4 Speaking the School Language

As children begin formal education, language practice in the immigrant household becomes more and more susceptible to the institutional power of schooling, which has conventionally favored standard American English. In this chapter, we look at language policies and practices in Ben's family in relation to the English-only educational language policy of a public elementary school. As I examine the narratives by and interactions with Ben's parents and schoolteacher, I will be guided by two main questions: first, what factors contribute to the family language policy and practice? Second, what would it take for the family language policy and practice to look otherwise?

But first, let us meet Ben (aged six) and his family. Ben was born in China and was cared for by his paternal grandparents until he turned two, when he joined his parents in the U.S. in the early 1990s. Both his parents, Jane and John, received their undergraduate degrees from an elite university in China in the mid-1980s, moved to the U.S. soon after Ben was born for graduate degrees, and subsequently settled down in a suburban area on the East Coast with jobs they are quite happy with. The language most often and most naturally used between the parents at home is Mandarin Chinese. The language the parents use when speaking with Ben is a mixture of both Chinese and English. In preschool years, Ben attended daycare programs sponsored and subsidized by the company his mother Jane works for. When Ben started kindergarten, Jane reduced her work hours and became a part-time financial analyst in order to look after Ben during after-school hours. Ben's father, John, a software engineer, negotiated a flexible work schedule with the company he serves and is able to attend to Ben's needs when Jane is not available.

4.1 Multicultural but Monolingual

Ben attends kindergarten, in a public school district with a student population that is 80 percent White, 11 percent Asian, 6 percent Hispanic, 2 percent mixed-racial, and 1 percent Black. This school district's stated goals include supporting multiculturalism. The district runs a quarterly newsletter that is distributed to all families who have children enrolled in the district's schools. In one issue

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of the newsletter, I found an interview with someone who gave a workshop to the district teachers on the topic of multicultural education. Here is an excerpt from the interview (due to conditions of anonymity under which the data were collected, the source of this excerpt is not included here):

> Multicultural education is about appreciating the uniqueness of every single student in your classroom, what they can bring to your classroom, and how they can make that classroom more of a robust, vibrant community . . . Multicultural education helps all students see themselves in the curriculum and the classroom. It aims to advance and advocate educational equity for all students of every age. It focuses on, but is not limited to, ethnic, racial, language, and gender issues that potentially marginalized groups or subgroups of people. It helps all students acquire the knowledge, skills, attributes, and attitudes needed to function in a democratic society while feeling valued and heard.

The same individual was reported to have made suggestions to bring guest speakers into the classroom who represent the student population and their interests: "Understanding what is happening in your school's community and bringing real-world examples into the classroom can help students connect learning experiences to their communities."

In another issue of the newsletter (the source is not included due to conditions of anonymity), there are reports of many activities at various levels (elementary, junior high, and senior high) designed to recognize and celebrate the district's cultural diversity, such as:

- culture corners in the classroom where books about different cultures are displayed and available for students' free browsing,
- a passport around the world upon which students receive a "visa" for each country they visited on the district's International Day,
- multicultural murals in the school hallway that enables students to express themselves with creative artistry as well as cultural authenticity,
- guest Speakers (e.g., a grandmother) who talk about cultural meanings of specific cultural traditions (e.g., ethnic food and festivals), and
- global language clubs.

However, the multiculturalism that is being advocated and the multicultural educational efforts does not appear to be associated with or predicated upon multilingualism. Instead, there seems to be a multicultural ethos but a monolingual choice, involving the promotion of one dominant language: English. Multilingual ways of constructing district achievements are conspicuously absent, in spite of acknowledgment of an increasingly multilingual community (Hinton, 2016; May, 2015). Such separation of language from culture perhaps reflects the broader challenge that the U.S. faces in reconciling a linguistic nationalist ideology with an ever more multilingual society.

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Ben's class has about twenty students. The teacher is Mrs. R, who received her undergraduate degree and teaching certificate from a state university in the region and is in her third year teaching full-time. I met with Mrs. R right before summer vacation, on the school's Field Day, when all the students enjoy what looks like a long, extended recess, with a myriad of organized physical and fun activities outside the classroom. Mrs. R had a student teacher, Miss G, as well as a few parent–volunteer–assistants that day to help organize the activities. As Mrs. R was watching her students, she and I talked. Below are fragments of what she shared with me about her own background, about Ben and his parents, and about language policy in her classroom.

4.1.1 "Home Languages Should Stay at Home"

I'm glad that I get to teach in the area where I grew up. This is my third year teaching kindergarten. My family is Italian. My husband's family is also Italian. English is all we speak. This area has changed a lot in the last ten years. We definitely have a lot more diversity now. My next-door neighbor is from India. A couple houses down is a family from Africa. Around the corner is a family from I think the Philippines. And there is an interracial couple right across from us. Seriously, our place is becoming the United Nations. Most people here are not – I won't say affluent, just regular middle-class I guess you could say, working hard, paying the bills, taking care of the house, raising children, and enjoying life. I love the kids in my class. Whatever their cultural background, kids are kids. They are all so cute. Oh yeah, our kindergarten classroom is definitely very multicultural, which makes my job really interesting, really fun, and sometimes challenging too.

I remember Ben from the first day of school. I was waiting to meet my class at the bus circle. I held up a giant Clifford the Big Red Dog that's about half my size that I got just for my class. Before school started, I had sent a letter to all my students and their families to introduce myself and to welcome the kids to my class. I attached a list of supplies needed for the year, things like crayons, glues, and marble notebooks. I also told parents to remind their kids that after getting off the bus on the first day, they should look for the big red stuffed animal Clifford. All my kids found me okay except for Ben. Finally, it was a lunch monitor who led him to me. I asked him, did you see Clifford? He didn't answer. And then it dawned on me that he might not know who or what Clifford was. Later in the classroom, I found out that Ben had some notebooks and pencils in his backpack but not the things I asked for on the supply list. What worried me more was that he did not say a word. I said to the principal that maybe this kid needed ESL. So later that week Ben was evaluated by our instructional consultant in the building and the report came back that he was okay; he was probably just shy.

In the beginning of the year, Ben was extremely quiet. I had a feeling that he could follow what's going on but he would never raise his hand like most other

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kids. Sometimes I would call on him, and maybe give him some little job to do like being the line leader, just to get him involved. His written work was great. We learned the alphabet, small letters and capitals, and numbers. His handwriting was great. But he seemed not ready or not prepared to participate orally. Like when it's sharing time, he would not want to do it. During recess, other kids played tag. Ben would watch on the side or sometimes played on the swing by himself.

At Open House, I met Ben's dad. He seemed genuinely concerned about how Ben was doing at school, asking a lot of questions about Ben. He kept apologizing for his English. I actually understood him fine. That's not a problem. I was just hoping that he'd use more English at home with Ben. I mean if a kid comes from a household where no one speaks English to him, it's not fair for you to expect him to be functional and communicative at school, right? I said to Ben's dad that Ben is very bright, but he's not participating fully in class activities. I suggested that they use English at home so that the kid can get used to it. You see, in my class, I try my best to provide the kids with the language they're going to need. I basically give a running commentary on everything we do together, like "Let's do numbers." "I'm going to ask Ben to show me how to draw this." Or, "We're going to put the red block on top." I always give them feedback, "Fantastic!" "Great job!" You know, I repeat a lot. I repeat my own sentences, and I also repeat the kids' sentences. The more they hear it, the more they'll be able to use it. We have a lot of kids who come from families where other languages are spoken. That's not a problem. But there will be a problem if the parents don't work with the school to help their kids with English. So I told Ben's dad that he should give his son more opportunities to speak English at home.

And I understand Ben's parents did try hard to help him. They deserve a lot of credit for that. Their effort paid off. Ben improved very fast. One time during a writing activity, he got the letter "b" and the letter "d" mixed up. I said, "Ben, remember, when you write 'b', the belly is on the right?" Later I saw that he was teaching his friend, "b, belly on the right!" I was so proud of him! By the second half of kindergarten year, Ben is no different from any other kid. He's doing great academically. He's on the soccer team and also joined the school newspaper club. He's happy and talks a lot. Actually, sometimes it is hard to stop him.

Ben's parents are great, just wonderful. I met them a couple of times. Each time they would ask me whether Ben was doing anything "wrong" or anything "bad" at school. They don't just want to hear praises. They want to know how they can make Ben better. Wouldn't it be nice if all parents are like that? . . . The school has an "International Day." We invite students and their families to come and share celebrations of diverse cultures. Ben's mom brought in huge trays of delicious dumplings to share with the class and beautiful bookmarks

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with Chinese writings on them as gifts to everyone. Just wonderful. Oh, I love his parents.

After many field-day activities, there was still no sign of Ben's parents. All the other kids in Ben's class had somebody, a parent or a grandparent, to do a three-legged race with. Ben did not have a partner. Mrs. R saw this, walked up to Ben and tied her left leg to Ben's right. They tried hard, came in last place, and laughed a lot . . . After the race, Mrs. R continues,

I think Chinese is cool. I hear it's a very difficult language. My niece is a freshman in college, and she is taking a Chinese class . . . Maybe Ben can teach me some Chinese haha. Oh yeah, I definitely think it's great if kids can speak another language and learning it from home is amazing! But speaking the [non-English] *home language in class? Nah, no, I wouldn't encourage Ben or any other kid to do that. I mean it's like it's weird and it's not fair and also it's not fair to him . . . I don't want any of my kids to feel weird. Having a home language is great. But it should stay at home. At school, we speak English. This is America, right?*

A recent large-scale study involving over 1,000 preschool teachers by Kurucz et al. (2020) shows that teacher ratings of engagement for immigrant and nonimmigrant parent groups differed on the basis of preschool characteristics. In schools where both the leadership and the staff members held a multicultural mind-set and maintained an openness to cultural diversity, teachers perceived the engagement of immigrant parents more positively. The study suggested that the school leadership's and the teachers' positive beliefs about inclusion and multiculturalism are critical for immigrant parents' successful co-operation and engagement. In Ben's case, the principal of Ben's elementary school is herself a second-generation immigrant from Central America and shows genuine interest in engaging parents, as evident in the following excerpt from her message to students and families at the beginning of Ben's first year:

MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Greetings Students and Families,

. . .

As the new school year begins, let's work together to create an environment that will provide each student with the positive support and instruction that they will need to have a successful school year. I want our students to enjoy coming to school each and every day. We will do this by creating a school environment that is filled with rich experiences, challenging projects, high academic achievement, and lasting friendships.

Additionally, I feel it is particularly important to develop and maintain positive communication with our parents and promote family involvement throughout the year. Our PTA has several fun activities planned for this year that will provide parents the opportunity to meet other parents in social settings, but also to engage and bond with their own children. I encourage every parent to become a member of our

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PTA . . . Our commitment to your child is genuine and the teachers' interaction with you is essential to your child's education – both academically and behaviorally.

Though well-intentioned, this message gives little explicit acknowledgment of the cultural diversity of the students and families, nor explicit indication of how parents who are new to the country and/or whose knowledge of the school system and of the instructional medium is limited might get involved. In fact, Ben's parents told me that they didn't even know that the acronym PTA stands for Parent–Teacher Association.

4.1.2 International Day

I participated in one of the "International Day" events at Ben's elementary school that Mrs. R was talking about. It took place on an evening at the beginning of spring 2015, with all students and their family members invited. Along the perimeter of the school gymnasium was a large circle of booths, each representing a specific culture or country, with food samples, ethnic crafts, traditional clothes, regional toys, greetings written in the specific language, and so on. The clear area in the middle was reserved for international folk dances, music, and other demonstrations. Loudspeakers were placed between the booths, where a wide variety of world music was played throughout the event. Those booths were prepared and hosted mainly by the parents and grandparents of elementary-school students.

A very large number of families coming from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds were in attendance. Everyone seemed pleased that their cultural backgrounds were being recognized and celebrated. However, this sense of gratification was undermined by the exclusively monolingual presentation of this event. It did not appear that the organizers had anticipated that the extended families of the ethnically diverse students might not have full access to English. I saw grandparents getting lost in the hallway as they could not understand the directions in English from the event volunteers. I saw family members hosting booths become frustrated because they could not communicate effectively with the organizers regarding what they needed (the particular type of tablecloth or the specific location to exhibit the cultural artifacts they brought to the event). There were also moments of confusion and chaos, presumably because not everyone could understand what was being said via the loudspeaker. What I observed confirmed to some degree findings by researchers such as Sohn and Wang (2006) and Antony-Newman (2019) that immigrant families encountered difficulties while contacting teachers and participating in school activities or browsing the school websites (Piller et al., 2021). These difficulties included linguistic and cultural barriers, feelings of discrimination, and limited school support.

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If non- or limited-English speakers are made to feel inadequate or inappropriate at an event specifically meant to celebrate cultural diversity, what does this say about multiculturalism? Can we or should we separate multiculturalism from multilingualism? Specifically, when we claim that a school is multicultural, exactly what do we mean? Do we mean that we have kids whose parents are new immigrants from different cultural backgrounds? Do we mean that kids speak different languages? Do we mean that schools are places where multilingual kids and their families feel comfortable using their entire linguistic repertoires? Do we recognize and respect the fact that kids and their family members have different degrees of command of the English language? Or are we claiming that teachers and schools consciously understand and apply the main tenets of multicultural education, namely content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, empowering school culture, and equity pedagogy (Banks and Banks, 2010: 23; Schmeichel, 2012; Wells, 2008)? Furthermore, have we done enough to prepare teachers for the challenges of today's classroom demographics, not only at classroom level, but also in pre-service training for prospective teachers and continued professional development for in-service teachers?

When I shared with Ben's parents my observations on the "International Day," they commented that events like the this are not for non-English-speaking grandparents. The reason is this: grandparents would not understand what is going on and parents would not have the time or the ability to translate everything for the grandparents. Additionally and more importantly, the kids would be embarrassed by their grandparents' and parents' speaking in Chinese or other non-English languages. Ben's parents were quite confident about their claims because they had firsthand experience. Jane said, *once I was helping out at school and was speaking to another Chinese parent in Chinese. Ben's teacher said, excuse me what you say? She thought I was talking to her. Ben pulled my shirt and said no Chinese no Chinese! And he ran as far away from me as possible. I knew he was embarrassed. So I don't speak Chinese at school ever again.* When schools do not have concrete plans for inclusion or specific measures to leverage the multilingual resources afforded by the presence of immigrant children, not only schools but also kids and their families themselves will see language and cultural differences as difficulties and deficiencies, as evident in Ben's case. It is, then, not surprising that parents as well as kids are reluctant to use, if not resistant to using, the Chinese language at school.

The construct of translanguaging and translingualism in current scholarship goes beyond the inclusion of multiple languages in the classroom and is meant to affirm students' ethnic, racial, intellectual, and linguistic backgrounds and to create equitable learning opportunities and knowledge construction opportunities for culturally and racially marginalized and minoritized students (Li Wei, 2022). While such "reconstitutive" efforts are important and must continue, it is

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also essential to explore the extent to which these theoretical lenses are productive for all individuals and families seeking to maintain or acquire multiple-language resources. For example, do post-structuralist interpretations of linguistic boundaries, where individuals fluidly mix and move between language resources, provide adequate support for individuals and families to keep their heritage languages and cultures as part of their repertoire?

There is, perhaps, no one-size-fits-all approach to multilingualism. We must attentively heed the intricate bilingual behaviors of children within their households, and examine how these practices are utilized within their communities and community-based language schools (as highlighted in the next chapter). It is crucial to comprehend the practical knowledge of parents and educators in instructing their children in multiple languages. Additionally, we should challenge certain preconceptions regarding multilingualism and the schooling of multilingual children in public educational settings, and create learning contexts where the heritage language is meaningful and useful to the student. As an example, since his fifth birthday, Ben has been taking Chinese language lessons, tae kwon do lessons, and piano lessons. His first piano teacher, Li *laoshi* ("Teacher Li"), was a retired professional pianist from China, who followed her children to the U.S. Even though her English was rather limited, and in spite of Jane's encouragement for her to use Chinese when speaking to Ben, Li *laoshi* insisted on using English with Ben, saying, *this is America, we speak English*. After several months, Jane decided that Li *laoshi* was not the right choice. Ben couldn't understand what his teacher was saying. Ben switched to a different piano teacher who is also from China and who speaks primarily Chinese during class while giving the key words such as "sharp" and "flat" notes, "octave," "arpeggio" and "harmony" in both Chinese and English. Ben learned many musical terminologies in Chinese that way and thrived as a piano student. While he very rarely uses Chinese on any other occasions, when the conversational topic concerns his music pieces and his piano lessons with the new teacher, he resorts to Chinese expressions often.

Ben's piano lessons presented an intriguing case in our investigation of the forces and factors that contribute to the maintenance or attrition of Chinese language. It shows that, even for a child who generally prefers English to Chinese, when the English is not comprehensible and when the Chinese serves to support and advance his interest (music, in this case), the child welcomes and embraces Chinese, albeit in the limited domain of his interest.

4.2 Family Language Ideology

I have met a couple of parents who forbid their children to speak English at home and force their children not only to speak Chinese but also to read, write, and memorize Chinese words and texts. To them, keeping the Chinese language

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is crucial, because this is the only way to sustain continuity with the ancestral homeland and their identity, and also because they believe that a person of Chinese descent will never become a true American due to physical traits such as the color of their skin. But this appears to be rather rare. And such family language policies are rarely successful, as children are exposed to school culture, pop culture, new values, new attitudes, new thoughts beyond the reach of parental control. Most parents' attitudes toward children's language choices are similar to those of Jane and John.

4.2.1 School Teaches Good English

Like many first-generation Chinese immigrants who came as students and scholars, Jane and John chose to settle in the suburbs, driven by the desire for better public schools, upward social mobility, and racialized anxieties. Even though they have joined the middle class economically in the American suburbs, race continues to be a relevant factor. On the one hand, they have sought to provide Ben with ethnic–racial socialization through Chinese language school and turned to private supplementary tutelage for extracurricular enrichment in music, arts, and sports. On the other hand, they encourage Ben to learn "good" English and to erase racial and ethnic traces in Ben's English. Their experience gives further evidence to the claim that immigrant Asian parents' choices are motivated and conditioned by the complex intersectionality of race, ethnicity, immigrant status, and socioeconomic class (Park, 2020).

Several days after Field Day, I had a chance to meet with Ben's parents Jane and John and I asked them about it and about their impressions of Mrs. R. Throughout our interaction, it was clear to me that Jane and John share Mrs. R's view that there is no place for non-English home languages at school.

Ben's mother Jane says:

Field Day? Right, we didn't go. Because we didn't know that parents were supposed to go and show support. You see, during our school years in China, we had end-of-school-year sports meets but never such a thing as a field day that involved students' families. We simply didn't know.

Ben is very lucky to have Mrs. R. We like her a lot! She is very nice, really nice, maybe too nice. She never criticizes her students. She always praises them. And yes, we agree with her 100 percent. We must use English at home to give Ben a better environment. Our English is not perfect, but it's better than nothing. You know, sometimes we are simply too lazy to speak English. It's our problem. We should do better. And, oh yes, it makes a great deal of sense for children to speak English, English only, at school. We want Ben to speak good English, of course. School is the only place where he can learn perfect English. Of course. Chinese, he can learn from home and from Chinese language school

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on the weekend. He'll learn whatever he can. We don't expect him to speak as well as we do. This is America. He is an American kid. You cannot expect too much. After he grows up, if he wants to learn more Chinese, he will learn. If not, we'll just have to accept it . . . We send him to the weekend Chinese language school now because he has nothing much to do anyway. His school doesn't give enough homework! But when he moves to upper grades when schoolwork becomes harder, we'll stop going to Chinese school. Definitely.

John says:

Speaking English only at school? Yes, good policy. Otherwise, how would the teacher manage the classroom? You have children not just from Chinese background, but also other countries, Russia, India, and I know a kid whose parents come from Cuba, yeah, ethnic Chinese from Cuba, yeah, they look Chinese but they speak like Mexicans! If everyone speaks whatever they want, how can the teacher maintain order? Celebrating everybody's culture is great, but we don't have to speak everyone's language. We can show respect to everybody, in English. That's the only way that works in America. That's the only way that's fair to everyone in America. We came to America, not expecting that our next generation will be the same as us. If Ben speaks Chinese, that's great. If he doesn't, maybe he will when he grows up. China is now rich and powerful. Who knows? Maybe one day everyone will speak Chinese.

At home, it's different. We speak anything and everything in whatever language that comes to mind. I'm actually not so sure about speaking English to Ben at home. You see, our English is not standard. Why do we want Ben to hear bad English? He should learn good English from school. One day, he asked me, baba, what does the train sound like? I said, woo-woo [the Chinese onomatopoeia for trains]. *He said, no, it's choo-choo, Mrs. R said it's choo-choo. So I don't want to teach him the wrong words . . . Our bad English cannot help him improve his English; it could impact his English negatively. But we can help him in many other ways. So that's OK. I'm not worried. My own parents cannot even read all the English alphabet but they gave me good values and I turned out OK. Ben will have a great future.*

Oh no, Ben will not forget Chinese culture, no way. Everyday we eat Chinese food at home, we talk about things Chinese. He hears and sees these things every day. How can he forget? It's like me. I don't speak the rural dialect from our hometown anymore because I went to college in Beijing, but that doesn't mean that I have forgotten my hometown culture or that I don't appreciate that culture anymore. Language is just a tool for living, and you can use any tool depending on where you are.

John and his family's language ideology and language practice corroborate the findings from a study on family language policy in relation to Malacca Portuguese Creole (Pillai et al., 2014). That study shows that although there is a general sense of Malacca Portuguese Creole being an ethnic and cultural

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identity marker for Portuguese Eurasians, this is not directly translated into the transmission of the language in the family domain. However, it contradicts Chiu's (2022) view that family interactions mediated by Mandarin Chinese tend to socialize children into Chinese ideologies, whereas family interactions mediated by English tend to socialize children into American norms and values. In Ben's family, the parents John and Jane do not have a principled insistence on using Chinese, even though in reality they mix Chinese and English when speaking to Ben and use Chinese almost exclusively when speaking to each other. Yet they value freedom and choice, values not often associated with Chinese cultural tradition.

Does Ben ever speak Chinese at home? I asked.

Jane says:

Every time after our summer visit to China, Ben speaks a bit more Chinese. Because his Chinese is bad, in China, he is called "the American kid"; but here, he is "the Chinese kid." His Chinese did improve a lot every time we visited China. He played with other kids "rock paper scissors" in Chinese [包子剪子捶捶捶 baozi jianzi chui chui chui] *and picked up the language that way.*

*But after a few times, he didn't want to go anymore. Because we went in the summer, the weather was always so hot. He got sick a lot during our visits. I think he cannot get used to the local air and water. And our relatives gave him lots of Chinese herbal medicine, the liquid kind. Ben totally hated it! Because it tastes bitter, very bitter! I brought some of those medicines back to the U.S. because they are good for your health, generally, even if you are not sick. Sometimes when Ben gets sick, has a cold or something, I'll give him that. But he always screams "no!" That's one of those rare occasions when he would speak to me in Chinese, "*妈妈, 我不要, 我真的不要 mama, wo bu yao, wo zhen de bu yao [mom, I don't want it. I seriously don't want it]*!" Maybe he's afraid I will underestimate his resolve. Thinking about it now makes me laugh!*

It so happened that Ben's class was having a student teacher, Miss G, for a few weeks. Miss G was completing her bachelor's degree in elementary education. She was supervised by Mrs. R during her clinical practice in this school district. She is an ethnic Chinese whose family immigrated from the Philippines. She was the only Asian-looking teacher in the school. Ben likes Miss G very much. Miss G told me that once Ben misspoke in class and called her "mom," presumably because Miss G is also Asian! When I related the story to Jane, she laughed and commented, "That's great! We need more teachers who are also Asians. But they must speak standard English!"

4.2.2 School Offers a Refreshing Educational Approach

The parental perception that the school, and only the school, can teach children "good" English appears closely tied to parents' view of the kind of education

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offered by the school as well. American schools place much emphasis on independent thinking, collaborative meaning-making, well-grounded development of personhood, leadership and creativity. Such an educational orientation may sometimes appear at odds with the traditional Chinese emphasis on superior test scores and high rankings and with Asian-American parents' overall high expectation for their children's academic success (Li and Sun, 2019). Jane and John have from time to time expressed concerns with the apparent lack of academic rigor of Ben's curriculum at school and surprise at the small amount of assigned homework. At Ben's level, Jane and John believe that accuracy in spelling, a large amount of reading, and agile arithmetic ability are crucial. They do not believe the school is doing nearly enough to help Ben in these dimensions. Nevertheless, they find the difference in educational focus from their own experience in China to be refreshing.

Jane says:

Yes, I really like Mrs. R. In the beginning, I thought she didn't know what she was doing. She asked the kids to do "projects"! Yes, "projects"! These kids are so young. They don't know anything. They haven't learned enough words. How can they "do projects"?! That must be a joke. They end up playing. You know, Ben came home and I asked him what he did at school; he told me they did a "map project" in a group. They put different pieces together and colored the pieces. He didn't even know what it was a map of. I thought he learned nothing. It's a waste of time. I thought American elementary schools were just like that, letting kids have fun. But then, one day, we needed to go somewhere and we weren't sure how to get there. Ben said, mommy, I'll make you a map. A map can tell you where you are, and if you follow the map you can travel to places far away, like Mississippi, like California . . . It dawned on me that Ben WAS learning something at school after all! Just not the same way we learned at elementary school in China when we were young. We were asked to commit to memory and then regurgitate things we didn't understand or couldn't care less about [死记硬背 si ji ying bei]*, things that had no meaning and no relevance.*

At this point, Ben's father John interjects:

Don't underestimate the power of "doing projects." Start early is good, very good. When I first start graduate school in U.S., my professor asked us to "do a project," and I had no idea what it was and how I should do it. American education is not about learning things – that, you can do on your own – it is about learning how to do things. That's why China cannot produce Nobel Prize winners. Memorize is not the same as thinking and not the same as creative. You start early and creative will be a natural habit for rest of life.

I noted that while John and I normally communicate in Chinese, John said the above in English. It is as if he appreciates American education so much that he must use the very language in which American education is delivered.

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4.2.3 *Penalty for a Chinese Accent*

But what about the advantages of the Chinese language, for example in counting? In English numbers, after ten, the teens each have a unique name, and each multiple of ten following that gets its own name. In fact, one would need to learn twenty-eight unique words to count up to 100 in English. In any Chinese dialect, however, one only needs to learn eleven words – one through ten and one hundred. In Chinese, numbers after ten follow a precise logic. Eleven in Mandarin is *shi yi* or ten-one, twelve is ten-two, thirteen is ten-three, and so forth. When we get to fifty-nine, the logic continues, five-ten-nine. Five tens and a nine, 59. The internal logic in counting numbers with Chinese results in kids who speak Chinese being able to count beyond a hundred before English speakers can even count to forty. But the Chinese language advantage doesn't stop in counting. Remember those fractions? In English we would read ¾ as three-fourths. But in Chinese, ¾ is literally translated, "divide into 4 parts, take 3." The name is itself a direct and clear explanation of the term. Wouldn't knowing Chinese give Ben an advantage in school, to say the least? And consider medical terms too. In Chinese, a dentist is called a "tooth doctor," a pediatrician a "children doctor," a cardiologist a "heart doctor," a dermatologist a "skin doctor," an ophthalmologist an "eye doctor." Isn't it so much easier than English?

Jane says:

Well, it depends. You see, we all know Chinese very well and our math is never a problem. But do we receive more respect because of that? No. You go to the supermarket. You see that the cashier does not know how to do simple arithmetic. You think you are smarter, but it is the cashier who thinks that you have a problem, because you cannot say "broccoli" properly. At my workplace, many first-generation immigrants like myself are really quite good, technically. Our math is strong. Our thinking abilities are strong. Honestly our technical capabilities are much stronger than our boss's. But our English is poor. So we never get promoted to managerial levels. It is those people who can talk and say lots of things at meetings who are trusted and get promoted. At staff meetings, my boss asked us to share our ideas. I told everyone my idea. My boss only said "OK" and nothing more. Then someone else, an American, said the same thing, and my boss got very excited and said, "Oh that is a great idea!" But it was MY idea! So I don't want to speak at the meetings, even when I know what others are saying is wrong. Poor English makes even smart people look stupid. I don't want to be laughed at. I don't like to be frowned upon every time I say something. It's just like in China, if you speak Putonghua [Mandarin] *with a regional accent, people look down upon you and think that you are stupid. Here in the U.S., if you don't sound like an American, you cannot reach higher levels. I don't want Ben to have an accent like us when he grows up.*

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Curdt-Christiansen (2009) argues that family language policies are strongly influenced by sociopolitical and economic factors. The parents' educational background, their immigration experiences, and their cultural disposition contribute significantly to parental expectations and aspirations and thus to the family language policies. This is clearly evident in the case of Ben's family, in the many other examples that Jane shared with me of explicit and implicit language discrimination in the workplace in terms of opportunities for interaction and participation (Dragojevic and Giles, 2016), recruitment (Hansen and Dovidio, 2016), recognition, and promotion (Hahn and Gawronski, 2019; Kim et al., 2019). Even in workplace settings like Jane's where her coworkers and managers are diverse in language and cultural backgrounds, a person's "nonnative English-speaking" status may affect others' level of confidence in and attitude toward them (Buckingham, 2014; Lev-Ari and Keysar, 2010), depending upon the hearer's personality traits, prior multilingual experience (Dewaele and McCloskey, 2015), and degrees of ethnocentrism (Neuliep and Speten-Hansen, 2013).

For example, Jane told me that one of her coworkers remarked offhandedly, "It is irritating to hear a salesperson speaking with an Asian accent." At her workplace, Jane felt that those speaking with nonstandard American accents, particularly Chinese or any other Asian accents, are often sidelined, if not excluded, in conversation. Their conversational input tends to be interrupted more, questioned more, appreciated less, valued less. Their opinions are less likely to be solicited. They are more often asked to do the most challenging tech work behind the scenes but are much less likely to be asked to give any important presentations to the top administrators, which means that they do not receive due recognition for their work. In spite of the culturally and linguistically diverse workforce, and in spite of its global presence, the company sticks to a monolingual ethos. Those who have less control and command of the English language feel double the pressure – pressure not only from the content of work but also from the language of work. Additionally, there is pressure from peers and supervisors who tend to focus on what they cannot do "well" in English while neglecting what they are able to do with their entire linguistic repertoire.

John says:

My big boss, my boss's boss, is also a first-generation immigrant, from India. He was speaking English before coming to the U.S. So he has an advantage in vocabulary. But his accent is hard to understand; I think even harder to understand than Chinese accent. I almost couldn't understand him when he interviewed me for the job. But he is not shy, not like most Chinese. He speaks loudly, warmly, and he appears very open and welcoming. When he speaks, everyone listens. I guess after some years people have gotten used to his accent. Plus, he is really smart. I think he is a good role model for us Chinese. We

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should not feel ashamed of our accent. The more we speak, the more opportunities we give others to get used to us. Ben will not have our problem. He will be speaking perfect English, naturally.

I brought up the case of Henry Kissinger, former national security adviser and United States Secretary of State under Nixon, well admired and highly respected by Chinese and Chinese-American communities for the critical role he played in establishing Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations in the 1970s. I shared with Jane and John that Kissinger had a very thick German accent, even though his writing in English is extraordinarily elegant. My point was that it is alright to have an "accent," since the U.S. is a country of immigrants. Jane and John didn't agree. They believed that it is okay for Kissinger to have an accent and still be successful because Kissinger is a White person (they did not know Kissinger is Jewish). In their view, the chance of success becomes minimal if a person is non-White *and* has a thick accent, unless that person is a painter, or a musician, or a theoretical mathematician. That, in their theory, is why so many first-generation Chinese immigrants choose to enter the fields of science and engineering, because, in comparison with other fields, working in science and engineering requires relatively less human interaction and consequently less use of English.

4.2.4 Communicative Styles and the Bamboo Ceiling

Indeed, the issue is much more complicated than "having an accent." It is noteworthy that Asian-Americans are well represented in the U.S. workforce yet woefully underrepresented at the top of the corporate ladder. Individuals of Asian descent represent 13 percent of the U.S. professional workforce but only 6 percent of executive posts, according to Ascend, a pan-Asian, New York City–based nonprofit for business professionals. Meanwhile, White individuals represent 69 percent of the workforce but 85 percent of senior roles, and Black individuals account for 8 percent of employees and 5 percent of executives (Ascend, n.d.). Researchers Denise Peck and Buck Gee (McGirt, 2018) authored a report for the Ascend Foundation that found that Asian-Americans are the least likely among all races to become managers and executives within the Bay Area technology sector. They found similar statistics across industries. A 2017 study found that Asian-Americans make up more than 10 percent of top thirty law school graduates but have the lowest ratio of partners to associates for all races. A Goldman Sachs report found that 27 percent of its U.S. employees are Asian-American, but only 11 percent of its U.S. executives and managers are (Bee and Peck, 2018).

In the book *Breaking the bamboo ceiling: Career strategies for Asians*, author Jane Hyun (2005) argued that East Asian cultural values can adversely impact the workplace, and coined the term *bamboo ceiling* for what prevents

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Asian-Americans from advancement in their careers, the same way women are said to be blocked by a *glass ceiling*. The book compels us to re-examine the "model-minority" label, which originated in a *New York Times* article published during the 1960s by a sociologist who praised Japanese-Americans for being hardworking and self-sufficient, for demonstrating respect for authority and collectivism, and for achieving academic excellence and economic success, in spite of the racial discrimination and internment they faced during World War II. The label subsequently turned into a racial stereotype, which depicts all Asian-Americans, Chinese included and in particular, as hardworking, obedient, resilient, and submissive.

The *model-minority* label is harmful in many ways (Muthukumar, 2022). First, it has been used to disparage other minority racial groups with divergent histories and cultures for not prospering, which was the original purpose of the *New York Times* article in the 1960s. Second, it obscures the fact many Asian-Americans, Chinese-Americans included, are not prospering, but struggling socially and economically. Lastly and most relevant to our purpose here, this label circulates and perpetuates the view that Asian- or Chinese-Americans don't speak up, don't stand up for themselves, don't have ambitious goals, and don't exhibit creativity or confidence. In other words, Asian- or Chinese-Americans are lacking in leadership qualities and thus do not deserve to be leaders.

This negative racial stereotype about Asian-Americans is further reinforced by the communicative preferences and cultural norms of Chinese- and other Asian-Americans. First-generation Chinese-Americans such as Jane and John commented that there are some elements of truth to the stereotype.

John says:

I was taught from very young to always respect hierarchy and authority: parents, teachers, superiors at work, or even anyone who is older than you. Even if the authority is wrong, you still obey them. I was taught that telling someone that they are wrong is disrespectful and that I should never brag about myself. This is not helpful. My cultural habit hurts me at work. I don't talk about my accomplishments and performances the same way my American coworkers do. Some people don't do much work, but they are very exaggerated, use big words, and sound very competitive. I generally don't talk about my achievements . . . Yes, at staff meetings, everyone has to talk about what they did last week, and I do too, but I never exaggerate my results and I am always on the cautious side. I always promise less and deliver more . . . Black and Brown people are definitely disadvantaged by the system. But they speak up. We Chinese are worse. We are disadvantaged by the system, and, in addition, we hurt ourselves by not speaking our mind out of respect.

Both John and Jane believe that the school can teach good public-speaking skills and culturally advantageous communicative strategies – something that

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they themselves cannot teach Ben and something that they believe will be very important for Ben when he grows up. In their words, *we chose to come to America and the responsibility is placed on us to have to adapt to the culture that is American.*

They do not want Ben to have their Chinese accent, nor their communicative style. They do not want Ben to become a "model minority" that prefers order to freedom, modesty to upward social mobility, and self-sacrifice to social success. Consequently, they do not insist on Ben learning and using Chinese, as the Chinese language is seen as a proxy for those Chinese cultural traits and tendencies that they believe are preventing them from making greater achievements in the U.S.

4.2.5 Feelings Are Better Expressed in English

And what about those intricate, complicated feelings that become most vivid and visceral only in the language we are most comfortable with? Like when we express love or anger? It has been documented that maintenance of the HL is contingent upon the affective, cognitive, and interactional scaffolding provided by the family (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015; Mishina-Mori, 2011). Likewise, psychologists such as Cole et al. (2010) point out that language and emotional development must be studied in terms of their mutual influences. If parents do not use sufficiently expressive language (which they are much better equipped to do in Chinese) to their children, will that have a negative impact on the children's development of emotion regulation, socially appropriate means of communicating about their needs, and enhanced ability to understand their own and others' emotional lives? In applied linguistics, the ability to communicate with passion, to radiate positivity, and to develop close relationships with the students is considered an essential trait for a language teacher (Dewaele, 2011). Might the same not be true for parents? And Wong-Fillmore (1991) warned us long ago of the danger of family alienation due to loss of the heritage language.

Jane says:

Oh no we don't express love in Chinese hahaha . . . Deep feelings and strong emotions are not said, but only felt. In English, we talk a lot, even when we don't have much to say, and even when we don't mean it 100 percent. "I love you," "Great," "Amazing," "Wonderful" . . . All the time, to everybody. When Ben was in daycare, his teacher said to me several times "Ben is special" and "He is amazing." In the beginning I was quite happy, thinking that my son is special and amazing, meaning he is probably better than other kids in some ways. And then I realized that the teacher said the same thing about every kid. So if every kid is special, how can my son be special? The same thing happens in kindergarten. Whatever Ben turns in, Mrs. R would put "Excellent," "Great

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Job," and lots of stars on his work. Speaking of positive reinforcement, there is certainly a great deal of that in American culture.

In Chinese culture, talking a lot without much substance is seen as a very negative personal trait. We love deeply but we don't say it, not in Chinese. Maybe in writing we do, but who is still writing these days? We don't talk much about feelings in Chinese. I say "I love you" to Ben only in English. But if I am angry at him, I always use Chinese to scold him hahaha . . . That is terrible; I realize that. But I cannot control myself. Too bad that Ben probably associates the Chinese language with Mom being angry . . . But in general, that's the Chinese way. Parents and teachers don't express our feelings that much in Chinese, except to criticize the kids when they do something bad. So we all grew up not being good at expressing our feelings. Just the other day, my mother told me on the phone that a close relative of ours just passed away. I actually didn't know what to say – the English expression "I am sorry" was on the tip of my tongue but of course I couldn't say it to my mother (who doesn't understand English) and I couldn't translate it into Chinese [对不起 *duibuqi* ("sorry"), which will not make any sense in Chinese in this context]. *So I just listened, kept quiet, and said nothing, which was probably the most appropriate thing to do anyway.*

Anyway, we don't actually lose much by speaking less Chinese at home. I don't believe Ben will be deprived of our love or anything like that if we speak less Chinese to him. On the contrary, I think I can express more love when I speak English . . . You know, Chinese parents will do everything and make any sacrifice for their children but don't say the word "love" much at all; American parents say a lot but I don't know how much they will actually do for their children. My coworker at the office talks about her son all the time, you know, how she loves him, cakes, cards, gifts, and all that. Then the son is going to college and my coworker said that she's only paying half of his college tuition and the other half will be a student loan that the son will need to pay back by himself after college. I was so shocked. It's not like she doesn't have money. She eats out very often, takes vacations, and goes to expensive hair salons. I was saying to myself, if you truly love your son, you would put your son's interest before your own and pay his full tuition! I guess that is a big cultural difference between Chinese and Americans . . . So Ben will actually get double the amount of love from the two cultures!

Jane's older sister immigrated to another state in the U.S. and her parents followed her sister there too. Her sister's daughter, Ben's cousin, is six years older than Ben and speaks English only. She attends a top-ranked magnet school and is a highly accomplished student, winning state and national medals in spelling bee, ballet, painting, and ice skating. Her stories and pictures have appeared in the local newspapers. She is also said to be extremely close to her parents, even though her mother (Jane's sister) speaks English no better than

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Jane. Jane considers her niece a big success and often tells her niece's story to inspire Ben. She tells the story in Chinese interlaced with English:

你看, 姐姐好棒呀, 学习那么好,还跳 *ballet,* 还 *painting,* 还 *ice skating,* 样样都好*!* 你看她多努力,多优秀, 是不是, *she tries so hard, right, you will try hard and do your best, right?*

(You see, how accomplished Big Sister is! She is doing so well academically, and also dances ballet, and does painting, and ice skating. She is good at everything! You see how hard she tries, how outstanding she is, right? She tries so hard, right, you will try hard and do your best, right?)

Speaking Chinese is not part of that model of "excellence". There is another reason: the fear of losing connection with children through enforcing a Chinese-only family language policy. Jane has several women friends with children a few years older than Ben. She learns from these friends about parenting. One of them used to keep a strict Chinese-only policy at home; if her son said something in English, she would make him say it again in Chinese. Then one day she found out that her son was bullied at school but did not tell her. She attributed her son's lack of communication with her to the strict family language policy. After she loosened the rule, her son became closer to her and shared with her much more about what happened at school. Jane learned from her friend's experience and never pressured Ben to use Chinese.

4.3 Planned Policy

More than thirty years ago, Lily Wong-Fillmore (1991) conducted a nationwide study of language shift among language-minority children in the U.S. The findings suggest that English-only programs are correlated with a significant higher rate of loss of heritage languages. When that happens, particularly when that happens to households where the parents are primarily monolingual speakers of the heritage language, parents essentially lose means of communication with children, which leads to devastating social and emotional "alienation" within the family for the children and their parents. The focus on the importance of social and affective factors in heritage language maintenance and development (such as identity, emotions, family well-being, family culture and traditions) and how they affect beliefs and values about language continues until this day (Schalley and Eisenchlas, 2020). At the same time, more recent research on family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Spolsky, 2021; Zhu and Li, 2016) suggests that most transnational families do not explicitly state that they have a family language policy; do not have a consistent policy, resulting from incongruent language ideologies (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016); and do not have a plan for how their languages are to be used and cultivated at

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home. However, many make decisions about language use that reflect an implicit or inconsistent policy, under the external influences from schools, peers, workplaces, and governments.

Our case here is somewhat different. First of all, Ben's parents are professionals using English functionally as the medium of communication at their work, even though they are not as fluent in English as they themselves would like to be. This means that even if the child loses the heritage language, the negative impact on this family will be less than in those families where the parents' knowledge of English is minimal. Second, it is obvious that Ben's parents are in firm support of the English-only policy at school, for a number of reasons, including the child's perceived long-term best interest (as indicated by his mother, Jane); perceived institutional necessity (as pointed out by his father, John); their own negative experience in the workplace, which they attribute to their less-than-perfect command of English and their own communicative styles; and their own experience in the Chinese language, which is rarely used to express affection, praise, or intimacy. In short, while the parents do believe that Chinese is of value, they generally do not have high expectations in terms of Ben's mastery of Chinese. Thus, in a sense, for this family, Chinese language maintenance would be something "nice," but not "necessary" for the preservation of home culture, and if immigration means the gradual loss of the Chinese language, so be it. For this family, the language policy is informed, and intentional.

It has been documented that the stated beliefs of first-generation immigrants, whose heritage languages include not only Chinese, but also Spanish, Portuguese, and Creole, may position bilingualism and heritage language maintenance as valuable. However, family language decisions often indicate a preference for English that inherently aligns with the English-only educational policies and practices and marginalizes heritage languages (Kaveh, 2020). Everyone surrounding Ben – schoolteacher, parents – has a positive, or at least neutral, view of bilingualism and heritage language maintenance. However, even though Jane and John themselves are not yet fully acquainted with the school education system (e.g., not familiar with the school's expectations of parents on the field day), they are already fully embracing the school language ideology, not blindly or unconsciously, but deliberately, based on their own language experience in everyday social encounters and at their workplace. Not only do the parents fully support the English-only policy and practice at school, but they are also ready and willing to intentionally shift to greater use of English at home, based on their conscious cost–benefit assessment of the consequences of the language shift for their family.

From a language socialization perspective, the indexical relationship between language and sociocultural dimensions of language use (including identity) is achieved through a two-step process. Ochs (1990) argues that

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affective and epistemological dispositions are the two contextual dimensions that are recurrently used to constitute other contextual dimensions. Consistent with this line of thought, many researchers have focused on heritage language as intricately interwoven with learner identity formation or transformation. Language socialization highlights the dual process of socialization to use the language and socialization through language use. In addition to these two, heritage language socialization adds a third dimension: the socialization of heritage language ideology (Avineri, 2014). In that domain the goal is not the mastery of language skills per se, but a meta-linguistic awareness of the heritage language and cultural community that embodies both a remembrance of the past and an aspiration to global citizenship in the future. This is what we find here. Jane and her husband are prepared and willing to disassociate Chinese language from Chinese culture and to relegate Chinese language to a "nonessential" status at home.

The conscious decision made by families like Ben's is at least partially shaped by the invisible hand of the children's best interests in the educational system. School being the main socializing agent besides the family, parents naturally do not wish their children to be treated negatively or unfavorably due to the use of non-English home languages at school. Hence a greater understanding of the connections between state language policy, the school, and language use in the family, particularly the interaction between the family and the school, is crucial (e.g., Schwartz and Verschik, 2013). Research has indicated that heritage language use at home alone is insufficient for heritage language maintenance (Lee and Wright, 2014). Further broadening an understanding of the family–community nexus to looking specifically at the affective, emotional, and psychological dimensions of this interrelationship (Tannenbaum, 2012) would similarly broaden horizons for family language planning. In our case, Ben and his family's exposure to the school's reaction to non-English home languages most likely contributed to the negative emotional valence of the Chinese language, and consequently to its increasingly low use in the home.

Can this negative attitude toward the heritage language be reversed? Can the challenges posed by monolingual ideologies (Bacon, 2020; Bailey and Marsden, 2017) be overcome? Research has indicated that adopting more favorable approaches toward emergent bilingual students and their families, as well as toward their languages, brings about positive outcomes in schools (Ascenzi-Moreno et al., 2016). And as argued by Menken and Sánchez (2019), until we put multilingualism at the center in schools and encourage school leaders to make language policy changes structurally in programming and pedagogy, as well as in ideology, heritage language maintenance at home will be an uphill battle.

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The increased global mobility in the last few decades has resulted in rapid growth in the numbers both of children raised multilingually and of children who are being instructed in a language that is not their heritage language. Multilingual classrooms are now commonplace, with students speaking a wide range of first languages. Many parents are anxious about their children's underperforming at school as their learning is being assessed in the official language of education. Rather than maintaining the use of a standardized form of the dominant language, what if we broaden the choice of languages taught in schools to reflect the personal interests of learners and build on their linguistic capacities? What if we accentuate the rightful place of immigrants within the language education system? What if we highlight the benefits of "mainstream" schools adopting a "language-friendly approach" that "normalizes" and affirms the value of students' knowledge of additional languages in ways that can greatly enhance students' motivation to develop and maintain their heritage language knowledge? What if we provide teachers with the skills and support to adapt their classrooms and pedagogical approaches to today's multilingual reality? What if we promote societal multilingualism, so that the languages of households are available in the schools and the wider environment (Barros et al., 2021)? What if we change school and company cultures and promote sensitivity toward culturally diverse ways of talking about accomplishments and performances and broaden our definition of a good leader beyond our long-ingrained characteristics of assertiveness and competitiveness? If our policies and pedagogies put multiculturalism and multilingualism at the center, would Ben's family and many families like Ben's adopt the same family language policy?

Naturally, family language decisions are not made once and for all; instead, they are highly contextual and fluid. As children get older and as parents' immigrant experiences unfold, changes are very likely to happen. Furthermore, while families may have a plan for the languages they use, the actual practice is highly multidimensional. It is not uncommon to find that families ready to accept and embrace English in their homes often place their last hopes for Chinese language maintenance on community-based weekend Chinese language schools, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

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