

Chinese Community Schools in England as Intercultural Educational Spaces: Pupils',
Parents' and Teachers' Constructions of the Chinese Language

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Abstract

This chapter presents reflections arising from a 14-month in-the-field research on pupils' identities within Mandarin Chinese community schooling in England. The research aims to explore the social, cultural and linguistic significance of Chinese community language schools for those who are involved in them. The research draws on the data from two Chinese community schools, Apple Valley and Deer River, to investigate how the schools provide a context for pupils, parents and school staff to “(re)construct” understandings of Chinese language. In particular, the chapter investigates how they construct ideas around Chinese heritage language (He, 2008) and native speakerism (Creese et al., 2014) and how the status of “heritage language speaker” risks being constructed as a homogenous and fixed system (Doerr, 2009; Kramsch, 2012). Literature on language community schools suggests that these schools play a political role in countering the monolingual orientation of mainstream schooling (Li & Wu, 2008; Archer et al., 2010). They also support pupils to resist ethnic categories and social stereotypes associated with static identity markers (Creese & Blackledge, 2012). The findings presented in this chapter suggest that although participants implicitly construct a complexity of language-related positions (e.g. the role of other *fāngyán* as Chinese heritage language contrasting the dominance of Mandarin), stereotypical discourses are still powerful in their explicit narrations.

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Introduction

Chinese migrant communities often constitute sites for discussion on Chinese culture and identity, providing alternative positions to nation-state related constructions, challenging an ontologically stable and homogenised construction of Chineseness, and fostering their own claim for “authenticity” (Ang, 1998; Archer et al., 2010).

In the UK, like in many other countries, some Chinese migrants have established community language schools to promote heritage language and culture to the new generations (Li & Wu, 2008). As community language schools offer an alternative to the monolingual and monocultural orientation of the mainstream education system, they represent ideal spaces for intercultural encounters —places where people, infused with different cultures and world-views, negotiate cultural and social identifications and representations (Kramsch, 1998). As sites for intercultural encounters the schools are also sites for intercultural learning and critical self-awareness development, where individuals negotiate their own identity positions and representations (Holmes & O’Neill, 2012). Parents, teachers and pupils bring together their different experiences of life, migration and different understandings of Chinese language and culture. As discussed by Pan and Wang chapter’s in this volume, teachers have also experienced different pedagogical conceptions and cross-cultural boundaries which shape their teaching practices.

In contrast with the intercultural dimension of language community education, Chinese community schools often have an explicit agenda focused on maintenance and transmission of “traditional” cultures and languages. At the same time, the schools —and in

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particular the teachers—face the challenge to cater for the needs of learners with a variety of linguistic abilities, motivations and learning objectives (Wang's chapter in this volume).

Drawing on the focus of two schools (Apple Valley School and Deer River School) on cultural-linguistic maintenance and promotion, this chapter explores how pupils understand the focus and importance of community schooling.

As argued by Blackledge and Creese (2010) languages and identities are socially constructed. Although it is an oversimplification to consider certain languages as symbols of identities, researchers need to take into account how people might believe that languages can function as a salient feature in their perception of identity.

Therefore, this chapter centres the focus from the discussion of the role and value of Chinese language learning in the context of community schooling (e.g. Francis et al., 2009; Mau et al., 2009) to explore how the schools provide a context for pupils, parents and school staff to “(re)construct” understandings of Chinese language. By listening to and analysing participants' narratives their “real voices” emerge in relation to Chinese language education (Dervin, 2013).

Chinese community schools in the UK, Chinese heritage language learning and native speakerism

Chinese community schools in the UK have been established since the arrival of migrants from Hong Kong in the 1950s and the 1960s (Li & Wu, 2008). Chinese community schools were traditionally focused on the transmission of Cantonese. However, in the past decade the raising economic power of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the related opportunities together with the arrival of new groups of Mandarin-speaker migrants contributed towards a major shift from Cantonese schooling to Mandarin schooling (Mau et al., 2009). Although not all Chinese mainlanders have Mandarin as first language and other

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languages and dialects are spoken in China, Mandarin is the official language of the PRC and as such it retains a strong political dimension. As argued by Archer et al. (2010): “particular critical concern has been directed at the role that the Chinese state continues to play within the construction and defence of dominant notions of contemporary Chineseness” (p. 409). As Chinese community schools are often charged with agendas aimed at promoting a sense of Chinese identity through language teaching, language teaching itself becomes a political act.

Mapping population and practices of Chinese community schooling in the UK, Mau et al. (2009) describe how some of the Cantonese-based schools have added Mandarin classes to address the demands of enthusiastic parents foreseeing the opportunities available to Mandarin speakers. This enthusiasm for Mandarin also turned into debates amongst parents and educators on which of the two languages should be prioritised within community schooling (Mau et al., 2009). Arguments towards the use of Mandarin and related simplified characters include a wish coming from the parents to foster stronger links with ‘homeland China’ and ‘Chinese identity’ with all the related benefits especially in terms of employment perspectives. However, the British-Chinese community (英国华侨 *yīngguó huáqiáo*) has a diverse origin which includes a large representation of Cantonese and Hakka speakers (including migrants from Hong Kong and Macau) and the presence of migrants from Taiwan and Singapore (Benton & Gomez, 2008). Controversies involve not only the spoken dimension of the language but also literacy as fostering the usage of traditional characters (繁体字 *fántǐzì*) used in Taiwan, Macau and Hong Kong over the usage of simplified ones (简体字 *jiǎntǐzì*) introduced extensively in the PRC by the Maoist regime in the mid-50s. As Mau et al. (2009) point out, controversies on languages (e.g. Mandarin and Cantonese) and writing systems (simplified and traditional) embroil issues beyond mere practicalities with cultural,

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social and political implications, including issues of political affiliation with the PRC and Taiwan, attached to any choices and unavoidable polemics.

Both Cantonese and Mandarin schools design their agendas on the transmission of Chinese language and Chinese culture mainly for heritage language learners (Li & Wu, 2008). In contrast, this study demonstrates that pupils schooled in Mandarin community schools are not necessarily Mandarin heritage language(HL) learners. It also argues how the schools design their agendas assuming particular language repertoires and family backgrounds of their pupils.

In order to critique the construction of Chinese heritage language in the schools, I draw on the definition of heritage language (HL) learner suggested by Valdés (2001, p.38) as a language student who is raised in a home where a non-English target language is spoken. HL learners speak or at least understand the language and they have some degree of multilingualism. Furthermore, learners see their HL as bearing a “particular family relevance” (Fishman, 2001, p.169).

Although Mandarin community schools generally target HL learners, the language backgrounds of their pupils are more complicated. He (2008) suggests the existence of different scenarios in CHL classrooms: Mandarin is the learner's home language, it is comprehensible to the home language or is unintelligible to the learner's home language. Classroom and home script (use of traditional or simplified characters) can be different, or the learner might not have any home literacy in Chinese. Such a variety of learning scenarios contrasts with the idea of Mandarin community schools for a homogeneous group of HL learners (He, 2008).

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Furthermore, Chinese as heritage language (CHL) has its own specificities (He, 2008). Jin and Dervin (in this volume) discuss how Chinese language has evolved from ancient times to the postmodern era. At the same time it has remained embedded in specific cultural, historical and global geo-political settings. Although Mandarin (also defined 普通话 *pǔtōnghuà*, common language) is the official language of the People's Republic of China there are seven major varieties of Chinese: Mandarin and six *fāngyán* dialects or varieties classified on geographical and linguistic-structural characteristics *Wu, Gan, Xiang, Min, Kejia* (Hakka), *Yue* (Cantonese) (Abbiati, 1996). Therefore, 'Chinese' as HL does not refer to one specific language but it is an umbrella term subsuming at least seven different languages (He, 2008). Failing to acknowledge linguistic diversity within Chinese communities and assuming the centrality of Mandarin represents, instead, a superimposition based on the political and cultural significance that Mandarin has enjoyed for centuries as associated with the speech of Beijing and its region (He, 2008).

Considering the complexity of the scenario of Chinese heritage language (CHL) learning and the dominance of Mandarin in the context of Mandarin community schooling, this study aims at exploring how the language is understood both by the official discourses of the schools and in the views of pupils, parents and teachers. Li and Wu (2008) discuss how the schools implement what is termed a "speak Mandarin-Chinese only" in the classrooms. Such policy is also often enforced in the teachers' practices.

In relation to the school policies and classroom practices, this study firstly critiques the construction of Mandarin as a monolithic entity and its implementation as one standard language in the schools. In fact, Mandarin used in the PRC (普通话 *pǔtōnghuà*), Taiwan (國語 *guóyǔ*) and Singapore (華語 *huáyǔ*) varies for instance in terms of phonetics and discourse norms (He, 2008). Secondly, the findings explore how native speakerism and the label of

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“native speaker teacher” in community language education are understood by participants and used to legitimate the language focus of the schools.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the different positions of Chinese language in the schools, it is necessary to consider the theorisations of native speakerism in relation to language teaching and acquisition. Holliday (2006) describes how the ideological construction of authentic native speaker teacher, as authentic and therefore legitimate language teacher, is persistent and uncontested in education studies. Authenticity and legitimacy of language use confers to its speakers a certain authority (Kramsch, 1998). Furthermore, benchmarks of authenticity and legitimacy are traditionally important in language teaching as “they define the native speaker teacher as the possessor of the right cultural and linguistic attributes to represent the target speech community” (Creese et al., 2014, p.938). Finally, as suggested by Doerr (2009) there are three ideological premises of the “native speaker” concept: its links to nation-states, an assumption of a homogeneous linguistic group and an assumption of a complete competence of the “native speaker” in their “native language”.

Although in the context of language teaching the notion of native speaker retains a strong hold, sociolinguistic research has challenged the notion of “idealised native speaker”. Rampton (1995) contests how for instance the definition of “native speaker expertise” is abstracted and problematic, not taking into account how language and membership to social groups change overtime. Further, Creese et al. (2014) defined a multiplicity of positions as native speaker teacher in the context of community schooling as negotiated by both teachers and pupils determining “what counts as the authenticity and legitimacy of the ‘native speaker’ teacher” (p. 2).

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Drawing on the discussed literature, this chapter explores how pupils, parents and teachers Chinese language in the context of their community schools construct Chinese language.

Focus of the study and methodology

This study draws on the experiences of community schooling of a sample of pupils, parents and teachers attending two Mandarin community schools in England to discuss representations of Chinese languages in Chinese language education. Participants' perspectives are discussed vis-à-vis the aims of the schools and their focus on CHL language. I have undertaken ethnographic observations in the schools, particularly in Apple Valley School where I have been involved in various capacities (observer, activity organiser and facilitator) over 14 months.

Participants

This study considers the perspectives of three groups of pupils (23 children), 2 head teachers, 8 parents and 8 teachers (18 adults) in two Mandarin Chinese community schools (Apple Valley and Deer River). The identification of research participants was purposive, based upon criteria such as the interest and willingness of participants to be part of the study and their ability to communicate in English. While there are Chinese speaking communities in many parts of the world, participants in the study came from Mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Hong Kong. By involving them I also intended to represent the ethnic, linguistic and geographical diversity of the schools' population.

A further criterion for the sampling of pupils was their age group so that all the age groups present in the schools could be represented. Thus, children were interviewed in three focus group sessions which throughout the analysis are referred to as FG1, FG2 and FG3:

FG1 took place at Apple Valley school. Five boys and one girl aged between 15 and 17 years old participated; they were all preparing for their Chinese GCSE. All the pupils were born in the People's Republic of China (PRC). All the participants stated that Mandarin was their mother tongue.

FG2 also took place at Apple Valley school. Participants (5 girls and 4 boys) were aged between 5 and 11 years old. They were at different points of their studies but they were part of the same Chinese art class. All of them were second generation migrants from the PRC or Hong Kong or from mixed heritage families. The children had different levels of command of Mandarin, and all had English as their preferred language.

FG3 took place in the second research site, Deer River school. Three girls and five boys aged between 12 and 14 years old participated. They were all attending year 7. Four of them started attending a Cantonese community school and moved to their present school in the previous year. All the children were born in the UK, five of them from Hong Kong families and three from Mainland China and mixed heritage families. They all stated that English was their preferred language, although children from Hong Kong heritage also considered Cantonese as their mother tongue.

Six parents were Mandarin speakers from Mainland China, one was from Hong Kong and spoke fluently Cantonese, Hakka and Mandarin and one was from Malaysia and she had a very good command of Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien. Both principals came from Mainland China, they both spoke Mandarin fluently although only one considered it their heritage language. Seven teachers were Mandarin speakers from Mainland China, one was from Taiwan and identified herself as speaker of Taiwanese-Mandarin (國語 *guóyǔ*). All adult participants were first generation migrants.

Data collection and analysis

The research design of the study included two phases. The first one — which draws from ethnography — was aimed at familiarising with the context and building up relationships participants. It involved participant observation sessions and co-production with teachers and pupils in extra-curricula activities. The second one involved a multimodal data collection including: pupils' drawing of Venn diagrams and cartoon storyboards of their experiences of community schooling; focus groups with pupils and interviews with adults.

The verbal data (interviews) were recorded, transcribed and coded by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) principles of thematic analysis. Researcher field notes recording observation of formal classroom teaching with teachers and pupils and informal conversations with parents and teachers, have been used to complement the data from the interviews and also included in the data analysis process.

In the analysis of the children's perspectives from the visual and verbal data are compared and contrasted. When visual data are presented in the chapter the full original artefact is included.

Languages and language conventions

The interviews both with adults and children were primarily conducted in English. However, Mandarin was occasionally used according to participants' choices and language skills. In order to respond to the need for presenting participants' "real voices" (Dervin, 2013) the data are presented in the original languages used during the data collection in the research site. Although all the data are presented and translated into English, the data analysis was undertaken considering the languages used in the interviews and in the visual artefacts, English and/or Chinese. Such a choice enabled me to consider meanings and linguistic

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choices as made by the participants. When during the analysis I grappled with representing meaning through translation, for instance where no precise English equivalent existed, the original Chinese word was used in the English text, and its etymology explained.

Finally, the research sites and all participants were given fictional names.

Accessing the research sites

This study received ethical approval from the university where the study was based, and their guidelines underpin the ethics of this study. In order to gain access to the research sites I contacted the head teachers and obtained their permission to carry out observation sessions in the schools and to engage with adults in the first stage. Adults' and pupils' participation was voluntary. Consent forms and briefing statements were designed for the school administration, parents, teachers and pupils. Pupils received suitable consent forms they could keep and show to their parents.

Constructions of Chinese language: pupils, parents and school staff

Perspectives of pupils, parents and school staff on Chinese language are illustrated in the context of teaching and learning taking place in the classrooms and in the broader social context of the Chinese community schools.

One or many Chinese Heritage languages

Mandarin is taught in the schools as heritage language with the assumption that pupils have some level of exposure to the language within their families. Such perspective on Chinese schooling as focused on HL learners was endorsed by a number of teachers. Shuchung, a teacher at Apple Valley School, explained how parents enrol their children into a community school for them to engage with the language and culture of their families:

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Parents want the children to come here and learn Chinese. Because the parents are native speakers. They want the kids to understand the language and through it Chinese culture.

Shuchung defined a relationship between (Mandarin) Chinese and what she loosely termed as “Chinese culture” where language becomes a vehicle to gain cultural affiliation. As suggested by Blackledge and Creese (2010), Shuchung perceived language as a salient feature of Chinese identity, glossing over the implications of simplifying concepts of language and culture. Instead, she defined a relationship between one Chinese language (Mandarin as taught in the school) and the existence of an overarching Chinese culture. Moreover, she confirms the position of the school assuming that pupils' parents are “native speakers” and as such they enrol their children to learn a language with family relevance.

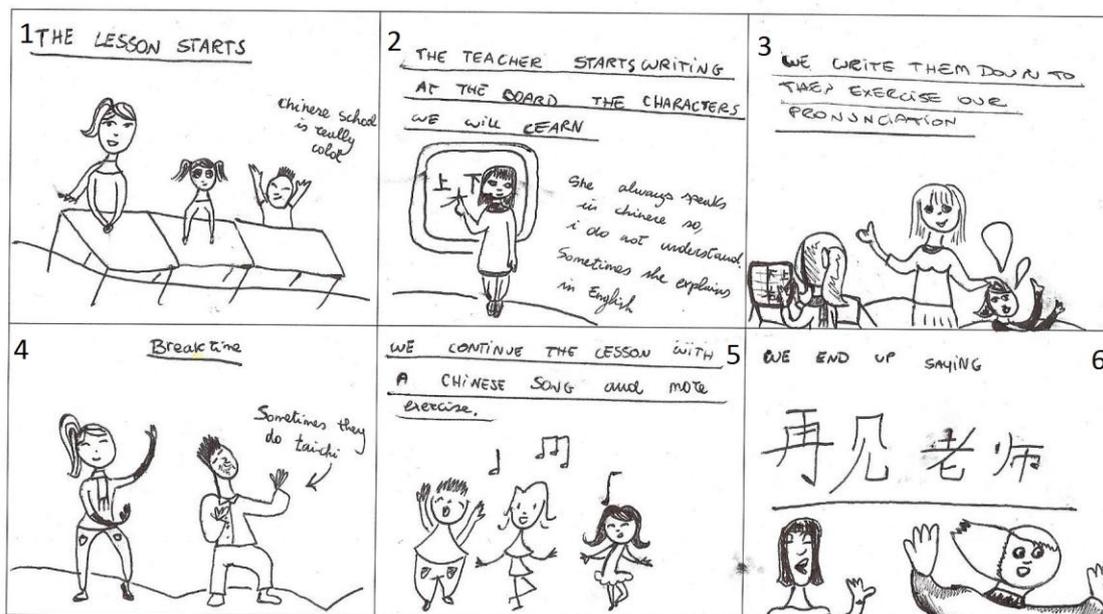
The analysis of the cartoon storyboard of Emily, a pupil attending Shuchung's class, challenges the idea of Mandarin Chinese taught in the school as HL. Coming from a background where Cantonese, Hakka and English are used for daily communication Emily started to learn Mandarin at Apple Valley School.

In her cartoon-storyboard Emily described a lesson at her community school, explaining in box 2 that:

The teacher starts writing at the board on characters we will learn. She always speaks Chinese so I do not understand. Sometimes she explains in English.

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Use this storyboard to tell the story of one learning moment at the Chinese Community School: something has made you learn about yourself, about being Chinese or anything else important for you. Feel free to use the space as you want with words, drawings etc.



Emily illustrated how a “speak Mandarin-Chinese only” policy (Li & Wu, 2008) is implemented in her teacher’s practice (“she always speaks Chinese”). Although Emily had a good literacy in simplified characters and she used them in her cartoon-storyboard, verbal communication in Mandarin was problematic for her (“I do not understand”). Her lack of exposure to Mandarin at home and her limited ability to speak and understand the language contrast with the definition of HL learner presented by Valdés (2001). Nevertheless, Emily had language competencies in other *fāngyán* (Hakka and Cantonese) and familiarity with Chinese simplified characters which He (2008) considers as characteristics of CHL learners. However, the actual teaching practices and the dominance of Mandarin in her classroom somehow failed to acknowledge her status of HL learner.

As demonstrated by the positions of Shuchung and Emily, although the research sites focused on Mandarin-Chinese for heritage language learners, to some pupils Mandarin did

not have family relevance nor affective value. Nevertheless, they had different language skills in other *fāngyán* (e.g. Hakka and Cantonese) which they considered as their own CHL.

The majority of pupil participants in FG3 at Deer River School came from Cantonese speaking families. They were confident Cantonese speakers themselves and explained how their parents wanted them to learn Mandarin at the school as an asset for the future despite the lack of family relevance. As explained by Roy who was transferred by his parents from a Cantonese to a Mandarin school:

Mandarin, it's going to be an important language because of the business that China is getting at the minute. They [parents] think that it will be useful if say you apply for a job for some companies on international business. They [companies] might want people with Mandarin that can do business in China.

A purely instrumental understanding of Mandarin (“useful say if you apply for a job”) was confirmed by Roy’s classmates in their discussion about Chinese language in relation to their preferences and practices:

Violet: I like Cantonese.

Lily: I like Cantonese.

Roy: I like Cantonese.

Julian: Cantonese, it's my first language.

Roy: English and Cantonese are my first languages. We all [refers to Lily, Violet and Julian] went to Cantonese school for few years and then we came here. I can't speak Mandarin but when I speak Cantonese [in Hong Kong] people would think I am just local.

Pupils sharing an understanding of Cantonese as Chinese as HL (CHL) articulated their responses by stressing its emotional value (Violet, Lily and Roy: “I like Cantonese”), by pointing at the family relevance of the language and their proficiency (“first language”, “I can't speak Mandarin”). In particular Roy discussed how his ability to speak Cantonese

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allows him to gain a sense of affiliation so that when he visits Hong Kong people would think he is “just local”. By stressing how language proficiency allowed him to feel connected to a particular group, Roy defined how Cantonese is important in relation to his cultural identity. As discussed by Kramsch (1998) there is a “natural connection between the language spoken by member of a social group and that group’s identity” (p.65). Furthermore, she defines how “although there is no one-to-one relationship between anyone’s language and his or her cultural identity, language is *the* most sensitive indicator of the relationship between an individual and a given social group” (p.77). Acknowledging his status of non-Mandarin HL speaker as he “can’t speak Mandarin” although his parents wanted him to study at Deer River School, Roy highlighted instead the significance of Cantonese as his own CHL.

Other pupils supported the idea that, although they do not attend the school as Mandarin HL learners they still consider themselves Chinese HL speakers. Coming from a family still largely living in Hong Kong, Kitty and Yvonne, who attended Apple Valley School, also gave a strong emotional value to Cantonese:

Sara: So do you speak Chinese when you are not in the school?

Kitty and Yvonne: Yes, we speak Cantonese a lot. Hakka and quite a lot of English.

Sara: Do you speak quite a lot of Cantonese?

Yvonne: I speak Cantonese when I don’t want anybody to understand what I say to her.

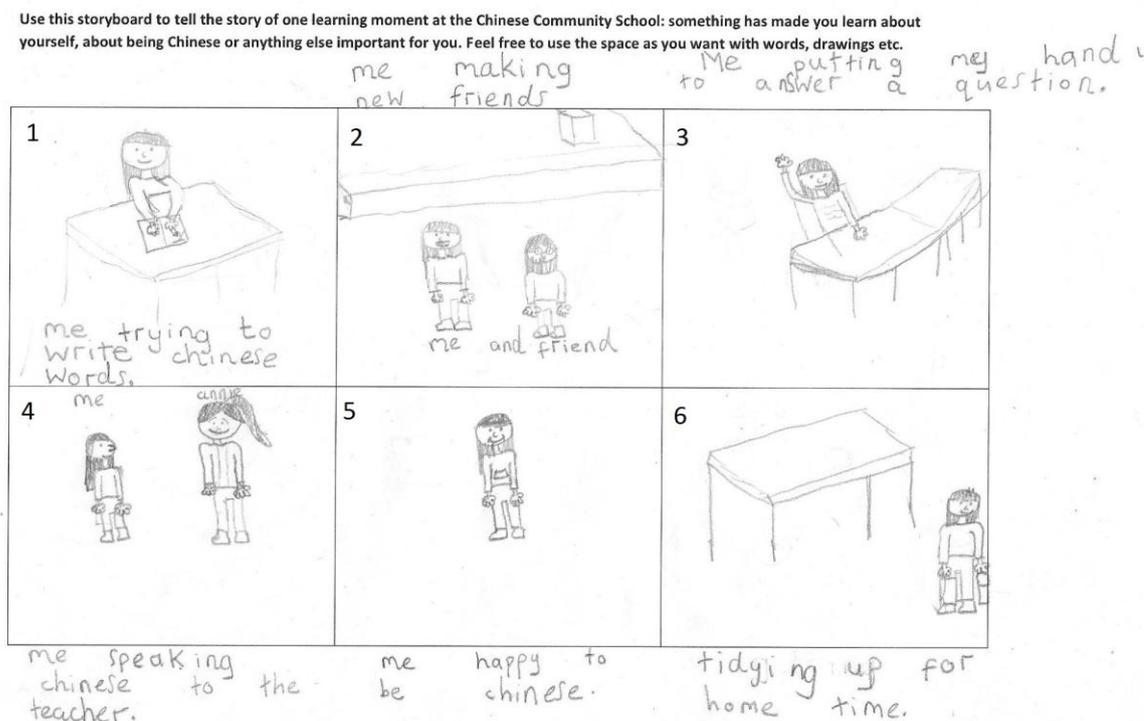
Kitty: Cantonese is important to speak secrets and to speak with our grandparents.

Yvonne and Kitty were confident Cantonese speakers who took great pride in their language skills, Kitty explained that “you might as well say that I speak Cantonese really well”. When they were asked if they speak Chinese at home they gave an affirmative response, but to them “Chinese” was Cantonese and not Mandarin. As suggested by Dai and

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Zhang (2008) in their theorisation of habitus of the CHL learners “acquisition and maintenance of CHL often occurs in a vertical and reciprocal intimate relation between grandparents/and their CHL learner grandchildren/children” (p. 41). Kitty and Yvonne emphasised the family value and intimate dimension (Fishman, 2001) of Cantonese as important “to speak with our grandparents” and also to “speak secrets” as opposed to Mandarin which Kitty reported to speak only at the Chinese school. Describing her cartoon storyboard, she illustrated box 4 saying that:

You need to use Chinese only. I speak Mandarin to the teacher. Only the words that I know.



On the one hand, she admitted how using Mandarin to communicate with her teacher requires an effort. On the other hand, she enthusiastically described how Cantonese as HL has family relevance for her and how she is a confident bilingual speaker able to use Cantonese and English exhibiting varying expertise and allegiance (He, 2008). Furthermore, not being a Mandarin HL learner did not seem to impact on Kitty’s identification with a Chinese-self. In

box 5 she portrayed “Me happy to be Chinese”, suggesting how proficiency in Mandarin is not necessarily a requisite to bond up with a Chinese sense of identity.

A further issue that emerged during the research is how some pupil participants in FG2 did not seem to have a clear sense of the difference between Mandarin and other varieties of Chinese. A possible reason was their age as some of them were 5 and 6 years old. Before the focus group Alice, their teacher, explained that a number of pupils speak fluently other *fāngyán* at home (such as Hokkien, Cantonese or Hakka) but were not necessarily fluent in Mandarin. In this excerpt Alice and some of the pupils discuss what *fāngyán* they speak at home:

Sara: 有没有人说广东话？ <Is there anyone who speaks Cantonese?>

Danny: 我知道广东话！ <I know Cantonese!>

Bella: 我爸爸妈妈说普通话！ <My parents speak Mandarin!>

Eva: 我只说中文！ <I just speak Chinese.>

Grace: 什么是广东话？什么是广东话？ <What's Cantonese? What's Cantonese?>

Alice: 广东话是广东人说的语言，Cantonese! <Cantonese is the language spoken by people from Guangdong.>

Sara: Does anyone speak Cantonese at home? 广东话?

Bella: Ah, yes yes me.

In the data it is evident that children did not necessarily recognise what *fāngyán* they speak at home and seemed confused about the question. Bella initially stated that she speaks “just Chinese at home”, but once Alice clarified that Cantonese is the language spoken by people from Guangdong—region of origin of Bella’s family— she realised that she actually speaks Cantonese. During the focus group Alice also tried to understand the pupils’ language

background by tracking their family origin. However, she did not seem to succeed as her pupils struggled to show a clear understanding of their Chinese language practice at home:

Alice: 你是福建人吗？你的老家 your hometown 是福建？还是哪里？
No,你爸爸妈妈是哪里人？在中国 <Are you Fujianese? Is your hometown Fujian? Or where? No, where are your dad and mum from? In China.> Maybe, when do you go to China, where do you go?

[Pupil whispers]

Sara: What did she say?

Alice: She says she doesn't know. Just her mum brings her back to China. [She looks at another student] Hey, there you go, new student. 说吧。你 在家里是说广东话还是普通？你爸爸妈妈说英语吗？还是说中文？没关系，没关系！你说中文还是说英文？<Speak. At home do you speak Cantonese or Mandarin? Do your parents speak English? Or Chinese? Never mind, never mind! Do you speak English or Chinese?>

The excerpt shows how Alice assumed the existence of particular language repertoires based on the provenience of the pupils' families. By limiting the pupils' options and simplifying their language repertoires (Cantonese or Mandarin/English or Chinese) she superimposed particular language labels on the pupils. The attribution of such labels somehow failed to capture the complexity of the pupils' language repertoires rather assuming a correspondence between their family regional origin (Alice presumed that a number of pupils were from Fujian and therefore speakers of a local dialect) and their language practices.

The child participants in FG2 were together at the pre-school club taught by Alice, but studied language in different classes. A number of them were taught by Rose, who participated in this study as a teacher. Rose's interview shows how some children have difficulties in distinguishing the different *fāngyán* that they all identify as Chinese:

Rose: It depends on the parents, some parents speak Cantonese. If they got parents from Malaysia they might speak the Malaysian language. So there is a problem because we learn Mandarin, not Cantonese or other languages. So they speak different tones and even different meanings.

Sara: Are there quite a few children from Cantonese backgrounds in the school?

Rose: Yes, quite a few or [they have] different mothers from different part of China so they speak the local languages. Even the children sometimes confuse them [languages]. Sometimes I talk to them and they answer back but on their mother tongue so I have to guess what they mean because I don't quite understand.

Rose suggested that children at home often speak a *fāngyán* constituting their CHL. Some of her pupils were from Chinese-Malaysian families and she argued how a number of them were confused in the classroom as at home “they speak the Malaysian language” (referring to Hokkien). Her perspective confirms Dai and Zhang's (2008) theorisation of the importance of different *fāngyán* in the daily language practices of CHL speakers. Different *fāngyán* are not necessarily mutually intelligible (“I have to guess what they mean because I don't quite understand”) and the same *fāngyán* can have local variations (Dai & Zhang, 2008) that contrast the idea of one Chinese language.

Rose reinforced the idea that there is no univocal construction of Chinese as HL suggesting how learners have diverse language repertoires. However, the existence of such repertoires was seen as problematic and confusing “because we learn Mandarin”. Similarly to Alice, Rose was aware of the diverse language repertoires (“they speak the local language”). However, she somehow failed to acknowledge the value of the children's repertoires rather considering them a barrier to proper Mandarin learning.

In conclusion, the positions of Rose, Alice and Shuchung demonstrated how Mandarin is central in the discourses of the schools and in the teaching practices. Pupils instead performed a variety of language repertoires (including Hakka and Cantonese) with

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family relevance challenging the idea of Mandarin as HL common to all learners in the schools. Their understanding of CHL accounting a diversity of *fāngyán* (especially Cantonese and Hakka) also contrasted with a standardisation of Mandarin where, as discussed by Rose, regional accents and vocabulary choices are problematic and represent barriers to learning.

Constructing native speakerism in a quest for the 'perfect' Mandarin speaker

Concerned about pupils speaking “the proper Chinese language” a number of parents and school staff advocated a standardisation of Mandarin taught by native speakers in the schools. However, the data show how their opinions were contested and conflicting and how the notion of native speaker within community schooling is problematic and politically charged.

Standardised constructions of Chinese language emerged both from the positions of parents and school staff and in the official discourses of the two schools. The mission statement of Deer River school refers to the transmission of “the official Chinese language” as:

The School teaches Mandarin Chinese language (in simplified characters), pupils can learn to speak, read and write the official Chinese language.

No further explicit references are made in the document to the meaning of “official”. However, as “simplified characters” are used in the PRC, a potential assumption of legitimacy related to the concept of Chinese nation-state emerges (Doerr, 2009).

The constitution of Apple Valley School refers to Chinese language as “Mandarin in modern simplified form”. The governing documents also explain how “Mandarin is the official language in Mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore, and used by ethnic Chinese worldwide”.

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The status of Mandarin as official language of three countries and “used by ethnic Chinese worldwide” is used to legitimate the linguistic focus of the school. Thus, Mandarin is assumed as a monolithic entity glossing over differences of lexis, phonetics and discourse norms and not acknowledging how Mandarin speakers are a heterogeneous group (He, 2008).

The official positions of the two schools both defining “official” Mandarin with script in simplified characters as language of HL education were supported and extended by the narratives of parents and school staff.

Chloe, one of the parents from Deer River School, was born in Malaysia from a Chinese family. She had a very good command of English, Malay, Mandarin, and of a number of *fāngyán* including Cantonese and Hakka. Although she was brought up in a Hokkien speaking family during her interview she somehow diminished the value of her own HL as:

There is no need to learn Hokkien, Mandarin is the proper language that's what she [daughter] should learn.

Chloe did not see Hokkien in the UK as relevant for daily communication as it is in her town in Malaysia. Instead, she diminished the importance of Hokkien in favour of Mandarin as “proper language”. By comparing Hokkien and Mandarin she subscribed to the idea that Chinese *fāngyán* and therefore speaker groups are in a hierarchical relationship (Li & Wu, 2008). As Mandarin retains an official status and a possible wider currency than Hokkien (during her interview Chloe mentioned the professional opportunities offered to Mandarin speakers), she prioritised it as language of education for her daughter.

Although other parents used they own *fāngyán* at home with their children, they had similar concerns to Chloe about “proper” Mandarin learning at school. Albert, a Cantonese speaking parent from Apple Valley School, was a confident multilingual speaker with an

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excellent command of Mandarin. Nevertheless, he enrolled his children into the school to learn tones and pronunciation from a native speaker teacher:

I speak better than other people, I could have taught them Mandarin myself. However as I wasn't brought up in a Mandarin speaking family my tones are not perfect so they need the schools.

The teacher is good. She is from Beijing. She can speak properly.

Albert seemed to endorse Kramsch's (1998) position that authenticity (a teacher from the capital city speaking Mandarin with a particular accent perceived as standardised) and legitimacy of language use confers to native speakers a certain authority which translates into competences as language teacher.

The idea of hierarchies of languages emerged in this study with both parents and school staff having opinions about what makes a good Chinese, and particularly Mandarin, speaker. The observation sessions and contact hours with the parents revealed concerns about language proficiency particularly in terms of accent amongst parents coming from different areas. In one of the research sites I suggested to encourage parents to support learning in the classrooms. I was surprised when my suggestion was declined by some parents and teachers though:

Made with good intentions is not going to work in our schools. A lot of parents don't speak Chinese properly with a proper accent; they come from villages in [region of China] or other places. You cannot have them teaching in the classrooms. (from field notes, Apple Valley School)

It was not only some parents who were concerned about their children learning Mandarin in a particular environment where the language is spoken in a standardised way. As demonstrated by the excerpt, such concern was also reflected into the organisation of the school (e.g. role of parents in supporting the teaching). The existence of regional accents was problematised together with assumptions on speakers' geographical provenience and

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education resulting in creation of hierarchies of Chinese speakers reflected in the internal dynamics of the school (Li & Wu, 2008).

Within the schools a number of participants made arguments in favour of a standardisation of the Chinese language focusing on Mandarin as spoken in the region of Beijing rather than other *fāngyán*. Other arguments also focused on accent (demonstrated by the above excerpt from the field notes “parents don’t speak Chinese properly with a proper accent”) and vocabulary.

An analysis of the classroom observations demonstrates how some teachers tried to implement ideas of standardisation in their own teaching practice. The following excerpt from the field notes illustrates the importance of a standardised vocabulary modelled on the northern dialects in the quest for the perfect Mandarin speaker:

The teacher discusses about vocabulary choices and family members with pupils asking them if they know how to say ‘wife’ in Chinese. When one of the pupils suggests 老婆 *laopo* she replies saying that 老婆 *laopo* is more a Cantonese word, remember this is not a Cantonese class, now people use it but is not proper Chinese, if you want to speak Chinese properly you need to choose something more standard. Then, another child suggests to use 太太 *taitai*, (and makes the sentence): “我介绍给你我的太太”. Teacher: “我给你介绍我太太” <I introduce you my wife>. 太太 *taitai* also requires you use your married surname, women in China don’t do that anymore, only Taiwan and Hong Kong, beside that it’s mostly used by Taiwanese, China moved on from the 40’s. (from field notes, Apple Valley School).

In the episode presented in the field note excerpt the teacher, a native speaker from northern China, corrected the structure of the sentence made by one of their pupils. She also focused on polishing their vocabulary by discouraging the word choices 老婆 *laopo* and 太太 *taitai* in favour of something more standard. Whilst 老婆 *laopo* was seen as not entirely suitable as too recent, colloquial and more of a “Cantonese word”, on the contrary 太太 *taitai*

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was problematised as supposedly out of fashion (“China moved on from the 40s”) and used in Taiwan rather than in Mainland China. By augmenting the superiority of standard Mandarin as spoken in Mainland China, the teacher defined herself as vehicle of knowledge and standardisation. First, she used as an argument a supposed lack of status of Cantonese (“now people use it but is not proper Chinese”).

Then, she discussed how an idea of progress made by the PRC in opposition to Taiwan is reflected in the development of a standard Mandarin language. In fact, in her opinion Mandarin speakers in the PRC often make different and more modern vocabulary choices than Chinese speakers in China and Taiwan.

The importance of a standardised and polished Mandarin was not only reflected into the classroom teaching practices. Teachers also had opinions about the language proficiency of the parents in relation to the school's focus on Mandarin. During her interview, Nala, a northern Chinese teacher at Apple Valley, expressed her concerns about language exposure that children get in their families, Mandarin not being necessarily their HL:

Nala: Well you learn Chinese yourself before. China is a very vast country. Even in the Chinese school you notice that parents and children from the same area like Cantonese speakers sit together.

Sara: They don't really speak Mandarin you mean?

Nala: Exactly, that's very important some people don't have the language skills to communicate with others. If you speak with them in Mandarin they wouldn't understand. They wouldn't be able to take part into a conversation. So of course people would talk with somebody else that they understand and that can be part of the conversation. People want to talk to each other effectively.

Similarly to the previously discussed perspective of Rose on children mixing different dialects in the classrooms, Nala discussed communication issues in the schools where people not speaking Mandarin cannot understand each other effectively. The classroom practices

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seemed to respond to such issues by encouraging the use of standard Mandarin and the presence of native teachers. The importance of having native speaker teachers was defined in the mission statement of Deer River School that defines how all the teachers are “native Mandarin speakers who have undergone through a strict recruitment process”.

By empathising how all teachers were Mandarin native speakers, the school uses a “native speaker” label as a marketing tool conferring authority and legitimacy to the language focus on the school itself (Holliday, 2006).

Furthermore, the positions of parents and school staff confirmed how the conceptualisation of native speakerism often assumes a strong correspondence between being a citizen of a nation state and being a native speaker of the national language (Doerr, 2009). Concerned about pupils becoming perfect Mandarin speakers, teachers and parents defined the importance for native speaker teachers to use and teach a standardised accent and vocabulary modelled on the northern dialects of Mainland China. Hence, a quest for the perfect Mandarin speaker not only confirms the correspondence between citizenship of Mainland China and the status of Mandarin native speaker, but it also suggests that within a nation state particular places and their speech might retain a particular status.

However, in the context of Chinese community schooling, notions of nation state and native speakerism are controversial and problematic. In the following excerpt Juliet (Deer River School), a teacher from Taiwan, expressed her frustration about the school focus on Mandarin as spoken in Beijing:

Juliet: As a teacher I am unhappy about different things. First, I am not Chinese, I am Taiwanese and they say that they want teachers mainly from Beijing who can speak a proper Chinese.

Sara: But Taiwanese people speak Chinese, right?

Juliet: I would say we speak proper form Chinese, yes, but they don't. Some people have a much worse accent. Taiwan is good because it is very traditional. Actually we speak Mandarin much better than them.

Sara: So why do they want people from Beijing?

Juliet: It's all about the accent. They want people to speak like that. The families say that. The school thinks they should provide proper Chinese language, proper characters which should be from China not the other Chinese speaking countries. Everybody would have their accent. Parents want their kids speak Mandarin even if they are not from the North. They want their children to speak an accurate Chinese even if they don't have it themselves. Children in this country will never speak with a proper Chinese accent anyway. I am a parent myself. However I would take pride in my kids speaking proper Mandarin. It means that they are clever.

Juliet summarised a diversity of issues ongoing in the context of Chinese community schooling. First, she problematised her own status as Mandarin speaker explaining how not being a citizen of the PRC does not impact on her own status of native speaker. Then, by attributing to herself what Creese et al. (2014) define as the right linguistic (“we speak better than them”) and cultural attributes (“Taiwan is good because it is very traditional”) she grounded her own authenticity and legitimacy as a Mandarin speaker. In particular she used tradition in Taiwan as a marker for language and cultural purity, resisting the surrounding discourses (“they say that they want teachers mainly from Beijing who can speak a proper Chinese”). Not only Juliet challenged and (de)constructed the assumption of a correspondence between being a citizen of the PRC and being a Mandarin native speaker. She also constructed an alternative correspondence between citizenship and native speakerism replacing the PRC with Taiwan and using tradition as marker for language legitimacy.

Finally, she used the parents' supposed language inadequacy (“even if they are not from the North they want their children to speak an accurate Chinese even if they don't have

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it themselves”) to contrast the school’s quest for perfect Mandarin speakers and reinstate her own legitimacy as “native speaker”.

In summary, the narratives of a number of both parents and teachers reinforced the idea that legitimacy and authority, often represented in the parents’ ideas about what constitutes native speakerism, play a strong role in the internal dynamics of the school. Hierarchies of languages, dialects and speaker groups contrasted with the monolingual focus of the schools on Chinese language and culture. They also contrasted with the pupils’ construction of Chinese HL as constituted by other *fāngyán*, especially Cantonese, as no less important to them than Mandarin.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored how pupils, parents and school staff who took part in a study of Mandarin community schooling in the North of England understood Chinese language. Their perspectives have been illustrated vis-à-vis the institutional foci of the schools, that is, the importance of teaching of Mandarin Chinese, and in relation to theorisations of Chinese as a heritage language and of native speakerism in the context of language teaching.

Where the construction of Chinese language is concerned this study reveals two themes: pupils’ constructions of CHL were complex and did not necessarily focused on Mandarin; in contrast, schools and parents were mostly concerned about the transmission of a standard Mandarin as taught by native speakers.

Regarding the first theme, this study demonstrates how — despite the focus of Chinese community schooling on Chinese as heritage language —Mandarin did not have particular family relevance nor emotional value for a number of pupils. Instead, pupils

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constructed a more complex vision of Chinese as heritage language, attaching emotional value and family relevance to other *fāngyán* and in particular Hakka and Cantonese (which were the languages that they spoke in their homes with either one or both parents). Such articulated understanding of CHL contrasted with the classroom practices where a “speak Mandarin-Chinese only” policy as taught by “native speakers” is mostly implemented by the teachers.

From their perspectives, teachers acknowledged the language resources of their pupils and the linguistic complexity displayed in the classrooms. However, there was a tension between what they believed their role to be (i.e. a teacher of a “good” and preferably Beijing accent) and the fact that many of the children could not understand or speak Mandarin.

Thus, the study highlighted a conflict between pupils' and teachers' constructions of Chinese as HL. Although the role of Mandarin is explicitly enforced by the teaching practices its status as CHL is implicitly challenged by the diversity of the pupils' language repertoires in other *fāngyán* and the affective value that these *fāngyán* retain (e.g. Cantonese speaker pupils considering themselves Chinese speakers).

Concerning the second theme, parents and school staff constructed a multi-faceted and sometimes conflicting value of Chinese language and language education. Discourses around native speakerism and the importance of educating standard Mandarin speakers emerged in the narratives of a number of parents and teachers in what could be defined as a quest for the ‘perfect’ Mandarin speaker.

On the one hand, a number of adults — both parents and teachers — agreed on the importance of transmitting a standardised variety of Mandarin with concerns around accent, vocabulary and structures. Central in this sense was the status of teachers as native speakers,

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status that conferred them authority and legitimacy (Holliday, 2006). On the other hand, participants had contrasting views of what constitutes a native Mandarin speaker, bringing up issues of legitimacy and purity where the status of native speaker implies a political affiliation with a nation state (Taiwan or the PRC).

In conclusion this study unfolds levels of linguistic and ideological complexity in the construction of Chinese heritage language in the community schools contrasting with the idea of community schools as monolingual and monocultural learning sites. Issues of language status and power between speakers of Mandarin and other *fāngyán* and between Mandarin speakers (mainland Chinese and Taiwanese) emerged from the data analysis suggesting the existence of hierarchies between different Chinese languages and speaker groups (Li & Wu, 2008).

The outcomes of this study suggest a number of new lines of research. First, this chapter has highlighted the need for studies that account for the intercultural dimensions of Chinese community schooling. Chinese community schools are linguistically and culturally varied educational spaces and such complexity needs to be dealt with in research. Future studies could investigate the root of language hierarchies and of the ideologies underlying the dominance of Mandarin in the context Chinese community schooling at the expenses of other *fāngyán*. Research could also explore the effects that a transition towards a focus on Mandarin might entail, and whether the notion of CHL does have any currency for pupils whose HL is not Mandarin. By exploring these themes researchers could contribute not only towards the literature on language community schooling, but also towards the broader literature on Chinese language education.

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