Preface

Previous works from different areas of study, such as child language study, language acquisition study, and bilingualism study, have argued about and shown the relation between home language and children's language competence. However, many of these studies have focused mainly on the English language and languages other than Mandarin. The subjects of these studies are also mainly children from Europe and United States whereby the language environment is composed of more alike languages. Similar studies on Mandarin competence of children in the complexly composed multilingual environment of Asia are comparatively rare. To contribute some insights into Mandarin competence of children living in the Asia region, this book presents a study on Mandarin competence of ethnic Chinese children in Singapore, a multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural metropolis city in Asia.

In Singapore, due to its unique multilingual environment and language education policies, its population, inclusive of ethnic Chinese, underwent a drastic home language shift over the past 15 years. Among the Chinese population, more than 50 % of the ethnic Chinese families have foregone their ethnic language (i.e., Mandarin and its dialect) as their home language and preferred to communicate at home using English, so as to expose and familiarize their children with the medium of instruction for formal education in Singapore. This home language shift has created a spectrum of Chinese children ranging from predominantly Mandarin-speaking (equivalent to L1 speakers of Mandarin) to predominantly English-speaking children (equivalent to L2 or FL speakers of Mandarin). This spectrum of Mandarin speakers, to a certain extent, represented different types of Mandarin learners, be it L1, L2, or FL learners. An analysis of the language data of children from different home language backgrounds will probably shed light into Chinese language teaching for different types of learners.

As such, this book aims to share its findings with linguists, language educators, and language policy makers both local and worldwide. It will provide its readers with a detailed sketch of Mandarin competence of different types of Chinese learners in Singapore, in terms of lexical diversity, syntactic complexity, and code-switching tendency. From the results attained, there are statistical differences in

lexical diversity and syntactic complexity among the compared groups of learners. These differences in linguistic competence were also found to be positively correlated to learner's increased Mandarin exposure at home. Code-switching tendency differences were also found to be statistically significant among the different groups of CL learners, and significant negative correlations were found on the code-switching indices with increased Mandarin exposure. Though displaying a logical interaction between Mandarin exposure and competence, some intricate findings are also obtained, showing a complex relationship between language exposure and competence in a bilingual context. With these findings, targeted readers will visualize a continua of Mandarin competence and Mandarin exposure that encapsulates the complex variation of Mandarin competence and exposure displayed by different types of Chinese learners in Singapore.

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