

**THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF PARENTAL LANGUAGE  
CHOICE ON THAT OF THEIR CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE  
IN CHINESE MIGRANT FAMILIES\***

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**ABSTRACT**

For the majority of migrants, family is the last redoubt of mother tongue maintenance. Understandably, there has thus been a large body of literature on the importance of parental influence on the language behaviour of their children. While many of the studies focus on either reversing language shift (Fishman 1991) or bilingual education (Barron-Hauwaert 2004), much less attention has been given to the immediate effect of parental language choice on that of their children in everyday interaction. In the present study, eight Chinese migrant children, aged 5 to 11 years, were monitored for one calendar year using Conversational Round (CR) as the primary unit of analysis. Results show that parental use of English sharply increased the use of English by the children and, if parents responded in English to code-switching by the children, there was only a slight chance of the children switching back to Chinese in the subsequent turn. It is therefore indicated that language choice is a substantially effective parental strategy for the maintenance of the mother tongue in children of this age group.

Key words: language choice, conversational round, code-switching

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Language shift, “a process in which a speech community gives up a language in favour of another” (Li 2000: 497), has been studied by scholars from a wide range of disciplines with diverse approaches and perspectives. It has been found in many studies that language shift among immigrant minorities is typically completed within three generations (e.g., Fishman 1991; Romaine 1995; Clyne 1999). While the majority of studies on language shift and maintenance have focused on the general trend and end result of this phenomenon diachronically across generations, scholars of code-switching are more interested in finding out the social motivation (Myers-Scotton 1993), psychological mechanism (Grosjean 2001), and syntactical constraints of this linguistic phenomenon. One question worth asking is how language shift happens in relation to people’s choice of language in every day life.

It has been repeatedly reported that the maintenance of an ethnic language by second-generation immigrants is strongly correlated with the degree to which they are exposed to the language at home. In his oft-cited Reversing Language Shift (RLS) theoretical model, Fishman (1991) regards the intergenerational transmission of the minority language as a crucial stage in the process of language reversing. However, there has been a lack of detailed examination of language behaviour in every day life in relation to language shift. For instance, in the only book-length study on language choice and language pattern among an overseas Chinese community, Li (1994) reported an age-related language shift from Cantonese monolingual to English-dominant bilingual. While exploring the local sequential meaning of code-switching, the author interpreted language shift mainly in terms of interaction within a social network. First advocated by Milroy (1987) for sociolinguistic study, the strength of the social network lies in its capacity to explain social behaviour among socially capable groups; nevertheless, it may not be indicative enough in explicating language behaviour and language choice among younger bilingual children whose “interchange” and “interactive” (Li 1994: 179) activities are generally restricted to within the confines of home and family.

Age has long been found to be a crucial factor in maintaining minority immigrant languages. For younger immigrants whose first language has not yet been firmly established, home / family environment is almost the only place where their first language can be nurtured. If unattended, it may not be surprising to find that bilingualism will be only a short temporary process during which immigrant children move from one first language to another.

Studies carried out in local New Zealand contexts show that Tongan is well maintained because it is used most of the time at home. However, English begins to affect the home language use once the children start school (Holmes 1996). It is natural for them to use English for topics and activities related to schooling since English is the language medium used in such environment. For younger immigrant children, language shift tends to start as they venture out of the home environment where L1 is spoken, and participate in the institutional structure of the wider society – first kindergarten and then school. However, traditional studies on language shift and language maintenance (LSLM) have overlooked these points in this process leaving many questions unanswered. For example, what are the children's language choices at home with their family members? How will the parents react if the children code-switch between the two languages involved? How much does the parents' reaction influence the children's subsequent language choice?

Parental language choice as strategy has been studied for more than one hundred years since Maurice Grammont created the term one-parent-one-language (OPOL) in 1902 (see Barron-Hauwaert 2004 for a short review). While the importance of parental input has been widely recognized in studies of early bilingual education (Lanza 1992; Quay 1995; De Houwer 1999) and of reversing language shift (Fishman 1991), the immediate effect of parental strategy on the language behavior of their children is far from clear.

In bilingual migrant families, code-switching – the mixed use of two or more languages – is an inseparable part of daily life. Studies show that parents use different interactive strategies with their children and the use of these strategies is believed to play an important role in the development of the children's bilingual ability (Goodz 1989). However, there are only a limited number of studies focusing on the effect of

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parental responses towards children's code-switching and there has been much discrepancy in the findings. In a longitudinal study of eight children in Montreal, Goodz (1989) found significant correlations between child and parent code-mixing in half of the cases who were followed from the ages of fourteen months to fifty-seven months. However, this result was only true of two of the twelve cases of a younger age range in another study conducted in the same community (Nicoladis 1995). Closer examination shows that the rates of parental and child code-mixing correlated when the children were three years old but not before they were two and half years old. Therefore, age seems to be a crucial factor affecting younger children's language behaviour in this respect.

A more comprehensive framework has been proposed in Lanza (1992, 2001), suggesting that the language choice of bilingual children is influenced more by their parents' discourse strategies.

In this framework, parental discourse strategy forms a continuum moving from monolingual to bilingual. When a parent responds to a child's code-mixing with a monolingual strategy like Minimal Grasp, it signifies that the parent does not understand the code-mixing and is therefore discouraging the use of code-mixing. In contrast, a child's code-mixing could be encouraged if parental responses are close to the bilingual end of the continuum. However, a replicate study of five French-English families in Montreal failed to find the relationship predicted by Parental Discourse Hypothesis (PDH). On the contrary, a negative correlation was found between children's code-mixing in the conversational turn following parental strategy (Nicoladis & Genesee 1998). The reason is, apart from parental belief that the children might be too young to understand the subtle implication conveyed in the parental language strategies. When hearing a parental Minimal Grasp expressed in typical words like 'what' or 'pardon', a child may simply repeat what has been said in a louder voice as s/he may not be able to target language choice as the source of problem. In fact, researchers may face the same problem at the time of coding even when they are provided with audio or visual recordings. Therefore, other ways need to be considered to explore the effect of parental strategy.

In this paper, language choice is investigated as it is the most explicit strategy that parents often employ, consciously or unconsciously. Particular attention is given to parental response towards children's code-mixing and its effect on the children's immediate reply. It is hoped that this line of research will enable us to see how parental language choice influences their children's daily language behaviors, therefore shedding light on the research of minority language maintenance in general.

## **2. THIS STUDY**

The goal of this paper is to explore how recent Chinese migrants use their native language in their daily life. Particularly, we want to know how parents respond to their children's code-mixing and the immediate effect of their response on their children's language choice.

### **2.1 The Participants and Their Parents**

The study on which the present paper is based was carried out in Auckland, New Zealand. Eight Chinese migrant children aged from 5 to 11 were selected through a social network, namely, among friends or friends' friends. These families were audio-recorded monthly for one calendar year. When the data collection started, the average age of the children was 7;5 (years; months) and their average length of stay in New Zealand was 28 months (Table 2). S1, S2, S3 and S4 were in the older group (aged from 8;8 to 10;9) and S5, S6, S7 and S8 were all around 5 years old. All but one child was born in China and only three of them had had some formal education in Mandarin, their first language (L1), before they came to New Zealand.

As shown in Table 1, all sixteen parents were university graduates and seven of them had postgraduate degrees. Eight parents studied English as their major. At the time of data collection, thirteen parents were working full time; two parents were studying full-time and one parent was working part-time and studying part-time. Mandarin Chinese

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was reported to be the dominant language used with all of the children although some couples used regional dialects between themselves.

Table 1. General characteristics of the subject-group

Subjects (S)	Gender	Age (y; m)	Length of stay in NZ (y; m)	Education in China (Y)*	Living with grandparents?
S1	Male	10; 9	3; 4	Y2	No
S2	Female	9; 3	1; 6	Y2	No / Yes**
S3	Male	9; 1	1; 9	Y1	No
S4	Female	8; 8	2; 9	Nil	No
S5	Male	5; 4	5; 4	N/A***	Yes
S6	Female	5; 1	2; 3	Nil	Yes
S7	Female	5; 10	3; 1	Nil	No
S8	Male	5; 1	1; 9	Nil	No

\* Y refers to the grade attended in primary school (e.g. Y2 = year 2)

\*\* S2's grandparents came in the ninth month of the data collection.

\*\*\* S5 was born in New Zealand

## 2.2 Audiotape Recording

Audiotape recordings, the primary data used in this study, were collected monthly from the participating families. Parents were asked to record their family conversation with their child. It was assumed that this arrangement could serve to maximize the naturalness of the setting and to limit possible disruption of the topics given the volatility of the child participants at the age at which they were at during the period of the study. Each recording session lasted for one hour and recordings were collected over a period of twelve months. The decision to make monthly recordings over a period of one calendar year was based on the assumption that twelve monthly sessions would generate a reliable sample for the study.

Altogether 96 tapes were collected and labelled for subject and tape number, for example, as S1-T1 or S4-T12. Given that the focus of the research was on the language used in everyday life, only recordings of every other month have been used for analysis for logistical reasons. It is assumed that the recordings of every other month were adequately representative of everyday language as this behaviour is relatively stable within two months' time.

Among the 48 tapes selected from each family, four of them were not included for analysis because there was not enough child-parent interaction in two of them, and the other two were recorded in China while one of the children was visiting her grandparents. This left 44 tapes providing material suitable for analysis. See Appendix for relevant turns in all tapes.

### **2.3 Transcription**

The 44 valid tapes were transcribed and each conversational turn coded for speaker and language. If a conversational turn was unambiguously in Chinese or English, it was coded with C (for Chinese) or E (for English). If a turn included a mix of elements from both languages, it was coded with M (for Mixing). Transcripts were then checked for accuracy by another fluent Mandarin/English bilingual who was linguistically qualified. Any differences were resolved by discussion.

When providing examples, all parts in English are in boldface. Anything uttered in Mandarin was converted into Pinyin, a Chinese phonetic system for transcribing the sound of Chinese characters into Latin script, in italics. Apart from these conventions, a free translation is provided for all Chinese utterances in single quotation marks.

To avoid possible confusion with the use of certain terms, code-mixing (CM) or mixing (M) refers to the mixed use of two languages within a conversational turn.

## **2.4 Unit of Analysis**

In choosing a unit, the Parental Discourse Hypothesis of code-mixing (PDH) is no doubt a very interesting step in the study of code-mixing in relation to language socialization in early bilingual development. The aim of this paper, however, was to investigate the dynamic relationship in parent-child interaction in a migrant minority situation in the light of language maintenance and language shift. In particular, the present focus is on to what degree parental language choice can influence that of their children's. Therefore, PDH was not considered an ideal tool for this study mainly because in many cases it is hard to decide which strategy was really intended by the speaker. Instead, language choice is considered as being a more effective indicator of parental language influence upon their children's language behaviours.

Based on these considerations, a unit called a 'Conversational Round' (CR) was used in our analysis. A CR, for the purpose of this study, has the following three features:

1. It must contain a core utterance, i.e., the child's code-mixed turn.
2. This code-mixed turn must be preceded by a parental turn in either Chinese or a code-mixed form.
3. Two other consecutive turns made immediately after by the parents and the subject must be present.

In other words, a CR is composed of four consecutive turns made by two speakers each contributing two relevant turns. A typical Conversational Round is illustrated in Example 1:

(1) S5 – T11:

1. M5. *Zanmen jia xianzai meiyou. Yaoshi you **our family** dehua zanmen jiu ( )*  
'Our family does not have. If our family has, we'll ( )'
2. S5. *Nage shenme **shape** ya?*  
'What shape is that one?'

3. M5. *Shenme shape? yiban doushi fangde bei! Shibushi? Nimen laoshi shibushi jiang ()*  
'What shape? It is normally square, isn't it? Didn't your teacher say ()'
4. S5. *Fangde.*  
'Square'

This example is taken from Tape 11 of S5 (Subject 5). The mother started the CR in Chinese in Turn 1 which was then followed by a Mixed reply from S5 in Turn 2. In the turn, S5 embedded an English word 'shape' in his reply. In Turn 3, the mother used the English word again in her response without paying particular attention to the child's code-mixing. The child, nevertheless, returned to Chinese in the final turn of this CR.

Following the criteria set out above, a total of 662 CRs were identified and analyzed in detail. To see the immediate impact of parental language choice, an analysis of two situations, of children's code-mixing preceded by a parental Chinese turn and of a parental Mixed turn is presented. Then, an investigation of children's language choice after a parental English turn is done to capture the overall picture in all of the valid tapes.

If a parent's Chinese turn is followed by a Mixed turn from his/her child, this pattern is labelled as CM (Chinese followed by Mixing). If the parent responds in Chinese in the third turn, the pattern is labelled as CMC.

All Conversational Rounds are selected with a code-switched turn (Turn 2) from a child. A child's code-switching is defined as either an act of mixing two languages or a complete switch from one language to another. Therefore, there are only four possible combinations for Turn 2: CM (Chinese followed by Mixing); CE (Chinese followed by English); MM (Mixing followed by Mixing); and ME (Mixing followed by English). In Turn 3, since a parent may use Chinese, English or a mixture of both, there are 12 possible combinations (4 x 3). Therefore, the total number of possible combinations for Turn 4 is 12 x 3 (=36) (see Table 7 for an example).

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Table 2 presents the total distribution of the language choice in the 17,157 conversational turns recorded in the 40 tapes. Of the language in the 9,105 parental turns, 75% is in Chinese, 10.4% in English and 14.1% in Mixed form. The distribution for the children is slightly different: 65.1% Chinese; 12.9% Mixed; 22% English.

Table 2. Total language choice of the families

	Chinese		Mixed		English		Total
Parents	6884	75.6%	1276	14.1%	945	10.4%	9105
Children	5239	65.1%	1041	12.9%	1772	22.0%	8052
Total	12123		2317		2717		17157

Among the 8,053 children's code-switched turns, there are only 662 that meet the criteria of a CR.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Children’s Language Choice after Parental English Turns

We will first look at how the children make their language choice when their parents start using English. All of the parental turns in English and the children’s immediate subsequent turns were extracted from the total of 17,157 turns from the 40 tapes; Table 3 presents the relevant results from the eight subjects.

Table 3. Children’s language choice after parental English turns

Subject	Children’s language choice						Total parental English turns
	Chinese		Mixing		English		
S1	3	25.0%	7	58.3%	2	16.7%	12
S2	8	24.2%	4	12.1%	21	63.6%	33
S3	9	2.6%	10	2.9%	327	94.5%	346
S4	4	21.0%	6	31.6%	9	47.4%	19
<b>Group average</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>26.2%</b>	<b>89.8</b>	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>102.5</b>
S5	9	12.2%	7	9.5%	58	78.4%	74
S6	11	10.7%	9	8.7%	83	80.6%	103
S7	1	7.7%	1	7.7%	11	84.6%	13
S8	7	10.1%	6	8.7%	56	81.2%	69
<b>Group average</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>81.2%</b>	<b>64.8</b>
Total	52	7.8%	50	7.5%	567	84.8%	669

Among the 669 instances where the parents initiate the use of English when interacting with their children, the majority of the children’s responses (84.8%) were in English. The use of both Chinese and code-mixing was limited to 7.8% and 7.5%, respectively. These

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figures clearly show the direct impact of parental language behaviour upon that of their children.

Compared with the younger group (S5-S8), the older group (S1-S4) produced, on average, more Chinese (18.2% vs. 10.2%) and Mixing (26.2% vs. 8.7%) but less English (55.6% vs. 81.2%). It is also worth noticing that the distribution of the linguistic coding of the older children's varies much more widely than that of the younger group, showing more self-control over their language choice when conversing with their parents. In contrast, the younger children's language choice was distributed more evenly among the group, with less discrepancy within each code choice. Their high level of use of English indicates that they are happy to respond with a language choice that is in line with that of their interlocutor's. This seems to suggest that the interlocutor, the parents in this case, has more influence upon the language behaviour of younger children.

Individual difference is huge between S1 and S3 in the older group. The experience of education in China does not necessarily result in more Chinese turns when we compare S1 and S3. In fact, S3 spoke less Chinese than the children in Group 2 none of whom had received any education in China. Some other forces are obviously in play. In one way or another, this is the result of the family choice based on their individual needs (Yu 2010). This is also a typical reflection of the complex reality in the field of language maintenance. For new migrants, how to master the mainstream language of the host country and quickly fit into the new environment is often much more urgent than maintaining their mother tongue.

### **3.2 Children's Code-Switching after Parental Chinese Turns**

In the following, children's code-switching behaviours will be looked at under two circumstances, that is, when a parent starts a CR either using Chinese or code-mixing.

Table 4. Children's code-switching after parental Chinese turns

Subject	Children's language choice				Total
	Mixing		English		
S1	97	89.0%	12	11.0%	109
S2	26	34.2%	50	65.8%	76
S3	17	36.2%	30	63.8%	47
S4	36	85.7%	6	14.3%	42
<b>Group average</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>61.3%</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>38.7%</b>	<b>68.5</b>
S5	13	65.0%	7	35.0%	20
S6	48	74.2%	18	25.8%	66
S7	8	53.3%	7	46.7%	15
S8	86	74.8%	29	25.2%	115
<b>Group average</b>	<b>38.8</b>	<b>66.8%</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>33.0%</b>	<b>54.0</b>
Total	331	67.6%	158	32.2%	490

\*Minor discrepancies in totals are due to decimal rounding.

From Tables 4 and 5 we can see that, among the 662 CRs analysed, 490 (74%) of children's CS in the second turn were made after parental Chinese turns. The rest, 172 (26%), were made when the parents themselves were mixing Chinese and English before the children took their turn in the conversation. This means that, among the 662 CRs, about three-quarters of the children's CS happened when the CRs were started with parental Chinese turns. Only one quarter is done after parental code-mixed turns. This is hardly surprising given the fact that only 65% of the children's total language contribution recorded is in Chinese in terms of conversational turn (Table 2 above).

Regarding age-related distribution, the older group (S1-S4) made, on average, 61.3% use of Mixing and 38.7% use of English, respectively.

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These figures are relatively close to those of the younger group's choices, which are 66.8% use of Mixing and 33.2% use of English, respectively.

Table 5. Children's code-switching after parental code-mixing

Subject	Children's language choice				Total
	Mixing		English		
S1	17	94.7%	1	5.3%	18
S2	6	27.3%	16	72.7%	22
S3	16	38.1%	26	61.9%	42
S4	8	58.3%	5	41.7%	13
S5	4	36.4%	7	63.6%	11
S6	11	64.7%	6	35.3%	17
S7	5	83.3%	1	16.7%	6
S8	34	77.3%	9	22.7%	43
Total	101	58.7%*	71	41.3%	172

\*Minor discrepancies in totals are due to decimal rounding.

However, it is interesting to note that the children's CS rate after parental Mixed turns was 9.9% (67.6% – 58.7%) lower than that after parental Chinese turns. In other words, the children's rate of CS does not increase due to parental CS. This appears to suggest that parental code-switching did not encourage more code-switching by the children. Instead, their rate of alternation, that is, complete switch from Chinese to English, increases from 32.3% in Table 4 to 41.3% in Table 5.

These figures suggest that the children's choice of code is affected, by, among others, their parent's language choice in everyday conversation. When the parents code-switch in the first turn, while more than half of the children's subsequent turns were still in code-mixed form, the percentage of subsequent turns made in English increased by about ten per cent. This implies that the increased use of English by the

parents leads to more use of English by their children although some variation does exist across the subjects.

### **3.3 Parental Response and Its Effect**

Table 6 presents a summary of the sixteen parents' responses to their children's code-switching in Turn 3. It is apparent that two-thirds of the parental responses are in Chinese when responding to their children's code-switching; nevertheless, they also display a high level of flexibility by using 28.5% mixing and 8.2% English.

It is particularly interesting to notice the difference in parental linguistic code distribution after CM/CE and MM/ME. When they start a CR with Chinese, i.e., after pattern CM and CE, the parents could always stick to their original language choice while using 26.6% of code-mixing and keeping the use of English to the minimum (3.3%). However, if the CR was started with a Mixed turn, their use of Chinese dropped dramatically and their use of Mixing and English almost doubled.

Table 6. Parental responses in Turn 3

Pattern	Parents' response in Turn 3						Total
	Chinese		Mixing		English		
CM	232	70.1%	88	26.6%	11	3.3%	331
CE	107	67.3%	31	19.5%	21	13.2%	159
MM	54	53.5%	41	40.6%	6	5.9%	101
ME	26	36.6%	29	40.8%	16	22.5%	71
Total	419	63.3%	189	28.5%	54	8.2%	662

CM=Chinese turns followed by Mixed turns

CE=Chinese turns followed by English turns

CE=Chinese turns followed by English turns

MM=Mixed turns followed by Mixed turns

ME=Mixed turns followed by English turns

Table 7 summarizes the language choices of the children at Turn 4 after parental responses to their code-switching. The first row from the top shows the children’s language choice after CMC, that is, a Conversational Round started with a parental Chinese turn (C) which is followed by a Mixed turn (M) from a child. This mixing is then responded to by the parent in Chinese (C), thus, forming the pattern CMC. Therefore, the figures in the first row show that after the pattern CMC (n=232), the children use 56.9% Chinese at the end of these CRs whereas their use of mixing and English accounts for 34.9% and 8.2%, respectively.

Table 7. Children’s language choice at Turn 4

Pattern	Children’s language choice						Total
	Chinese		Mixing		English		
CMC	132	56.9%	81	34.9%	19	8.2%	232
CMM	51	58.0%	28	31.8%	9	10.2%	88
CME	2	18.2%	5	45.5%	4	36.4%	11
CEC	38	35.5%	14	13.1%	55	51.4%	107
CEM	9	29.0%	10	32.3%	12	38.7%	31
CEE	6	28.6%	2	9.5%	13	61.9%	21
<b>Sub-average</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>37.7%</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>34.5%</b>	<b>81.7</b>
MMC	32	59.2%	14	25.9%	8	14.8%	54
MMM	20	48.8%	13	31.7%	8	19.5%	41
MME	1	16.7%	1	16.7%	4	66.6%	6
MEC	8	30.8%	4	15.4%	14	53.8%	26
MEM	5	17.2%	6	20.7%	18	62.1%	29
MEE	1	6.3%	1	6.3%	14	87.5%	16
<b>Sub-average</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>29.8%</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>50.7%</b>	<b>28.7</b>

### *Parental Language Choice and Immediate Effect*

From Table 7 we can see that, generally, if a CR is started in Chinese by the parents, the children will have more than a third's chance to complete the CR with Chinese. They also show slight preference for English over Mixing. However, the children have a 50% chance of concluding the CR in English when a CR starts with parental mixing. More specifically, after CMC and CMM, the children used similar amounts of Mixed turns (34.9% and 31.8%) and English turns (8.2% and 10.2%). However, the children's use of code-mixing and English increased to about 45.5% and 36.4%, respectively after the CME pattern. In other words, when children are mixing the two languages, parental responses in English substantially increase the children's use of English in the subsequent turns. To a large degree, this is also true of the children's language choice after patterns MMC, MMM, and MME, except that the amount of children's English turns increased from 36.4% after CME to 66.6% after MME showing greater impact from the parents.

The results seem to suggest that, after pattern CM, that is, CRs started by parents in Chinese and followed by children's Mixed turns, the children's choice of language at Turn 4 varies according to their parent's response at Turn 3. While the parents' Chinese response does not have much effect in making the children speak more Chinese, their use of English leads to a big increase in the children's use of English.

After patterns CEC, CEM and CEE, the number of children's English turns rapidly increase to 50% on average (51.4% / 38.7% / 61.9%). This means that if children completely switch to English after parental Chinese turns, they will carry on using English for fifty per cent of their subsequent turns regardless of the language used in their parents' response.

To certain degree, the children's choice of language after patterns MEC, MEM, and MEE repeats those made after CEC, CEM, and CEE, although with further significantly increased use of English. It also needs to be noted that after pattern MEE, children's use of English reached the highest point of 87.5%.

A careful examination suggests that there is an 'upgrading phenomenon' in some children's language choice, i.e., they tend to use code-mixing to respond to their parents' Chinese turns, but use English only to respond to code-mixing. If the parents are 'carried away' by their children's use of English, consciously or unconsciously, the children would be more than

happy to switch completely to English while Mandarin Chinese is completely pushed out.

These phenomena show that, within about two to three years' time, there had been a significant change in the language patterns of the migrants. Particularly, the younger migrants displayed a steady tendency to code-switch in family situations even when their parents were using Mandarin Chinese. However, code-mixing seems to serve only as a transitional device, as the children's rate of CS drops after parental code-mixed turns.

Immediate parental influence is further indicated by the fact that the children used an average of 63.1% of English after CME, CEE, MME and MEE. That is when their parents used English in Turn 3. However, the children's average rate of English use was only 32.1% after parental Chinese turns (i.e., after patterns CMC, CEC, MMC and MEC), and 32.6% after parental mixing in Turn 3 (i.e., after patterns CMM, CEM, MMM, and MEM).

Perhaps the most comfortable pattern for the children is to respond to English in English. This pattern illustrated in the two examples in the following:

(2) S3 – T3:

363. M4 *Haiyou yinian ni jiu du intermediate school le。 Jiushi, jiushi ...*  
'One more year you'll go to intermediate school, which means, means ...'
364. S4 **Two more years.**
365. M4 *Dui a, one more year.*  
'Right, one more year.'
366. S4 **Two more.**

(3) S2 – T5:

543. F2 **Your mum is the best. Shibushi ?**  
'Your mum is the best, isn't it?'
544. S2 **I heard the other one. ( ) worst among the worst.**
545. F2 ( ) **It's the best among the best.**
546. S2 **It's the worst among the worst.**

Example 2 is a typical MEME pattern in which the mother uses two code-mixed turns in both Turn 363 and 365 but the child responds with two English turns in Turn 364 and 366. This MEME pattern is actually quite common with some participants. In this pattern, the parents and their children each choose to use their favourite code for their own turns. Neither of the two sides cares about what language the other side is using nor do they accommodate to each other.

In Example 3, S2 is having an argument with her father. This CR was started by the father with a code-mixed turn. When the child responded in English in the second turn, the father simply continued the argument in English. The CR then finishes off with the third English turn by the child.

This suggests that, as the children's English becomes stronger and their Chinese weaker, they feel more confident and comfortable in using English, especially in relation to the domains of school and study. However, common sense tells them that their parents are more comfortable with Mandarin Chinese. Their parents may have problems in their English though they often know and use words the children may not understand. But if their parents start using English in the first place the children appear to be more than happy to go along with it since that is their stronger language. This explains why the parents' code-mixing could increase the children's rate of use of English and why parental English turns often stimulate an English response from their children.

### **3.4 What Happens If the Children Were Asked to Speak the Other Language?**

In the total of 662 code-switched turns from the children, there are only two occasions identified when a child, from S8, was asked to speak Mandarin Chinese. Unfortunately, neither of the two parental attempts yielded any desired results. On the first occasion, the request was only embedded in a longer turn when the father was reading a story with the child. On the second occasion, the child actually succeeded in a negotiation with his mother, so she had to make one more code-mixed turn:

(4) S8 – T3:

54. F8. “**But it’s important for him to defend the house if a burglar comes.**” *Danshi zui zhongyao de yinggai shi shenme ya?*

“‘But it’s important for him to defend the house if a burglar comes’. This dog says from now on, I’ll get the newspaper ... But, what is the most important thing?’

55. S8. **Burglar.**

56. F8. *Zhe shi shenme yisi a? Ruguo laile ze, laile qiangdao dehua, ta yao xuehui zenmeyang baohu fangzi, shibushi a?*

‘What does this mean? If a burglar comes, he should learn how to protect the house, isn’t it?’

57. S8. *En.*

‘En’

(5) S8 – T5:

554. M8 *Ni shuo yingyu ma, wo, ni shuo hanyu ma.*

‘Could you please speak English, we, could you please speak Chinese.’

555. S8 *Bu, bu. Ni yao shuo xian (?) yingyu, please.*

‘No, no. You should speak first (?) English, ...’

556. M8 *Hao. The race shi shenme?*

‘OK. What is the race?’

557. S8 **Let’s ( ).**

There are a few points in need of comment. First, in Example 4, the father’s encouragement to the child to speak Chinese did not work as it was intended; rather, it seemingly discouraged the child’s participation in the activity. Second, in Example 5, the fact that S8 returns to English without any trouble at the end of this conversational round clearly tells the child that he has won the code negotiation. This winning could be a clear message to the child that it is acceptable to use English at home and he does not have to speak Chinese if he does not want to.

#### **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This paper has explored the language strategy used by Chinese migrant parents with their children in an English-speaking country. Particular interest was paid to how the parents responded when their children code-switched Chinese and English. Conversation Round (CR) was used to examine the immediate effect of the parental response. The results show that, within 28 months the children's use of their ethnic minority language is decreased dramatically and that the children's choice of language was markedly influenced by that of their parents'. Parental use of English was closely related with the sharply increased use of English by the children. The percentage of the patterns CMEE, CEEE, MMEE, and MEEE clearly suggests that if parents respond to children's code-switching in English, there is little expectation of the children switching back to Chinese in the subsequent turn. This result is strongly supported by the fact that, among the 669 English turns initiated by the parents in all the tapes, 84.8% of the children's responses are in English.

This finding is in line with some early studies that have observed that children at the age of 2 are addressee-sensitive and capable of adjusting their language choice accordingly (Quay 1995; Lanza 1997; Comeau, Genesee & Lapaquette 2003), although further research is needed to see how long this capability will last when children start kindergarten and formal education and begin venturing away from home into the broader society. If language maintenance is a life-long task, then what the parents do today forms a crucial part of the process and may decide whether it is a success or failure tomorrow.

Another interesting finding is that the rate of parental code-mixed turns reveals an inverse relationship with that of their children's. That is to say, after parental code-mixed turns, the children's rate of code-mixing drops whilst their rate of English rises. This finding supports Nicoladis & Genesee's (1998) study which found "significant negative correlations between parental discourse styles and their children's rates of code-mixing within a single observation session" (96). In fact, the present study has found that the children tend to 'upgrade' their language choice with their parents in favour of their stronger

language. When their parents are speaking Chinese, the children's rate of code-mixing outstrips their rate of English and when their parents use code-mixing, more children tend to completely switch to English rather than code-mixing. This is a 'warning' for parents who want to hear more of their ethnic language from their children. As has been rightly pointed out, without successful intergenerational transmission, within the confines of home, family, neighbourhood and face-to-face community, other efforts in maintaining minority languages are "equivalent to constantly blowing air into a tire that still has a puncture" (Fishman 1991: xii).

It seems apparent, therefore, that to maintain and develop minority languages with young migrants, persistent parental effort is needed on a daily basis. Simple, explicit, and direct parental strategies, such as simply sticking to the 'right' language, would be more effective. The kind of implicit and subtle strategies proposed by Lanza (1992, 1997, 2001) might work well for language socialization with younger pre-schoolers, although there is recent evidence showing that bilingual children of 3 and 5 years old are able to identify language-based communication breakdowns and repair in the 'right' language (Comeau et al. 2003). That, however, was in an experimental situation involving strangers rather than true spontaneous conversations between children and parents. An essential difference is that in bilingual families, the parents are often more or less bilingual, a fact that the children are well aware of. Furthermore, the genuinely multilingual social relationship found in the case of English and French in Montreal differs from the relationship between Mandarin Chinese and English in New Zealand. For the purpose of maintaining and developing a minority migrant language at home, the strategies proposed by Lanza seem too delicate and too weak when compared with the kinds of social-political pressures and forces the children are involved with.

Results of the present study suggest that parental language choice is more effective with regard to minority language maintenance/development at the family level. Therefore, to some degree, these findings agree with Roberts (1991) when she writes that "... providing the right environment for language maintenance is only half the battle. The other half is getting children to speak the language for large chunks of their childhood" (56).

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Elsewhere, when analysing unsuccessful bilingual education, Clyne (1999) has likewise suggested, with some emphasis:

In fact in many of the families where bringing up children bilingually doesn't work, the problem is that the parents are not consistent. They sometimes use one language and they sometimes use another, and they switch from one language to the other. The child doesn't get enough input in the weaker language or the minority language ...

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## **APPENDIX**

### 1. Children's total language choice with parents by conversational turns

Subject		Chinese	English	Mixed	Total
Group 1	S1	803	30	239	1072
	S2	620	185	82	887
	S3	233	578	72	883
	S4	934	49	128	1111
Group 2	S5	954	269	68	1291
	S6	750	492	192	1434
	S7	127	25	27	179
	S8	818	144	233	1195
Total		5239	1772	1041	8052

華人父母語碼選擇對孩子的即刻影響

于善江  
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對於大多數移民來說，家庭是母語保持的最後堡壘，很多研究也證明了父母言行的重要性。但是，諸多學者專著於如何逆轉語言轉換(Fishman 1991)，或者著眼於孩子的雙語教育(Barron-Hauwaert 2004)。至於父母的語言為對孩子在家庭中的語言使用和選擇到底有什麼即時影響，卻很少有人研究甚至提及。本文基於八個五到十一歲的中國兒童移民一年的錄音調查，使用對話回合(Conversational Round)作為分析單位，在這方面做出嘗試。結果顯示，父母的語言選擇對孩子的語言選擇影響巨大。一般來說，英語是孩子們的首選語言，如果孩子用中英文混雜與父母交流，而父母用英語回答，孩子則很難使用中文。所以，在日常生活中，選擇使用語言也許是最簡單的語言保持策略。

關鍵字: 語言選擇、對話回合、語碼轉換