

Chapter 2

Multilingualism in a Drifting Family

Abstract This chapter presents a detailed study of a Hokkien family migrating from Fujian to Burma in the 1940s and subsequent emigrations of some members in the next generation from Burma to Macao in 1971 and to San Francisco in 1981. These emigrations typically involved children of a young age. Coping with linguistic scenarios varying from one country to another, the emigrants had to make adjustments to the dominant language in a different society. This longitudinal study of an extended family over a period of almost half a century involves unusually rich linguistic experiences, allowing an analysis of language shift in multilingual settings. This adds a third dimension, an intra-familial one, to the micro-interactional and macro-societal perspectives on studies of bilingualism [cf. Li (Three generations, two languages, one family: language choice and language shift in a Chinese community in Britain, 1994)]. A theory, the Youngest Child Model, is proposed to differentiate subtle differences that may exist between children of the same generation in an immigrant family. This theory highlights the fact that sociolinguistic change occurs on a continuum.

2.1 Ethnic Chinese in Burma¹

Despite the lengthy 2,000 km border between Burma and China, the number of *Han* Chinese living in Burma in the 20th century was small compared with other major Southeast Asian countries, and *Han* Chinese were a small minority among ethnic groups in Burma.² This excludes minority ethnic groups of China, from Tibeto-Burman or Tai stock, whose traditional homelands span the border of the two countries. In the 1950s and 1960s the proportion of ethnic Chinese peaked at approximately 1.6 % of the total population of Burma (Mya 1997, p. 118). National

¹The spelling of *Burma* was changed to *Myanmar* in June, 1989. As this chapter relates to the country in a period much earlier than this, the old spelling is adopted here. The use of *Burma* therefore signifies old *Myanmar*.

²This situation has changed in the past two decades.

census figures do not distinguish major DIALECT groups of Chinese, but the following are known to have been spoken in Burma in the 1950s: Yunnanese (a variety of Mandarin, 20 %), Hokkien (40 %), Toisan Cantonese (25 %), Hakka (8 %) and Hainanese (3 %).³ Except for Yunnanese spoken in Upper Burma in the north (which adjoins Yunnan in southwest China), all others were found in and around the Irrawaddy delta in Lower Burma.

Originating from southern Fujian and coastal Guangdong, Chinese migrants in Lower Burma represent a microcosm of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, the majority of these speaking Hokkien, Cantonese or Hakka. As noted in Sect. 1.2, the variety of Hokkien spoken in Burma is akin to Malayan Hokkien in adopting Malay loanwords such as *suka* ‘to like’ and *lui* (<*duit*) ‘money’. Such linguistic influence is readily comprehensible, considering that Lower Burma is part of the area of distribution of Hokkien people and other overseas Chinese during the influx of Chinese migrants between the mid 19th and mid 20th centuries. During this time, they took sea routes from Amoy to Singapore before traveling to other destinations in Southeast Asia such as Rangoon (Cheng 1985, p. 15; Lintner 1999, p. 141). In view of this migration route, Mya (1997) labels these people as Maritime Chinese, as opposed to Mountain Chinese who crossed the mountainous border to enter Burma from Yunnan.

Another common characteristic of the ethnic Chinese of Lower Burma and overseas Chinese in Peninsular Malaysia (including Singapore) during the colonial era was a general trend for specialization and dominance of certain occupations by a particular DIALECT group. To take Singapore as an example, the Hainanese were largely engaged in the business of food preparation, Henghua-speakers (from Putian 莆田, situated between Quanzhou and Fuzhou in Fujian) were associated with the bicycle trade (Cheng 1985, p. 89), and Foochow-speakers were mostly barbers and shopkeepers of coffee shops (Ng 2006, p. 24). In colonial Burma, Toisan Cantonese were typically artisans and wore short-sleeved jackets suitable for their work, whereas Hokkien people were well-known for being traders and wore long-sleeved jackets. Based on this slight difference in clothing, the Burmese refer to the Cantonese as *eingyi/let to* (literally, short-sleeved jackets) and to Hokkien people as *eingyi/let shay* (literally, long-sleeved jackets).

The ethnic Chinese in Lower Burma were mainly concentrated in Latha township in downtown Rangoon. When the British founded new entrepôts such as Hong Kong and Singapore in the Far East in the 18th century, a great number of Chinese from south and southeast coastal China were allured to these colonies for economic opportunities. In spite of identical ethnicity, these Chinese migrants were linguistically diverse and different DIALECT groups would claim their own territory in a neighborhood within which self-contained communities emerged (Rae and Witzel 2008, p. 19; cf. also Zhang 2009 for the early development of colonial society in Hong Kong). People in the community would speak the same Chinese

³The estimated percentage of DIALECT distribution is from Skinner (1951, p. 3), cited by Mya (1997).

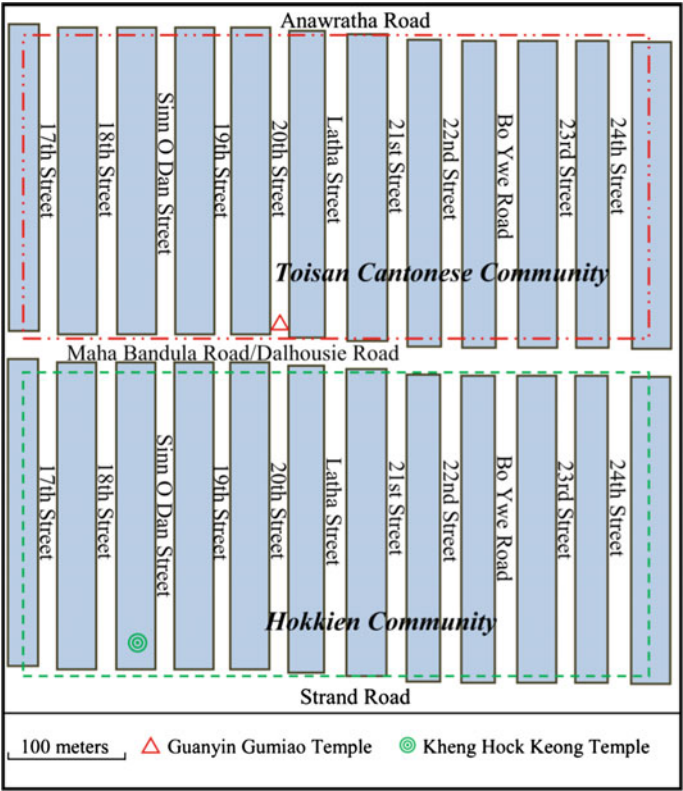


Fig. 2.1 The Chinatown in Rangoon, Burma

DIALECT, not only with neighbors, but also in public venues such as the marketplace, grocery stores, clinics and temples. As illustrated in Fig. 2.1, old Chinatown in Rangoon could be divided roughly into two sections along Maha Bandula Road (formerly called Dalhousie Road): the upper section was occupied chiefly by Toisan Cantonese, whereas the lower section belonged to the Hokkien people.

On the southern edge of each section sits a temple founded and managed by clan associations of respective DIALECT groups. The Guanyin Gumiao Temple (觀音古廟), also known as the Guangdong Guanyin Temple, was first built in 1823 and rebuilt in 1864 after it was destroyed by a fire. As implied by its alternative name, this Buddhist temple caters for the Cantonese community. Completed in 1863, the Kheng Hock Keong Temple (慶福宮) on Strand Road represents the largest temple in Burma dedicated to *Mazu/Matsu*, a deified heroine from Meizhou of Fujian who is worshipped as the goddess of the sea in Chinese folk religion. Being the most respected goddess of the Hokkien people, temples dedicated to *Mazu* can be found not only in seaboard of China but also in many countries across Southeast Asia.

With language and culture well-preserved in a homogeneous district, it was feasible for a native of Hokkien to live and function at ease monolingually for daily

life in the community without the need to learn Burmese or other Chinese DIALECTS, as long as his/her interaction with people outside the community was limited and aided, if necessary, by bilingual family members or friends.

However, such compartmentalization of ethnic Chinese communities in Burma faced severe challenges following the propagation of an integration policy around the time of the country’s independence in 1948, and especially after the military regime came into power in 1962 (cf. Mya 1997). According to Thein (2011), teaching of ethnic minority languages, such as Shan, Karen, Arakanese/Rakhine and Mon, was formally prohibited in the education system under the Burmanization Movement in 1962. This also affected the teaching of Chinese in schools, as Chinese schools were nationalized in 1965. Fueled further by the new regime’s nationalization of the economy and a series of violent protests by Burmese against ethnic Chinese in June 1967, approximately 100,000 Chinese including their families decided to leave Burma between 1963 and 1967 (Lintner 1999, p. 143).

2.2 The Overall Migration History of a Hokkien Family

Unlike previous studies of language use in Chinese migrant families, such as Li (1994), Li et al. (1997) and Chiang (2009), which involve only one instance of migration, this chapter studies three cases of language use and the development of multilingualism in a migrant family with successive migrations. These cases are related to one another within a large family across four generations, but each differs in regard to the migration destination, as well as the time of migration. The first migration occurred between the 1930s and 1940s from Fujian in southeastern China to Lower Burma (details in Sect. 2.4). The next waves of migration concerned the eldest daughter’s family in 1971 and the eldest son’s family in 1981. The former emigrated from Rangoon to Macao (Sect. 2.5) and the latter from Rangoon to San Francisco (Sect. 2.6).

A simplified profile of the members of this family over four generations is presented in Fig. 2.2, where each box represents a nuclear family. The following methods of encoding are used to generate unique codes for each member: (1) a name code consists of a combination of initials from both parents, with an optional number to indicate siblings of the same family; (2) the name code of a female is

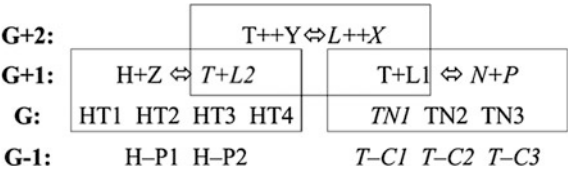


Fig. 2.2 A simplified presentation of an extended four-generation Hokkien family

rendered in italics; (3) the double-arrow signifies a marital relation; and (4) individuals of the base generation (G) are unmarked for generational coding, their parents' generation (G+1) is indicated by '+' between the name initials, their grand parents' generation (G+2) by '++', and their offspring's generation (G-1) by '-'. These unique codes are used consistently below, irrespective of the actual status of an individual in the family at the period of discussion.

Family members within each box share the first initial of the father (except for the spouse). Taking no part in the family migration, the youngest generation, G-1, is included to show the effect of language shift/maintenance after an emigrant family has settled down in a new society. For the sake of simplicity, the family profile outlined above excludes marriage details for the base generation and contains only members relevant to the case studies below.

2.3 Source of Data and Scale of Language Competence

The author, being a member of the extended family under study, has first-hand personal information about the language situations of many of the other members. Descriptions of the following three cases of family migration are based on the author's memory and observation, as well as conversations, rather than interviews, with relatives of the parents' generation about the history of the family. This longitudinal information spans several decades without any written record. As such, not all information can be provided in great detail with absolute accuracy. In particular, it is impossible to pinpoint an exact time for changes in linguistic behavior, as this is typically a process of adapting to a different language setting over a long period of time. Furthermore, individual response often varies from one person to another, even under similar circumstances. However, changes in language use are discernible when a speaker's linguistic behavior is compared after a long interval.

Most studies of language shift in a family, e.g. Li (1994), Li et al. (1997) and Chiang (2009), focus on patterns of language use. In addition to this, two important parameters are introduced in the following case studies: frequency of use and language competence.⁴ These are considered important in understanding changing linguistic behavior in a multilingual environment. The general correlation between frequency and competence is incontrovertible. The more a language is used, the more competent a speaker becomes in it. In a multilingual setting, one tends to select the language one feels more competent using for communication, if possible.

⁴Xu (2007) took these two parameters into consideration in her study of the use of Hokkien in Singapore. She conducted interviews with 80 subjects bilingual in Hokkien and Mandarin, collecting self-ratings of their use of these two languages, first in 1980 and then in 2000. Tests on fluency in controlled situations and on day-to-day vocabulary were also performed to determine subjects' competence in the languages at the time of interview.

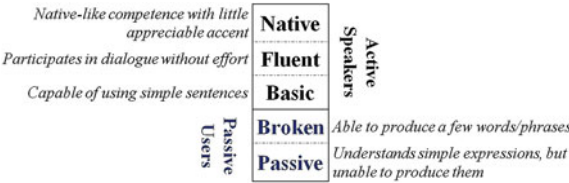


Fig. 2.3 A scale of language competence for indication of linguistic knowledge

Consequently, language preference establishes a link between patterns of language use and frequency of use.

The notion of language competence adopted in this book refers to the ability to communicate in a language in various situations, rather than the overall language skills (which typically consider both verbal and writing abilities) a speaker possesses. No test was administered to determine a speaker’s competence. Language competence is described using the five-category scale outlined in Fig. 2.3. As can be seen from the illustration, the scale of language competence does not indicate incremental productive skills. Instead, it encompasses linguistic knowledge for both active speaker and passive speaker. The assignment of a category is essentially based on self-reported ability of an individual as well as others’ observations on his/her speaking ability in natural conversation.

Notwithstanding similarities in labels or brief descriptions to well-known language assessment schemes such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001), the competence scale proposed in this study is fundamentally different in two aspects from those developed in applied linguistics. First of all, it is not oriented towards language tests and thus its proficiency levels cannot be quantified. More significantly, this scale aims to describe a range of competence from native-like speaker to passive speaker (with the five scales divided into two major parts). It essentially deals with the falling curve of change in language competence associated with language shift, rather than the rising curve of linguistic development commonly observed in language learning. Therefore the bottom two levels under ‘Passive Users’ imply negative cases, where a person has lost substantial knowledge of an ancestral language that s/he used to speak or should have spoken.

2.4 From Fujian to Burma: The First Emigration

After the famous Buddhist monk Faxian (法顯) discovered a sea route between Southeast Asia and China on his return from Ceylon to China by sea around AD 410, the Hokkien people became the first *Han* Chinese to travel back and forth to

Southeast Asia for business and trade (Song 1967: p. 2). Their active sea trade in this region between the 15th and 18th centuries was mentioned in some written documents. During this period, Toisan Cantonese joined the Hokkien in sailing in large junks from the south(eastern) seaboard of China to Rangoon by way of the Strait of Malacca (Lu 1988: pp. 42–43). Strictly speaking, these Hokkien traders were sojourners rather than emigrants, even though some of them eventually settled in Southeast Asia; initially, they had no intention of departing their homeland in Hokkien permanently. Burma, situated in the northwestern part of Indochina, became increasingly appealing to Maritime Chinese in the 1890s (Hong 2007), after direct passenger transportation service between Amoy and Singapore was regularly provided in 1870 (Cheng 1985, p. 18). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries these Hokkien traders continued their tradition of traveling back and forth between Rangoon and southern Fujian as seasonal migrants.⁵

T++Y was among these Hokkien young men stationed in Rangoon. On one of his return trips to Hokkien in the 1930s, he married a Hokkien woman, L++X, and brought her overseas with him. After T+L1 was born around 1940 in Burma, the couple returned to Hokkien and stayed there until 1947. On their final voyage from Amoy to Rangoon, the family was joined by two little daughters, both of whom had been born in Hokkien. After this, the family settled in Rangoon without visiting their hometown in Fujian again, although a few of their children would continue the journey in search of a new home with their own families several decades later.

Living in a house in the Hokkien section of Chinatown (where Hokkien was spoken not only at home but also in the neighborhood), L++X, being a monolingual speaker of Hokkien, could feel at home in her daily work as a housewife. Like most Chinese women of her generation, she had not received any schooling and was illiterate (cf. Sect. 5.1). Although they were far away from home, their language and much of their culture was maintained in this foreign land. For instance, they would dress in traditional Chinese style, avoid Burmese food, and some women opted to deliver their babies at home, as practiced in rural China at the time. The unchanged lifestyle of L++X represented the most conservative sector of ethnic Chinese living in Burma, who were almost untouched by the foreign environment. Naturally, her children, like other small children in the neighborhood, spoke Hokkien all the time and would not encounter speakers of other languages or DIALECTS until they attended school.

The children were sent to Chinese schools founded by the Chinese community. With Mandarin, known as *Guoyu*, adopted as the medium of instruction, these schools in Chinatown could accommodate students of different DIALECT backgrounds, including Hokkien, Toisan Cantonese, Hakka, and Foochew. What divided the Chinese community in the 1950s was not language but political ideology,

⁵To control foreigners such as these living in their country, the Burmese governments handled their legal status by passing a number of laws such as the Foreigners Registration Act of 1940 and the 1948 Union of Burma Citizenship Act (Mya 1997, pp. 133–134).

with pro-communists and pro-nationalists hostile to each other. In school, students would speak Mandarin with each other if they did not share the same DIALECT. Unlike the use of Hokkien as a lingua franca among ethnic Chinese in Singapore (see Sect. 3.1 for details), Hokkien never assumed this function in Rangoon, despite its dominance in number of speakers. Learning to speak another DIALECT was uncommon for Chinese of Rangoon. Apparently, Hokkien served as the ETHNIC LANGUAGE for Hokkien migrants in Burma, whose identity could be defined linguistically, based on their native tongue.

Chinese schools in Rangoon during this period appeared to have attached great importance to language education: in addition to Chinese, Burmese (being the national language of the host country) and English were also taught in primary education. Such a trilingual curriculum was feasible only in private schools. The inclusion of English as a subject was remarkable at that time, since Burma has never joined the British Commonwealth.

Through schooling, T+L1 and T+L2 gradually came to learn three languages that were not spoken at home or in the neighborhood. With exposure to this multilingual setting, a pattern of language use slowly emerged and would be followed by their siblings, except for the youngest one. At this time, the number of children of the family had doubled to six. In 1960 the two eldest children, having lived in Rangoon for more than a decade, were approaching the age range of marriage after which the daughter would move out of the family. Table 2.1 provides a linguistic profile of the entire family (as of 1960), showing their approximate age in parentheses, who they would speak a specific language to, and the level of knowledge of the language (with ‘–’ indicating a lack of knowledge). A language level rendered in bold signifies that it was the dominant language, i.e. the one spoken most frequently in everyday life by that person.

While Hokkien was the unchallenged dominant language of the family, it was not exactly identical to the dialect spoken in their hometown in Fujian. The speech of the younger generation was influenced by the local variety of Burmese Hokkien, which incorporates a number of loan words from Malay, Burmese and English

Table 2.1 Linguistic profile of the first-generation family in Rangoon, as of 1960

| | | Hokkien | Burmese | Mandarin |
|------|-----------|---------------|-------------|---------------------|
| | Spoken to | Hokkiens | Non-Chinese | Non-Hokkien Chinese |
| T++N | (44) | Native | Basic | – |
| L++M | (44) | Native | – | – |
| T+L1 | (20) | Native | Basic | Fluent |
| T+L2 | (17) | Native | Basic | Fluent |
| T+L3 | (13) | Native | Basic | Basic |
| T+L4 | (11) | Native | Basic | Basic |
| T+L5 | (9) | Native | Basic | Basic |
| T+L6 | (5) | Fluent | – | – |

Table 2.2 Loanwords found uniquely in Burmese Hokkien

| Meaning | Hokkien | Source form ^a | Donor |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| ‘potato’ | a ²² lu ⁴⁴ | အာလူး (a lu:) | Burmese |
| ‘ice cream’ | je ²² k ^h ej ⁴⁴ muʔ ³² | ရေခဲမုန့် (ye hkè mun.) | Burmese |
| ‘electric fan’ | pā ²² ka ²² | ပန်ကာ (pan ka) | Burmese |
| ‘(plastic) bag’ | pa ⁴⁴ la ⁴⁴ se ⁴⁴ tiʔ ³² | plastic > ပလတ်စတစ် (pa lat sa dit) | English, via Burmese |
| ‘bus’ | pa ⁴⁴ si ²² ka ²² | bus car > ဘတ်စကား (bat sa ka:) | English, via Burmese |

^aWang’s (1987) Chinese-Burmese dictionary was consulted for checking the Burmese forms

borrowed via Burmese. Table 2.2 presents some examples of well-entrenched loanwords in Burmese Hokkien, not shared by other varieties of Hokkien. These are typically vocabulary representing new objects found in everyday life in Rangoon. Names of tropical fruits tend to be borrowed from Malay (see Table 1.6).

Entertainment in Hokkien was also available in Rangoon, mainly in two forms: puppet shows and movies. In the earlier period, *potehi* (布袋戲), a type of glove puppetry originating in Quanzhou in the 17th century, was regularly performed on the street. Its popularity, however, was not strong enough to sustain this traditional form of entertainment in the Hokkien community. Eventually it vanished from Chinatown due to a lack of new performers.

Between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, a total of more than 200 Hokkien movies were produced in Hong Kong for overseas markets in Southeast Asia and Taiwan.⁶ These movies were set in ancient China, relating classical Chinese stories such as *Butterfly Lovers* (梁山伯與祝英台), *Legend of the White Snake* (白蛇傳) and *Tan San and Ngo Niung: A Love Story* (荔鏡記/陳三五娘). The former two were well-known in Chinese culture, but the latter was famous only in Southern Min-speaking regions. After these classical stories were turned into Hokkien movies, producers started to introduce new themes set to modern times. Many of these movies were shown in cinemas run by Chinese in Rangoon. Using the native tongue of the audience, these movies were greatly welcomed by the Hokkien community. Indeed, they provided not only entertainment to young audience, but also exposed them in a more direct medium to Chinese culture, as well as to mainland dialects of Hokkien.

⁶Hong Kong became the production center of Hokkien movies for two reasons: being the Hollywood of the East, it had the necessary facilities and personnel, and, more importantly, many actors and actresses who were native speakers of Hokkien left mainland China for Hong Kong in the late 1940s.

2.5 From Rangoon to Macao: Emigration of the Eldest Daughter's Family

As noted in Sect. 2.1, the 1960s marked one of the important turning points in the modern history of Burma. Unfortunately, this was also a time marked with social unrest for ethnic Chinese living in Rangoon. Following Chinese tradition, the eldest daughter *T+L2* moved out of the family after her marriage in 1964. Her new family was doing relatively well economically, but the family was deeply caught in an identity crisis. With the ban of private education in 1965, future generations were deprived of the opportunity to learn and gain literacy in Chinese at school. Moreover, ethnic Chinese could no longer stay simply as foreigners as in the colonial era; they needed to apply for naturalization to become Burmese citizens in order to maintain their residency in the country. Finally, another new policy of great impact on the Hokkiens (most of whom were merchants, traders and shopkeepers) was nationalization of business firms, be they big or small. In response to this crisis, a large wave of Chinese departed Burma in the 1960s for Taiwan and Macao, the two most popular destinations where their Chinese identity could be safeguarded. (Hong Kong and Singapore had largely closed the door to these Chinese refugees unless they had professional skills and/or a great wealth.) Consecutive waves of Chinese exodus in the 1960s and 1970s saw a diaspora of Burmese Chinese, whose number was estimated to range from 150,000 to 180,000, heading not only to Greater China, but also the U.S.A. and Australia (Hong 2007). The family of *T+L2* was among many of those who elected to return to a Chinese society.

Table 2.3 outlines the linguistic profile of *T+L2*'s family in 1970, a year before their emigration from Rangoon. Her husband, *H+Z*, although born in Fujian, moved to Burma around the age of eight and grew up in Syriam (or Thanlyin) across Bago River from Rangoon, where he worked and socialized mainly in Burmese, and his use of Hokkien was restricted to within the family. His command of Burmese was better than that of Hokkien when the couple first met, but he caught up quickly after being subsumed into a strong Hokkien-speaking environment. He is not only bilingual, but also biliterate in Chinese and Burmese.

The linguistic profile of *T+L2* had changed little compared to the previous decade. The couple spoke Hokkien to each other and to their children, creating a monolingual setting within the family. When the elder boys visited their

Table 2.3 Linguistic profile of the eldest daughter's family in Rangoon, as of 1970

| | | Hokkien | Burmese | Mandarin |
|-------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| | Spoken to | Hokkiens | Non-Chinese | Non-Hokkien Chinese |
| <i>H+Z</i> | (28) | Native | Native | Basic |
| <i>T+L2</i> | (27) | Native | Basic | Fluent |
| <i>HT1</i> | (5) | Fluent | Basic | – |
| <i>HT2</i> | (4) | Fluent | Basic | – |
| <i>HT3</i> | (1) | – | – | – |

grandmother in Chinatown, they would speak Hokkien to everyone there, including cousins of about their age. Although the parents designated Hokkien as the only language for communication between family members, the two boys were able to pick up Burmese from others such as caregivers who were typically from ethnic minorities indigenous to Burma. Although a caregiver's employment might not stretch over a long period, she would stay with the family day and night, being a live-in nanny looking after the young boys.

By this time the family had moved to a new apartment in an Indian neighborhood in Rangoon. The family ran a small business and converted a room of the apartment into a workshop, where a few Indian workers were employed. At night, Indian hawkers would cry in Burmese 'ice cream' on the street and the boys would often get some delicious dessert out of a cold tube from the hawker. While the linguistic environment of the biological family was supposedly monolingual, the immediate surroundings of the household, in reality, were bilingual. The children's competence in Hokkien and Burmese varied but in this developmental stage they had no problem switching between these two languages, using a simple principle: Hokkien for family members and Burmese for others.

When *T+L2* left for Burma, she traveled in a family of five. This time she was also in a family of five, taking her own children to an unknown small city, Macao, where they would have no relatives or old friends. In the 1970s, Macao was a tiny Portuguese colony, where the majority of the population spoke Cantonese; few could understand Mandarin, let alone Hokkien. During the first days after their arrival, the couple had to resort to using written Chinese to communicate with local Cantonese-speakers.

The two elder boys, studying in the same class, tried to speak Burmese to the teacher on their first day of school, as this was the language they used according to their rule: Hokkien for family members and Burmese for others. Unfortunately, this no longer worked in the new environment. Every member of the family would have to cope with the challenging linguistic conditions and learn the dominant language of the new society in which they now lived. The use of Hokkien at home remained unchanged, but it had apparently been degraded to PRIVATE LANGUAGE, whose function was confined to the home domain. Outside home, the boys would speak Cantonese with their playmates in the neighborhood and with classmates and teachers in school. Burmese had completely fallen out of use in the speech of the two elder boys. After settling in Macao, a new linguistic profile gradually emerged for the family, as sketched in Table 2.4. (Foreign languages taught at school are ignored in the table.)

Since their arrival in Macao in 1971, Cantonese had become increasingly important for every member of the family, with the exception of *T+L2*, who, being a housewife, had minimal need for it. The boys, on account of their young age and extensive use of Cantonese at school and outside the home, experienced more significant changes in their linguistic behavior. Hokkien was no longer the language they spoke the most on any given day, although they continued to use it when speaking to their parents and among themselves. By 1977, a new baby had been born in the family and he was acquiring Hokkien from his mother. The home

Table 2.4 Linguistic profile of the eldest daughter's family in Macao, as of 1977

| | | Hokkien | Cantonese | Burmese |
|------|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| | Spoken to | Family members and Hokkiens | Cantonese-speakers | |
| H+Z | (35) | Native | Fluent | Native |
| T+L2 | (34) | Native | Basic | Basic |
| HT1 | (12) | Fluent | Fluent | Broken |
| HT2 | (11) | Fluent | Fluent | Broken |
| HT3 | (8) | Basic | Fluent | – |
| HT4 | (3) | Basic | – | – |

language of his brothers, led by HT3, would ultimately shift from Hokkien to Cantonese in a few years.

Two major factors contributed to this language shift in the family: disuse of Hokkien by the younger boys, and the mother's enhancement of her Cantonese. Prior to attending kindergarten around the age of five, both HT3 and HT4 were fluent in Hokkien. On his first day in kindergarten, HT3 experienced a linguistic shock, as he could not communicate with teachers and other children. The teachers smiled, probably out of frustration, but did not punish or humiliate him for his inability to speak Cantonese.⁷ In time he overcame this linguistic barrier and started to interact with others in the much broader linguistic environment of Cantonese. Since then Cantonese gradually became his dominant language and was brought to use even in the home domain. In this period his Hokkien had declined not only in use but also in competence.

The introduction of a television set into the home further reinforced the dominant role of Cantonese, since Chinese channels were broadcast in Cantonese from stations based in Hong Kong. HT4, with at least some knowledge of Cantonese, was in a better position than his elder brothers during his kindergarten experience. With the support of HT3, he shifted to Cantonese soon after starting formal schooling, responding naturally to the widespread use of Cantonese in Macao.

This language shift was facilitated by the fact that communication with other family members was not hindered, although the parents might keep talking to the boys in Hokkien, especially the mother. With her deeper involvement in the family-run business in the late 1970s, she started to speak more Cantonese in her daily life. At the beginning of the shift, the boys were required to speak Hokkien at home. However, since non-compliance was not accompanied by punishment, resistance to this change soon dissolved. By the mid-1980s, a rather different linguistic picture had developed for this family; see Table 2.5.

⁷The kind of shock experienced by this small child was extremely mild, and not at all comparable to the horrible experiences of children of about his age in Taiwan during the early 1970s, where pupils would be punished for speaking even a word of Hokkien in schools (see Sandel 2003, pp. 535–536).

Table 2.5 The completed language shift in the eldest daughter's family in Macao, as of 1986

| | | Hokkien | Cantonese | Burmese |
|------|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| G+1: | Spoken to | Family members and Hokkiens | Cantonese-speakers | |
| G: | Spoken to | Parents (sometimes) | Everyone | |
| H+Z | (43) | Native | Fluent | Native |
| T+L2 | (42) | Native | Fluent | Basic |
| HT1 | (20) | Fluent | Native | Broken |
| HT2 | (19) | Fluent | Native | Broken |
| HT3 | (16) | Broken | Native | – |
| HT4 | (11) | Passive | Native | – |

As shown in the table, Cantonese had become the language spoken the most readily by all the members of the family. The parents still employed Hokkien frequently, talking to each other and friends who spoke the language, but its use by the children was extremely limited, as Hokkien was confined to the home domain, or more precisely, for talking to the parents only. Among the four brothers the choice of language was Cantonese and this was necessary, since the two youngest boys had become passive users of Hokkien. On rare occasions, some Burmese could be heard in the household when Burmese dishes such as *lep^he?to?* 'tea leaf salad' and *ōnok^hawswe* 'coconut chicken noodle soup' were served.

2.6 From Rangoon to San Francisco: Emigration of the Eldest Son's Family

Back in Rangoon, ethnic Chinese who stayed in the country were inevitably assimilated into Burmese language and culture. Children received a thorough schooling in Burmese, which has been taught there as the first language since 1965. English has remained to be the other language taught in public schools in Rangoon since the country's independence in 1948. Ethnic Chinese could maintain their ancestral language at home, but developing literacy in Chinese was extremely difficult, permitted only in privately run small classes. Burmese had been firmly established as the dominant language of society. Consequently, Hokkien, once spoken as the sole language at home in many families in Chinatown, had given way to Burmese by the 1980s. In fact, Chinatown in Rangoon was no longer inhabited exclusively by Chinese; ethnic Burmese had moved into apartments left vacant by those who fled the country in the 1960s and 1970s. Table 2.6 presents a snapshot of the changing linguistic profile of T++Y's family (first described above in Sect. 2.4), focusing on the immediate family of T+L1.

Compared with two decades ago, when Hokkien was the language spoken by everyone at home, it was now spoken mostly by the parents at home, but not by the children. The elder children would need to talk to their grandparents in Hokkien,

Table 2.6 Language profile of the eldest son's family in Rangoon, as of 1980

| | | Hokkien | Burmese |
|------|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| G+2: | Spoken to | Family members and Hokkiens | Non-Chinese |
| G+1: | Spoken to | Family members and Hokkiens | Non-Hokkiens |
| G: | Spoken to | Parents (sometimes) and grandparents | Everyone |
| T++Y | (64) | Native | Basic |
| T+L1 | (40) | Native | Fluent |
| N+P | (41) | Native | Fluent |
| TN1 | (14) | Fluent | Native |
| TN2 | (12) | Fluent | Native |
| TN3 | (6) | Passive | Fluent |

although they preferred to use Burmese when talking to each other and to their parents, uncles or aunts. The youngest child, on the other hand, had the least exposure to Hokkien. His interaction with his aged grandparents was also highly restricted, as they could no longer take care of him, even when he was a baby. With the use of home language split between the children's and the parents' generations, the language of the children had completed a shift from Hokkien to Burmese, reflecting a general demotion of the functional status of Hokkien from *ETHNIC LANGUAGE* to *INNER LANGUAGE* in Burma.

With his family of five, T+L1 left Rangoon for San Francisco in 1981, after his parents passed away. Their linguistic adjustment in the initial stage in California was much smoother than that of T+L2's family in Macao. The children were equipped with a basic knowledge of English (which they had learned in school as well as in a private class) and the parents took English courses catering for new arrivals. As a whole, language shock was barely experienced and communication with people outside the family did not pose a great challenge to them. A new linguistic situation with further language shift soon emerged in the family. A sketch of this is provided in Table 2.7, showing the linguistic development after a decade.

Table 2.7 Further language shift of the eldest son's family in San Francisco, as of 1991

| | | Hokkien | Burmese | English |
|------|-----------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| G+1: | Spoken to | Family members and Hokkiens | Children | Non-family members |
| G: | Spoken to | Older family members | Family members from Burma | Everyone |
| T+L1 | (51) | Native | Fluent | Basic |
| N+P | (52) | Native | Fluent | Basic |
| TN1 | (25) | Fluent | Native | Native |
| TN2 | (23) | Fluent | Native | Native |
| TN3 | (17) | Passive | Fluent | Native |

As can be seen from the table, this family had become quite multilingual. All of them were at least bilingual and most were also biliterate. In terms of dominant languages, it was English for the younger generation. An interesting bilingual pattern of language use at home was observed. The parents continued to speak to each other in Hokkien and to their children in Burmese, as they had done a decade ago in Rangoon. The children's home language was primarily Burmese, but English was also used frequently when talking to a sibling. This pattern of language use also applied to interaction with members of their extended family who had emigrated from Burma to the Bay area in California. English and Burmese would therefore be used among cousins, whereas Burmese or Hokkien would be used when talking to uncles and aunts, depending on their level of competence in Burmese.

2.7 Multilingualism as a Result of Immigration

Reviewing the emigration experiences of T++Y and the families of his two children over almost half a century, it is patent that most members of this family have become multilingual as a result of their migration from one country to another. Table 2.8 summarizes the languages involved and whether they were used as a

Table 2.8 Language profile of extended family members of four generations

| | | Residence | Hokkien | Burmese | Cantonese | English | Mandarin |
|------|------|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| G+2: | T++Y | Fujian and Burma | Native | Basic | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| G+2: | L++X | Fujian and Burma | Native | – | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| G+1: | T+L1 | Burma and U.S.A. | Native | Fluent | Basic | Basic | (Fluent) |
| G+1: | N+P | Burma and U.S.A. | Native | Fluent | n/a | Basic | (Fluent) |
| G+1: | H+Z | Burma and Macao | Native | Native | Fluent | n/a | (Fluent) |
| G+1: | T+L2 | Burma and Macao | Native | basic | Fluent | n/a | (Fluent) |
| G: | TN1 | Burma and U.S.A. | Fluent | Native | n/a | Native | n/a |
| G: | TN2 | Burma and U.S.A. | Fluent | Native | n/a | Native | n/a |
| G: | TN3 | Burma and U.S.A. | Passive | Fluent | n/a | Native | n/a |
| G: | HT1 | Burma and Macao | Fluent | Broken | Native | (Basic) | (Fluent) |
| G: | HT2 | Burma and Macao | Fluent | Broken | Native | (Fluent) | (Fluent) |
| G: | HT3 | Burma and Macao | Broken | n/a | Native | (Fluent) | (Fluent) |
| G: | HT4 | Burma and Macao | Passive | n/a | Native | (Basic) | (Basic) |
| G–1: | T–C1 | U.S.A. | – | n/a | n/a | Native | (Basic) |
| G–1: | T–C2 | U.S.A. | – | n/a | n/a | Native | n/a |
| G–1: | T–C3 | U.S.A. | – | n/a | n/a | Native | n/a |
| G–1: | H–P1 | Macao | – | n/a | Native | (Basic) | (Fluent) |
| G–1: | H–P2 | Macao | – | n/a | Native | (Basic) | (Fluent) |

dominant language (rendered in bold) by a family member after the age of ten.⁸ A language shown in parentheses indicates that it was learned in the classroom setting and that the speaker typically did not have the experience of living in the country where the language is spoken. A dash signifies that a language could have been acquired.

As shown in Table 2.8, it is possible to have more than one dominant language for a bilingual speaker, if both languages are spoken proficiently. Across the four generations, monolingual speakers are found only in G+2 and G-1. If mainstream foreign languages such as English and Mandarin taught in school (and placed in parentheses) are excluded, the youngest generation, G-1, lacking any experience of living in different countries, will all be monolingual speakers. In contrast, each family member in the two middle generations is multilingual and many of them speak (or spoke) more than one language as their dominant language beyond the age of ten. In this extended family, the changing linguistic environment, which has arisen through migration, inevitably prompted the development of bilingualism or multilingualism in the process of adjusting to the new society.

In this type of bilingualism/multilingualism, the sex of the speakers is not a deciding factor, but the length of exposure to the dominant language of society is crucial. The loss of Hokkien in the speech of the G-1 generation, for example, is attributed to the fact that the parents of the *T-C* children speak English at home, and that Cantonese is spoken by the parents of the *H-P* children. The father in both these families is fluent in Hokkien, as is the mother in the former, but the dominant language of the local society instead of Hokkien is adopted as the home language in both families.

Maintenance of an *INNER LANGUAGE* is largely achieved through the availability of a strong speaker of the language within the family. This speaker need not be monolingual, but should speak it as the dominant language so that younger members will switch to this language when talking to her/him. This role of language anchor in the family is typically fulfilled by a grandmother. If she is able to serve as a caregiver of the grandchild, the child will grow up to be at least a passive speaker of the ancestral language. This connection between the role of a grandparent and acquisition of an ancestral language by young children is termed here *GRANDMA'S EFFECT*. The *GRANDMA'S EFFECT*, among a score of other factors, has contributed to disparity in their level of knowledge in Hokkien among siblings in the families studied above.

While the term *GRANDMA'S EFFECT* does not appear in linguistics literature, the vital role of a grandparent in a bilingual family is attested in many case studies in Taiwan. For instance, it is from a grandmother that young children acquired Southern Min, e.g. Huang (1995, p. 237); Sandel (2003) and Sandel et al. (2006), or Hakka, e.g. Huang (1995, p. 238). Park (2006) also examines linguistic resources provided by a grandparent in Korean families living in New York.

⁸This age is chosen on account of a person's limited domain for social interaction before becoming a teenager and relative stability in a language spoken past the age of ten.

Every family has a grandparent, but his/her role in the language acquisition of his/her grandchild varies from family to family and from culture to culture. This variation implies that GRANDMA'S EFFECT may be stronger in certain cultures. It is more likely to exist in traditional Oriental culture, where an extended family lives together under one roof. Variation on GRANDMA'S EFFECT can also occur within the same family. For instance, while this kind of effect is often seen on elder grandchildren, it may be lacking on the younger ones. This discrepancy is typically ascribed to the aging process which may prevent a grandparent from taking care of a grandchild who is much (say, 8 or 10 years) younger than the eldest one. Even if health is not a concern, psychologically an older grandparent is likely to become less enthusiastic about this role after s/he has taken care of many grandchildren in long service.

2.8 The Youngest Child Model: Hokkien as a Legacy of Drifting Families

Research on self-identity of Asian Americans reveals that overseas-born Americans have more complicated identity issues than their siblings born in the U.S.A. Young immigrants of the same generation from a family may not always share similar growing-up experiences, suggesting the existence of a 1.5 generation between the parents' generation and the locally-born one (e.g. Danico 2004). Likewise, cross-generation data presented in this chapter patently shows that language shift in an immigrant family does not progress on the basis of a generation as a unit. This is contrary to the common, but over-simplistic, assumption that describes language shift as follows:⁹

After generation G+1, monolingual in language X, migrates from X-land to Y-land, the next generation G becomes bilingual in X and Y, and then generation G-1 may become monolingual again, but in language Y.

Such a generalization, while reflecting an overall trend, has missed individual variations which may exist among members of the same generation, as recurrently observed in the case studies above as well as cases concerning ethnic minorities in China (which are not presented here). To better analyze the extraordinarily complex and dynamic nature of the gradual process of language shift, the Youngest Child Model is proposed as follows:

Taking the individual as the smallest affected unit in the process of language shift, a significant macro-event such as migration of a family may prompt different effects on individuals of the same generation, with the youngest child the most likely to exhibit a dramatic change in linguistic behavior.

⁹For instance, Waters and Jiménez (2005, p. 110) observe in American society that 'the immigrant generation ... remains dominant in their native tongue, the second generation is bilingual, and the third generation speaks English only'.

It should be stressed that the reference made to the youngest child in this model should not be interpreted literally. The model does not predict a necessary effect on the youngest child, or confine the effect to the youngest child only. What it intends to highlight is that when language shift occurs in an immigrant family, the change is more likely to start from the youngest end rather than from the eldest side. For example, in HT's family, both HT3 and HT4 completed language shift to Cantonese. One obvious difference between the two is that the former has directly participated in the immigration event (albeit at a very young age), whereas the latter lacked this experience. If the immigration is taken as the significant event for the family, the youngest child involved in this case will be HT3.

Considering the minimal use of Hokkien by HT3, HT4, and TN3 beyond their early childhood years, the youngest sons in these two families have become passive users of Hokkien according to the scale of language competence described in Sect. 2.3, while their elder siblings have retained more knowledge of Hokkien. The different linguistic profiles of the siblings result from varying degrees of impact from events that have happened in the family. These include presence/absence of GRANDMA'S EFFECT, place of birth, and the status of Hokkien in the society (or societies) where they grew up and lived. The diagrams in Figs. 2.4 and 2.5 give a visual representation of the impact of some of these significant events in the lives of the younger generation on the development of their competence in Hokkien. The length of the bars represents the relative age of the siblings, with various starting points to indicate difference in birth dates.

Language shift, being a gradual process, typically proceeds with distinct results across generations. Within the affected generation, individual difference is typically discernible such that the youngest one(s) is/are subject to the greatest impact and will complete the change in language use sooner than the elder one(s).

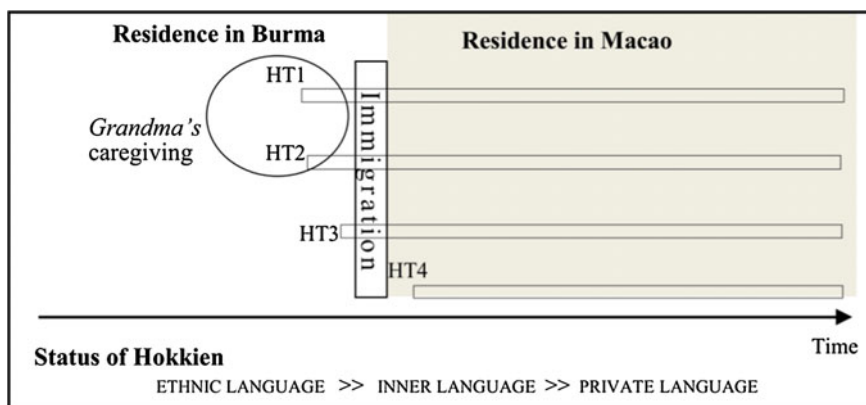


Fig. 2.4 Significant factors that affect linguistic profiles of the four HT siblings

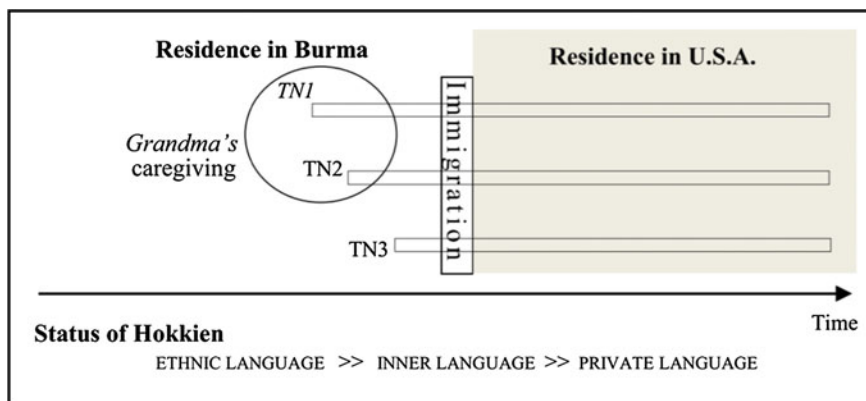


Fig. 2.5 Significant factors that affect linguistic profiles of the three TN siblings

The Youngest Child Model may be formulated as follows:

- (i) three (or more) elements A, B, and C (etc.) form a set S and these elements hold a chronological order in which $A > B > C$;
- (ii) if a significant factor F applies to S to make $S \subseteq Z$ (all elements of S becoming elements of Z), C will be the first one to belong to Z ($C \in Z$) and then the other elements ($\{A, B\} \in Z$).

Symbolically, the Youngest Child Model can be expressed as follows:

$S = \{A, B, C\}$ and $A > B > C$, if $F(C \in Z)$, then $F(\{A, B\} \in Z)$ and $S \subseteq Z$.

When this formulation is applied to the case of HT siblings, the details are as follows:

S = the set of Hokkien-speaking siblings, where $A = HT1$, $B = HT2$, and $C = HT3$; F = immigration to Macao; Z = Cantonese as a dominant language at home such that $F(C \in Z)$ is true (HT3 speaking Cantonese as a dominant language at home after the family's immigration), entailing $F(\{A, B\} \in Z)$ and $S \subseteq Z$ (the elder siblings following suit in their linguistic behavior).

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