

This work is on a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. Access to this work was provided by the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) ScholarWorks@UMBC digital repository on the Maryland Shared Open Access (MD-SOAR) platform.

Please provide feedback

Please support the ScholarWorks@UMBC repository by emailing [scholarworks-group@umbc.edu](mailto:scholarworks-group@umbc.edu) and telling us what having access to this work means to you and why it's important to you. Thank you.

## "I Call Them My Little Chinese Kids": Parents' Identities and Language Ideologies in Mandarin-English Dual Language Immersion Schools

May F. Chung\*

University of Maryland, Baltimore County

\*[mayfchung@gmail.com](mailto:mayfchung@gmail.com)

Received : 2020-JUN-30

Accepted : 2020-DEC-19



DOI: 10.46303/jcve.2020.19

---

How to cite this paper: Chung, M. F. (2020). "I Call Them My Little Chinese Kids": Parents' Identities and Language Ideologies in Mandarin-English Dual Language Immersion Schools. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 3(2), 179-195. doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2020.19

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

---

### Abstract

Research on bilingual education presents clear advantages for children's linguistic, cognitive, and social development. However, recent criticism of dual language education programs has led to claims of dual language education as a marker of elite bilingualism or that parents play their roles as socially accepted "good parents" by sending their child to a bilingual school. This paper presents the linguistic ideologies of parents of students enrolled in two Chinese-English dual language schools in the MidAtlantic U.S. Qualitative data were obtained from in-depth interviews with 21 parents (mothers = 15, fathers = 6), the majority of whom have no Chinese ethnic connection. In drawing from theories of Family Language Policy, parents addressed the connections between Mandarin and economic, political, sociolinguistic, or sociocultural factors. Discussions with parents reveal both their knowledge and misconceptions regarding language learning theories. Findings also indicated that parental language ideologies often intertwine Chinese language with culture and nationality. Further, this research explores the ways parents uniquely shaped their identities in how they both accept and reject aspects of Chinese culture and language. My study reveals a more nuanced portrait of the parents who choose Mandarin immersion for their children, and explores the critical role that caretakers can play in informing bilingual policies and practices.

*Keywords:* bilingual education; dual language immersion; Mandarin

### Introduction

Dual language immersion schools in the United States have become a popular method of school choice, offering both language majority and minority speaking students a chance to learn in two languages (Collier & Thomas, 2004). Dual language schools also differ in the type of immersion, which may be either one-way or two-way: Two-way immersion is designed to blend English speakers and nonnative speakers in the same setting, to allow everyone to learn a second language (Collier & Thomas, 2004), whereas one-way immersion serves "a majority language group in the process of acquiring the same second language" (Fortune & Tedick,

2008, p. 5), for example, Mandarin immersion in the United States. In recent years, the number of schools offering dual language immersion in Mandarin and English has increased exponentially, becoming one of the most highly sought types of immersion, second only to Spanish. Today, over 300 immersion programs are taught in Mandarin, including 42 schools with the entire curricula delivered entirely in Mandarin (Weise, 2019).

Language immersion programs are long sought after by parents, and for a good reason. Research on bilingual education presents clear advantages for children's linguistic, cognitive, and social development (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas et al., 1993). For example, studies have shown that dual language immersion narrows the achievement gap for both minority and majority populations to reach at or above grade levels, compared to their non-immersion peers (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Fortune, 2012). What is more, studies have shown dual language immersion students excel in both oral proficiency, reading, and writing tests administered in both languages (Howard et al., 2003). However, despite these advantages, recent criticism of dual language education programs has centered around the fact that they tend to enroll language majority students from more affluent backgrounds than those from working-class backgrounds. For example, studies have found that dual language immersion programs tend to enroll students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than those from working class or middle class backgrounds (Parkes, 2008; Potowski, 2007). For some parents, the disparity in bilingualism, which de Costa (2010) refers to as "elite bilingualism" or "designer bilingualism" could create discord in communities where dual language schools become commodities only for the economically and academically privileged (Valdez et al., 2014). This phenomenon has led to claims of dual language education as a marker of "elite bilingualism" or "designer bilingualism" (de Costa, 2010).

Bilingualism for children is considered to be a social trend, a means for upwardly mobile and highly educated parents to invest in their child's education. Piller (2005) notes that "bilingualism has definitely joined the markers of parental success. Childhood bilingualism is hip, a potential that must be tapped – no questions asked" (p. 614) King and Fogle (2006) found that caretakers value bilingual education as an act of "good parenting," and are playing socially accepted roles as "good parents" by sending their child to a dual language school (p. 697). Other scholars characterize bilingualism as a "gift" for parents to position themselves as benevolent bestowers of bilingualism (Palviainen & Boyd, 2013; Piller, 2001). For a closer investigation of the decisions parents can make for their children regarding school choice, I turn to the framework of Family Language Policy (FLP).

### **FLP: An Emerging Field of Study**

The study of what has come to be known as Family Language Policy, or FLP, has been around for over a hundred years. Earlier researchers captured children's bilingual development in great detail, developing recommendations for maintaining home languages, such as Grammont's popular so-called One Person One Language, also known as OPOL (c.f. Ronjat, 1913). Since then, the study has grown to encompass both explicit language policies (King et al., 2008; Spolsky, 2004; Curdt-Christiansen, 2013) and implicit linguistic practices (Okita, 2002; Schwartz & Moin, 2012) guiding their children's language learning. FLP became

a means by which researchers could explore parental language ideologies, or views about language, and how they mapped out their children's bilingual outcomes (de Houwer, 1998; King, 2016). Those ideologies were not only used to cast language shift on an individual level, but also used to reflect broader attitudes and ideologies about language from a societal level. As Curdt-Christiansen (2009) explains, "Language ideologies are often seen as the driving force of language policy as language ideologies are based on the perceived value, power and utility of various languages" (p. 354-55). In applying Christiansen's statement to the family context, how parents perceive of, or their attitudes toward, a language is instrumental to whether speakers in the family will choose to speak the language.

A family's language policy also has important implications for language negotiation, especially in the current political climate. Immigration issues feature prominently FLP literature (Gallo & Hornberger, 2019 Okita, 2002), undeniably affecting the ways in which families shape the languages they use. Concurrently, the U.S.'s current relations with China, has evolved from "tense standoffs to a complex mix of intensifying diplomacy," according to the Council on Foreign Relations (2020). In the recent months following the outbreak of COVID-19 novel coronavirus in the United States, the disease's origin in Wuhan, China has led to a decline in American views favoring China (Silver et al., 2020). Given the close association of Mandarin with China, the degree to which parents desire their children to learn Mandarin rises and falls with the current condition of Chinese-U.S. relations.

### **Parents' Linguistic Beliefs: The Driving Force of FLP**

Parental perspectives regarding language are salient to the child's upbringing and family bonding. Because the family is so crucial to language planning, parents' beliefs about language and their language ideologies affect not only the languages they choose to speak in the home but how they make their linguistic decisions. According to Curdt-Christiansen (2009), "Language ideologies are context specific and related to and interwoven with economic, political, socio-cultural and linguistic factors as well as parental educational experiences and expectations" (p. 355). Further, their language policies may be impacted by "parents' expectations, parent's education and language experience, or parental knowledge of bilingualism" (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009, p. 355). These past experiences serve as a driving force for parental expectations, school choices, and family language policies.

For parents, a sense of identity is also deeply tied to language and culture and is shaped by their own experiences, all of which can then translate into the choices they make for their children. Studies looking at parental linguistic attitudes and ideologies have shown that children's language attitudes have been shown to reflect those of their parents (Feenstra, 1969; Potowski, 2007). As Norton and Toohey (2001) argue, "the language choices available to children and their parents, as well as the discursive practices that are encouraged and supported in school, have an important impact on children's identity" (p. 310). Parents' experiences with language can serve as a guide to the kinds of linguistic choices that are made readily available for their children. This paper will address parents' language ideologies regarding Mandarin, and how these linguistic choices impact their role as a parent of a Mandarin language learner.

### **Method**

### **Data Collection**

This study features 21 parents from two schools: 19 parents whose children attend a way Mandarin-English immersion program for a charter school, Dragon Academy, and three parents enroll their children in a Mandarin immersion program located in a traditional school, Panda Elementary. Both institutions are one-way immersion schools, alternating between Mandarin and English daily. Both elementary schools serve Pre-Kindergarten (from age three years old) to fifth grade students. Interviews were collected from February to April of 2020. 16 interviews took place in person, with five interviews that shifted to taking place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All names are pseudonyms.

In order to engage with the community, I reached out to the principal and teachers at both institutions to introduce my study and role as a researcher. My plan was to engage with administrators of the school, so they might serve as advocates for my study. Then, through a school listserv, I sent an email invitation to the Parent Teacher Association, asking parents to participate. From the pool of volunteers, I recruited via snowball sampling, where participants nominated other individuals in their social network.

During the interview, parents filled out a survey questionnaire asking about demographic information, as shown in Table 1, and interactions with Mandarin at home. I conducted semi-structured interviews ranging from 45 minutes to 2 hours, culminating in almost 20 hours of recordings. My interview protocol, adopted from Curdt-Christiansen (2014), investigated parents' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward Mandarin Chinese and strategies parents used to manage the language at home.

## Participants

Table 1: *Participants' mean ages, education levels and employment*

		<i>Mothers</i>	<i>Fathers</i>
<b>Age</b>	Mean	44.8	46.9
	Range	39-52	42-57
<b>Education</b>	Four-year college / undergraduate	4	3
	Post-graduate degree	11	3
<b>Mandarin ability</b>	No ability	8	5
	Can speak the language somewhat	4	1
	In the middle	3	0
<b>Traveled to a Mandarin speaking country</b>		9	5

Twenty-one parents participated in audio-recorded in-depth interviews for the study, consisting of 15 mothers and six fathers. In most cases, parents were interviewed individually, although in two instances, three participants were interviewed alongside their partner. In these cases, the interviewees felt their partner, who were all of Chinese descent, should be included because they would provide more insight into their motivations for school choice. All participants were currently married at the time of recording, except for one who was in a domestic partnership.

All 21 participating parents lived in the MidAtlantic United States, and all had high incomes of over \$90,000; which is not surprising as the area boasts one of the most highly educated resident populations and one of the largest incomes in the country (McCann, 2020; Taylor, 2019). All participants had at least a four-year undergraduate degree, with 14 possessing an advanced graduate degree. As shown in Table 1, there were more mothers that attained an advanced graduate degree than did not, while the fathers were split 50/50, half having pursued a four-year-degree and the other half having obtained advanced degrees.

The participants represented a myriad of ethnic identities. Ten parents identified as non-Hispanic white/Caucasian, two parents identified as African American or Black (who also self-identified as Latina), three identified as Asian American, three identified as Hispanic or Latino/a, and four were of mixed race ethnicity (three of which had one Chinese parent). Three participants also claimed Chinese ethnic or Asian spouses who were not interviewed for this study.

The participants also reflected a range of languages spoken at home. Even though the majority of parents spoke English as their native or first language; three spoke Spanish (one of which also listed French), two spoke French, one spoke German, and one spoke Taishanese dialect of Cantonese Chinese. As seen in Table 1, over a majority of the parents, 13, cited they had "no ability in understanding or speaking Mandarin at all", five cited that they "Can understand and speak the language somewhat" and three noted that they were in the middle of the two categories. No parent answered that they were a "native speaker" or a "native-like ability in the language". Most of the participants (n = 14) have had experience in visiting a country or region where Mandarin was widely spoken (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore), either visiting family, through business or personal trips; study abroad, or on an annual school-sponsored visit to China.

While the parents in the study reflect a well-educated and high-income sample, both markers of "elite bilingualism" (de Costa, 2010), given a closer look, parents may have various reasons and ideologies for enrolling their children into a Mandarin dual language school.

## Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed through multiple rounds of coding and categorization using NVIVO, the software data used in coding themes. I utilized a thematic content analysis to code through semi-structured in-depth interviews, incorporating Curdt-Christiansen's underlying factors of FLP (2014) model as a set of established codes. In line with FLP scholars such as Piller and Gerber (2018), thematic coding allowed me to focus my analysis related to linguistic beliefs. In particular, I coded responses for themes such as the political, cultural, economic, and linguistic factors that underlie parental language ideologies; their expectations and aspirations for their children's language use; and their thoughts toward their child's language immersion school.

## Results

### Parents' Sociolinguistic Ideologies

**Benefits of Bilingualism.** Sociolinguistic factors are related to how people perceive a language and may include "sources for beliefs about what language is good/acceptable or bad/unacceptable" (Curdt-Christiansen, 2014, p. 37). Discussions with parents reveal their sociolinguistic ideologies, including both parents' knowledge and misconceptions regarding language learning theories. For example, parents believe that children are better suited to learning a second language than adults, and that the younger their children learned, the better they were able to retain the language.

Frieda, a mother of a second grader and of French origin explains, "I feel like there is an age at which you need to learn a language in order to be blending in." Blending in, Frieda explained that her children will be able to assimilate to American culture in a way that she could not. Being both an immigrant to the United States and a non-native English speaker, Frieda remarks that she will always have an "accent" in English, her third language, because she learned it later in life. By enrolling her son in a bilingual school early, Frieda feels relieved her son will learn an additional language, Mandarin, but with the advantage of a native-like pronunciation.

Frieda's assumptions have traction in academic research. The parents seemed resigned by their fate of not being able to acquire native-like speech as an adult, supported by studies that suggest difficulty in acquiring a native accent was correlated with age (Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Flege, 1991). Further, many scholars believe that there is a critical period for acquisition of native-like pronunciation of a second language, with younger children more susceptible to master pronunciation up to puberty (Kuhl, 2011). While there are instances of adults who are able to master a language, their acquisition of pronunciation is less likely to match that of a native speaker.

**Cognitive Benefits.** For parents who were not bilingual speakers themselves, they were aware of the literature that learning a language was cognitively beneficial for their children. 13 out of 21 parents mentioned specifically how bilingualism impacted their child's "brain" in their interviews. To deepen their understanding, parents referenced literature they have read or studied and rely on community members for their information on bilingualism. Lena, mother of four kids ranging from PreK4 to 6th grader in middle school, discussed the role of learning languages in rewiring the brain. She states, "You know, from the different things I've read, learning a foreign language helps your brain to work and understand other aspects of life and academics as well." Lena drew from her knowledge from literature to form a positive perception of bilingualism.

Mara, a mother of two fifth graders, relied on her background as a child psychologist and provided a more specific explanation on the cognitive benefits of bilingualism. She states, "being exposed to a second language is just really good for the synapses and the connections in the brain. And it's just really good for cognitive development." Both Lena and Mara use the qualifier "good" to describe the linguistic impact of the brain ("good brain training", "good in general", "good for the synapses", "good for cognitive development") and speaking effusively about the benefits.

Margaret, mother of a second and third grader, also mentioned the positive benefits but framed bilingualism in terms of child development: She maintains, "I think it's like the building blocks of your brain when you learn two languages when you're growing up."

Although not a second language speaker herself, Margaret was well-versed in theories of bilingualism and consulted with friends on her decision. She refers to the brain as "building blocks," setting a strong foundation for her child's learning of a language.

Some caretakers were also so satisfied with the cognitive advantages of bilingualism, that they would be pleased even if their child decided not to use Mandarin in the future. Magaly, a mother of Kindergartener and a Pre-Kindergarten three-year-old, explains that the act of learning a language is still enriching, even if she has not traveled to a country that has spoken that language or will plan to use it. When asked if her child would continue to use Mandarin after school, she responded "[learning Mandarin] is like riding a bike that even if you haven't done it in a long time, that it's easier to get up or like get that switch turned on in your brain and hopefully, the Chinese is more connected."

Magaly believes that her daughter is forming the cognitive "building blocks," as Margaret envisions, even if they do not use the language later on in life. Under this model, Lance, father of a 6th grader, believed that even if his child does not use Mandarin, the language will still remain imprinted. He states, "You might not use it again later on, but it's still there. And then when you need to access that, it's there." Both Magaly and Lance converge on the idea that a language is retrievable, even if it is not spoken for a long amount of time.

Based on the belief that their child's language learning at a young age benefits the brain, a dual language immersion education presents parents with a chance to provide their children with a cognitively demanding education, regardless of the language. However, parents were satisfied because Mandarin served a crucial role not only as additional language to learn, but a "difficult" one.

**Mandarin as a "Difficult" Language.** A common theme that emerged from parents' motivations were how "difficult" or what a "challenge" learning Mandarin was. Many parents may be drawn to the learning of Mandarin Chinese because of the perception that the language poses difficulty to native English speakers due to the different set of phonological (tones) and orthography (strokes).

Out of 21 Parents, seven referred to learning Mandarin as "difficult" and a "challenge" for their children. Freida, Keri, and Maria, all non-Chinese parents believed that Mandarin Chinese is more "difficult" or intellectually rigorous than other languages, such as Spanish and French:

Frieda: "Chinese was the most difficult, so he learned early on and hopefully, that's going to stick with him."

Keri: "And it's such a difficult language to learn that secondly, if she were to pick up anything else, like Spanish or French, a second or third or fourth language might come easier."

Maria: "And then I also, my thought process was that Chinese is a very difficult language to pick up as an adult. Most, many languages are always harder as an adult, but I think Chinese is particularly harder."

Maria, a native Spanish speaker, reasoned that she could teach her child Spanish, but it was much more difficult to teach her child Mandarin. Like the parents featured in the last section,

these mothers also agreed on learning Mandarin as a child was best, especially because of Mandarin's perceived difficulty.

On the other hand, while some parents believed Mandarin was difficult, many ultimately believed their children were gifted language learners who could meet the arduous challenges of learning another language:

Carol: "So, our oldest daughter was very clearly extremely intelligent from day one. And we could tell right away that she needed to be challenged in school. And I felt that the extra language would keep her mind busy."

Vero, a mother of a Kindergartener and a 3rd grader, echoed Carol's same values of their child being an academically "gifted" student and boasted that her eldest child was ready to read at 9 months old. To illustrate her child's precociousness further, she tells the story of how she enrolled her Spanish-native speaking daughter in an English Montessori school. Due to the pressures of learning another language, Vero's daughter became emotional while she was learning English.

Vero: "So after four months, even when she was crying she was learning in English. So that makes me really happy and then I went like, "Okay, these kids are going to learn Chinese. We're going to make this happen."

Even through her daughter's tears, Vero could sense that she was capable of learning Mandarin and could handle the difficulties. Other parents also believed that the perception of Mandarin being difficult was an advantage for their children. Jennifer, a mother of four, touted how learning Mandarin aided her children's musical ability:

Jennifer: "I also think, you know, my sister was saying if your kids are musical at all, which our kids are, but Patrick takes guitar lessons and the other kids are taking piano lessons. But you know, having that helps them with both pieces. It helps with the language, it helps with the music because Chinese Mandarin is a tonal language. So, you know, if they have any musical ability, they can pick that up and they understand the nuance."

Jennifer believes that the ability of Mandarin's tones are able to carry over to their perception of different musical abilities.

Similar to benefits on pitch awareness, parents also perceive that Mandarin will aid in other abstract concepts, such as understanding math. Lin, mother of a PK4 and a middle schooler, believes that her eldest's learning of Mandarin also improves their "math concepts, because of the way Chinese sort of reverses the way that you think and speak of things". When probed a little further to discuss her son's performance in math, she explained, "Since he's been in seventh grade, we had him evaluated and he is off the charts in math, which kind of makes sense why his language skills would be off the charts." Lin sees both high scores in math and language skills for her son and suggests the two are not only related but carries a

causal relationship: the acquired language skills lead to higher scores in math. To explain this phenomenon, Lin points to the effect of learning Mandarin.

In describing their sons' abilities, both Lin and Jennifer associate Mandarin as a bridge to learn advanced concepts, such as music or math. Their depictions are not so different from the same way that China or Chinese culture is represented as a foreign-- shrouded in mysticism and hard to understand (Hubbert, 2019). These mothers' assertions closely align with Hubbert's (2019) analysis that Mandarin language learning is "cool" in its "ability to define the speaker as "different" and thus special." (p.51). In other words, parents believe that their children will be set apart from others by his language ability.

### **Parents' Economic Ideologies: Mandarin as a Language of Opportunity**

Curd-Christian (2009) refers to the socioeconomic context of FLP as the "whether and to what degree language variables affect economic variables, such as earnings and salaries" (p. 356), or in other words, how parents base their decisions on the economic vitality of Mandarin. Many of the parents admitted that their motivations for enrolling their students into a Mandarin language school were influenced by the rising power of China, especially as an economic competitor. In one example, Eleanor looked at the current economic competition between the U.S. and China as the top global competitors and predicts that Mandarin will be a useful language in future global order:

Eleanor: "You look at the US/China relationship and the economic part of that and the future of these two biggest economies in the world working hand-in-hand for the foreseeable future. One, I thought it would give her a head-start in, maybe... It's crazy to predict or impose or say you want your child to learn Chinese because she's gonna do business with China one day or be a diplomat or something. But you know, I think that it doesn't hurt, you never know."

Eleanor's motivations are highly motivated by economic trends and China's economic standing in the current global order. Many of the other parents also express how Mandarin is a pathway for economic success and "looks good on a resume". From a parental perspective, caretakers may be just as wary of the competitive academic environment they predict their children will be exposed to, and so feel the need to carve out future careers--even for their three-year-olds.

Other parents also mention the negative role of China, while being cognizant of the fact that their children were learning the national language of China. For example, Jennifer referenced a conversation with her husband with their choice of Mandarin as their FLP, "But he likes to joke with me and say, well, you're the one sending them to this Chinese school. You know, they're all going to move away and live in China and then we're going to be stuck here by ourselves." In her discourse, Jennifer is othering the learning of Mandarin, not as an opportunity as other parents have described the language, but as a means of separation between parent and child. The interaction between Jennifer and her husband reveals just one of the real many sutures parents have regarding their FLP. Though having chosen a Mandarin DLS is her FLP, Jennifer still remains uncomfortable with her children learning the language. Her hesitation reveals that not all parents are on board with dual language learning, even if it is touted as a coveted school choice for parents.

### Parents' Socio-Political Ideologies: Mandarin vs. China

Parental ideologies of Mandarin are often directly tied to the perception of China as a country. Many parents expounded on the competitiveness of Mandarin language learning rises and falls with the perception of China. As mentioned above, parents cite China's economic power as an attraction for enrolling their child into a Mandarin dual language school. However, Yeow, a father of two children, believes the lure of learning Mandarin may be numbered.

Yeow: "We know and if you'd asked me, I know, 10 or 15 years ago or even before that, right when, so in China was really booming, all you heard was, okay, your kid needs to learn Mandarin. That's the way we're going to be a global superpower and the way to advance in business is to learn that there was a big rush. I felt like when we had kids, that started to taper off a bit, right, there was a big rush, and then it started to taper off even. But I don't know if some of that still exists. It's probably going to die off now with the virus."

Yeow discusses the trend of learning Mandarin because China was once hailed as a "global superpower" and learning Mandarin was "the way to advance in business," but reasons that now the motivation for learning Mandarin will "die off now with the virus," referencing the COVID-19 novel coronavirus that began to spread in late 2019 and 2020. During the time of this interview, the virus was not yet at a pandemic level and had not reached the shores of the United States. Still, Yeow may have forecasted the declining views of Mandarin as American views favoring China are waning (Silver, Devlin, and Huang, 2020). While Mandarin becomes closely associated with China, the level of whether parents desire their children to learn Mandarin is closely connected with the current condition of Chinese-U.S. relations.

Similarly, while Yeow associates Mandarin with China in referencing current global affairs, parents can show that they can laud the Chinese language while simultaneously rejecting elements of Chinese culture. In one example, Margaret, mother of a second and third grader, discusses how learning Mandarin will yield future opportunities for their children. Namely, the language will "get them into a college" and "separate them from the other kids." However, later in the interview, she states frankly, "I would not ever let them live in China, because I am not a fan of the government there." In other words, Margaret's choice for her children to learn the language arises from not appreciation of China itself, but the act of learning the language will delineate them from other children as well as reap rewards like university admission. In this example, Margaret can separate the learning of Mandarin from China's politics.

Margaret's criticisms about the Chinese government coincide with Secretary of State Pompeo and lawmakers' recent decisions to close down Confucius Institutes, centers of learning Chinese language and culture nestled within universities across the country. Secretary of State Pompeo criticized the center for spreading "well-funded propaganda efforts and influence operations" on behalf of the Chinese government (Wong, 2020).

Further, in June 2020, President Trump signed an order that suspended entry into the United States to "aliens who present a risk to the U.S. labor market following the Coronavirus outbreak" (The White House, 2020). The order suspended work visas used to hire Mandarin teachers from China to work in Mandarin immersion programs (Weise, 2020). As a result, immersion programs across the country that depend on foreign teachers for Mandarin instruction remain in jeopardy. Margaret's belief "also reflects on an educational landscape that 'needs' but continues to fear China" (Hubbert, 2019, p 53); this situation may have continued repercussions, both educational and political, if the relationship between the U.S. and China continues to devolve.

### A "Mommy" But Not a "Mama": Parent's Socio-cultural Ideologies

It is not surprising that highly motivated parents and professionals were up-to-date on the latest caretaker trends. In their interviews, many brought up the ideology of "tiger parenting" or being a "tiger mom," popularized by the 2011 book by Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. The term refers to a usually ethnically Chinese mother who practices traditional strict child rearing practices. In her book, Chua details strict practices such as name-calling, threats, and high expectations. While the book and subsequent term came into criticism, Jennifer perceives "tiger mom" to be a humorous term. When describing her husband's insistence in sticking through Mandarin school, Jennifer states, "I always joke that my husband is a tiger mom, because he wants them involved in everything." Her depiction of tiger mothers is almost reverent and encouraging, in labeling a father who strives for his children to succeed, in contrast to the critical depiction of strict disciplinarian.

While Jennifer relishes in the tiger mother trope—or tiger father in her case— she expresses her unease at her child's traditional Chinese cultural learning practices. Jennifer describes an interaction with her young son where he accidentally code-switches into Mandarin. "Sometimes I'll say something to my youngest son, he will answer me in Mandarin. And I'll say, 'what did you just say to mommy?' He's like 'oh, wait.'" Jennifer makes it very clear that the home language is in English by invoking "mommy", a reminder of who his son is addressing. Jennifer is also clear here in delineating their identity as an English-speaking parent. In this moment, the mother also rejects Mandarin when it comes to creating her own maternal identity.

Keri, a white mother of a first grader and PK4 who undertook two semesters in Taiwan and in China, told a similar story. Despite her fluency in Mandarin, she expresses displeasure of being called "mama" instead of "mommy". She recalls her displeasure, "there are certain words that they use that I don't love. Like I like to be called mommy. And when they say mama, I don't like that."

Even though they are mothers of Chinese language learners, they are still rooted in their own self-conceptualizations of who they are as a parent. For Keri, even though she does speak Mandarin, she rejects being called "mama", which she associates with being a Chinese mother. Although their children are learning Mandarin, mothers Keri and Jennifer are anxious about being spoken to in Chinese, especially when it comes to their child's maternal forms of address. In formulating their identities of caretakers of nonparents, parents both accept and reject aspects of Chinese culture and language.

### **Identities of Parents of Mandarin Learners: Adoption, Reclamation, Appreciation**

Similar to how Keri and Jennifer situate themselves apart from being a Chinese mother, the caretakers uniquely shape their identities based on their own experiences of raising a bilingual child, especially one who speaks a language they do not understand. Some parents are irrevocably changed by their experience of enrolling their children in a Mandarin school. When asked how learning Mandarin influenced her family's life, Vero explains, "I call them my little Chinese kids. I don't worry that these are eroding either their Americanness or their Panamanianess, I think they have one more thing to appreciate."

She has embraced that her children's language learning has become a part of who they are. As a mother, the act of learning Mandarin has seeped into their identity of being "Chinese" so much that she is able to give them an affectionate moniker "my little Chinese kids", despite the fact that her children are not ethnically Chinese. Nevertheless, Vero believes her children are able to claim being "Chinese" through the act of learning Mandarin, which does not take away from their other parts of their identity. Her children are also able to adopt the tongues of their nationality, American, their ethnic heritage, Panamanian, and now their language of their FLP, Mandarin.

For parents, a sense of identity is also deeply tied to language and culture and is shaped by their own experiences, all of which can then translate into the choices they make for their children. Lance, a father of a sixth grader, discusses that one of his motivations for enrolling his child in Chinese was that he himself was "deprived" as a child as a young age. Later, when he reflects on his child's progress in Mandarin, he is able to think of his daughter's ability to learn a language.

Lance: "we're like, no, I don't speak Chinese, but my daughter does.... And because I think as a parent, you want your child to be better than you. And so, in some ways, I try to encourage her and I'm very proud that she's learning it."

Lance notes how language can transform not only his daughter's life but his as well. In his case, he is able to reclaim his heritage language through his children. Heritage language learners are speakers, who, like Lance "who were exposed to the language in the family since childhood and as adults wish to learn, relearn, or improve their current level of linguistic proficiency in their family language" (Montrul, 2010, p. 3)

Yeow, a father of two twin sixth-graders, told a story about returning to his birthplace, Singapore, with his family. Yeow had a cathartic experience of his children meeting his family members for the first time and being able to converse in the same language.

Yeow "And so, you know, it wasn't sort of validating, it wasn't like, I wanted them to be who I wasn't, but it was just neat to see that we brought these kids back from the US. I'm the only cousin who doesn't really speak [Mandarin], but my kids are, so it felt good to, I don't know, pass that on, skip me, so I can't say pass that on, but good to give them that."

Similar to Lance, Yeow is not looking to replicate his own childhood. He states, "it wasn't like, I wanted them to be who I wasn't". Yeow chooses his FLP not to validate their own identity, but

as a pathway for their children to formulate their own selves. Instead, he wants his children to develop their own identity as Mandarin speakers.

As a father, this moment of seeing his children interacting with his family in a language he himself was not able to speak, was an experience that brought him joy. Even though Yeow's original desire to enroll his children in a dual language school had more to do with the school's reputation and performance than language, he felt rewarded in his experience with his family reunion in Singapore. This narrative suggests that not only are parental motivations susceptible to change, but also having the experience of Mandarin immersion as FLP itself can shape parental choice.

## Discussion

While the parents interviewed in this study fit the economic and academic profile of "designer" or "elite bilingualism" parents (de Costa, 2010), this study offers a more nuanced analysis in uncovering the language ideologies and complex identities of parents who choose Mandarin immersion for their child. Parents converge on the benefits of bilingualism but differed in their understanding of Mandarin. Findings show that the parents in this study are largely knowledgeable about academic research regarding bilingualism— not surprisingly, due to their high economic and academic achievements. Many of the parents in this study are aware of the linguistic flexibility of young children to acquire a second native language and wanted a bilingual immersion experience for their children, regardless of language. As a result, parents balance the perceived difficulty of Mandarin with their child's language resiliency. They also believe that learning a language is infused in the brain, and even heritage language loss is repairable as learners can re-immerse in the native language. At the same time, their views about China and the Chinese language often reflect conflicting and often contradictory ideologies—such as praising the economic ability of China while admonishing the Chinese government, or accepting "tiger mother parenting" but rejecting Chinese maternal forms of address.

As evidenced in the data, parents' own personal experiences shape their child's language learning and, in turn, are shaped by their child's linguistic experiences. De Houwer (1998) writes that a parent's beliefs and attitudes can influence their child's language use, but the opposite is also true: the child's language behavior also affects parents' perception and decisions regarding language. Parents exert their identities as parents of emerging bilinguals in complex, context-driven ways. In summary, parents have multifaceted and often complex approaches to and motivations for enrolling their children in Mandarin-English one-way dual language immersion schools.

## Limitations

In the current design, my study is contingent on parents' self-selection to participate, which may not be reflective of the school demographics. For example, while Dragon Academy lists 36.9% Black or African American student population, only two out of 21 participants (9%) self-identified as such. Furthermore, all of the participants had high incomes, which may not be reminiscent of the city demographics. Additionally, since part of the research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents were hesitant about meeting in person. When I shifted my interviews online, many of the participants withdrew from the study due to limited time restraints as a result of taking over childcare duties.

## Conclusion

A dual language immersion program is only as strong as its parental involvement. Through the process of schooling, parents are able to establish their own identities as caretakers of language learners. Parents who were bilingual or multilingual trusted in their bilingual experiences, valuing their child's adoption of Mandarin as a part of their own identity. These parents were not threatened by the process of immersion but instead, sought to teach their children their native languages. Parents who were of Chinese heritage often chose immersion for the purpose of reconciling their language loss. These parents indicate a stronger affiliation with their ethnic identity and familial association due to their enrollment in a Mandarin immersion program.

However, the data showed a bifurcation between the parents who had varied linguistic backgrounds and those who did not. The monolingual parents reveal their discomfort with some of the teaching practices or ways in which their children use language. They may express concerns about Mandarin eroding their identity as a parent. In light of the current tensions between the U.S. and China, parents may even give pause to their beliefs and motivations. Because parents are crucial stakeholders, their concerns are not only valid but must be considered for language immersion to thrive.

As parents serve as the bedrock of immersion, additional research is needed on the ways in which leaders and school professionals can integrate linguistic knowledge for their parents' home language policies. Since a majority of the parents interviewed did not speak Mandarin, this study provides further implications of how parents who do not speak Mandarin can mitigate their parenting roles in a language they do not understand. Further, while this data presents some of the beliefs of attitudes parents hold in, more research is needed on how these ideologies translate into actual practices. Do their family language policies match up with their home policies? This paper adds to research of culture and values on educational policies and the critical role that parents can play in informing policies and practices that shape language immersion programs.

## References

- Birdsong D., & Molis M. (2001). On the evidence for maturational constraints in second-language acquisition, *Journal of Memory and Language*, 44, 235–49.
- Christian, D. (1996). Two-way Immersion Education: Students Learning through Two Languages. *The Modern Language Journal*, 80(1), 66–76. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.1996.tb01139.x
- Chua, A. (2011). *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. A&C Black.
- Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2004). The astounding effectiveness of dual language education for all. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 2(1), 1-20.
- Council on Foreign Relations. (2020). *Timeline: U.S. Relations With China 1949–2020*. Retrieved September 18, 2020, from <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-relations-china>
- Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2009). Invisible and visible language planning: Ideological factors in the family language policy of Chinese immigrant families in Quebec. *Language Policy*, 8(4), 351–375.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2013). Negotiating family language policy: Doing homework. In M. Schwartz, & A. Verschik (Eds.), *Successful family language policy: Parents, Children and Educators in Interaction* (pp. 277-295). Springer.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2014). Family language policy: is learning Chinese at odds with leaning English in Singapore. In X. L. Curdt-Christiansen, & A. Hancock (Eds.), *Learning Chinese in Diasporic Communities: Many Pathways to Being Chinese* (pp. 35-58). (AILA Applied Linguistics Series; No. 12). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Curdt-Christiansen, X. L. (2020). Educating migrant children in England: language and educational practices in home and school environments. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 14(2), 163–180. doi:10.1080/19313152.2020.1732524
- de Costa, P. I. (2010). Language ideologies and standard English language policy in Singapore: Responses of a 'designer immigrant' student. *Language Policy*, 9, 217-239.
- de Houwer, A. (1998). Environmental factors in early bilingual development: The role of parental beliefs and attitudes. In G. Extra & L. Verhoeven (eds.), *Bilingualism and migration* (pp. 75-96). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Feenstra, H. J. (1969). Parents and teacher attitudes: Their role in second-language acquisition. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 26, 5-13.
- Flege, J. E. (1991). Age of learning affects the authenticity of voice-onset time (VOT) in stop consonants produced in a second language. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 89(1), 395–411. <https://doi.org/10.1121/1.400473>
- Fortune, T. W., & Tedick, D. J. (2008). One-way, Two-way, and Indigenous Immersion: A Call for Cross- Fertilization: Evolving perspectives on immersion education. In T. W. Fortune, & D. J. Tedick (Eds.), *Pathways to multilingualism: Evolving perspectives on immersion education* (pp. 3-21). Multilingual Matters, Ltd.
- Fortune, T. W. (2012). What the research says about immersion. In Asia Society (Ed.), *Chinese language learning in the early grades: A handbook of resources and best practices for Mandarin immersion* (pp. 9-13). Retrieved from <http://asiasociety.org/education/chinese-language-initiatives/chinese-language-learning-early-grades>

- Gallo, S., & Hornberger, N. H. (2019). "Immigration Policy as Family Language Policy: Mexican Immigrant Children and Families in Search of Bilingualism." *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 23(3), 757–770.
- Howard, E. R., Sugarman, J., & Christian, D. (2003). *Trends in two-way immersion education: A review of the research* (Report No. 63). Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk.
- Hubbert, J. (2019). *China in the World: An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, and Globalization*. University of Hawaii Press.
- King, K. (2016). Language policy, multilingual encounters, and transnational families. In Special Issue edited by Lanza, E., Wei, Li: "Multilingual encounters in transcultural families". *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(7), 726–733.
- King, K. A., & Fogle, L. W. (2006). Bilingual Parenting as Good Parenting: Parents' Perspectives on Family Language Policy for Additive Bilingualism, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 9(6), 695–712.
- King, K., Fogle, L., & Logan-Terry, A. (2008). Family Language Policy. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(5), 907–922. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2008.00076.x>
- Kuhl P. K. (2011). Early Language Learning and Literacy: Neuroscience Implications for Education. *Mind, Brain and Education: The Official Journal of the International Mind, Brain, and Education Society*, 5(3), 128–142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-228X.2011.01121.x>
- Lenneberg, E. H. (1967). *Biological foundations of language*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Lindholm-Leary, K. J. (2001). *Dual language education*. Multilingual Matters.
- McCann, A. (2020). *Most & least educated cities in America*. WalletHub. Retrieved August 27, 2020, from <https://wallethub.com/edu/most-and-least-educated-cities/6656/>
- Montrul, S. (2010). Current Issues in Heritage Language Acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30, 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190510000103>
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2001). Changing perspectives on good language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(2), 307–322.
- Okita, T. (2002). *Invisible work: Bilingualism, language choice, and childrearing in intermarried families*. John Benjamins.
- Palviainen, Å. & Boyd, S. (2013). Unity in discourse, diversity in practice: The one person one language policy in bilingual families. In M. Schwartz & A. Verschik (Eds.), *Successful Family Language Policy: Parents, Children and Educators in Interaction* (pp. 223–248). Springer.
- Parkes, J. (2008). Who chooses dual language education for their children and why. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11(6), 635–660.
- Piller, I. (2001). Private language planning: The best of both worlds? *Estudios de Sociolingüística*, 2(1), 61–80.
- Piller, I. (2005). Review of Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One-parent-one language Approach. By Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert. *International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*, 8(6), 614–617.
- Piller, I., & Gerber, L. (2018). Family language policy between the bilingual advantage and the monolingual mindset. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. DOI: 10.1080/13670050.2018.1503227
- Potowski, K. (2007). *Language and identity in a dual immersion school*. Multilingual Matters.

- Ronjat, J. (1913). *Le développement du langage observé chez un enfant bilingue*. Librairie.
- Schwartz, M., & Moin, V. (2012). Parents' assessment of their preschool children's bilingual development in the context of family language policy. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 33(1), 35-55.
- Silver, L., Devlin, K., & Huang, C. (2020). *Americans Fault China for Its Role in the Spread of COVID-19*. Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/07/30/americans-fault-china-for-its-role-in-the-spread-of-covid-19/>
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy: Key topics in sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, D. (2019). *DC Among The Most Brainy Cities In Nation: Report*. (2019, June 6). Washington DC, DC Patch. <https://patch.com/district-columbia/washingtondc/dc-among-most-brainy-cities-nation-report>
- The White House. (2020). *Proclamation suspending entry of aliens who present a risk to the U.S. labor market following the coronavirus outbreak*.  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspending-entry-aliens-present-risk-u-s-labor-market-following-coronavirus-outbreak/>
- Thomas, W. P., Collier, V. P., & Abbott, M. (1993). Academic achievement through Japanese, Spanish, or French: The first two years of partial immersion. *Modern Language Journal*, 77(2), 170-179.
- Valdez, V. E., Delavan, G., & Freire, J. A. (2014). The Marketing of Dual Language Education Policy in Utah Print Media: *Educational Policy*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904814556750>
- Weise, E. (2019). Mandarin immersion school list. *Mandarin Immersion Parents Council*.  
<https://miparentscouncil.org/full-mandarin-immersion-school-list/>
- Weise, E. (2020, July 23). Utah gets exemption to President Trump's order suspending work visas that would have hurt Mandarin immersion programs. *Mandarin Immersion Parents Council*. <https://miparentscouncil.org/2020/07/23/utah-gets-exemption-to-president-trumps-order-suspending-work-visas-that-would-have-hurt-mandarin-immersion-programs/>
- Weise, E. (2014). *A Parent's Guide to Mandarin Immersion*. Chenery Street Press.
- Wong, E. (2020, August 13). U.S. labels Chinese language education group a diplomatic mission. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/us/politics/state-department-confucius-institutes.html>