Medium of Instruction in Education and Language Use: The Case of the Hakka in East Malaysia

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Abstract: In the context of education in Malaysia, the challenges faced by the ethnic Chinese population consist of having to learn Malay and understanding the need to acquire fluency in English for economic mobility. Should they opt for vernacular education, they have also to deal with Mandarin, which is not their native/heritage language. Adopting a quantitative method, this study examines how Hakka communities in East Malaysia navigate the challenges and the consequences of their decisions on language use. Three specific questions are addressed: (a) What is the impact of medium of instruction in education on the language used by students at home and socially? (b) Has this impact changed across generations? (c) How has language use in school impacted identities? The findings show that Hakka language is used less in everyday conversations over time. The need to preserve Hakka language to retain their ethnic identity is perceived to be less important, more so among the younger generations. The issue is most evident among individuals who attended Mandarin speaking schools, particularly the Chinese independent schools. The findings suggest an association between the education language and the shift in both usage and knowledge of the heritage language toward the education language.

Keywords: Medium of instruction, heritage language, identity, intergenerational change, Hakka
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1. Introduction

Medium of instruction (MOI) in education plays a vital role not only as the means by which knowledge and skills are transferred but its impact transcends to the language used in daily life and perceived identity. The choice of the MOI is no simple matter. For a country with a population of relative homogeneity the MOI could be its mother tongue. The advantages of mother tongue education would seem obvious; learning is easiest, literacy gains too. In this situation, the only barriers to its implementation are

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the adequacy of the mother tongue in teaching science or technology, and the extent of institutional support, e.g. availability of the requisite resources to support its teaching.

The rise of English as the global language of communication has complicated this equation. Even with a linguistically homogenous population, many countries have to contend with demand for the use of English as the MOI. This demand nowadays has emanated from English being the international language of commerce, its popularity spurred by globalisation. Parents also see English education as a means to give their children upward mobility in their careers or simply as elite markers. English is also the legacy language of some countries' colonial past, although if that legacy strengthened or diminished demand of its use is uncertain. Since English is not the mother tongue of most countries, its use in the schools brings with it challenges, not least of which is the need to learn an additional language and possible impact on the mother tongue.

The Malaysian case justifies examination because it exemplifies all the challenges mentioned above. Malaysia adopts an accommodative education policy in which Malay, the national language, is the MOI in the mainstream national schools, while vernacular schools that teach in Mandarin and Tamil co-exist in the education system. English was the MOI when Malaya was a British colony. After the subsequent shift of MOI to the Malay language, recognising the importance of English in international commerce, attempts have variously been made to teach English as a second language, but with limited success.

For the Malaysian Chinese, there is an additional dimension to this issue of education language. Malaysian Chinese speak several dialects/heritage languages (peripheral languages) at home. The challenges faced by the ethnic Chinese population thus consist of having to learn Malay whether or not they go through the national school in which Malay is the MOI and understanding the need to acquire fluency in English for economic mobility. Should they opt for vernacular education, the growing importance of China being a factor, they have also to deal with Mandarin, which is not their native language.

How ethnic Chinese communities of specific dialect/heritage language groups navigate these challenges and the consequences of their decisions on language use deserves careful study. This paper attempts to address three specific questions. First, what is the impact of the MOI on language used by students at home and socially? Second, has this impact evolved across different generations? Third, how has the MOI in education impacted identities?

To address these questions, the group selected for study is the Hakka community located in East Malaysia, that is, Sabah and Sarawak. The Hakka is the dominant Chinese speech group in Sabah with a population of 148,000, or 58% of the Chinese community (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2003). In Sarawak, the Chinese population constitutes 24.5% of the total population of more than 2.2 million people. Among the Chinese population, 31.5% are of Hakka origin (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). In other words, the Hakkas represent the largest Chinese sub-ethnic group in East Malaysia with over 310,000 speakers (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2003, 2010). The Hakkas were brought to Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak by British colonisers during the early nineteenth century from a few Hakka-speaking districts in Guangdong Province, China, namely, Bao'an, Wuhua, Meixian, Huiyang, Dabu, and a

few others (Ding et al., 2019). In the context of this selected case, the key focus of the research is specifically about how Mandarin, the MOI in Chinese schools and whose prestige has been rising with the rise of China, plays a role in language use and identity formation among the Hakkas.

This paper is organised as follows. The next section is a brief literature review of the use of mother tongue and English in education and their impact on heritage language and ethnic identity, areas of importance for the case study. Section 3 outlines the research methodology and the data used for this study. Section 4.1 examines, for the case study, the impact of MOI on language use by the Hakka community studied. Section 4.2 looks at the intergenerational change in language use. Section 4.3 analyses the impact of education language on the community's identity. Section 5 concludes the study.

2. Literature Review

There exists already a sizeable body of literature on issues like the use of mother tongue as MOI, English as the MOI, and the role of language in maintaining ethnic identity. A number of studies (e.g. Benson, 2004; Guversin, 2010; Kioko, 2015) argued for the use of mother tongue as the MOI while others have warned of its pitfalls (e.g. Garcheche, 2010). Nyika (2015) discussed issues related to the use of mother tongue as the MOI in developing country universities that have long-term consequences.

Similarly, in the area of the use of English, Dimova et al. (2015) reviewed the use of English as MOI in European universities and encountered a range of attitudes ranging from positive to negative. Kyeyune (2003) discussed the challenges of using English in a multilingual context in Uganda, a former British colony. Radu (2015) spoke to students' motivations for choosing English as the MOI.

For Malaysia, the most relevant literature has to do with the teaching of a language other than the home language as the MOI. This discussion divides into two lines of argument. The first relates to the pros and cons of using as MOI a language different from home language, and the second to the impact of this on the language use and identity.

In terms of the former argument, Macedo (2000) argued for using the minority language as the primary language of instruction in education. Likewise, Spolsky (2012) voiced concerns about the potential for conflict between school and home policies should the MOI differ from the home language given that school is one of the most powerful and dominant influences on individuals' language behaviours and family language decisions (Gallo & Hornberger, 2019; Smith-Christmas, 2016). Ding and Goh (2020) showed the tendency of family language to shift from heritage language to education language (i.e. MOI). King and Fogle (2006) revealed how the promotion of 'additive bilingualism' has become incorporated into mainstream parenting practices as a result of the change of medium of instruction. However, balancing the use of heritage language and education language may give rise to both children's sense of failure and parental disappointment (Piller, 2002) or even stress and personal struggle (Ding, 2023). Hence, some children become passive (receptive) rather than active (productive) bilinguals (Döpke 1992, 1998).

In terms of the MOI's impact on identity, how this impact occurs is debated. It is said that language and using language manifest 'who we are' (Wodak, 2012, p. 216). Knowing and speaking a language also involves a personal sense of identity with, and a set of attitudes toward, the community using that language (Lambert, 1967). The role of learning in the 'construction of identity' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53) or the 'longer-term agenda of identity building' (Lemke, 2000) may be greater.

However this language–identity link is constructed, scholars have taken sides on how MOI affects self-identity. Much of this discussion revolves around the identity immigrant children should take. Regardless of whether the host government has adopted an assimilative or accommodative policy towards migrants, migrants in host countries will have to learn the language of the host, and their children educated through whatever MOI the host country government has selected. The consequences of this can range from better economic prospects and sense of belonging for migrants to loss of their native language and traditions. Studies showed how immigrant national identity matters both for the wellbeing of immigrants themselves (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000) as well as for the acceptance of immigrants in the host population (Manning & Roy, 2010). Taking an assimilative perspective, Constant and Zimmermann's (2008) study found assimilation and integration have positive outcomes in the labour market. Likewise, language proficiency and the assimilation are positively associated with employment as well as with wages (Piracha et al., 2023). However, Cummins (1992) warned of the negative consequences of immigrant students' native language loss, including the destruction of family relationships. Similarly, Park (2013) argued for the maintenance of immigrant students' heritage languages and cultural identity through government support. Taking a broader view, Hornberger (1998) warned of the threat posed to indigenous languages from world languages like English.

The above literature has relevance for Malaysia, where in vernacular Chinese schools, Mandarin was chosen over dialect(s)/heritage language(s) (Hakka in this case) as the MOI (Ding, 2023). Mandarin was chosen as the MOI in primary Chinese school at the end of World War II (Han, 1975). This practice is continued after Malaysia gained its independence from the British. Mandarin is also a subject taught as 'Pupil's Own Language' (mother tongue) in secondary school. As such, the change of MOI in Chinese primary schools from Hakka (or other dialects) to Mandarin is expected to impact not only on language use at home, but also identities of those who change their language patterns. This is because language socialisation begins early in life, and much of this socialisation occurs during the compulsory years of schooling (Carter, 2006).

3. Methodology and Data

This paper is based on one segment of a larger study which investigated language and identity of Hakka-speaking community in East Malaysia. This study was conducted over a period of two years and used mainly quantitative fieldwork method. Three towns in Sabah, i.e., Menggatal, Inanam and Telipok, and Bau, a district in Sarawak, were selected. These areas are situated within semirural locales where the Hakka language is still widely used compared to in larger cities. The fact that the settlements selected consist of one primary Chinese sub-ethnic group, i.e., Hakka, makes both

communities more ethnically and linguistically homogeneous than other areas. A survey questionnaire was framed to obtain background information from the respondents, including year of birth, gender, place of residence, and educational background. A series of questions were asked on language use in everyday situations, knowledge of the Hakka dialect, and the respondents' perception on their Hakka identity. The 'snowball' sampling (Denscombe, 1998) process, based on recommendations and referrals from informants and the respondents themselves, was employed to gather the data. The survey was conducted at houses, shops, schools, restaurants, and churches/temples. A total of 920 completed questionnaires were collected. Three age groups based on year of birth (1922–1961; 1962–1989; 1990–2001) were distinguished. Given the dearth of quantitative evidence in this body of literature, the survey we reported here aimed to validate assumptions about the relationship between education language and intergenerational Hakka use.

4. Analysis and Results

This section reports the results of our analysis.

4.1 Medium of Instruction and Language Use

Table 1 shows the types of primary and secondary schools attended by the respondents categorised into three age cohorts, namely, the grandparents (born in 1922–1961), parents (born in 1962–1989) and children (1990–2001). More than 90% of the respondents went to national-type schools for their primary education. Although there is more variation in the type of secondary schools they attended, between 35% (oldest cohort) to 50% (youngest cohort) attended national-type schools (where Mandarin is

Table 1. Types of schools attended (in percentage)

Type of school	Cohort		
	Grandparents 1922–1961	Parents 1962–1989	Children 1990–2001
(a) Primary school			
National school, English school & others	7.2	4.8	2.2
National-type school	92.8	95.2	97.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of observations	242	374	316
(b) Secondary School			
National school	10.0	52.3	50.2
National-type school	20.7	27.6	31.5
Chinese independent school	14.3	15.2	18.3
English school	55.0	4.9	–
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of observations	140	348	311

predominantly used in school for communication) and Chinese independent schools (where the MOI is Mandarin). Over time, these two types of schools became more popular among the respondents, especially after the abolishment of English schools.

Since more than 90% of the respondents had proficiency in Mandarin from their primary school education, further analysis is conducted based on the secondary schools they attended to infer the main language they are exposed to in their early life.

One of the survey questions asked the respondents how much of Hakka they use to communicate with 13 different categories of people consisting of family, friends, acquaintances, and others they meet in daily life. The responses range from 1 that indicates almost always in other languages like Mandarin or English to 5 that indicates almost always in Hakka. These responses are averaged to create a score to measure frequency of Hakka use in daily life. A high score suggests frequent use of Hakka. A regression is estimated using this score as the dependent variable, controlling for state, gender, cohort, and highest level of education to examine the association between language exposure through education and Hakka use.

Table 2. Regression estimations for use of Hakka in daily life and with family

Variable	Dependent variable			
	Hakka use in daily life		Hakka use with family	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
Intercept	2.359***	0.0942	3.346***	0.1269
State:				
Sabah	-0.015	0.0726	-0.167*	0.0979
Sarawak[a]	0.000		0.000	
Gender:				
Male	0.368***	0.0629	0.069	0.0847
Female[a]	0.000		0.000	
Cohort:				
Grandparents 1922–1961	1.522***	0.1139	1.409***	0.1541
Parents 1962–1989	1.093***	0.0702	0.906***	0.0946
Children 1990–2001[a]	0.000		0.000	
Highest level of education:				
Secondary	0.375***	0.0781	0.202*	0.1051
Tertiary	0.000		0.000	
Secondary school:				
National-type school	-0.259***	0.0825	-0.303***	0.1112
Chinese independent school	-0.495***	0.1024	-0.519***	0.1378
English school	-0.061	0.1323	-0.204	0.1785
National school[a]	0.000		0.000	
No. of observations	799		797	
Likelihood ratio (p-value)[b]	0.000		0.000	

Notes: [a] Reference group.
[b] Test for the significance of overall model.
*** Significant at 1%. *Significant at 10%.

Table 2 shows that the use of Hakka in daily life is lower among the females, the younger generation, and those better educated. The MOI and language use in school plays a significant role in affecting language use in daily life. Those who went to Mandarin speaking schools, i.e., national-type schools and Chinese independent schools, are less likely to speak Hakka compared to those who went to English or national schools. This adverse effect on communication in Hakka is greater among those who attended Chinese independent high schools than those from national-type schools.

The analysis is repeated for a variable created to measure the frequency of Hakka use at home. This refers to whether a respondent communicates in Hakka with his/her family including father, mother, siblings, spouse, and children. The results are similar, i.e., Hakka is used less by those who attended Mandarin speaking schools. The effect of education language in displacing the use of heritage language at home is even greater than its effect on everyday use of Hakka including with non-family members. This suggests that Mandarin is more frequently used with family and in daily life by those who have greater exposure to the language in schools.

The respondents were asked if a particular language is deemed favourable, neutral, or unfavourable in the survey. Four languages were covered – Hakka, Mandarin, English, and Malay. Table 3 reports the logistic regression results on whether each language is deemed favourable. The grandparent and parent cohorts are more likely to think that Hakka and Malay are favourable languages than the children cohort. Those with tertiary education deemed English favourable. Generally, MOI is not a significant determinant except for English where those from national-type and Chinese independent schools think that this language is favourable. The implication is that the language deemed favourable is not biased towards the MOI in school, but it is chosen for other reasons.

4.2 Intergenerational Changes in Language Use

The parents were asked to rate their youngest and oldest child on their knowledge of Hakka. Table 4 shows a significant drop in the rated ability to understand and speak the Hakka language over time. The proportion of the children rated to have very good or good knowledge of Hakka has dropped by half or more from the grandparent cohort to the parent cohort. The drop is more drastic in the ability to speak Hakka well than understanding of the language. Even within the same cohort, the youngest child in the family has poorer command of the Hakka language compared to the oldest child.

The respondents were also asked to rate their own understanding of Hakka and how well they speak this heritage language. Table 5 shows the proportion of those who have very good or good knowledge of Hakka. The proportions of those who have good understanding of the language and those who can speak Hakka well have declined over time. While the language used in school did not affect understanding of the language, it is significantly associated with the ability to speak the language. Those who went to the national-type and Chinese independent schools have poorer ability to speak the language. This is particularly obvious among those who attended Chinese independent schools in the children cohort. Only one third of them have proficient oral skills of Hakka.

Table 3. Logistic regression estimations for language deemed favourable

	Hakka		Mandarin		English		Malay	
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
Intercept	1.058***	0.2635	2.149***	0.2968	0.566**	0.2255	-1.023***	0.2393
State:								
Sabah	-0.328	0.2184	-0.690***	0.2179	-0.001	0.1697	-0.108	0.1825
Sarawak[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Gender:								
Male	0.100	0.1809	-0.522***	0.1897	0.146	0.1472	0.164	0.1611
Female[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Cohort:								
Grandparents 1922–1961	1.754***	0.4343	0.241	0.3536	-0.056	0.2660	0.644**	0.2901
Parents 1962–1989	0.690***	0.1924	-0.161	0.2119	0.048	0.1636	0.617***	0.1841
Children 1990–2001[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Highest Level of Education:								
Secondary	-0.028	0.2253	-0.017	0.2331	-0.831***	0.1921	-0.280	0.1929
Tertiary	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Secondary School:								
National-type school	-0.349	0.2294	0.126	0.2467	0.036	0.1910	-0.109	0.2088
Chinese independent school	-0.025	0.2961	0.370	0.3076	0.628**	0.2429	-0.424	0.2721
English school	0.275	0.5273	-0.362	0.3833	0.800**	0.3172	-0.174	0.3253
National school[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
No. of observations	796		796		796		796	
Likelihood ratio[b] (p-value)	<0.001		0.009		<0.001		0.006	

Notes: For the dependent variable, the estimation treats favourable as the response and neutral/not favourable as the reference group.

[a] Reference group.

[b] Test for the significance of overall model.

***Significant at 1%. **Significant at 5%.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents rated by parents to have very good or good knowledge of Hakka

Knowledge of Hakka	Grandparents 1922–1961	Parents 1962–1989	All cohorts	No. of observations	Chi-squared test (p-value)
(a) Understanding					
Oldest child speaks very good or good Hakka	79.34	40.00	60.17	472	0.000***
Youngest child speaks very good or good Hakka	76.26	35.11	57.25	407	0.000***
(b) Spoken					
Oldest child speaks very good or good Hakka	78.10	33.04	56.14	472	0.000***
Youngest child speaks very good or good Hakka	75.80	26.60	53.07	407	0.000***

Note: The chi-squared test examines the significance of the association between the age group and the knowledge of Hakka language. ***Significant at 1%.

Table 5. Percentage of respondents who have very good or good knowledge of Hakka

Cohort	National school	National-type school	Chinese independent school	English school	No. of observations	Chi-squared test (p-value)
(a) Understanding						
Grandparents 1922–1961	100.00	82.76	90.00	87.01	140	0.207
Parents 1962–1989	77.47	84.38	75.47	82.35	348	0.065*
Children 1990–2001	64.74	59.18	75.44	–	311	0.287
All cohorts	72.73	73.09	77.69	86.17	799	0.192
(b) Spoken						
Grandparents 1922–1961	100.00	82.76	90.00	83.12	140	0.594
Parents 1962–1989	76.37	81.25	73.58	82.35	348	0.588
Children 1990–2001	55.13	42.86	33.33	–	311	0.045**
All cohorts	67.90	64.57	59.09	82.98	801	0.008***

Note: The chi-squared test examines the significance of the association between the type of secondary school attended and the self-rated knowledge of Hakka language. ***Significant at 1%. **Significant at 5%. *Significant at 10%.

Proficiency of a language is often acquired through daily practice. There is lesser engaging of the Hakka language in daily situations over time, and this is true irrespective of the type of school attended (see Table 6). The average score of Hakka use is the lowest among those who went to Chinese independent schools, followed by the national-type schools. Among those who went to Chinese independent schools, the score of Hakka use in daily life drops by almost half from the grandparent cohort to the children cohort. After controlling for other factors (state, gender, highest level of

education), the regression results in Table 7 suggest the decline in daily use of Hakka is most serious among the youngest generation who attended Chinese independent schools, and this is followed by those who went to national-type schools.

Table 6. Average score of Hakka use in daily life

Cohort	National school	National-type school	Chinese independent school	English school	All school types	No. of observations
Grandparents 1922–1961	4.3425	4.2204	4.0810	4.3299	4.2729	140
Parents 1962–1989	3.7184	3.7946	3.5239	4.0836	3.7276	348
Children 1990–2001	3.0420	2.3779	2.1088	–	2.6617	311
All cohorts	3.4434	3.2274	2.9891	4.2854	3.4083	799

Notes: The score ranges from 1 (almost always in other languages like Mandarin or English) to 5 (almost always in Hakka). The p-value for the test of differences in means between the three cohorts is 0.000. The p-value for the test of differences in means between the types of schools is 0.000.

Table 7. Regression estimations for use of Hakka in daily life by cohort

Variable	Grandparents 1922–1961		Parents 1962–1989		Children 1990–2001	
	Coeffi-cient	Std. error	Coeffi-cient	Std. Error	Coeffi -cient	Std. Error
Intercept	3.851***	0.2433	3.103***	0.0964	2.864***	0.1715
State:						
Sabah	0.285***	0.1017	0.046	0.0971	-0.245	0.1634
Sarawak[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000	
Gender:						
Male	0.222***	0.1040	0.390***	0.0876	0.342***	0.1152
Female[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000	
Highest Level of Education:						
Secondary	0.230	0.1662	0.582***	0.0954	0.056	0.1613
Tertiary[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000	
Secondary School Education:						
National-type school	-0.175	0.1861	0.0660	0.1064	-0.514***	0.1596
Chinese independent school	-0.300	0.2006	-0.112	0.1385	-0.704***	0.2117
English school	-0.017	0.1670	0.292	0.2024		
National school[a]	0.000		0.000		0.000	
No. of observations	140		348		311	
Likelihood ratio (p-value)[b]	0.030		0.000		0.000	

Notes: The dependent variable is the score for Hakka use in daily life.
[a] Reference group.
[b] Test for the significance of overall model.
***Significant at 1%.

4.3 Medium of Instruction and Identity

The questionnaire collected information on maintenance of the Hakka language and ethnic identity. The respondents were asked if they agree that preservation of the Hakka language is necessary. Almost all of them in the grandparent cohort agree that it is necessary to preserve the heritage language. Table 8 shows that the proportion who agree, however, has dropped over time. Although not significantly associated with the type of secondary school attended, this proportion is the lowest among those who went to Chinese independent schools in the children cohort.

Respondents were asked why the Hakka language should be preserved by the younger generations. One of the reasons given is that engaging with the Hakka language in daily situations is a means to preserve ethnic identity. The reason seems important for the grandparent cohort, but this motivation has weakened over time (see Table 9). The proportion of those who agree that the Hakka language should be maintained to preserve ethnic identity is higher among those who went to national schools and English schools in the grandparent cohort than the proportion who went to Mandarin speaking schools. This association between the type of school attended and the motivation to preserve the language is no longer present among the youngest generation. Consistently, only half of the individuals of the youngest generation agree that maintaining Hakka use is important to preserve ethnic identity across all types of schools.

Close to 90% of the grandparent cohort feel good about being Hakka as reported in Table 10. Even among this cohort, a lower proportion is found among those who went to Chinese independent schools. The proportion who feels good about being Hakka has declined by about 10 percentage point across each generation. The drop is particularly obvious among the youngest generation that attended Chinese independent schools. Only half of them expressed positive sentiments about their Hakka identity.

The proportions in Table 11 reaffirm the findings from Table 10. The youngest generation exhibits the lowest proportion who feel that being Hakka is important. Among them, this perception is significantly related to the types of schools attended, despite the lack of such association for the grandparent and parent cohorts. About 56% of the children cohort who went to Chinese independent schools perceives Hakka heritage as significant in their lives whereas the corresponding proportion is more than 80% among the respondents from other types of schools.

Across all the three cohorts, education background is considered to be the most important element that influences their identity (Table 12). This view, however, differs according to the type of school they went to among the youngest cohort. While education background is the most important element to those who received their education in Chinese independent schools and national-type schools, culture is predominantly chosen by those who attended national schools.

Table 13 reveals the identity that the respondents consider more important. Among all the respondents who went to Chinese independent schools, the ratio is 60:40 for choosing Chinese as a more important identity than Hakka. The proportion that favours Chinese as their identity is even higher among the youngest generation that received their education in Chinese independent schools.

Table 8. Proportion of respondents who agree that preservation of Hakka language is necessary

Cohort	National school	National-type school	Chinese independent school	English school	All school types	Number of observations	Chi-squared test (p-value)
Grandparents 1922–1961	100.00	96.55	100.00	97.37	97.84	139	0.787
Parents 1962–1989	96.11	91.67	96.23	100.00	95.09	346	0.280
Children 1990–2001	89.74	84.69	78.95	–	86.17	311	0.114
All cohorts	93.43	89.24	89.23	97.85	92.09	796	0.029**

Notes: The chi-squared test examines the significance of the association between the type of secondary school attended and if the respondents feel that preservation of Hakka language is necessary. **Significant at 5%.

Table 9. Proportion of respondents who agree that the Hakka language should be maintained to preserve ethnic identity

Cohort	National school	National-type school	Chinese independent school	English school	All school types	Number of observations	Chi-squared test (p-value)
Grandparents 1922–1961	92.86	55.56	60.00	78.95	72.99	137	0.018**
Parents 1962–1989	63.58	52.87	60.87	35.29	58.47	301	0.085*
Children 1990–2001	48.18	45.71	50.00	–	47.93	169	0.945
All cohorts	58.91	51.68	57.78	70.97	58.81	607	0.031**

Notes: The chi-squared test examines the significance of the association between the type of secondary school attended and if the respondents agree that the Hakka language should be maintained to preserve ethnic identity. **Significant at 5%. *Significant at 10%.

Table 10. Proportion of respondents who feel good about being Hakka

Cohort	National school	National-type school	Chinese independent school	English school	All school types	Number of observations	Chi-squared test (p-value)
Grandparents 1922–1961	100.00	86.21	75.00	92.11	89.21	139	0.078*
Parents 1962–1989	82.12	77.08	75.47	88.24	80.00	345	0.491
Children 1990–2001	78.21	73.47	50.88	–	71.70	311	0.000***
All cohorts	81.09	76.68	64.62	91.40	78.36	795	0.000***

Notes: The chi-squared test examines the significance of the association between the type of secondary school attended and if the respondents feel good about being Hakka. ***Significant at 1%. *Significant at 10%.

Table 11. Proportion of respondents who feel that being Hakka is important in their life

Cohort	National school	National-type school	Chinese independent school	English school	All school types	Number of observations	Chi-squared test (p-value)
Grandparents 1922–1961	92.86	82.76	85.00	92.21	89.29	140	0.466
Parents 1962–1989	82.22	85.42	73.58	82.35	81.79	346	0.352
Children 1990–2001	86.54	81.63	56.14	–	79.42	311	0.000***
All cohorts	84.57	83.41	67.69	90.43	82.18	797	0.000***

Notes: The chi-squared test examines the significance of the association between the type of secondary school attended and if the respondents feel good about being Hakka. ***Significant at 1%.

Table 12. The most important element that influences one's identity

	National school	National-type school	Chinese independent school	English school	Total
(a) Children 1990–2001					
Ethnic	9.66	8.42	5.66		8.53
Religion	12.41	29.47	24.53		20.14
Culture	35.17	16.84	18.87		26.28
Language	13.79	14.74	9.43		13.31
Education background	28.97	30.53	41.51		31.74
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00		100.00
(b) All cohorts					
Ethnic	9.34	11.06	8.13	12.64	10.01
Religion	15.36	24.42	21.14	28.74	20.42
Culture	30.42	17.97	22.76	25.29	25.03
Language	12.95	12.44	8.13	8.05	11.46
Education background	31.93	34.10	39.84	25.29	33.07
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Notes: For the children cohort, the p-value for the chi-squared test that examines the significance of the association between the type of secondary school attended and the most important element that influences one's identity is 0.007 (number of observations is 293). For all the cohorts, the corresponding value is 0.014 (number of observations is 759).

Table 13. The proportion of respondents who consider Chinese/Hakka identity more important

	Chinese independent school	All other types of schools
(a) Children 1990–2001		
Chinese	65.45	53.20
Hakka	34.55	46.80
Total	100.00	100.00
(b) All cohorts		
Chinese	59.17	50.70
Hakka	40.83	49.30
Total	100.00	100.00

Notes: For the children cohort, the p-value for the chi-squared test that examines the significance of the association between the type of secondary school attended and the identity considered important is 0.098 (number of observations is 305). For all the cohorts, the corresponding value is 0.088 (number of observations is 765).

5. Conclusion

Generational changes have taken place in the types of secondary schools attended in the Hakka communities surveyed in this paper. The proportions who attended national-type schools where Mandarin is predominantly spoken and Chinese independent school where Mandarin is the MOI has increased over time, especially after the abolishment of English schools. This has impacted the use of Hakka language. This heritage language is used less in everyday conversations and interactions with family members among those who went to Mandarin speaking secondary schools, more so among the younger generations. The understanding of the Hakka language and the ability to speak it has deteriorated over time. The issue is most evident among individuals who attended Mandarin speaking schools, particularly the Chinese independent schools. The need to preserve Hakka language to retain their ethnic identity is perceived to be less important by the younger generations. Fewer of the younger generations, especially those who attended Chinese independent school, expressed positive sentiments about their Hakka identity or feel that being Hakka is important. As they feel that educational background is the most important element that determines their identity, more of them see themselves as Chinese first and Hakka second. The findings suggest an association between the education language and the shift in both usage and knowledge of the heritage language toward the education language. This shift is also evident in terms of how individuals perceived their identity.

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