The Hybrid Identity Construction of Young Australian Chinese—From the Language Applied Perspective

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Abstract: This study investigates the constitution of the development of hybrid identity in young Australian Chinese from the perspective of language applied. The literature review focuses on bicultural and bilingual, and Chinese as heritage language. The guiding research questions is: How Language applied strategy used by 2 and 1.5 generations Chinese immigrants in Australia to develop their hybrid identity. Data was drawn from a focus group collected from three participants. It is grounded in the third space theory. It suggests that hybrid identity formation in Australia for young immigrants involves a fluid, diverse and complex cultural identity formation. The experiences of bilingual applied shape their hybrid identities. Australia as a third space provides the ground for constructing interplays between culture, environment, and community.

Keywords: language applied, multiculturalism, young Australian Chinese, hybridity, the third space

1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, Events transpired rapidly, causing a seismic upheaval in educational norms around the world. With the arrival of COVID-19, we stopped going to university and started working from home, creating our own versions of the university experience all over the world. Since I had the opportunity to collaborate with young Chinese Australians during the pandemic, we were able to connect through mutual friends, we set up a video chat and shared our experiences as an ethnic Chinese in Australia. Throughout the course of the weeks, we discovered that we were participating in recurring patterns of several talks, cultivating intimate relationships, and refining our reflections that were firmly rooted in our identities. As one of this group, I felt my transition and formation in shaping of my identity. In this study, me as a researcher, insider and outsider, through the conversation with Australian Chinese young people, trying to explore these young peoples' identity construction from the language using.

Those young Australian Chinese who have strong transnational linkages to China often provide a resource for retaining Chineseness in a community that otherwise has lower emotional and physical ties to China [36]. As Ngan and his colleagues [36] definite 'Chineseness', it refers to the identification with the local culture and the ways in which Chinese people are willing or forced to participate in it, as an ethnic identity in the Australian context. This unique experience gives them a new mixed identity, bilingual and bicultural. Bicultural bilinguals can master both the mainstream language in education and the language used by their parents at home [21]. They acquire a sense of belonging not just to the culture in which they were raised, but also to the culture of the country in where they were born [21] [24]. Living in such a multicultural country, for young people growing up in immigrant families can create both challenges and opportunities.

It is common for migrants and their children to experience liminality during the process of constructing their identities. Liminality is defined as the sensation of existing on the boundary between two cultures [36]. The concept of hybrid identity production, which links first- and second-generation migrants as well as the sojourner's sense of origins in a diasporas environment, has been explored in diasporas literature [1] [9] [27] [42]. Underlying the perspectives of third space [31] and double consciousness is the difference of nations or ethnics, and its opposition to the consolidation of a variety of distinct cultures into a one category. An effort to eliminate the reliance on the unitary, fixed, and essentialized conceptions that are ingrained in the acculturation framework is represented by the assertion of diversity. Therefore, the aim of this study focuses on the hybrid practices that the young Australian Chinese 2 and 1.5 generations, their cultural identities' construction employ in language applied. 1.5

generation refers to adolescents who immigrated with their parents before or during their early teens, generally 6-14 years old, but who grew up and attended school in the host country [51]. 2 generation refers to children who were born of immigrants in the host country [51].

The research project is guided by the following question:

How Language applied strategy used by 2 and 1.5 generations Chinese immigrants in Australia to develop their hybrid identity?

Hybrid identities of various minority groups in Australia have already been studied, but deeper analysis of the language applied experiences and viewpoints of Australian-Chinese, is crucial to comprehend their integration to Australia as minorities. The purpose of this study was to understand the language used of shaping young Australian Chinese participants identities and the effects of being in between Australian Chinese and multicultural communities.

2. Literature review

Language is an essential component of identity and plays a significant part in determining who we are as well as our individual and social identities in a global context that is increasingly multilingual and multicultural. The languages that we speak serve as an index, a mould, and a catalyst for the redefinition of our national cultural identity [47]. Immigrants who successfully assimilate into a new culture develop a feeling of ethnic identity, which can be defined as a sense of affiliation or belonging to a particular ethnic group within a larger civilization [40]. Immigrants are better able to appreciate their ethnic membership, comprehend their connection to traditional culture, and build self-esteem through a sense of belonging when they have an ethnic identity [15].

Biculturalism is the result of integration or balance in the process of acculturation. It is more likely to occur when two cultures are compatible rather than opposite [10]. Most ethnic minorities living in different mainstream cultures are bicultural. While interacting with and learning from the mainstream culture, they maintain their own unique culture, values, customs, beliefs and habits [2]. Associated with feelings of pride, uniqueness, and a rich sense of community and history, bicultural identity is considered the healthiest form of ethnic identity as it gives greater flexibility and adaptability, and is a potentially positive attribute of today's global world [2] [23] [48]. Thus, in this diverse world, the cultivation of this attitude is highly encouraged.

Scholars such as LaFromboise et al. [28] suggest that there are two dimensions in bicultural personal and cultural identity. Simultaneously, they [28] demonstrate that individuals with bicultural competence not only have knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, but also have positive attitudes towards minority and majority groups, which promote communication or the flow of knowledge between the two cultures. Bicultural individuals usually develop a cultural zone switching to navigate their dual cultural identities [10].

However, when the mainstream and ethnic culture is considered in the direction of the highly unique, or immediately isolated, bi-cultural integration is not easy [50]. Based on the idea of McKay and Wong [30] and Richmond [43], this condition is experienced by many ethnic minority groups in Australia, Canada, United States and Western Europe, all of which have an increased number of immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa. Therefore, minority adolescents might be highly aware of the discrepancies between the mainstream and their ethnic cultures which can be a source of internal conflict [3].

Various forms of bicultural identity have been documented in the literature, including fused identities [28], blended biculturalism [39], hyphenated identities [45], and bicultural identity integration [3]. The definition and development of cross-cultural identity by scholars of cross-cultural communication are formed by the frequent flow between different identity choices.

Australia has experienced a flowering of study into language maintenance, particularly since Clyne and his colleagues' ground-breaking work on immigrant languages through systematic examination of Australian Censuses [44]. Younger generations of immigrants typically begin to demonstrate a remarkable inclination towards shifting from their heritage language to English by the age of five [49]. Therefore, the second generation is a turning point that will determine whether the heritage language is preserved or lost. Their research shows that young Australians are increasingly rejecting their parents' (or grandparents') native language in favour of English, therefore ending a multilingual tradition.

In contrast to a previous United States' study [25] indicates second-generation Chinese with low

levels of traditional language fluency can still achieve higher ethnic identity, Mu [32] suggests a moderate to strong correlation between Chinese language (Mandarin and dialects) proficiency and core elements of Chineseness (such as Chinese ethnic identity). Although it is commonly recognised that identity plays a significant role in the maintenance of heritage language, the relationship between identity and language is still complicated and calls for additional empirical research [47].

According to Eriksen and Jakoubek's research [16], a common language may serve as both an influential representation of cultural cohesion and an efficient instrument in the governance of a nation-state. Of the many core values of ethnic identity, language is considered the most prominent aspect [8] [12] [13] [18] [29]. Fishman [18] emphasizes that most culture values reside in the language and are expressed in the language such as greetings, curses, praises, literature, songs, riddles, proverbs, cures, wisdom, and prayers. Clyne [13] contends that speaking a language and understanding it is also an expression of identity. In the study of young people of ethnic minorities in Australia, Louisa Jane Vaughan [29] also points out that non-English speaking Australian young people considers speaking heritage as the indicator of their identification with ethnic groups. Similar point in studies of British-Born Chinese youth shows that Mandarin or local dialect could maintain their Chinese cultural identities [19].

For multilingual Chinese people, Mandarin is the national unifying national language of different ethnic groups throughout the country [56]. Chinese heritage language has a range of linguistic varieties apart from the standard Mandarin [6]. Furthermore, many Chinese dialects are mutually unintelligible, and Chinese dialects should be considered as sinitic languages [55]. Based on the statement, language using could influence the young participants negotiate cultural identities, and Chinese could consider as the heritage language for the young participants in this study.

3. Hybridity Theory and Third Space

Researchers studying hybridity theory believe that immigration could lead to the emergence of a third identity, which is a product of integrating cultures, and distinct from the cultures that originally formed their identity [5] [17] [22] [31] [52]; Other researchers have studied how first-generation immigrants define and create their identity, and how cultural colonization has become a factor in this identity formation [5]. In 1990, according to Bhabha, immigrants and their movement across spaces and identities could complete in a fluid third space. In other words, the emerging of the third space enables other positions to emerge [22] [31]. Bhabha defines the third space as the in-between space, which involves various degrees of resistance, acculturation, and or assimilation synchronously through a fluid negotiation process [4].

In this case, hybrid identity in the center is surrounded with culture and is shaped throughout socialization by specific cultures. Ethnicity is also a core element that nourishes and shapes culture. Language is another core element that shapes and reflects culture and cultural-social belongings. The way we speak the language reflects the way we choose to perform our identity in various speech communities to show our degree of belonging and ownership of those communities in different spaces. Therefore, culture, ethnicity, and the language that an individual speaks cannot be separated from each other because they are closely intertwined and shape identity. The interaction of multi-culture and multi-language in diverse environments finally forms hybrid identities within third spaces.

Thus, understanding hybridity theory and third spaces provides an approach to realizing the thinking and practices of young people engaged in identity development. The operation of third spaces for Chinese-Australians reflect multi-dimension that have integrated Chinese and Australian culture. It dissects how these young Australian Chinese actualize both languages applied, and how they handle hybrid identities in group and practice.

4. Method

Table 1 below shows the details of the participating young people. The names of participants were anonymous and the places were identified as common geographical names. During the pandemic, I organised the zoom meeting online as the focus group [54] site which was video-recorded. In the focus group, I attempted to elicit information regarding their language experiences, the feelings of belonging to cultures and religions.

In this small-scale research, the focus group as a data collection tool is more cost effective and adaptable to the research approach and design [38]. All three participants took part in the focus group

which was 'one-off' encounters [38]. Focus groups are used as a primary method of gathering data, and its purpose is to examine both the substantive topics of conversation and the interactions among respondents [7] [26]. The researcher plays the role of moderator of group discussion on the topic of their cultural identities' construction experiences.

The focus group data were coded on the basis of research questions [35]. To describe what participants, express in the conversation and discussion, as well as to understand how they explain their social interactions and their social experiences from language using, descriptive coding helped me to further analyze the processes, experiences, contexts of identity negotiation, and actual or imagined third space experiences in more detail.

Name and gender	Place of birth	Parent's local dialect	Age	Education	Job
Jeff (male)	China	Mandarin/Xinghua	32	PhD	academic
Rina (female)	China	Mandarin/Nankinese	25	Bachelor	Part-time salesman
Cathy (female)	Australia	Mandarin/ the Wu dialect	23	Master	University student

Table 1: Profile of participants

5. Findings: Mandarin/local dialect and English Language in Practice

The findings of identification focus on bicultural identity development [10] [28], which from languages using perspective [28] [16]. Adopting Smolicz et al. [46] core cultural values, the aspects of culture in this study are limited to language using. Language using in Chinese includes both Mandarin and local dialect.

The most important cultural aspect of belonging to a social group is language [46]. Louisa Jane Vaughan [29] suggests that speaking an ethnic language is the most obvious evidence of a sense of belonging to an ethnic group among young Australians of ethnic minority groups. This linguistic identification with an ethnic group is adopted by all participants of the study whose home language is Mandarin and local dialect.

Language using could create a conflict zone for young people in two cultures. Depending on the length of stay in Australia, one participant immigrant expresses difficulty in speaking and understanding English at his/her first arrival, whereas the Australia-born participant expresses difficulty in learning academic Mandarin. Another immigrant's challenges with the English language did not last more 2 months, and all the 1.5 generation immigrants all had previous English education at schools in China. Yet, when they look back and think about their immigration experience, rather than their identity as a Chinese minority, their language is the most persistent challenge they express that they had to overcome with while practicing hybrid identities. What follows is an in-depth analysis that reflects the real-life experiences of 1.5 generation versus 2 generation participants; practices elements, namely language, that affect identity and belonging to speech communities.

Jeff migrated to the Australia when he was 8. During the conversation, he is entirely positive about his life in Australia, but when I ask him about the experiences of the time he moved to the Australia, he states,

It took a month to adapt the life in Australia for me; I mean it took a month to be able to speak enough English when I was at that young age to start interacting with friends. I think children that fairly quick (Jeff, male, 32).

Jeff does not express many challenges that he could remember in Australia upon the first arrival, other than linguistic, but it did not take longer than a few months, because of his young age.

When we had conversation, he returned to China, hired by a famous University. His current workplace may have contributed to his feeling of being Chinese, as he rarely uses English as his daily language and does not make any mention to his colleagues of having grown up in Australia. He explains:

Now I have to use Mandarin, all my students are Chinese, and most of my co-workers are Chinese too, I totally immerse in Chineseness! I haven't told my colleagues I am Australian citizen; I don't want to be special (Jeff, male, 32).

However, he also expresses he predominantly identify himself as being Australian in the conversation, all the language he applied was English. As a Chinese man influenced by Chinese cultural implicit, Jeff indicates growing up in a country where he is predominantly exposed him to names of Anglo-Saxton or European Roots, Jeff remembers these names much more clearly than he would Chinese names.

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Rina migrated to Australia at the age of 10 and she states that language thing in the first years.

I used 4 years to adapt to the life in Australia, especially language was the hardest. I didn't know how to express myself and how to deal with people because it was hard to not to speak at the beginning. I had to study hard but it was a poor situation. Although now Mandarin is my first language, thankfully I speak English good enough as well (Rina, female, 25).

Rina's immigration experience illuminates her difficult situation not being able to speech English, and then her effort to learn English to feel comfortable in Australia society. As Rita attended high school, she still was afraid of talking in regular mainstream classes because she feared that if she said something wrong in front of native English speaker, she would be embarrassed. When asked to do group work in regular classes, Rita either worked alone, or she had to rely on group members who were native English speakers because her English was not good enough to enable her to fully participate in regular classes. Rita found a sense of belonging among Mandarin-speaking peers. She also expresses in the focus group that Mandarin was still her more dominant language. Rita also feedbacks the terminology in career learning is a reason why she dropped from university:

In my nutrition class, most of students were white people (native speakers), the language using is a major influence me quiet. Such as in a seminar, we need discuss with other people who were all white people, and they were talking about something I can't understand or slang I don't know. I had a fairly low self-esteem when I experienced these. I don't in their pop cultures, but I like talk with the international students or students who have the same immigrant experiences with me. So, I didn't feel too much belonging to here (Rina, female, 25).

Also, Rina is the only one who inserts Mandarin words in her sentences while speaking English and demonstrates her story and associating the impressions of both cultures in her identity. Her language reflects [20] explanation of the primary discourse that is used in everyday vernacular speech as a way to reflect one's self-regarding culture. Through integrating a variety of language, she predominantly uses according to the specific social contexts; she reflects her identity as a tool for belonging to social dynamics.

All 1.5 generation' cases indicate challenge, expectedly due to English being their second language upon arrival, rather than identity. More significantly, all immigrant participants claimed high effort and success in overcoming the English language barrier, which indicates their wish to belong to social groups and use language as a tool for belonging to speech communities.

For the participant who was born in the Australia, Cathy, although not as salient as 1.5 generation's language shock, learning Mandarin was more challenging for her, which had some implications of her identity practices as well. Cathy has low proficiency in Mandarin. She only speaks to her mom and very occasionally to relatives. All three young people's literacy skills in Mandarin are lower than their oral skills

I went to a Chinese weekend school when I was in grade two and I did it for two years. I think that really helped me speaking like we can watch Chinese dramas and talk about it with my mom. But I can't write, maybe can read a few words, but not a full sentence (Cathy, female, 23).

As a means of Mandarin or local dialect immersion, visiting China is not always effective. During Cathy's visit to China, she could not find the sense of belonging in her extended family.

I think when I got there a little bit disappointed because they do speak Mandarin, umm, not very well, but they mainly speak the local dialect. I felt like a foreigner kind of (Cathy, female, 23).

Additionally, she states that she feels more comfortable speaking in English as her native language. But she indicates that she showed some effort to learn Mandarin and that she values learning Chinese socially and academically. She also states that she feels bilingual and she switches between Mandarin and English intuitively, which indicates that both English and Mandarin coexist and she feels a sense of belonging to both languages.

I speak English with my friends and university; I speak Mandarin with my mom because her English is not very good. It never changed, form the language point (Cathy, female, 23).

Although English is her native language, she speaks Mandarin words with the family as an indication of belonging and speaks native Australian English among Australians as an indicator of belonging as well.

It is noteworthy that the Australian-born participant indicates feeling utmost comfort speaking in

English and said that she is bilingual, as she feels comfortable speaking mandarin as well; which reflects her hybridity and her determination to feel like she belongs to both cultures.

Hence, the outcomes regarding language experiences of the participants were in line with literature [11] that says the length of stay in Australia affects individuals' proficiency in the host language as well as in heritage language. A variety of language usages of the participants, either in Australian or Chinese contexts, were significant markers of their selected ethnic or national identities [57].

In sum, all the three participants they are bilinguals. The using of two languages not only help participants express themselves, but also reveal their social belonging. All participants expressed a positive orientation to learning language and positive attitudes to being bilinguals. The crossover of languages usage represents hybrid of identity. Participants adjust themselves depend on various situations and contexts; and dichotomous spaces within third spaces among Mandarin, local dialect, and English.

6. Discussions

The three participants show a balanced identification with both Australia and China through showing a sense of belonging and positive attitudes to both languages. As the result of hybrid identification, they have adopted two languages; express themselves in a new harmonious way. It is worthy note that the practices and reflects in Australia are represented as positive, seeing diversity as a strength, and navigating away from potential conflicts.

I found in this study that the sense of belonging and attitude in language using create conflict zones between host culture and home tradition for young people [33]. These conflict zones are reported as language switching and cultural values adoption. For Jeff, the conflict zone is between the current Australian belonging and his career context in China. For Rina, the shift of sense of belonging from university class language using and learning creates a conflict zone. For Cathy, the two languages switching simultaneous remind her of her hybrid identity. The practices they identity as conflict zones are all practices that the participants navigate with positivity, reconciliation, and harmony.

In addition, I found that all three participants' hybrid identities are accommodating to difference. The participants all pointed out that at various thoughts in their lives they felt as if they were straddling different worlds and receiving conflicting signals. In terms of language, the dominant Australian English influences ethnic minority cultures, and in turn, coloured by Mandarin and dialects. The notion of hybridity [5] is one which seems to explain the participants development of different cultural attitudes and different language switched strategy.

Through analysis of the three participants, I also found their identities as being fluid [41]. All the three participants have developed hybrid identities and switch languages strategically, to be 'different people' depending on the situation [53]. Nagel [34] 's description of hybrid identity as a fluid and dynamic phenomenon, is supported by my finding. All three young people have developed a beneficial hyphenated Chinese-Australian identity, and they held more identities in different situations, integrative hybridity.

The result illustrated that third spaces are complex in nature and it is not always easy to separate third spaces or social spaces from practice. In this regard, hybridity theory can be utilized to acknowledge the complexity of third spaces [37] and various degrees of negotiation of multiple identities in the solid body. For participating young people who have developed hybrid identities in Australia, the challenge of third spaces' negotiation and creation depend on the context, and the structure of society [14]. Particularly in language using, regardless of participants' being immigrants or Australian-born, all participants demonstrate belonging to Australian discourse communities at university or at social spaces as a reflection of operation of their hybrid identities and being open to internalizing different cultures and speak the language of the host community and interaction between cultures mutually. Data provided by all participants demonstrate that they fluidly moved between Mandarin and local dialect and English as part of their desire to excel at English, maintain Mandarin and local dialect, and navigate between the two. Thus, Australia, combining theory and practice, values the human regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and aim to serve humanity in various categories such as education, business, economy, media, and intercultural faith, not only in Australia but all over the world. As Cathy states, Australia is different from other places because it is diverse. More specifically, Australia provides multicultural milieu that has cultural harmony.

7. Conclusion

The conflicting spaces as public spaces with the least comfort in terms of identity practices. While not all the young people lived experiences of conflicts in third spaces, all three participants explicitly expressed awareness of the presence and possibility of the notion of differences, otherness, not being welcomed by everyone, and that these were the most typical outcomes in any society, especially in significantly diver societies such as Australia. In short, the results summarize that: Australia as the third space is a complex concept to consider because in the third space the ethnic identity and cultural practice are hybrid in nature and complexity flux according to the specific spatial spheres. Australia provides a third space that creates a new identity in which Chineseness and Australian cultural harmonious coexist. And Australia serves the third space of hybrid identity practice, which adjusts various identities in multiple social contexts.

This study is qualitative, multiple studies, which is an informative resource for educators to see the challenges and multiple realities of Australian Chinese. With the information gathered through real-life experiences and interactions, teachers might be informed and better understand their non-mainstream students; parents could gain awareness of on the surface difference, but also the challenges in representation of hybrid identities; the society will be informed to understand and interact with these people in a conscious way. All these contribute to the integration and belonging of young Australian Chinese to the Australia life, respecting and maintaining their heritage culture and language. This kind of understanding should help to minimize the conflicts and clashes on the populations and on the Australians who contact them. This study could also stand as an informative resource for other minorities. This project highlights the successful integration of young Chinese into Australia society and the ways in Australia third space structure hybrid identity. Australia as a complicated context provides maintaining an ethnic identity, cultural identity, and encouraging adaptation to Australian values and practices in a harmonious way.

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