "praise" is closely connected with the fact that children never spoke Chinese because of their lack of ability to speak Chinese as shown in this research that even the majority of the parents cannot speak Chinese.

Speech and writing contests are designed to encourage language learners to enhance their understanding of the language and culture as well as to provide the motivation for furthering their language proficiency. By encouraging the children to join such Chinese speech and writing contests, parents expect their children to be able to maintain the language.

There is pessimism in encouraging children to join Chinese speech and writing contest to maintain their heritage language. For instance, only a very small number of parents encourage their children to join Chinese speech (1.5%) and writing contest (1.5%). It is possibly assumed that such contests are rarely done like English speech and writing contest.

In connection with a Chinese language course as a means of maintaining the language, only a small number of the

parents who find a Chinese course for their children and the majority of the parents always (44.1%) and usually (7.4%) find a course for their children to maintain the heritage language.

Item 14 asked the students' parents whether they sent their children abroad for a home stay program or a Chinese English course. The result showed that almost all of the respondents (94.1%) never and seldom sent their children abroad to join such a program as homestay in Chinese speaking countries.

Table 1 displays the percentages and frequencies of respondents' efforts to maintain the heritage language by sending their children to schools which have Chinese lessons. As can be drawn from the data, a promising number of the participants indicated their efforts to maintain their language. Drawn from the responses of 'Always' (17.6%) and 'Usually' (27.9%), it is almost certain that almost half of the respondents sent their children to school with Chinese lesson. They were doing their best to enhance their confidence of heritage language maintenance through formal Chinese lessons at school.

It is important for parents to ask the children to visit and celebrate the cultural events, such as *Pasar Semawis* (Semarang Fair held in Chinese New Year) to give them opportunities to recognize their own traditions better. The ultimate goal here is to enhance the children's awareness of the language and the culture in a meaningful and interesting way.

However, only small number of the parents (29.4%) usually and always ask their children to visit such festivals while the majority of the parents do not seem to see the benefits of visiting such cultural events.

C. Students' Parents' Attitudes toward Their Chinese Heritage Language

This section attempted to find out the respondents' attitudes toward their heritage language maintenance.

TABLE 1:
PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD HERITAGE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I want my children to know the history of China	68	1	5	2.50	.855
I want my children to know the news of China	68	1	4	2.66	.704
I want my children to marry a Chinese	68	1	4	1.99	.855
I want my children to like Chinese food	68	1	4	2.18	.809
We celebrate Chinese holidays with my family	68	1	4	1.74	.785
I feel comfortable to communicate in Chinese language	68	1	5	3.10	.949
I want my children to speak Chinese	68	1	4	2.15	.815
It is important for me to deal with people who can speak Chinese	68	1	5	2.87	.913
I feel comfortable to communicate in Chinese language	68	1	4	2.62	.647
I like Chinese products	68	1	5	2.40	1.186
My children proficiency is important for my children's future careers	68	1	4	2.35	.910
I want to send my children to the Chinese speaking countries.	68	1	5	2.63	.991
Valid N (listwise)	68				

Table 1 gives an overall picture of reasonably strong support for respondents' attitude level toward their heritage language. The students' parents under investigation appeared to show positive attitudes toward the maintenance of their Chinese heritage language. This was best reflected in their responses to the statements with the average mean score 2.43.

The finding also displays the percentages and frequencies of the children's knowledge of the history of China in connection with the language heritage maintenance. As can be drawn from the data, more than half of the respondents (54.4%) indicated the connection they can feel between the children's knowledge of the history of China in connection with the language heritage maintenance. However, Table 1 shows that only a small number of the parents (35%) who really want their children to know the new of China. It can be seen from Table 1 that parents are more interested in the history of China than its news.

TABLE 2:
I WANT MY CHILDREN TO MARRY A CHINESE

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	23	33.8	33.8	33.8
Agree	25	36.8	36.8	70.6
Neutral	18	26.5	26.5	97.1
Disagree	2	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Parents' responses to intermarriage showed clearly that the majority of the respondents (70.6%) perceived parents' marrying their children with the ones within the same ethnicity considered the best way to maintain their heritage

language. Only 2.9% of the respondents indicated their disagreement to the belief that it is through marriage within a single ethnicity worth maintaining the heritage language.

A similar result shows that the majority of the respondents (63.2%) seemed to feel that they could maintain their identity by their interest in Chinese food. It is through maintaining their identity through Chinese food that they could maintain their heritage language.

TABLE 3:
WE CELEBRATE CHINESE HOLIDAYS WITH MY FAMILY

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	30	44.1	44.1	44.1
	Agree	28	41.2	41.2	85.3
	Neutral	8	11.8	11.8	97.1
	Disagree	2	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

The fact that Chinese students must speak Indonesian as a medium of instruction means that the exposure to their heritage language is very limited. This condition will contribute to their loss of the heritage language by themselves neglecting it at home. Therefore, efforts must be made by parents for its maintenance. Frequent communication between parents and children in the heritage language at home is an effective way for its maintenance.

As for children's participation in the celebration of Chinese holidays at home, the majority of students valued their participations. For instance, almost all of the parents under study (85.2%) appeared to be fond of celebrating Chinese holidays with their family.

TABLE 4:
I FEEL COMFORTABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN CHINESE LANGUAGE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	5.9	5.9	5.9
	Agree	20	29.4	29.4	35.3
	Neutral	42	61.8	61.8	97.1
	Disagree	2	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 reflected students' parents' level of comfort toward the use of Chinese language for communication. There are more people who agreed and strongly agreed 35,3% than those who disagreed (2.9%).

Parents' responses to Chinese products showed clearly that a big number of the respondents (61.8%) indicated positive attitude toward Chinese products. It can be assumed that they are proud of their identity through their pride of their heritage country, China. Only 22,1 % of the respondents indicated their disagreement and 2.9% of parents who do not like Chinese products.

TABLE 5:
CHINESE PROFICIENCY IS IMPORTANT FOR MY CHILDREN'S FUTURE CAREERS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	18	26.5	26.5	26.2
	Agree	24	35.3	35.3	61.2
	Neutral	9	13.2	13.2	75.0
	Disagree	15	22.1	22.1	97.1
	Strongly Disagree	2	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 displays the percentages and frequencies of parents' beliefs that their children's Chinese proficiency is important for their future careers. As can be drawn from the data, more than half of the parents (55.9%) indicated the importance of maintaining their heritage language as it is closely connected with their children's future careers.

Another finding shows that less than half of the respondents (38.2%) wanted to send their children Chinese speaking countries to maintain their heritage language. It is assumed that a small number of parents who want to send their children abroad are closely connected with the fact that it is costly for them to support their children's education abroad. In fact, there are a small number of parents who disagreed (11.8%) and strongly disagreed (2.9%) with this idea.

VI. CONCLUSION

Due to the fact that only 68 student's parents of the Faculty of Letters participated in this study, the findings cannot be generalized to the Chinese students' parents in Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang.

The finding of this study suggests that students' parents' weak Chinese competencies hamper the communication in Chinese heritage language with their family members such as children, spouses, siblings, and parents for its maintenance. However, most of the parents still want to send their children to the schools which provide Chinese lessons for their children. No writing and speech contests in Chinese heritage language in Semarang, no religious mass and service in Chinese unlike English limit their exposure to their heritage language.

The findings from this study also indicate that the Chinese students' parents in the Faculty of Letters show positive attitudes toward their children's heritage language maintenance and development. It was best reflected in their responses to the statements with the average mean score of 2.34.

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