



Report

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**Mother Tongue Maintenance and Shift among Chinese
Individuals and Families in Manchester: A Domain
Analysis of Cantonese, Mandarin, and English**

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Introduction

The several waves of immigration throughout the past decades have contributed to shape a multilingual Chinese community in Manchester. Starting in the 1940s, with a number of Chinese immigrants settling down in Manchester, the Chinese community rapidly spread out with the arrival of a considerable amount of farmers from Hong Kong from the 50s to the 60s. Therefore, Cantonese was set as the first dominant language amongst the community. However, Mandarin was slowly introduced later on when a growing amount of Mainland Chinese arrived and settled in Manchester from the 1990s on. According to Lo (2010), in Manchester English is the public dominant language and Cantonese is the main dominant language in the Chinese community nowadays, among other active Chinese dialects including Hakka and Mandarin Chinese.

Our interest therefore fell on the coexistence and possible shifts among these languages in correlation with the influence of the English-speaking environment within which these languages are set. We first acknowledged that the languages would converge to English, for English is the official language of the country. Yet, we also took into account that a shift between the Chinese languages themselves could be likely to happen. Indeed, older residents in Manchester most commonly use Cantonese while Mandarin Chinese is generally more active amongst younger generations who come from Mainland China.

Thus, the rather complex multilingual environment of the Chinese Community in Manchester aroused our desire to choose this topic. Our research dealt with the current practice of the mother tongue among Chinese individuals and families with a particular focus on the factors leading to the maintenance of this mother tongue or shift to another language. A few questions came into consideration as well, such as the consequence of the rather recent wave of Mandarin-speakers onto the language practice of the individuals. We eventually drew a particular attention to the Fisherman question 'Who speaks what to whom and when?' in order to draw proper conclusions to our research.

Methodology

Contrary to what we had planned in the preliminary report, we divided our work into two stages instead of four, which could be briefly summarized as handing out questionnaires and conducting individualized interviews. We also used the Fisherman's table as a model for shaping our interviews and complementary observations. At a practical level we had to alter some processes due to the complexity of finding targets and collecting data. We will specify

those difficulties that we have come across later on as well as the modifications that we had to carry out.

We brought the designed questionnaires to Chinatown and filled them in by ourselves instantly thanks to a participant observation. Indeed, we directly asked the questions composing our questionnaire to the participants in Mandarin instead of leaving the questionnaires and collecting them later on. Our efficiency was quite affected due to the constant activeness of the area. Therefore, we only got 12 valid questionnaires at last among which 3 participants out of 12 left their contact information and showed willingness to join our following research. We proceeded to the next step by emailing and phoning them back. Eventually, we received two replies among the initial three people. In order to widen our amount of participants and to build up solid findings, we shifted to our back up plan contacting former acquaintances. Thus, we managed to end up with four participants in total for our interview.

As for the next step, we adopted a face-to-face active interview conducted in Mandarin in the field of China Town with one of our participant. Due to non-availability to meet up we had to interview the remaining three participants by emails and social networks.

Last but not least, we obtained extra data through the means of the participants help in as much as some of them provided for the answers of their relatives.

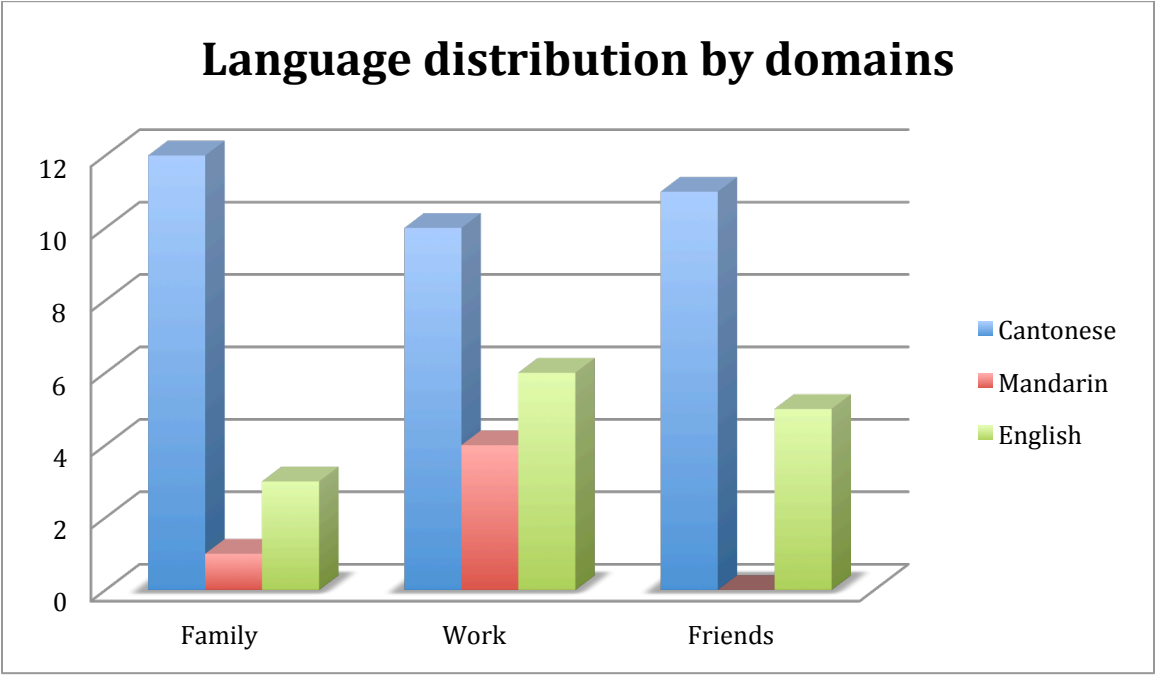
Findings

1) Questionnaire

Out of 12 participants who responded to the questionnaire in China Town, 11 of them are Cantonese native speakers and have been living in the UK for more than 10 years. Yet, a vast majority of them –9 in all, was born in China. Only one participant answered the questionnaire verbally through an interaction in Mandarin Chinese between her and one of our members. The remaining participants were given the English-written questionnaire to fill in. We have observed that all of them were able to read and comprehend it.

We have then taken a closer look to the distribution of English, Mandarin and Cantonese in particular domains such as Work, Family and Friends in order to go deeper into details. We can observe from the graph that Cantonese is the language that prevails in the Family domain with a total of 100% of people preferring to use it at home. What is interesting is that English is also used at home by 3 of the questioned participants. Furthermore, the graph logically displays the increase of the use of English at work in comparison to the family domain. Yet, Cantonese

remains the major language utilized by the participants at work. As for Mandarin, even though it is the less popular language in the work domain, 4 participants out of 14 would choose it when addressing to colleagues or customers. The graph eventually shows that Cantonese and English are respectively the most dominant languages even in the domain of friends.



The fact that all the participants were able to understand the English-written questionnaire let us deduce that they all have acquired English in order to adapt to the milieu they live in. We might assume that, with time, a shift would slowly be undergoing among the future generation process from Chinese languages to English. However, the data collected give us clear evidences that the process of mother tongue maintenance is not deniable. Besides, the domains in which Cantonese is spoken confirm this latter assumption. Indeed, Cantonese is often the only language used within the households and with friends. As we have focused our study in the field of China Town for this questionnaire, we can deduce that the environment not only favours but also strongly influences the maintenance of Cantonese from part of our participants. In fact, China Town appears to be way more than a mere cultural and commercial centre. It may be seen as a village in itself, a ‘communal urban space’, which highly influences the process of language maintenance and shifts. In this context, maintaining Cantonese seems to be linked with identity and more precisely with common feeling by the individuals to ‘belong’ to the same ethnic group.

2) Interviews

From the 12 participants we had beforehand, 2 of them were given an interview and both of them are Cantonese native-speaking women. Two Chinese Mandarin men from our acquaintances also participated to the interview. All four participants are aged between 20-40, were born in China and have been living in the UK for more than 10 years. Considering our problematic we mainly focused on the maintenance and shift in the participants' mother tongue, evaluating the different situations and contexts provoking either one or the other.

The interviews hinge round the following topics:

- 1) The participants' linguistic, educational and professional profile
- 2) The length of residence in the UK
- 3) The languages spoken at home
- 4) The languages spoken in their home country
- 5) The languages spoken with Chinese and non-Chinese people
- 6) Their opinions about a possible change in their language daily practice

Participant A (PA) was born in China and Chinese Mandarin is his mother tongue. All his family members live in China and all his interactions with them –be it passive or active, are led in Chinese Mandarin. Mandarin is also one of the languages he uses when it comes to addressing to his Chinese peers, friends, going to Chinese restaurants or when using Chinese social networks. Besides, the entire interview unfolded in Mandarin. However, the participant revealed that English is the language he uses more often on a daily basis. As a matter of fact, English is the omnipresent language in his workplace. Indeed, he speaks English with both the customers he knows and doesn't know – be it face-to-face, on the phone, or with his colleagues and boss. As for the community part, the interviewee prefers to speak English in all public facilities such as hospitals, gym, and with his neighbours. As a consequence, it is clear that the participant's choice of language relies on multifarious factors, the main one being a personal will to be understood best by his interlocutors. The context or domains in which he is settled happens to have a strong influence on his choice of language. Furthermore, it can be construed that despite having Mandarin as a mother tongue or using it with friends, a slow shift is occurring from Mandarin to English. The participant even goes further saying that 'as time goes by, English seems to become the first language tool that offers guidance on almost all daily

issues, unconsciously, which I believe results from a simple fact that adaption of language environment makes life easier’.

Participant B (PB) is a native Mandarin-speaker as well studying at the university. He moved from China along with his parents when he was 4 years old. His parents used to work here but now are back in China. Although Mandarin is the single language set in his family domain, he went to British schools and was thus exposed to an English-speaking milieu. That is the reason why he believes that his English is better than his Mandarin. In a more personal level, e.g. with school peers and friends, he uses English to all the non-Chinese people and Chinese to all the Chinese people. In all public area, the interview points out that English is always his first choice; while in Chinatown when he is himself a customer, his choice of language will depend on whether he is addressed to in Chinese or English. As for the leisure and media part, he uses English mostly but sometimes also watches Chinese TV programmes. As for his parents, he has reported that they shared the same language habits in the family, leisure and community domains but only used English at work when they were still living in Manchester. His opinion concerning the possible change in his daily language practice is that he has ‘been using Mandarin more than before and less English since (he) entered the university because (he) has encountered more peers from China over there.’

Participant C’s (PC) mother tongue is Cantonese. As a hairdresser in Chinatown, her case attests our previous hypothesis of language maintenance. Indeed, Cantonese prevails in most of the domains of work, family, and community. Furthermore, we observe a case of monolingual interactions between her and her relatives and her employees as well. Nevertheless, the interview highlights that Mandarin and English are languages that she utilizes as well on a daily basis. Interestingly, her choice of using ‘Mandarin or English when speaking to a first customer’ will ‘depend on his/her skin colour’. She will often shift from Cantonese to Mandarin when being herself a customer in China Town, with her Chinese friends or with customers on phone conversations. English is mostly to be found in the media part and public facilities such as TV or shopping for instance.

Participant D (PD) is a part of a travel agency in Chinatown. She has a large family here including her parents, sister and daughters, yet she herself is a first-generation immigrant. In her family, she exclusively uses Cantonese with her parents while with her siblings and children she will prefer to alter between Cantonese and English. Some shift will occur at work, as she will use Mandarin, Cantonese and English with customers, depending on whom she is addressing. However, on the phone, she will only address her customers in Mandarin or English and only speaks Mandarin to her colleagues and boss. As a citizen, she will prefer English in

the public facilities and with her neighbours. Yet, when she is herself a customer in Chinatown she uses both Cantonese and English. She also uses both languages when addressing to her Chinese friends. Last but not least, when taking a closer look to her children responses to the school part, we found out that they only use English at school, even with Chinese peers.

3) Data Analysis

Generally, the information we collected from these 4 interviews attests to our primary hypothesis: people are converging from their mother tongue towards English in order to adapt better to the English-speaking environment that surrounds them. English is in fact the language commonly used by all the participants in the work domain. Kroll and McClain (2013) acknowledge this language shift process as being caused by a wish of the individual to turn the situations to their advantage. We can denote a certain will from participant A to substitute his mother tongue to the English. His preference to use English from Chinese Mandarin may be linked with a wish of cultural assimilation to England and to English people in general in order to pertain to a group. Participant D clearly reveals that a shift is occurring from Cantonese to English whether it is in her own practices or her children's. English seems to be omnipresent in each domain even the family one. The fact that passive and active interactions with her children are led both in Cantonese and in English proves that she simultaneously wants her children to maintain a certain relationship with their ethnical origins and to assimilate to the country they live in.

Nonetheless, the interview showed evidence of maintenance of the mother tongue from part of the individuals. Chatzidaki and Maligkoudi (2013) explain that 'language transmission in the home domain is a crucial tool for language maintenance as it focuses on the intergenerational communication. Thus, in the case of PA, even though English is present in more domains than Mandarin is, the maintenance of Mandarin remains favoured by its direct link to the family and his Chinese friends. As for PB, although he did not grow up in his home country and used a different language from his mother tongue, his family kept using Chinese Mandarin as raising him up, which makes a comparatively good case of language maintenance. The interview reveals that PC's use of Cantonese is more symbolic of her identity relationship with the language than the rest of the participants towards their mother tongue. The fact that Cantonese is predominant in all the domains of her daily life may imply a strong attachment to her home country and will to maintain this bond thanks to her mother tongue. Finally, PD's maintenance of her mother tongue lies on her frequent use of Cantonese in the family domain as well and the transmission of this mother tongue to the second generation.

A passive observation of one of our acquaintance allowed us to provide a counterexample to the process of language maintenance. She herself is an immigrant from China but all her family and friends live there. She has built a family here in Manchester with a British husband and they have two daughters. She reported to be the only person in the family who can speak Chinese Mandarin, as neither her daughters nor her husband know how to speak it. Yet, she states that she does not often have the chance to speak Mandarin. This case lays emphasis on the crucial feature of the family domain in the process of language maintenance evoked earlier by Chatzidaki and Maligkoudi (2013).

Finally, the interview allowed us to verify our assumption that Mandarin has emerged among the Cantonese-speakers. PD says she 'only use(s) Mandarin for work purpose'. It seems that she does not mind shifting from Cantonese to Chinese Mandarin in the sense that Mandarin still relates to her national identity. This is what Charles Sanders Peirce calls 'indexicality', or the 'something else' that drives an individual to use a particular language. When it comes to participant C, we have seen previously that she uses Mandarin in a more personal basis than she uses English, which implies that some of her friends are Mandarin-speakers. Namei (2008) explains that the domains in which the first and second languages are used play a significant role in the language maintenance and shift. Besides, work and friends are an integral part of the shaping of an individual's identity and societal values. We can deduce that the language might be highly influenced by these domains as well. Thus, even though this shift from Cantonese to Mandarin appears in a context where the individuals need to seize an opportunity –business and so forth, we may want to go further relating it to the identity process once again; In that, native mandarin-speakers still stand for and belong to the same country as Cantonese-speakers namely China.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, our research on the mother tongue maintenance and shift among Chinese individuals in Manchester is based on 5 different aspects: (1) language use frequency, (2) domain analysis, (3) influence of the milieu of residence and work, (4) influence of the family (5) role of identity. Our findings confirm our hypothesis that English has inherently been merged into the Chinese community however frequent the use of the mother tongue would be. The analysis of data has proven that multilingualism is both seen as a tool of communication in a practical way and associated with cultural belonging to a certain group.

Moreover, we got acquainted that family is playing a crucial role on the maintenance of the mother tongue. Indeed, in a non-native environment, family is the only connection between mother tongue and young immigrants or Chinese-born individuals. If the family fails to function as a link, the language maintenance is being damaged and a language shift from the mother tongue to the language of the country will happen between the generations as shows the case of our acquaintance. As this immigrant generation functions as a link between the previous generation and the future one, we can assume that the mother tongue might be lost within the future generation if there is a fail to transmit the mother tongue directly among the family domain.

Our survey also supported the idea that the acquaintances of the informants –friends or colleagues have an important role to play in their language choice, maintenance or shift. PB is the embodiment of this assumption proving that language maintenance is possible even when an individual is being raised and scholarly educated in a foreign language environment thanks to the regular practice of his mother tongue with Chinese-speaking school peers and friends. The contrary has also been put to the test with our counterexample. The mother tongue transmission is slowly abandoned within the generations when the frequency of speaking it is too low nay non-existent. On the hand, the survey has revealed that Mandarin gradually make its way through the Chinese community language landscape thanks to its recent use in the workplace.

All in all, we have seen cases of mother tongue maintenance as well as mother tongue shifts from Cantonese to English, Mandarin to English and Cantonese to Mandarin. We could thus ponder over the reasons why cases of native Mandarin-speakers learning Cantonese have not been found in a Chinese community where Cantonese is the dominant language.

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Mother Tongue Maintenance and Shift among Chinese Individuals and Families in Manchester: A Domain Analysis of Cantonese, Mandarin, and English

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This survey is totally anonymous. Your personal information will not be required. All the information you provide is only for academic use, and it will be included in our final coursework report only. Thanks for participation!

1. Family Domain:

a) Which family members do you have in the UK?
b) Which language do you use when you are speaking to your...?
Parents:
Grandparents:
Children (if any):
Husband/Wife (if any):
Brother/Sisters (if any):
Others:
c) Which language do you use when ... are talking to you?
Parents:
Grandparents:
Children (if any):
Husband/Wife (if any):

Appendix 1

Brother/Sisters (if any):
Others:
If you use different languages towards different family members, what makes this change happen?

2. Work Domain:

Face to face contact
a) Which language do you use when you are speaking to...?
A customer you meet for the first time:
A customer you know:
If you use different languages towards different people, what makes this change happen?
b) Which language do you use with...?
Your colleagues:
Your boss/employees:
On the phone
a) Which language do you mostly use with customers?
b) Which language do you mostly use with suppliers/business partners?

Appendix 1

3. School Domain (if you have children or any school-aged generation in UK in your family, could you ask them to help with this part?)

a) Which language do you use with...?
Teachers:
Chinese peers:
Non-Chinese peers:
Language Tutors:

4. Community Domain:

a) Which language do you mostly use with...?
Your Chinese friends:
Non-Chinese friends:
If the situations vary, which language do you speak to whom, when and where and why?
b) Which language(s) do you use when you are yourself a customer in the Chinatown? With whom?
c) Which language do you mostly use with your neighbours?
d) Which language do you use in public facilities like hospital?

5. Leisure Domain:

a) Which language(s) do you mostly use on:
The Internet, when and why:
TV, when and why:
Restaurants, when and why:
Shopping, when and why:
Pubs, when and why:
Gym, when and why:
Do you often go back to China? If so, which language(s) do you mostly use there?

Do you think that your language using habits in all these situations have changed in the past years? If yes, how?

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