

The “Intent” of Mandarin Bilingual Programs: A Discourse Analysis in the Context of Ethnic Chinese Immigrants’ Heritage Language Maintenance in the Public Schools of British Columbia

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Abstract

This paper intends to explore the intent of the Mandarin Bilingual Programs (MBP) implemented in numeral school districts around British Columbia (BC). In the past decades, Canada has witnessed a growing public awareness of multiculturalism, a trend towards globalization, and transnationalism, and the reversal of East and West power relations. Mandarin Bilingual Program and Mandarin Immersion Program, have emerged in the Vancouver, Burnaby and Coquitlam School Districts of British Columbia since September 2010 (School District 39, 41 and 43 official websites). Despite the encouraging tendency towards newly developed Mandarin programs in an English dominant culture, the language used to define the program details on the official school websites raises questions on their intentions for establishing such programs. This paper will analyze the wording, phrases, and graphics from the official information on the Mandarin Immersion Programs online and in news media. It may shed light on the intent and intended learners of Mandarin programs in British Columbia. One may question whether or not the establishment of Mandarin Bilingual and Immersion Programs has anything to do with governmental assistance, enhancement or support for ethnic Chinese immigrants in maintaining their heritage language in the dominant culture of a contemporary and multicultural society such as British Columbia. Obstacles in maintaining heritage language, societal attitudes, social relations, Mandarin Bilingual Programs, and theorizing Discourse Analysis are addressed.

Keywords: Mandarin Bilingual Program, intent, discourse analysis, power relations

Introduction

In the past decades, Canada has witnessed a growing public awareness of multiculturalism, a trend towards globalization, and transnationalism, and the reversal of east and west power relations. Mandarin Bilingual Program and Mandarin Immersion Program, have emerged in the Vancouver, Burnaby and Coquitlam School Districts of British Columbia since September 2010 (School District 39, 41 and 43 official websites). Despite the encouraging tendency towards newly developed Mandarin programs in an English dominant culture, the language used to define the program details on the official school websites raises questions on their intentions for establishing such programs. This paper will analyze the wording, phrases, and graphics from the official information on the Mandarin Immersion Programs online and in news media.

Obstacles in maintaining heritage languages

Cummins (1992) initially defined the term *heritage language* (HL) in Canada as languages other than Canada's official and indigenous languages (Duff & Li, 2009). Kondo-Brown (2006) addresses the severity of heritage language shift or loss after landing in a receiving society by stressing one study conducted on Japanese students in the United States; If the child's arrival age was less than ten, their English proficiency level was likely to surpass their Japanese proficiency level within two years, even if they continued their Japanese language studies in the United States. Under an assimilation pressure, few heritage language speakers maintain a proficiency of their HLs and most shift to one of Canada's official languages instead. Why has such a case become the norm in a highly Mandarin-speaking society such as Vancouver? Even though this article does not center around racialized exclusions and white supremacy, which were and are still integral to economic, legal, and institutional marginalization in British Columbia, one cannot fully comprehend the obstacles of maintaining a heritage language, such as Mandarin Chinese, without first exploring the historical and social circumstances of a pre-Multiculturalism context. Since the first arrival around 1858 and the larger-scale immigration a few decades later due to the labour shortage for the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) construction, Chinese have been the victims of cruel legislative controls and institutional racism (Lee, 1971). For instance, a head tax was in effect from 1885 until 1923 which limited the number of incoming Chinese immigrants. From 1924 onward to 1947, Chinese were barred from entering Canada all together by the most comprehensive legislation (Wickberg, Con, Johnson and Willmott, 1982). For those already inside the country, highly regulated laws were implemented (Li, 1999). The discriminatory policy eventually became an embarrassment for Canada, and therefore, towards the end of the Second World War, many laws against the Chinese were repealed and a somewhat improved social status emerged. Still, racism and exclusionary laws prevented Chinese from being included in many white communities. In Victoria, Chinese children were segregated at school and were not trusted as equals. Chinese were also excluded from certain professions, paid less for the same jobs compared to their white counterparts, and prevented from moving upward because they could only acquire labouring and low skill jobs (Li, 1999), not to mention that they had no civil rights until 1947. Virtually every social evil was blamed on them, including corruption, depressing wages, dishonesty, and epidemics. Until World War II, the Chinese had the most severe sex imbalance among all ethnic populations due to the Head Tax and immigration ban, because men who had immigrated for the CPR construction could not bring their families into Canada. Even at the turn of the twentieth century,

there had been two anti-oriental riots in Vancouver, British Columbia; both were ignited by an anti-Asian influx sentiment (Morton, 1974).

In addition, even at the peak of the Multiculturalism trend in the late twentieth century, there were many biased portrayals of Chinese in the media (Jiwani, 2006; Li, 1999). It is this internalization of psychological violence from the dominant culture that affects not only the identity of Chinese individuals, but also the perception that the rest of the population carries. In the midst of this racial discrimination, how could ethnic Chinese immigrants expect public support for preserving a minority language (Jiwani, 2006)? Li (1999) stated in his study that these incidents suggest that despite their long history and contribution to Canada, Chinese Canadians are still, to this day, treated as a public burden by many members of our society. Anti-Chinese sentiments have been considered a lasting factor. Racial inequality, unbalanced power relations, and a lack of minority rights are intertwined with, and contribute to, the difficulty of maintaining Chinese as a heritage language.

Societal attitudes, social relations and (the lack of) support

Commissioned in the seventies by the federal government, before the Multiculturalism Act was enacted as a law, the Majority Attitudes Study (Berry et al, 1977) suggested that while Anglophone and Francophone Canadians were generally positive towards the idea of cultural diversity, they tended to reject the idea of teaching minorities' languages in public schools. The Non-Official Languages Study (O'Bryan, Reitz & Kuplowska, 1976), also conducted by the government around that time, showed that the majority of minorities felt that public institutional support was needed if the goal of promoting minority languages was meant to be achieved. There was strong evidence of minorities' language loss being a severe problem facing ethnic groups across generations, yet many believed that the responsibility of language maintenance should be borne mainly by parents or ethnic communities. Scholars (O'Bryan et al, 1976) pointed out that the rapid intergenerational loss of language indicated that this monumental task was most likely beyond the efforts of parents and communities alone. Both studies show the division in public opinion on the subject of maintaining minority languages before the Multiculturalism era in Canada.

Progression of Chinese Language maintenance in public school systems

In 1947, after many decades, the unjust immigration policy against the Chinese was repealed and a new immigration policy based on individual merit took its place in the 1960's. After all that, one might expect that the recent Chinese immigrant children could enjoy a fair societal status in our society. However, the evidence shows that when they initially encounter a dominant language in public school, most of them have a painful transitional experience (Zhang, 2010). Surprisingly, even with the many Chinese Language K-16 Programs already established in the United States (Wright, 2007; Li & Lu, 2008), and similar Mandarin Bilingual Programs (MBPs) in Alberta since 1982 (Genesee, 2009), there had been no Chinese Language Programs in the Greater Vancouver public school system until 2010 (Brand, 2010).

The past few decades have seen growing public awareness, globalization, and an evolution of power relations between China and North America, and in recent years some public school districts in British Columbia have started offering Chinese Language instruction. Among the dominant language programs, a few Chinese programs have emerged in the Vancouver, Burnaby, and Coquitlam School Districts of British Columbia, as of September 2010 (School

District 39, 41, and 43 official, 2016). That being said, these recent Chinese Bilingual Programs, in the public school system, clearly state or indirectly imply in their criteria that they are not intended for students whose first language is Chinese. The Burnaby School District may be the only exception, as they do not explicitly describe who are not eligible for the programs (Burnaby School District 41, 2016), however this does not suffice to indicate that these programs support heritage language. To explore these MBPs' true intent, a discourse analysis will be undertaken later on.

Economic significance of China rising on the global stage

Since the BC China memorandum in 2008, MBPs have been on the rise in Vancouver's public school system. Many factors that influenced this implementation include Canada's history of bilingual school programs in the form of French Immersion (Canadian Heritage, 2009), Greater Vancouver having the highest concentration of Chinese in Canada, and China's gradual rise as a super power on the world stage due to its financial strength (Brand, 2010). China has had the fastest growing gross domestic product (GDP) for the past 25 years, and is the third largest economy in the world. Mandarin is also the most spoken language in the world, spoken by one in every six people on Earth. In business, it is the second-most prevalent language after English. The trend and need for MBPs emerged as a result of these contributing factors, in terms of multiculturalism, demographic change, and global competitiveness.

Mandarin Bilingual Programs in three school districts in British Columbia

Vancouver School District (SD39)

In March 2010, School District 39's Dr. Annie B. Jamieson Elementary commenced its first MBP at grades four and seven, with the possibility of continuing on to high school at Eric Hamber Secondary (SD 39, 2016). In the Early Mandarin Program children learn and are instructed in Mandarin for part of the day. The day is structured to allocate 50% of the time to Mandarin immersion. While the core curriculum is taught in English, some of the subjects taught in Mandarin include Language Arts, Music, Physical Education, and Career and Personal Planning. However, this program is linked to a special program called Strings Program, which is very competitive and for enrichment purposes, thus this MBP was not designed to satisfy the needs of those trying to maintain a heritage and existing knowledge of Mandarin. To make matters worse, the space offered is only one fifth of the student demand. In addition, many consider grade four to be a late age for learning a new language, as students starting in kindergarten would benefit most. In 2014, the Vancouver School Board also implemented the program for grades 1 to 3 at Norquay Elementary.

Coquitlam School District (SD43)

In September 2010, SD 43's Board of Education followed suit with a MBP at Walton Elementary (K-5) and plans to expand to Scott Creek Middle (grades 6 to 8) in 2015/2016 (SD43, 2016). It has been a very sought after program, as there are three times more applicants than available spaces. Gleneagle Secondary (grades 9 to 12) is expected to be the high school for the MBP in the years to come (Strandberg, 2014). This program offers a fifty-fifty split instruction given in Mandarin and English.

Burnaby School District (SD41)

In January 2009, the Burnaby School District proposed a MBP that would run from kindergarten to grade three, with learners being exposed to Mandarin language and culture for thirty minutes of instruction per school day. Since 2010, the program has been running at Forest Grove Elementary at the kindergarten and grade one level (SD41, 2016).

Theorizing Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is the field of analyzing written and spoken texts, which is a multidisciplinary approach that can be applied to social contexts and educational practices for examining how text is put together, studies of policy, etc. (Bukhari & Wang, 2013; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) evaluates how discursive sources are sustained and disseminated within specific social, historical and even political contexts (Van Dijk, 1998) in order to explore, question, and disrupt unequal power relations, dominance, and supremacy (Bukhari, & Wang, 2013; Fairclough, 1993).

Fairclough (1993) was one of the first theorists to look into texts and analyse the implications and causal relationships between words that shape power relations and outcomes. He defined CDA as a “discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and process; to investigate how such practices, events, and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped the relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony” (p.135).

In short, CDA is an appropriate research instrument in the field of text and media for focusing on textual details and socio-political contexts (Bukhari & Wang, 2013; van Dijk, 1993). This is the rationale for the chosen method in undertaking an analysis on the texts from the school district websites and media announcements.

Contextualizing the MBPs on the SD websites: The wordings, graphics and implications

Vancouver School Board (VSB, SD 39)

On the Vancouver School Board website, under the Early Mandarin Bilingual section, two places explicitly emphasize the following: “The program is intended for children who have fluency in English”, “...to have students leave at the end of grade 12 with proficiency to a level where they could continue to study Mandarin at university” and “ All students are required to participate in an English language proficiency assessment, as this program is for children who have fluency in English” (SD39 website, 2016). These statements clearly demonstrate that the intent of the program is not to assist in maintaining Chinese children’s heritage language, but to provide a competitive advantage for non-Mandarin speaking children in the working world and global economy.

In addition, “The program is designed for students who will be entering grade four in September and do not have Chinese literacy skills”. Based on this criterion alone, one can be certain that they intend to exclude Chinese immigrant children from such as program, as its true intent is to cultivate non-Mandarin speaking children equipped with this language niche for

future job, work or economic prospects. Unfortunately, this encourages the language loss of those with pre-existing knowledge.

Retrieved from www.vsb.bc.ca/programs/early-mandarin-bilingual

Retrieved from <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/programs/mandarin-bilingual>



Retrieved from www.vsb.bc.ca/programs/early-mandarin-bilingual

The images depicting targeted learners, retrieved from the official website of the Early Mandarin Bilingual Program, further cement this analysis.

Burnaby School District (SD 41)

Burnaby's official school district website, under Mandarin Language Program, states that "The program is designed for students who have strong English language skills", therefore it is not intended for those young immigrant children who, in addition to seeking support in maintaining their heritage language, also need to acquire or improve their English (SD41, 2016).



Retrieved from www.sd41.bc.ca/mandarin-language-program/

The photograph for SD41's Mandarin Language Program depicts two Caucasian pupils dancing with a typical Chinese festival lion. It implies that a targeted student for such a program is not ethnic Chinese, thus those struggling to maintain their HL in the dominant culture are unable to access this resource.



Retrieved from <http://www.sd41.bc.ca/mandarin-language-program/>

Coquitlam School District (SD 43)

In Coquitlam's official Mandarin Bilingual Program application form (SD43, 2016), one of the definitions of the program is the following: "students develop their knowledge of OTHER cultures and the program helps prepare students for global economy." This statement clearly

indicates that such a program is not intended for Chinese immigrant children who struggle to maintain their heritage language, as it is for the dominant group to gain an understanding of OTHER cultures and language.

ca/Programs/Mandarin/Documents/Mandarin%20Ad%202016.pdf



Bilingual Mandarin Program Application Process

WHAT IS THE BILINGUAL MANDARIN PROGRAM?

- Bilingual Mandarin is a program of choice offered by School District No. 43 (Coquitlam) at the Kindergarten through Grade 5 level for the 2016/2017 school year and is located at Walton Elementary School. This program will include Grades 6 and 7 at Scott Creek Middle for the 2016/2017 school year.
- Regardless of their first language, the program offers all students the possibility of completing fifty percent of the prescribed B.C. curriculum in Mandarin (Mandarin Language Arts, Math, Health and Career, and P.E.) and 50 per cent of the prescribed B.C. curriculum in English (English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies and Fine Arts).
- Students develop strong communication skills in both English and Mandarin.
- Students develop their knowledge of other cultures and the program helps prepare students for the global economy.

APPLICATION PROCESS:

- Children must be entering Kindergarten or Grade 1 in September 2016.
- Application forms will be available at the January 12, 2016 information meeting (see below) at Walton Elementary School, and on the district website: www.sd43.bc.ca/Programs/Mandarin/Bilingual on January 13, 2016 at 9:00 a.m.
- Completed application forms must be mailed or hand delivered (no faxes or email accepted) to the Coquitlam School Board Office (550 Poirer Street, Coquitlam V3J 6A7) no later than 4:30 pm on Thursday, January 21, 2016.

Please note that applications for Kindergarten/Grade 1 is done by a random draw and will be limited to the number of spaces available. Siblings of students already enrolled in the Bilingual Mandarin Program at Walton will be given first priority. Please clearly identify sibling status on the application form. **Late application forms will not be part of the draw.**

A parent information meeting is planned for:
Tuesday, January 12, 2016
 6:00 p.m.
 Walton Elementary School
 2960 Walton Ave., Coquitlam

As this is an information meeting for parents, kindly make arrangements to leave your children at home.

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 43 (COQUITLAM)

Retrieved from www.sd43.bc.ca/programs/mandarin/Pages/default.aspx

Surrey School District (SD 36)

In order to provide a point of comparison using a language program other than Mandarin in BC school districts, Surrey's Punjabi Language Program (PLP) is a good candidate to provide such information. The PLP is not only a program in a different language, but an example of genuine heritage language maintenance support.

All content on the PLP is retrieved from Surrey School District's official website (SD36, 2016). Even after examining the program's description thoroughly, one cannot find even one word regarding the targeted pupils for such a program. There is no chosen criteria to enter the program, in comparison to Mandarin Bilingual Programs which often explicitly state and emphasize the requirement of English proficiency. In addition, for PLP, there is no mandatory requirement for students to undertake an English language proficiency assessment in order to be considered eligible. This program was established to help maintain the heritage language of a particular ethnicity in BC, even though the program is under the Second Language Acquisition curriculum. MBPs, on the other hand, were designed and implemented to provide a communicative niche to some non-Mandarin speaking children and foster competitiveness in the global economy. Unlike the Punjabi Language Program, MBPs do not aim to assist heritage language speakers in retaining their first language.

surreyschools.ca/departments/EDSC/AnalyticsReports/Punjabi%20District%20Info%20Sheet%20

Surrey Schools
LEADERSHIP IN LEARNING
Tel: 604.596.7733
Fax: 604.596.5328
www.surreyschools.ca

Punjabi Language Program

Description
The Punjabi Language Program is a four-year course offered as an alternative to French to meet curriculum second language requirements. Students begin their study of Punjabi in Grade 5 and remain together in the program for grades 6 and 7. In order to meet curriculum requirements, students are expected to stay in the Punjabi Language Program from Grade 5 through Grade 8.

The course is based on the B.C. Punjabi as a Second Language curriculum and is taught by a teacher fluent in Punjabi. Between 45 and 60 minutes per day are devoted to Punjabi instruction in a variety of subjects.

Punjabi 5-7
Punjabi 5-7 is offered at three elementary schools. Students from neighbouring schools may also register if space is available.

Punjabi 5-7 Locations

Beaver Creek Elementary 6005 123A Street Surrey, B.C. Phone: 604-572-6911	Newton Elementary 13359 81 Avenue Surrey, B.C. Phone: 604-596-8621	Strawberry Hill Elementary 7633 124 Street Surrey, B.C. Phone: 604-596-5533
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Punjabi 8
Students who have been enrolled in the Punjabi Language program at the elementary level and are entering Grade 8 can choose to attend Princess Margaret Secondary or Tamanawis Secondary for their Grade 8 Punjabi Language course.

Punjabi 8 Locations

Princess Margaret Secondary 12870 72 Avenue Surrey, B.C. Phone: 604-594-5458	Tamanawis Secondary 12600 66 Avenue Surrey, B.C. Phone: 604-597-5234
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Punjabi Secondary Programs
Six high schools in Surrey offer senior Punjabi courses. Punjabi 11 meets the language requirement for entrance into many universities.

Secondary Punjabi Locations & Courses

Princess Margaret Punjabi 8, 9, Intro 11, 11, 12	Punjabi 8, 11, Intro 11, 12 Intro Punjabi 11, 11	Queen Elizabeth Panorama Ridge L.A. Matheson	Punjabi 11, 12 Punjabi 11, 12 Punjabi 11, 12
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Retrieved from

www.surreyschools.ca/departments/EDSC/ChoicePrograms/Languages/Pages/default.aspx

BC China Agreement (Memorandum)

In 2008 Gordon Campbell (the then-Premier), politicians including MLAs from the Ministry of Education, and many city majors went on a mission to China and South Korea to recruit international students to BC. (2008). During this delegation visit, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed by the Premier and Lawrence Gu, Dean of the Confucius Institute (Steeves, 2008). The initial phase of this mutual understanding intended to bring free online Mandarin language courses to anyone in British Columbia, developed in partnership between the Ministry of Education and the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) and delivered through an online portal, LearnNowBC. This initiative aimed to build stronger educational and cultural ties between these two nations, facilitate mutual understanding and foster friendship between China and Canada.

Aside from the diplomatic purpose, the BC. Government has always been working towards building stronger economic and educational ties with key partners in Asia. As part of the Asia Pacific Strategy, the Ministry of Education works to increase student knowledge and awareness of Asia-Pacific countries and to increase the number of international students coming to BC to study. There are an estimated 150,000 plus international students in BC, which includes those studying in higher education, K to 12, and private institutions including career training and ESL schools. International students bring in approximately \$2 billion annually, sustaining the growth of the BC economy (BC Ministry of Small Business, 2015).

This mission was solely market driven, promoting economic and business development and international trade. Little thought was given to the struggles that ethnic Chinese heritage language immigrants encounter in the midst of the English dominant supremacy in British Columbia. Despite the enormous financial assets brought by the ethnic Chinese immigrants for the past few decades, the retention of the Mandarin language has never been part of the mandate for such a partnership and collaboration. Both parties primarily focus on the future economic cooperation and mutual benefits for business and economy. The existing landed ethnic Chinese immigrants were not on the agenda when implementing MBPs for 2010.

True intent of MBP implementation

The true intent of the MBPs was not only specifically addressed in the BC China memorandum, but can also be found from a dialogue with Professor Ross King (2010), the head of the department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC). King articulated that “if British Columbia wants to be a *gateway* for business with China, it will have to invest in more Chinese-language classes from kindergarten to university”. She also states that “we live in a province that is heavily oriented toward Asia in business ties, but the reality on the ground in terms of investments, so citizens of BC know something about Asia, is essentially a generation behind” (Canada.com, 2010). King expresses British Columbia’s need for a Mandarin Immersion Program from K to 16, in order to align with trends in global economy and business culture with China. That being said, the intention in developing these programs is to meet the growing demand for Mandarin acquisition, based on evidence such as the long waitlists for Chinese-language courses at UBC or other post-secondary institutions. Heritage language maintenance for immigrant youth has never been part of the agenda or mandate for implementing MBPs in the school districts of British Columbia.

In addition, BC’s Ministry of Education has clearly stated that it is up to local school boards to introduce Mandarin courses (CBC News, 2010). This allows school boards to create MBPs that serve school districts’ and political agendas, without having to adhere to an across-the-board policy. Unfortunately, this takes away from immigrant children’s cultural capital and perpetuates the hegemonic power imbalance.

Conclusion

Mandarin, defined as a heritage language in Canada, is the most spoken non-official language in the country. It is acknowledged that a proficiency in Mandarin garners a competitive advantage, capital, and resource in business and economic fields. Mandarin Programs are being implemented to teach non-Mandarin speaking students. Despite all this, those with the most potential for fluency, immigrant youth with prior knowledge of the language, are being deliberately left behind.

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I am an ethnic Chinese who was raised and educated in Taiwan. After earning my first advanced degree in Business Administration at Eastern Washington University in the United States, I immigrated to British Columbia and worked in the field of Business for many years in Vancouver. Over the last decade, the focus of my career has shifted towards public affairs, humanitarian work, and teaching. I have been teaching youth at Tzu Chi Humanistic Academy in British Columbia, while involving myself with the Tzu Chi Foundation, the largest multinational NGO in Asia, for international disaster relief and local community support. Being inspired by the work in that field, I decided to pursue a second advanced degree in Education concentrating in Justice, Ethics, and Law at Simon Fraser University. In 2014, I began my PhD studies at the University of British Columbia, focusing on justice to incite critical social change. I consider myself a passionate educator, seasoned globe trotter, devoted parent, and committed lifelong learner.

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