Digital Ethnography on Linguistic Repertoire of Japanese-Chinese Children:

A Case Analysis of Blog Narrative on Mother's Struggles with

Ideology, Identity, and Language

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1. Introduction

With the backdrop of increased transnational marriage, linguistic repertoire management of mixed parentage children is a pressing issue for their parents. According to Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan (2015), the number of Japanese-Chinese couples accounts for 30.9% of the total transnational marriage in Japan[1]. Despite the fact, however, the number of research is remarkably limited on parents' daily struggles on linguistic repertoire management of overseas Japanese-Chinese children. The present study, therefore, intends to explore how a Japanese mother living overseas faces daily conflicts on linguistic repertoire management of her Japanese-Chinese children. More specifically, drawing on longitudinal digital ethnographic data from a personal blog, the present study as a part of exploratory research illustrates how language ideology and personal experience are negotiated in her daily subjectivities as a mother of Japanese-Chinese school-age children.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Linguistic Repertoire Revisited

In the context of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007), the necessity is urged to update the notion of "linguistic repertoire". In sociolinguistics, Gumperz (1964) is generally placed as the point of departure in development of the notion of "linguistic repertoire" (e.g. Busch, 2017). In his original conceptualization, however, the notion was closely tied to relatively stable speech communities. Facing increased mobility in the globalization, therefore, the extensive number of research challenges the fixed relation between stable speech communities and named languages in actual language use in late modernity (Blommaert, 2005; Blommaert, 2010; Li Wei 2011; Rampton, 2011; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010). With this background, Blommaert & Backus (2012) and Busch (2012; 2017) explicitly demonstrate attempts to re-theorize the notion of "linguistic repertoire" with the following three insights. First, linguistic repertoire should be studied at individual level, as opposed to the primary focus on speech communities as in Gumperz (1964); that is, the analytical lens should be focused on individual speakers and their subjectivities[2]. Second, linguistic repertoire should be in effect understood as "indexical biographies" (Blommaert & Backus, 2012); that is, linguistic repertoire is in effect biographically organized complexes to involve multiple modes of learning in one's life trajectory. Lastly, a variety of linguistic resource in one's linguistic repertoire is not evenly distributed but functionally developed (i.e. "truncated repertoire" in Blommaert's sense[3]); that is, linguistic repertoire is developed in reference to "polycentric"[4] learning environments, characterized by multiple foci of normativity. The deployment of competence is, hence, differently yet functionally organized, such that one can fully demonstrate vernacular Japanese in an informal setting, on the one hand, while the same person would have difficulty to handle formal writing in Japanese, due to his/her life trajectory, on the other hand.

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[1] Although the statistics here are the most credible ones of all accessible data to date, the statistics have limitation in the sense that the figures merely cover population residing in Japan. In other words, the figures fail to capture the accurate number of Japanese-Chinese couples based overseas.

[2] Busch (2012), for instance, suggests to introduce "a language portrait" to multimodally represent speakers' linguistic repertoire and associated experiences, by means of visual and linguistic representation.

[3] For a fuller discussion, see Blommaert (2010, Chapter. 4).

[4] For a fuller discussion, see Blommaert (2007).

2.2 Family Language Policy (FLP)

For intergenerational transmission of immigrant language (i.e. heritage language management), family is argued as the critical domain (Fishman, 2006; Spolsky, 2012). Family Language Policy (henceforth, "FLP") refers to, regardless of its level of explicitness, decisions and practices "within the family regarding language use, learning, maintenance, and/or loss" (Hirsch & Lee, 2018, p.885). Further, Spolsky (2012) argues a tripartite view of FLP components, namely ideology, management and practices. Spolsky's analytical approach is widely applied in FLP research (e.g. Koustoulas & Motsiou, 2020), and the present study shall adopt the tripartite view as an analytical lens. Grounded on the definition of FLP discussed in Hirsch & Lee (2018), in the present study, "ideology" refers to deeply ingrained values and beliefs regarding linguistic resource, its use, language learning and maintenance; "management" refers to the plans within the family domain; and "practice" refers to the actual language use by each of family members.

3. Methodology

The data was collected from a personal blog initiated in 2005, *Nihao China*. The author is a Japanese female who married to a Chinese husband and has resided in Beijing, China, since 2008. She has two school-age children, one son and one daughter. The blog covers a wide range of topics related to daily life in China with the central focus on overseas childrearing of Japanese-Chinese children. The blog is mostly written in Japanese and the average length of each posting is approximately 1,500 Japanese words. In the present study, 49 postings tagged as "bilingual education" were analyzed of the total 2,440 postings at the moment of analysis. The data was inductively analyzed with the following three steps. First, I scrutinized all the 49 postings; in the scrutiny, I recorded any noticeable descriptions in light of articulations on daily subjectivities related to linguistic repertoire management and FLP for the school-age children. Second, I analyzed types of themes that repeatedly appear in the author's articulation. Lastly, I categorized the themes into three major groups.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis identified the following three major categories related to felt conflicts of the Japanese mother, as summarized in Table 1: (1) ambivalent identity as perceived dichotomy choice, either being Chinese or Japanese; (2) urges to re-define labels of "languages" such as "heritage language" in a contextualized manner; and (3) tensions between deliberate efforts for a successful bilingual in the future and inertia of the present life. First, at the stage of compulsory education of the children, the mother appears to struggle with perceived dichotomy choice, whether identity of her children is Chinese or Japanese. This conflict seems evoked by interplays of "polycentricity" (i.e. plural normativity) across domains, primarily family and education; at her family, the decision was made that the children go to Chinese local primary school, on the one hand, while within the family domain, Japanese is used for interaction between children and the mother, on the other hand. In part due to increased exposure to Chinese at school, however, the mother feels the family domain becomes also imbued with Chinese in children's daily life. This change in their daily language practices has brought the mother anxiety that children's identity is more inclined to being Chinese at the expense of being Japanese. In parallel with that, the mother also feels a sense of deficiency, due to the dichotomy ideology; that is, hypothetical comparison with "purely Chinese" or "purely Japanese" monolingual environment has resulted in the sense of deficiency that both of Chinese and Japanese competence of her children are disadvantaged. This sense of deficiency is characterized as clear contrast to the view of "truncated repertoire" discussed in 2.1.

Second, the competing forces (i.e. more than one possible normative forces) across the domains also brought the mother perceived discrepancy between her actual experiences and conventional meaning of "language" labels; for instance, "heritage language" is, in her view, semantically understood as "minor language(-s) learned from parents within the family domain". Nonetheless, her actual experiences led the mother to question whether the conventionally accepted definition is truly valid. More specifically, "minor" in the definition seems not adequately articulated. In her view, which language is positioned as "minor" would vary, depending on a primary community of practice for children (i.e. mostly, school). Therefore, even in the same country of China, for instance, "minor" language for Japanese-Chinese children would vary, depending on a choice whether they go to Chinese local school or overseas Japanese school. The attempt to pragmatically construct more contextualized definition is associated with her assumptions on innate subjectivity of her children in daily language use.

Lastly, the mother's emotional attachment to Japanese as heritage language appears to cause tensions against overall management of

"cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) for her children. The tensions are characterized by the following two ways: the first point is concerned with perceived risks of interference across children's linguistic repertoire. In the face of school-age development, simultaneous exposure to multiple linguistic resources is concerned as source of negative effects on children's overall linguistic competence. Second, concerned is whether Japanese will truly serve as valuable cultural capital for children's future. Considering the fact that it is not likely for her family to move to Japan, the mother is not fully convinced that Japanese serves as cultural capital exchangeable into other forms of capital, such as social and economic one. Consequently, her "rational" view tells her that intensive efforts should be "properly" distributed, according to the priority under the time pressure in everyday life; that is, in the rational view, Chinese should come first. Nevertheless, her attachment to Japanese as heritage language does not allow the mother to fully devote (or invest) the efforts to Chinese and alternate cultural capital other than Japanese (e.g. piano; Japanese martial arts). This type of tensions (or frictions) between parents' emotional aspect and programmatic commitment is also echoed in observations of Little (2020).

Table 1. Three Identified Major Themes on Felt Conflicts of a Mother of Japanese-Chinese Children

Themes	Interplay across Ideology, Management, and Practices	Descriptions	Exmaples of Observed Struggles in Postings
Ambivalent Identity as Dichotomy Choice	Ideology x Practices	Polycentric normativity across family, education, and other domains evokes assumed dichotomy choice either being Chinese or Japanese	Which identity will my children have, as Chinese or Japanese?
Urges to Re-define Labels of "Languages"	Ideology x Practices	Felt discrepancy between actual experiences and conventional meaning of "language" labels urges to pragmatically construct re-definitions	Is definition of "heritage language" truly valid as "minority language(-s) learned from parents"?
Bilingualism: Deliberate Efforts vs. Intertia of the Present Life	Ideology x Management	Emotional attachment to Japanese as heritage language causes felt conflicts against overall management of cultural capital for children	Is being bilingual truly benefitial for the future of my children? Wouldn't it just be parental ego?

5. Conclusion

The present study explores how a Japanese mother of Japanese-Chinese school-age children faces felt conflicts in linguistic repertoire management for her children in an overseas setting. Longitudinal digital ethnographic data led three major themes. Further, the overall findings suggest the following two points as future research orientation. First, optimal actions as a parent are reflexively simulated under the interplays across ideology, management, and practice. The reflexive simulations are deployed in an attempt to leverage both Japanese-Chinese children's "roots" (i.e. cultural capital as heritage) and biographical "routes" (i.e. historical and present communities of practices the children engage). This finding suggests the extended notion of "investment" (Norton, 2013); in Norton's original sense, "investment" is argued primarily in a second language learning setting from the (adult) learners' point of view. Norton makes point that "If learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (Norton, 2013, p.50). In FLP setting, the finding suggests that parents and other significant family members are also highly involved in the work of "investment" here. Further theorization is required in the future research.

Second, the findings indicate that linguistic repertoire management of mixed parentage children involves ambivalent feeling as in-between. As limitation, however, the present study can merely capture daily subjectivities of a mother, which is selectively presented (i.e. consciously performed) by herself in the personal blog to be public online. Due to this nature, consequently, the future research further requires complementary methodology, such as on-site observations of actual interactions with children and interview with the mother, to further reveal implicit logic and subjectivities behind the conscious presentation.

As Shimoji (2018) argues, mixed parentage children (so-called "*ha-fu*" in Japanese) generally did not gain scholarly attentions sufficiently in Japan. Consequently, stereotyped view seems still prevailing, such that mixed parentage children are endowed with balanced bilingual competence without any intensive efforts. My hope is that the present and future research can contribute to adequately describe and understand actuality where mixed parentage children and their family live.

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