

Language, identity and sense of belonging: the case of Chinese in South Africa

3rd Asian Conference on Cultural Studies, May 25-26, 2013, Osaka

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Prelude

- Personal puzzles:
 - Chinese is no longer my predominant language of thinking and writing...
 - What kind of identity does English represent?
 - What about other 3rd or 4th language that I learn? Eg. would I become more French the more I learn and master the language?

Literature observation

- Two schools of the language-identity nexus
 - Inextricable link
 - Language is closely linked with tradition, group membership, collective mythology;
 - “every time one speaks a language, one is organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world (Norton, 1997, 2000)
 - Nationalism (national consciousness, loyalty, uniqueness, unity, autonomy, purity...)
 - Language central to maintenance to tie to home country: attitudinally and behaviourally (Raumbaut, 2002, Children of immigrants longitudinal study)

Literature observation (Cont.)

- Two schools of the language-identity nexus
 - Situational view: the link depends on the context (internal and external)
 - Both are not fixed but open to change (Miller 2000);
 - Language is particularly prone to external pressure and practical concerns, eg. urbanization, modernisation, in-migration, concerns of socioeconomic advance and security;
 - Other identity markers (eg. cultural activities, festivals, dress, dance, songs...) are less prone to the above
 - The Irish experience

Immigrants— “tug-of-war”

- Tension: cultural maintenance versus acculturation
- Generational shift in terms of identity: “each generation...move a step further from the immigration experience” (Sears at el. 2003); complete shift generally occur within 3rd/4th generation (Phinney et al, 2001)
- Generational shift in terms of language: 3 stages; shift occur 3rd/2nd generation (Fishman, 1991; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Wiley, 2001)
- Q: parallel process indicates inextricable link?
- or, although both may undergo general shifts, one may proceed ahead of the other, leaving a certain period of time where the two are not inextricable linked?

Language/identity maintenance factors

- Host society: context of reception
- Ethnic Community
 - Size; concentration; history of establishment; language school
- Parents' attitude/effort & family dynamics
 - Motivations include: ideology; practical concern; SES
- Demographic factors:
 - length of stay; age of immigration; gender...
- Other
 - Difference/difficulty /visibility...

Chinese in South Africa

- 3 distinctive groups
- The turning moment: from sojourner to settler
- The language experience: a highly practical event
 - The communicative need;
 - Community size and concentration;
 - Availability of Chinese education and language school;
 - Need for social mobility and advancement;
- The identity experience: a highly emotional event
 - Hostility environment...end of Apartheid;
 - Mythical attachment;
 - The challenges from newer immigrants;
- Snapshots

Chinese in South Africa

- Back to the factors
- Back to the two schools of language-identity nexus
- Sense of pride/honour & need to succeed (Chinese value) overwrite loyalty to ethnic language?

Thank you!

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- Comments and/or questions?