FORWARD OR NEUTRAL ON THE LANGUAGE SHIFT: CHOICES BY BILINGUAL PARENTS IN THE MEXICAN AND CHINESE SECOND GENERATION

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Speaking the language of the host society has long been recognized as an essential aspect of immigrant incorporation, but it often comes at the price of fluency in the language of origin. Communication in the host county's language enables immigrants and their children to participate with their native-born peers and adapt to their culture, while loss of a heritage language is associated with less access to its culture and social networks (Gordon 1964, Bean and Stevens 2003). The predominant model of Joshua Fishman on language shift holds that the immigrant generation often uses its native language at home, but the children grow up easily speaking the host-country language and by adulthood shift to this language (Fishman 1965). Against this trend, maintenance of a heritage language in the host country requires both individual motivation and a substantial co-ethnic community also using this language (Lieberson and Curry 1971, Solé 1990).

Such motivation often comes from parents, because the home is last stand of the heritage language (Fishman 1965). As Lieberson and Curry (1971: 126) put it:

> There are two crucial demographic events necessary for mother-tongue shift. First, non-English speaking immigrants or their descendents must learn English as a second language. Second, bilingual parents must pass on English as the mother-tongue of the next generation. If only the first step occurs, but the bilingual parents maintain their mother-tongue in socializing the offspring, then a stable multilingual situation will exist in which bilingualism does not generate mother-tongue shift.

Parents would be particularly motivated to use the heritage language, or mother tongue, when many of their co-ethnics are not bilingual, because the loss of the heritage language would create a large cultural rift for their children. If many co-ethnics are bilingual, the cultural loss would be mitigated (Lieberson and Curry 1971). Although Lieberson and Curry had in mind French-

speaking Canada, recent U.S. studies have found varying rates at which immigrant groups shift entirely to English speaking (Rumbaut, Massey, and Bean 2006, Alba et al. 2002). This raises the question of the extent to which bilingual parents are trying to maintain their heritage language and the context in which they are doing it.

In this paper we specifically focus on whether the presence of children affects the language spoken at home among bilingual young adults of the 1.5 and 2nd generation from two immigrant groups, Chinese and Mexicans. This is an important question because it addresses the issue of parental agency in language usage and how much parents may consciously try to ensure retention of the heritage language or to adopt English. Depending on the immigrant group, bilingual parents may tend to hold differing views on the advantages and importance of speaking the heritage language versus English. Their attitudes may hasten or slow the language shift.

Much previous research has examined the language spoken by children in later-generation households. Portes and Hao (1999) showed that only a minority of the second generation remained fluent in the heritage language but that such fluency varied considerably among immigrant groups and was reinforced by parents' speaking the language, co-ethnic friends and a broader co-ethnic context. Alba et al. (2002) found that the shift to English only appeared to be occurring as fast among Asians as it did for early generation of Europeans. However, the children and grandchildren of Spanish-speaking immigrants retained their language longer, particularly when their parents married within their ethnic group, and they lived in ethnic enclaves. The presence of other kin in the household, particularly grandmothers, also encouraged retention of the heritage language (Arriagada 2005, Ishizawa 2004). Among Asian Americans, outmarriage discourages use of the heritage language (Kim and Min 2010).

Another strand of language research examines the interplay between speaking a language at home and the retention of this language. The distinction matters because speaking the language at home can represent a conscious choice, at least for parents, whereas language loss and maintenance is less intentional (Stromswold 2001). Rumbaut, Massey, and Bean (2006) find that the life expectancy of home speaking of the heritage language is roughly similar for the offspring of Mexican and Chinese immigrants, but the ability to speak the language well persists much longer for the Spanish speakers. Among the children of Latino immigrants, the use of Spanish at home and school does not deter the learning of English but helps with the retention of Spanish (Tran 2010). Proficiency in the heritage language, more than its use, is associated with better adjustment among Asian and Latin American adolescents (Oh and Fuligni 2010). On the basis of this literature, we would not expect the presence of children in the household to be related to bilingual adults' knowledge of their heritage language, but the presence of children might affect adults' decision to use that language at home.

We further expect Mexicans and Chinese parents to differ in the likelihood of speaking their heritage language at home, for several reasons. Mexican parents would have both contextual and cultural reasons to maintain Spanish at home. Contextually, the vast growth of Mexican immigration in the United States since the 1970s has ensured the flourishing of Spanish-speaking communities and culture for decades to come (Solé 1990, Bean and Stevens 2003). Spanish-language newspapers, radio, and television stations abound (Lopez 1996). Monolingual English speakers of Mexican heritage have had difficulty relating to the Spanish-speaking immigrant generation (Jiménez 2010). Culturally, Mexicans' history as labor migrants and their cultural commitment to work would give them incentive to retain their Spanish, because in cities like Los Angeles, the primary language of the working class is Spanish (Van

Hook and Bean 2009, Bachmeier and Bean 2011, Lopez 1996). Among Mexican-American professionals, Spanish-speaking is invaluable for brokering relations between older relatives and U.S. bureaucracies but occasionally disadvantageous in a workplace, because it signals difference (Agius Vallejo 2012). In general, research on bilingualism shows that it does not produce a wage premium (Fry and Lowell 2003, Shin and Alba 2009).

Bilingual Chinese parents face different contexts and cultural values. Contextually, they have a language far different from English and more difficult to learn to read and write in an English-speaking country. Further, while the Chinese ethnic communities may be institutionally rich, they are not nearly so large as those of the Mexicans. Culturally, many Chinese feel pressure to succeed. Because Chinese immigrants tend to be positively selected, they have high expectations of their children's educational attainment (Feliciano 2006). Indeed, for generations, Asian Americans have attained exceptional levels of education and generally positive occupational returns as (Hirschman and Wong 1986). Many second-generation Chinese have recounted that they were told by their own parents to assimilate so they could access opportunities generally reserved for the mainstream (Zhou 2011). This pressure may leave the second generation inclined to speak Chinese at home to their own children.

DATA/METHODS

To address the research questions, we draw on three data sources. The first set of data comes from the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) survey (Rumbaut et al. 2004). In 2004, IIMMLA surveyed 1.5 and second-generation persons between ages 20 and 40 residing in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. IIMMLA collected data on members of the six national-origin groups – Mexican,

Salvadoran/Guatemalan, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino – that comprise most of the immigrant population in Los Angeles. IIMMLA compared these groups with third-plus generation non-Latino whites and blacks. This paper focuses exclusively on the 1.5/second generation respondents of Mexican and Chinese origin. The second set of data comes from the 2010 American Community Survey. These national data will permit comparisons of the language spoken at home by 1.5 generation parents across multiple metropolitan contexts. While it would be preferable to be able to use the second generation as well, it is impossible in these data to distinguish the second from later generations. The third data are the most specific and come from 35 in-depth interviews with 1.5 and 2nd generation Chinese parents from the Los Angeles area. These data allow further probing into the reasons why parents choose to speak a particular language with their children.

FINDINGS

Preliminary results using the IIMMLA data show that the majority of the adult children of immigrants speak English at their current household. Among those still speaking heritage languages, the Mexican adult 1.5 and 2nd generation is more likely to speak Spanish than the Chinese 1.5 and 2nd generation is to speak Chinese, but the difference is not statistically significant. However, a significant difference emerges when biological children are present in the household. We find that having biological children in the household make Mexican 1.5 and 2nd generation adults more likely to speak Spanish, while they make the Chinese 1.5 and 2nd generation more likely to speak English.

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