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Commodification of the Chinese language: investigating language ideology in the Chinese complementary schools’ online discourse

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing popularity of Chinese and the recognition of the growing commodifying ideology of Chinese language in many contexts [Liu, Y., & Gao, X. (2020). Commodification of the Chinese language: Investigating language ideology in the Irish media. Current Issues in Language Planning, 21(5), 512–531. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1741236], the ideological orientations of the Chinese diaspora community towards the Chinese language remain under-researched. This research seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the micro-level language ideologies embedded in Chinese complementary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Informed by Ruiz’s ([1984). Orientations in language planning. NABE Journal, 8(2), 15–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/08855072.1984.10668464] metaphorical representations of language, 11 Chinese complementary schools’ websites were analysed as discursive texts that signal the language policy and ideology to prospective learners and parents. The results of the analysis suggest that a move from a portrayal of Chinese as linked to student heritage identity, to the commodification of linguistic and cultural diversity, is evident. It denotes the growing commodifying ideology among the Chinese complementary schools in the Republic of Ireland. This study contributes to wider discussions of language ideology and language planning, with regards to modern language learning and heritage language maintenance.

Introduction

Language policies have an impact on the wider ideological beliefs of a society, since they ‘determine what is thinkable about language in society’ (Ruiz, 1984, p. 16). Language policy is used to legitimise certain ideological preferences about language, although it is ‘rather about people and about the sites where underlying language ideologies are constructed, reproduced and challenged’ (Hornor, 2011; Reinhoilde & Piet Van, 2014, p. 29). Irish foreign language policy highlights the importance of promoting the Chinese language in Irish mainstream education and the society. In 2017, the Irish Department
of Education and Skills launched the ‘Languages Connect – Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). As part of the 10-year Foreign Language Strategy (FLS), the Chinese language (i.e. standard Chinese) has now been added to the Leaving Certificate curriculum (a two-year senior cycle programme that prepares students for higher education and employment) in the Republic of Ireland from 2020.

The implementation of the newly developed Irish FLS regarding the promotion of Chinese language demands that scholars and educators undertake critical examinations of the ideologies embedded in the Irish FLS and the wider socio-political context, particularly, the Chinese diaspora in Ireland that is directly affected by this policy. These undercurrents point to a more complex reality behind the rise of Chinese globally, where language ideology and practices are entangled with economic incentives, political ideologies, and cultural identities (Lou, 2018, p. 91). As the agent directly affected by this language policy, the attitudes of the Chinese diaspora community towards this government-initiated foreign language policy, and its impact upon them, is to be investigated.

Complementary schools (also known as ‘community language’ schools or ‘supplementary’ school) provide spaces for immigrants and ethnic minorities to transmit heritage language and culture, and to exercise their language rights (Francis et al., 2009). Chinese complementary schools have long existed in Ireland as an important agent to promote the maintenance of Chinese language and culture. There are 13 Chinese complementary schools with more than 1000 students in Ireland. There is a growing recognition that complementary schools are not just about preserving culture and heritage languages (Blackledge & Creese, 2010) but also have a role to play in national and international language policy (i.e. Hutchings & Matras, 2017). Despite this, the relevant literature review shows gaps exist between this top-down government language strategy and bottom-up heritage language maintenance (Hancock, 2014).

On the other hand, the Chinese community is further marginalised in the Irish media discourse and the Irish press media downplays the Chinese community, Chinese heritage speakers in Ireland, and the socio-political dimensions of language acquisition (Liu & Gao, 2020). As observed by Guo et al. (2020), for Chinese international education, Chinese language is ‘more instrumental than identity-based’: current Chinese language learning outside China is driven mainly by economic factors rather than culture and immigration factors historically. With Chinese being increasingly ideologised as a marketable commodity (Liu & Gao, 2020; Wee, 2006), there is the possibility of a de-emphasising of Chinese as a maker of ethnic identity linked to learners’ ancestral past among the Chinese diaspora community. This new discourse could potentially bring a conflict between commodification of Chinese in FLS and the maintenance of Chinese as community/heritage language in complementary schools, or it could be a source of synergy between both. Does this new value embedded in the Irish context affect attitudes among the Chinese complementary schools to the language and to inter-generational transmission?

This study explores the complementary schools’ online websites as a discourse that signal the language policy and ideology to prospective learners and parents within the Chinese community. The Chinese complementary school transformed into a space of contestation for language legitimacy, ownership, identity, and a focal point that connects ‘the past with the present, traditions with modernity, home country with host society and
local with global’ (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2021, p. 7). The complementary schools’ websites are used as a lens or communication tool to convey ideological concepts of Chinese learning and teaching. The schools’ online profiles provide ‘frames of symbolic representations’ (Winter et al., 2003, p. 31) to shape and influence how the schools want to be understood or perceived. The scrutinisation of these websites will help to capture the beliefs and attitudes popularised and promoted by the schools within the Chinese diaspora community. It is noted that no study has been found in investigating the responses, beliefs, and attitudes of the Chinese diaspora community in Ireland regarding this top-down Irish government-initiated national language policy. This research contributes to bridging this gap by investigating the micro-level language policies and initiatives carried out in the local Chinese complementary schools in Ireland to bridge the gap between top-down and bottom-up language policy. Thus, this article addresses the following question:

What is the language ideology embedded in the Chinese complementary schools’ online website discourse in the Republic of Ireland?

First, the theoretical framework underpinned in this study is discussed followed by the contextualisation of this study within the Irish setting. Then 11 Chinese complementary schools’ websites are explored as discursive texts through a critical discourse analysis (CDA). Implications on the development of the Chinese complementary schools and the implementation of government language policy are discussed.

**Language ideology and commodification of languages**

Situated in specific social, historic, and political contexts, language ideologies are turned into practice by the dominant group through language policies, and specifically through language-in-education policy (Reinhilde & Piet Van, 2014). Language policy is used to legitimise certain ideological preferences about language, although it is ‘rather about people and about the sites where underlying language ideologies are constructed, reproduced and challenged, including the media’ (Hornor, 2011; Reinhilde & Piet Van, 2014, p. 29). Language ideologies are a ‘ubiquitous set of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity’ (Kroskrity, 2004, pp. 496–497). Therefore, language ideologies can be discursively constructed by people, from all walks of life, who engage with a multitude of discourses (for example, TV commercials, newspaper, magazines) and share those ideological talks with their acquaintances (Kobayashi, 2015; Shao & Gao, 2019).

Among the variety of ways to classify different ideological constructions of languages, this article draws on Ruiz’s (1984) metaphorical representations of language as ‘problem,’ ‘right,’ and ‘resource’ as the theoretical framework to guide the analysis. From the language as problem perspective, the lack of competence in the dominant majority language is seen as a deficit or disadvantage. The language as problem orientation perceives linguistic diversity as ‘a threat to national unity,’ which favours the development of the dominant majority language and its assimilation to minority groups (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 34). Meanwhile, the language-as-rights orientation is associated with the human and civil rights of the minority group to use and maintain their heritage language (Ricento, 2005; Ruiz, 1984). The language-as-resource portrays language as ‘a resource to
be managed, developed and conserved’ (Ruiz, 1984, p. 28). The subordinate languages are perceived as individual and social assets instead of problems or deficits. Consequently, a language is ideologised as a marketable commodity and valued based on the extent to which it can be marketised, which can be described as the commodification of languages. The terms ‘language-as-resource’ ‘language as instrument’ and ‘language as commodity’ are used interchangeably by researchers (Heller, 2010; Ricento, 2005) to discuss this commodification of languages. Languages and language varieties are seen as other tradeable commodities, which have ‘an economic exchange value’ (Cameron, 2012, p. 352) in the linguistic market. Similarly, ‘language maintenance is only beneficial if it also serves the needs of the nation’ (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 40). In the globalised economy, the commodification of language has received increased attention from various researchers (Cameron, 2005; Guo et al., 2020; Heller, 2003, 2010; Petrovic, 2019; Tian & Rubdy, 2008). Relevant studies (such as Heller, 2003; Leeman & Martínez, 2007) indicate the shifting conceptions of language as a marketable commodity on its own, away from the understanding of language as a marker of ethnonational identity.

Analysis of the commodification of language is mainly illustrated in the economic spaces of tourism, marketing (Blommaert, 2009), language teaching, translation, communications (especially call centres) (Heller et al., 2014), and performance art (Heller, 2010). Two ways in which the globalised new economy has resulted in the commodification of language are summarised by Heller (2003, 2010). Language is commodified as a technical, universally available skill, standardised and invented for industrialisation, for example, in the call centre industry (Duchêne, 2009; Heller, 2003). The other way is through commodifying authenticity, which serves as a means for niche marketing and localisation dimensions of globalisation (Heller, 2003, 2010; Kelly-Holmes, 2000, 2005).

The language orientations can be employed to guide deductive analysis about the values that are embedded in messy policy debate and negotiation to help foster understandings of ‘what is thinkable about language in society’ (Hult & Hornberger, 2016, p. 43). According to Hult and Hornberger (2016), the notion of orientation proposed by Ruiz (1984) is believed to be compatible with the concept of discourse made by Gee (1999, p. 13). Ruiz (1984) clarifies that ‘orientation’ refers to a ‘complex of dispositions toward language and its role, and toward languages and their role in society’ (p. 16). Discourse is defined as the way that language relates to ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects … [in order to] give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaning connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others (Gee, 1999, p. 13).

In this study, I explore how school websites operate as discursive texts that signal the language ideology embedded in the schools’ policies through a CDA of 11 Chinese complementary schools’ websites in Ireland.

**Top-down vs bottom-up grass rooted: Irish government FLS and complementary schools in Ireland**

Language policy researchers have long been calling for a bridging of the gap between top-down (macro-level) and bottom-up (micro-level) language policies and for a more holistic approach and less binary view of the process (Kelly-Holmes et al., 2009; McCarty,
Micro-planning (bottom-up influences) involves small organisations such as supplementary schools, family units, and individuals; while the macro-level components of language planning and policy (LPP) normally indicate large-scale, national-level government activities.

Complementary schools are generally seen as an example of bottom-up or grassroots language policy. Meanwhile, national foreign language policy, such as the Languages Connect – Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026 (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) is seen as a top-down approach (Hancock, 2014). In general, both do not meet, something which researchers (e.g. Hutchings & Matras, 2017; Maylor et al., 2010) have criticised. Under the Irish FLS, the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture became the shared aim and goal between the top-down government language policy and the complementary schools. Thus, this proposed research investigates the ideological construction of the Chinese complementary schools’ online discourse and explores whether the commodified Irish government language strategy affects the ideological construction of Chinese complementary schools in Ireland. Micro-level language policy plays important roles in meeting the needs and demands of the individuals and community organisations in the absence of macro-level policy (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014; Ricento, 2000). Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech (2014) proposed four contexts that micro-language planning can inform and shape macro-level policy work:

1. local implementation of macro-level policy;
2. contestation of macro-level policy;
3. addressing local needs in the absence of macro policy;
4. opening new possibilities for developing multilingualism.

Researchers have focused on investigating the commodification of heritage language in the area of call centres (Heller et al., 2014), tourism (Blommaert, 2009), and performance art (Heller, 2010). This phenomenon also further indicates the growing tendency of the transformation from language being associated with culture and identity to the commodification observed by previous researchers. As an example, Guo et al. (2020) examined the linguistic landscape in Chiangmai, Thailand, and the linguistic beliefs of local Thai Chinese language learners. The commodification of Chinese language education as a foreign language in Thailand is highlighted and such commodification is seen as a positive factor in promoting higher-education availability for low-income families and social sustainability. Such uncritical perceptions towards language commodification is rather interesting, compared with those from a critical approach, which often associate language commodification with linguistic imperialism and unbalanced social-economic status.

As a space initially built for the purpose of heritage language and cultural maintenance, complementary schools seem to be in conflict with this growing commodifying language ideology in the wider socio-cultural background. However, the commodification of language in complementary schools is under-researched. Lytra (2013) examined the commodification of Turkish in two London-based Turkish complementary schools; the standard Turkish is seen as a form of social and economic capital that can be exchanged for success to enhance employment and access to tertiary education. The
Turkish complementary schools are regarded as key sites for the promotion of these commodifying Turkish ideology by most teachers, parents and school administrators (Lytra, 2013). The changing faces of transnational communities in Britain and the ongoing social changes and internal differences within the translational communities in Britain are noted (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2021). Curdt-Christiansen et al. (2021) investigated the changing demographic and linguistic profile of the immigration profile in the Chinese community in the UK, depicting the co-habitation of long-term settled communities from Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Singapore with recent migrations from China and Taiwan. The changing demographics within the Chinese diaspora in the UK also bears witness to the legitimisation of Putonghua over other dialects (including Cantonese and Hakka) as the language of instruction in complementary/community schools, and its emergence as the lingua franca of the Chinese communities in recent years. The Chinese complementary school transformed into a focal point that connects ‘the past with the present, traditions with modernity, home country with host society and local with global’ and became a space of contestation for language legitimacy, ownership, and identity (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2021, p. 7). Ganassin (2020) investigated the significance of Mandarin–Chinese complementary schooling in Britain and concluded that Chinese complementary schools are ‘intercultural educational spaces’ where Chinese language, culture and identity are ‘promoted’ on the institutional level, although these are ‘constructed, negotiated, and contested’ also by stakeholders (p. 184). The growing complexity and internal diversity in Chinese complementary schools demands the inquiry of the teaching methodology, teaching materials, student learning and identity cultivation and teacher education.

As far as I have noticed, little research exists which has scrutinised LPP at the micro-level in the context of the Irish FLS regarding the Chinese language policy. This proposed research investigates whether the commodification of Irish governmental language strategy affects the ideological construction of the Chinese complementary schools in Ireland. It will also further investigate whether there is space for the Chinese complementary schools in delivering on the strategy, or if they will be further marginalised. It will contribute to bridging the gap between these top-down and bottom-up language policies. This research contributes to bridge this gap by investigating the micro-level language policies and initiatives carried out in the local Chinese complementary schools in Ireland. It will contribute to provide the bottom-up way of approaching this national government language policy.

The study

The aim of this study is to discover current ideologies of Chinese language embedded in the online profile of Chinese complementary schools in Ireland. It is part of the larger study aiming to investigate the opportunities and challenges in the implementation of the Irish FLS regarding the promotion of Chinese language. This study contributes to mapping out the sociolinguistic profile of Chinese complementary schools in Ireland. A critical discourse approach will be employed to investigate the relationships between Chinese language, power and inequality which are central to the field of Chinese language and learning and how these ideologies stem from larger political, social, and economic contexts. There are 13 Chinese complementary schools in Ireland in total, with 11
schools having online profile pages. All schools’ websites are included in the data collection. All texts available on the schools’ websites are selected as the qualitative data. To select texts from each site, I began from the homepage and clicked through the site, following all links (e.g. ‘Homepage’ >>> ‘about our school’) to map our paths through the sites, tracking site structure in terms of links and where links led. To explore the research questions listed above, the websites of 11 Chinese complementary schools in Ireland available were scrutinised by employing a qualitative document analysis. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the theoretical framework of CDA that underpinned the data analysis, and outline practical procedures for how I limited, organised, and coded data.

**Analysing complementary schools’ websites as a discourse**

In this study, the complementary schools’ websites are viewed as ‘documents’ that can be analysed qualitatively. Through a CDA of 11 Chinese complementary schools’ websites in Ireland, I explore how school websites operate as discursive texts that signal the language ideology embedded in the schools’ policies. As stated by Winter et al. (2003), websites provide ‘frames of symbolic representations’ that aim to inform and attract the potential customers or stakeholders (p. 31). In other words, the complementary schools’ websites are utilised as lens to convey ideological concepts of Chinese learning and teaching. As argued by Wilson and Carlsen (2016), discourse is constructed not just as means to represent the world but more significantly to signify the world and construct meaning; thus, language is used not just for delivering information but also as a tool for representation by the institutions. Certain values, images, and representations regarding the Chinese language and the school are embedded in the web discourse in order to shape and influence how the school want to be understood or perceived. In treating complementary schools’ websites as qualitative documents, I draw on an emerging body of qualitative studies of school websites (Drew, 2013; Wilkins, 2012; Wilson & Carlsen, 2016).

The principles of research ethics are taken into consideration when carrying out this internet-mediated research (Ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research 2021; UK Research and Innovation [UKRI] 2021). The public nature of the information collected through the Chinese complementary schools’ websites is critically examined and justified. Information provided on the internet including forums, social media or spaces that are intentionally public would be considered ‘in the public domain’ (UKRI 2021). The information on all these Chinese schools’ websites can be easily accessed by both potential customers and non-customers. In addition, the names of the schools have been changed to anonymous labels, for example, No.1 school and No.3 school.

**Critical discourse analysis**

In order to explore the ideological constructions of the Chinese language in the Chinese complementary schools’ online profile discourse, CDA is employed. CDA is defined as ‘[a method] primarily studying the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context’ (Dijk, 2008, p. 352).
CDA investigates ‘a relationship between text and social conditions, ideologies and power-relations’ (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, pp. 98–109). It allows the examination of the connections between structure and strategies of discourse considering social and political contexts through language use (Fairclough, 1992). It is often employed by social and educational researchers to explore, expose, intervene, and ultimately resist the perceived abuse of power and social inequalities. The online websites employ already existing beliefs and attitudes about learning a language by using certain exercises, organisation of data or incorporation of socio-cultural context, thus contextualising language learning effectively by reclaiming language ideologies (Wagner, 2017). In this study, CDA will help to unveil the construction of language ideologies attributed to Chinese language teaching and learning embedded in the schools’ online profile discourse.

The 11 complementary schools’ websites are identified (see Table A1 in Appendix). I created PDF versions of every ‘page’ of each school’s website in April 2020 and then combined these pages into one PDF file for each school. All information listed on the school’s website is gathered in the data collection. These files are managed and organised using Nvivo 12. For some schools’ websites, both Chinese and English are used to deliver information. All Chinese content on the website were translated from Chinese to English and the translations were verified by another researcher.

Combing insights from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and Fairclough (1992)’s approach to CDA, I conducted the coding process recursively. Thematic analysis is a method for ‘identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within the data set’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 35). Guided by Braun and Clarke (2006)’s framework for thematic analysis, six phases are involved recursively in the coding process, including (1) familiarises him/herself with the data, (2) generates initial codes, (3) searches for themes, (4) reviews themes, (5) defines and names themes, and (6) produces the report. The coding processes were also connected to Fairclough’s three-dimensional view of CDA: description, interpretation, and explanation. The initial coding process is an open coding of the 11 schools’ websites, which is close to the data as I made a note of possible codes and categories that might describe the information provided by the website. After open coding, I recoded websites recursively aiming to develop and test more analytical categories and themes in order to develop a conversation with the research questions and theoretical framework of the study, what Fairclough terms ‘interpretation and explanation.’ All the codes were checked and examined by another Chinese researcher who has high competency in English.

As an example, the codes generated from the following paragraph include ‘aims and objectives’ (denoting the aim and objectives of the school); Chinese heritage; Chinese language and culture; cross-cultural communication; multicultural community. The themes emerging from the data are presented and discussed in the following section.

The School is dedicated to providing a nurturing and stimulating environment for students to learn the Chinese language, instilling an awareness of the Chinese heritage, creating programs to introduce Chinese culture to the community, thereby building bridges of understanding with people of all cultures. < Example. An excerpt from Files\chinese community school 华协会 中文学校>
The online representations of Chinese complementary schools

The online profile of Chinese complementary schools in Ireland, including their aims and objectives, languages taught, target students, funding bodies, and links and collaborations with mainstream education providers are scrutinised in order to investigate the ideology/orientation embedded in the Chinese complementary schools’ online discourse. Findings in this study show that the Chinese complementary schools are transforming themselves into a space serving the wider society rather than purely focusing on the diasporic community. There is a change of the linguistic landscape and language ecology in these schools, from a space created for Chinese heritage language maintenance, to a diverse, multicultural, and multilingual community containing students learning Chinese as a foreign language. In addition, the standardised Chinese language (Mandarin Chinese) and standardised Chinese test (HSK) are highlighted by Chinese complementary schools. Further, the lack of communication between mainstream education providers, top-down government language policy, and bottom-up complementary school language maintenance was also exposed.

Aims and objectives self-promoted by the complementary schools

It is interesting to note that the aims and objectives provided by the complementary schools investigated in this study are quite diverse. Among all the aims advertised by the Chinese complementary schools (Table 1), it is not surprising to see the inclusion of Chinese language and culture promotion (9), which is the most frequently mentioned one, and cultural identity (2). Historically, complementary schools provide space for immigrants and ethnic minorities to transmit heritage language and culture and exercise their language rights (Francis et al., 2009). Language learning for heritage speakers is often rooted in the local diasporic community and linked to learners’ ethnocultural identity, reflecting ‘the predominance of ideologies that conceive of ethnocultural identity as embodied in language’ (Leeman, 2015, p. 100).

However, it is noted that Chinese complementary schools are transforming themselves into a space serving the wider society rather than purely focusing on the diasporic community. As mentioned earlier, the aim for Chinese language and culture promotion (9) in general is the most frequently mentioned ones as 9 of 11 schools included this on their websites. This indicates the promotion of Chinese language and culture as a generic term, which is a much broader concept than Chinese as a heritage language. Among these nine schools, only four clearly indicate the Chinese heritage maintenance specifically as their aims and two schools emphasised the crucial role they play in grounding and maintaining Chinese roots and cultural identity. One of them made a rather strong and radical statement saying that

‘不要忘记自己的根’(Don’t forget your roots.). [No.3 school]

Thus, it can be concluded that though Chinese heritage maintenance is still one of the core aims for complementary schools, there is also a trend of de-emphasising Chinese heritage and diasporic roots and connections, as more than half (five of nine) aim for the promotion of general Chinese language and culture as an umbrella term. It indicates
the increasing detachment of the Chinese complementary school from its original 'Heritage' representation.

Additionally, personal, education and career success (three) are among the top three most frequently mentioned aims and objectives. Three schools mentioned the students’ education and career success, with one school focusing on the transferable skills, personal development and self-cultivation. As stated by No. 7 school, ‘Learning Chinese today may discover new and exciting ways to succeed tomorrow!’. Here, learning Chinese is associated with opportunities for future academic and career success, which opens doors for educational, professional, and social opportunities. As can be seen below, No. 6 school also portrait the learning of Chinese language as a foundation for students’ future success, which seems to be quite attractive for target students.

The school aims to build a solid Chinese language foundation for the students’ future academic and career success. The school also encourage the cultivation of the students’ artistic taste and refinement, in order to enhance their confidence and the ability to be an autonomous learner. [为了给学生将来的学业和事业打下良好的汉语基础, 学校同时提倡培养学生的才艺技能和修养, 建立自信心以及独立学习的能力, 并训练学生们的团队合作精神, 我们也同时希望, 学生们学习中文也要象对待其它课外学习一样, 认真, 勤奋]. [No.6 school]

As illustrated by the website of No. 6 school, the instrumental value of the Chinese language is highlighted. The ideology underpinning this is associated with the language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984), which considers language as an asset (rather than a right) for the individual and communities, prioritising instrumental benefits over cultural or ethnic group benefits (Ricento, 2005). The association of the Chinese learning with students’ future success demonstrates that the change of the learning motivation from preserving one’s heritage identity to the instrumental value it brings. According to Bourdieu (1986), language as a form of cultural capital, manifests itself in three states, including embodied (e.g. pronunciations), objectified (e.g. textbooks,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Language and culture</td>
<td>A. Chinese heritage maintenance (4*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Chinese language and culture promotion (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Roots, identity</td>
<td>C. Chinese roots, cultural identity (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Multilingual society</td>
<td>D. Building multicultural and multilingual society (3)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>E. Society integration for minority children (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal, education, and career</td>
<td>F. Education and career success (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success</td>
<td>G. Transferable skills, personal development and self-cultivation: artistic taste and skills, teamworking spirit (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Religion</td>
<td>H. Building religious community (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (*) indicates the number of schools that specify this aim.
dictionaries), and institutionalised (e.g. tests and exams). Language as a kind of cultural capital can be converted into economic capital materially, and it can also promote upward mobility in the social hierarchy symbolically (Lou, 2018). However, according to Lou (2018), the Chinese language, as a form of cultural capital, mainly converted into economic capital and rarely into social capital.

Building multicultural and multilingual society (three) and society integration for minority children (one) are highlighted, which shows the awareness and promotion of multilingualism among the Chinese heritage language schools in Ireland. Previous researchers often perceive complementary schools as ‘a platform to offer space for pupils to build friendships with peers who have the same ethnic background’ (Hu, 2020, p. 25) and a communal space for pupils to gain a sense of group belongingness and identity negotiation (Francis et al., 2009). However, in this study, it is interesting to see the transformation of the Chinese complementary schools operating as a space for students of the same ethnic background to a more open space for cross-cultural and multilingual/multicultural communication. The change of the linguistic landscape in the Chinese complementary schools is believed to have impact on the Chinese heritage learners. Chinese language is often being associated with the Chinese identity as researchers point out that the incompetence of the heritage language makes heritage learners feel ashamed about their ethnic identity (Sharma, 2018). With the growing diverse learning group in the complementary schools, the strong links and association of Chinese linguistic proficiency with Chinese identity might decrease. On the other hand, researchers stated that complementary schools are a safe place to help Chinese ethnic minorities to alleviate the identification, ethnicisation, and social boundary issues occurring in mainstream schools (Francis et al., 2009). However, the changing dynamic and language ecology of the Chinese complementary schools towards a multicultural and diverse environment poses challenges for this statement. Thus, the impact of this changing linguistic landscape and ecology within the Chinese complementary schools needs more detailed research for issues including the development of teaching pedagogy and the negotiation of learners’ identities in future research.

Further, the Chinese school funded by the Chinese Gospel Church of Dublin clearly specify that the building of a religious community as their aims and objectives. The school offers Chinese language classes to its religious community as one of its societal benefits.

**Target students and language**

More than half of Chinese complementary schools attract target students not only from the Chinese diaspora community but also for all who are interested in Chinese language and culture. Among the 11 Chinese complementary schools, 5 declare that their target students are Chinese diaspora in Ireland with the remaining 6 encourage students both from Chinese and non-Chinese backgrounds.

As can be seen below, No. 10 school clearly describes itself as a multi-national and multicultural Chinese language school on the website.

No.10 Mandarin Chinese Language School was founded in 2010. It is a non-profit language club that offers Chinese classes for children over 5 years of age. Children are grouped according to their ages and language levels. As a multi-national and multi-cultural
Chinese language school, our students are from Chinese and non-Chinese backgrounds. [No.10 school]

Most of the Chinese complementary schools in Ireland are advertised not just as a safe space for the language, cultural and identity construction, and negotiation for the Chinese heritage community (Li, 2014) but also as a place for multicultural and multilingual communication among people from various cultural and heritage background. This finding further indicates the changing linguistic landscape and the popularity of the Chinese language as a foreign language in Ireland, which is corroborated with the changing aims and objectives of the Chinese complementary schools discussed previously. It also indicates the growing commodification of the Chinese language in Ireland, which will be explained in detail in the next section.

Regarding the language taught at the complementary schools, all schools researched in this study offer Mandarin Chinese. Even though, some Chinese complementary schools were set up originally to teach Cantonese, they have changed completely to the teaching of Mandarin. The No. 1 school, who claims to be the oldest Chinese school in Dublin, has changed the teaching to Mandarin Chinese since 2001 from Cantonese. This Chinese complementary school originally provided opportunities for young people to sustain their heritage language Cantonese but is now switching the focus to Mandarin. As can be seen on the website:

"Chinese Community School is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1986 by the Chinese Society of Ireland. We are the oldest Chinese school in Dublin, a registered and fully insured organization. Our school initially held classes teaching Cantonese. Since 2001, our school has started to teach Mandarin Chinese. [No. 1 school]"

This change corroborates the findings of other researchers, such as Lu (2013) and Francis et al. (2008). In a report investigating the Chinese complementary schools in London, Francis et al. (2008) reported that Mandarin is becoming increasingly popular in many Cantonese Chinese schools, with the rapid economic development of mainland China and the number of people interested in learning Mandarin outweighing that of Cantonese. For people who have Cantonese heritage, Mandarin is not their home language but is deeply connected with them through historical and cultural exchanges (Lu, 2013).

The increasing popularity of Mandarin Chinese is sometimes perceived to threaten the diverse linguistic and cultural identities that have characterised Chinese diasporic communities (Lou, 2018; Zhu & Li, 2014). Findings in this study provide further evidence for this. According to Lo Bianco (2009), ‘the foreign language enters contexts in which preceding, dispersed, native speaker populations are well established and whose activities of recovery and retention of the national language, or one of its varieties, must be reconciled and accommodated to authorised versions’ (p. 4). As is the case of some of the Chinese complementary schools funded by the Cantonese diaspora community in Ireland, the change of the teaching from Cantonese to Mandarin Chinese is an example of the reconciliation and accommodation to authorised version of Chinese varieties.

**Standardised Chinese language test – HSK exams**

Among all schools investigated in this study, three Chinese complementary schools (No.6, 8, and 10) clearly advertised that the learning programme is to help students
pass the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK). HSK is an international standardised exam, which assesses the Chinese language proficiency of non-native speakers. HSK is operated by Chinese Testing International, which is owned by Hanban/Confucius Institute (CI) Headquarters, a non-governmental public institution affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. As clearly stated by the Chinese CI, Mandarin Chinese is the official language being promoted and tested in the standardised Chinese proficiency test among all other varieties.

Language tests are perceived as political instruments, often deployed to regulate the use and legitimacy of standardised language forms, and ‘to narrow the curriculum, control linguistic use/knowledge, impose discipline, and determine social order’ (Cushing, 2019; Shohamy, 2006). It is argued that state-sponsored organisations, including the Chinese CI, the British Council, the Alliance francoise, the Goethe Institut, and the Japan Foundation all play a crucial role in framing ‘what it means to teach a language or to be the speaker of that language’ politically and economically (Heller, 2010). As an example, the number of HSK test-takers increased from 750,000 in 2010 to five million in 2013, according to Hanban (Lou, 2018). The general director of the CI, Xu Lin acknowledged the establishment of the organisation to host Mandarin tests (HSK) as it creates a marketplace for the HSK, which brings in a revenue of about 10 million Chinese yuan annually (Xinhua News Agency, 2008). These organisations, like the Chinese CI and the British Council, regulate what kinds of language, and which kinds of speakers, are legitimated or granted authority, which creates tension between standardisation and variability.

In this study, the economic and instrumental value of the Chinese language is being emphasised through the highlight of the HSK tests preparation classes in these Chinese complementary schools. Similar to other standard international language tests [for example, International English Language Testing System (IELTS), TEFEL, SAT], HSK test is now a prerequisite in the increasingly competitive marketplace, which is used to indicate the language proficiency one must have to enter the Chinese market or working with Chinese consumers. In addition, for international students who intend to apply for the Chinese universities and scholarship, HSK test is required to prove the language proficiency needed. Therefore, it is very interesting to see the growing importance of the HSK test among the Chinese complementary schools in Ireland, which indicates the commodifying ideology embedded in these schools.

**Macro- and micro-language policy: the mainstream education programmes vs the complementary school**

As the micro-level language planning agent, it is expected that the complementary school can inform and shape macro-level policy work (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014), but data in this study indicate the existing divergence between the two in the Irish context. Only one school seems to be aware of the FLS, with another one highlighting the intention for collaboration with the mainstream education. On the other hand, there is no mention of these Chinese complementary schools in the FLS (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) though the shortage of resources is identified as the main obstacle for promoting Chinese in Irish mainstream schools. Findings in this study relevel the lack of collaboration and trust between the mainstream education
and complementary schools. In addition, there seems to be a gap between the top-down government language policy and the micro-heritage language maintenance.

Mandarin Chinese is now added as a curricular exam subject in the Irish Leaving Certificate based on the recent 10-year FLS in Ireland since 2020. This decision is explicitly linked to the acknowledgement of China as one of the largest export markets for Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) rather than associated with language rights for the Chinese community in Ireland. As revealed by Erdocia et al. (2020), to situate the Irish market within a global economy is one of the main drives and language as an economic resource is the driving force behind the Irish government language policy-making process. Despite that, the acknowledgment of the growing importance of Chinese language and the promotion of Chinese language in the mainstream education and the social context seems to be very encouraging for the Chinese diaspora in Ireland. It is expected that positive reaction and embracement of this language policy will be detected from the Chinese complementary schools. However, the findings in this study show the opposite.

In total, there are three Chinese complementary schools that mentioned the collaboration with the mainstream education, including one only collaborated with the local school by renting the classrooms over the weekend. The other two schools (No.4 and No.11) highlighted the collaboration and links with the mainstream education. No.11 shows strong intention for collaboration with the mainstream education. It clearly states that the school can help the mainstream school to run the Chinese learning programme at various levels, including junior cycle short courses, transition year subject, senior cycle. It provides experienced and qualified Chinese teachers and syllabus.

Our qualified native Taiwanese teachers are all garda vetted and available to deliver Mandarin Chinese language and culture classes to your schools/clubs as a core curriculum, extra curriculum, afterschool activity, junior cycle short courses, transition year subject, senior cycle or as a Foreign Language Assistant.

Please contact us for further information and we would love to arrange a meeting to discuss syllabus with you.

**Transition Year Work Experience:** We offer places for Transition Year students who is either a heritage speaker or has been studied Mandarin Chinese in junior cycle. [from No. 11 school]

This No. 11 school noted the shortage of the Chinese teaching and learning resources and advertise the collaboration opportunity that the school can offer.

Surprisingly, the No.4 school is the only school that mentioned the FLS on their website, highlighting that Chinese language is to be added to the Leaving Cert Curriculum in 2020. This school utilises this top-down government language policy to promote its Chinese classes. The fact that only 1 of 11 Chinese complementary schools in Ireland seems to be aware the FLS indicating the lack of recognition and communication between the top-down government policy and the bottom-up local language maintenance. The disconnection between the mainstream and complementary schools is also identified in this study. Researchers (such as Archer et al., 2009; Kenner & Ruby, 2012) highlighted the lack of trust and communication between the mainstream education and complementary schools and the effort made by complementary schools is
often neglected by the mainstream education. According to Cushing et al. (2021), previous research calls for more and closer links to be established between the two educational systems as together they compose the full educational experience of a non-negligible number of multilingual students. This study joined the call and further addressed this issue.

**The growing commodification of the Chinese complementary schools**

Findings in this study pinpoint ‘a more complex reality behind the rise of Chinese globally, where language ideology and practices are entangled with economic incentives, political ideologies, and cultural identities’ (Lou, 2018, p. 91). It denotes the growing emphasis on Chinese language as a foreign and world language, detaching from the ‘heritage’ representation among the Chinese complementary schools in Ireland. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the emphasis on building a multicultural and multilingual community instead of the promotion of itself as a safe place for students of the same Chinese heritage ethnic background. In addition, it reveals that there is a growing tendency of de-emphasising of Chinese as a maker of ethnic identity linked to learners’ ancestral past in the Chinese complementary schools in Ireland, with Chinese being increasingly ideologised as a marketable commodity. Furthermore, the learning motivation of students in the Chinese complementary schools has moved away from the identity-based to more instrumental (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

As indicated in this study, language retention has been the main orientation of Chinese teaching in complementary schools, in which it is now a promoted foreign language. Lo Bianco (2009) noted the complex situation that the Chinese complementary schools are facing, with the Chinese language became a popular foreign language internationally. In this new era, with the growing popularity of Chinese as a foreign language, it seems that the Chinese complementary schools in this study have been moving away from retention of the ‘heritage’ representations of Chinese but more towards the new image of promoting Chinese as a foreign and world language. This transformation will influence and challenge what it means to be Chinese and to speak Chinese. The promotion of the standardised official Chinese language among the Chinese immigrant group is undoubtedly influencing the Chinese lingual identity and behaviour of the diaspora community. Concerns were expressed by researchers when taking into consideration issues of ‘emotional attachment, linguistic variation and diverse forms of cultural capital’ (Lo Bianco, 2009, p. 5) among the Chinese diaspora community. In Zhu and Li’s (2014) study on geopolitics and the changing hierarchies of the Chinese Language, the increasing hostile reactions by the dialect speakers in the Chinese diasporas with the promotion of Mandarin were noted. Cantonese has traditionally been the lingua franca of the Chinese communities in the UK, but the expansion of Mandarin at the cost of Cantonese and other regional varieties of Chinese in the Chinese diasporas has caused concerns over community cohesion by community leaders (Zhu & Li, 2014).

The transforming profile of the Chinese complementary schools to serve the wider community rather than the Chinese diaspora community is believed to be associated with the contextual ideology towards Chinese language in Ireland and globally. Liu and Gao (2020) illustrate the growing commodification ideology towards the Chinese language and its speakers in the Irish media context. The present study indicates the
The growing commodification of the Chinese language in the complementary schools in Ireland, which provides further support for that of Liu and Gao (2020). Historically, the Chinese complementary schools provide a safe place for identification negotiation and cultivation for Chinese immigrant children (Li, 2014), but now are transforming into a learning space for all who are interested in the Chinese language and cultural in general. In other words, it indicates a language ideology based on mass consumption wherein preference is given to securing a hopefully profitable mass market of learning Chinese as a foreign language as opposed to having only a small market of education catering the needs of the diasporic community.

The Chinese language is commodified by the CIs through the intertwining of politics and economy. On the one hand, the Chinese government adopted a very flexible way of marketing Chinese as a language for mass consumption rather than for a small elite market of education. CIs are used as the primary tool for promoting China’s soft power through the promotion of Chinese language and culture globally (Li, 2019; Zhou & Luk, 2016). By the end of 2011, 861 CIs and Confucius classrooms (in secondary schools) had been set up in 105 countries and regions worldwide (Wang & Adamson, 2015). In Ireland, two CIs were established around 2007, in conjunction with University College Cork (UCC) and University College Dublin (UCD) separately. The earliest example of Chinese language teaching in the Irish education system started with the establishment of the two CIs in Ireland. Although Chinese has only granted state-exam status until 2020 based on the Irish FLS, by 2016, there are 53 secondary schools with 7011 pupils benefiting from courses offered by UCC CI and UCD CI delivered courses to 4,750 pupils and 102 schools (Osborne et al., 2019). As pointed out by Pérez-Milans (2015), the commodifying language ideology in the context of language education policies issued in the UK in the last few years has resulted in the decline of modern foreign language teaching and the rise of Mandarin Chinese in UK schools. Similar to the UK context, the overall numbers of students learning Chinese have increased while the number of students learning French dropped from 70.28% to 59.42% in 2013–2017 in the secondary school in Ireland (Osborne et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the state can intervene and manage the education of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language using the international standardised language test. The evaluation of the Chinese learners’ proficiency became of great importance and need intervention when the teaching and learning process is not standardised. The Chinese Testing International initially set out by Hanban/CI Headquarters (renamed as Center for Language Education and Cooperation in 2020) creates a marketplace for the international standardised exam – HSK test. The instrumental value of the Chinese language has been exemplified through the importance of the HSK certificate in entering the Chinese job market and applying for the Chinese universities and scholarship for non-native speakers.

The growing importance the HSK test among the Chinese complementary schools revealed in this study further indicates the growing commodification of the Chinese language. It is believed that languages have been treated as commercial commodities in foreign language teaching industry (Cameron, 2012; Heller, 2010). For the commodification of English, standardised tests are not simply utilised as a tool for assessing students’ language proficiency, rather they are a part of a broader neoliberal market of education and a major commodity supporting the ‘global profit-making agenda of
local education consultancies’ (Phyak, 2018, p. 227). As an example, Hamid et al. (2018) illustrate that language tests (such as the IELTS) are increasingly being used as gatekeeping tools for higher education and transnational immigration in a globalised world. Similar to other language tests, the HSK Chinese language proficiency test is deployed to regulate the use and legitimacy of standardised Chinese language forms, and ‘to narrow the curriculum, control linguistic use/knowledge, impose discipline, and determine social order’ (Cushing, 2019; Shohamy, 2006). The Chinese government adopted the logic of economic transaction to create a Chinese learning market and the ideology of language-as-commodity underpins the conceptualisation of the Chinese language through the provision of language textbooks, as well as through the implementation of Chinese language tests (HSK) initiated by Hanban (Gao, 2017).

Further, findings in this study indicate the growing prominence of the instrumental value of the Chinese language highlighted by the Chinese complementary schools. Language learning for heritage speakers is often rooted in the local diasporic community and linked to learners’ ethnocultural identity, reflecting ‘the predominance of ideologies that conceive of ethnocultural identity as embodied in language’ (Leeman, 2015, p. 100). The complementary school provides space for immigrants and ethnic minorities to transmit heritage language and culture and exercise their language rights (Francis et al., 2009). The language as ‘rights’ orientation (Ruiz, 1984) associates individuals and communities with their rights to ‘use [their] languages in the activities of communal life’ and ‘freedom from discrimination on the basis of language’ (Macías, 1979, p. 89). However, with the language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984) having gained currency in government language policies, the recent emphasis on globalisation often portrays language as a world commodity available to all, rather than an entitlement of heritage and identity (Heller, 2010). The language-as-resource orientation considers language as an asset (rather than a right) for the individual and communities, prioritising instrumental benefits over cultural or ethnic group benefits (Ricento, 2005). The association of the Chinese learning with students’ future success demonstrates that the change of the learning motivation from preserving one’s heritage identity to the instrumental value it brings. It indicates the shift from integrative to instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) in Chinese learning.

Findings in this study indicate the lack of communication and attention between the top-down national FLS and the bottom-up Chinese complementary schools. Although the Irish FLS largely affects on the promotion of Chinese language and culture in Ireland, the FLS did not receive much of the attention of the Chinese complementary schools. Data shows that only one school mentioned Irish FLS; on the other hand, the further margination of Chinese diaspora community by the FLS is also identified. Based on the Irish FLS, the learning of Chinese as a ‘global language’ is articulated as a desirable commodity that has market value (Liu & Gao, 2020; Erdocia et al., 2020). To situate the Irish market within a global economy is one of the main drives and language as an economic resource is the driving force behind the Irish government language policy-making process (Erdocia et al., 2020). The promotion of Mandarin Chinese in the Irish education system is explicitly linked to the acknowledgement of China as one of the largest export markets for Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). The Irish FLS (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) clearly states the implied learners of Chinese in the Irish education context are non-Chinese Irish,
and the learning envisaged is new learning of Chinese as L2, not continued learning. Chinese is highlighted as ‘a new language’ instead of a heritage language by the Irish FLS, as shown below:

Introduce a curricular specification for new learners of Mandarin Chinese for Leaving Certificate and curricular specifications for heritage speakers for Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese. Irish FLS. (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p. 6)

It corroborates with findings of other researchers regarding the lack of communication and collaboration between the government-initiated top-down policies and the grass-rooted bottom-up language policies by the diasporic community (Hutchings & Matras, 2017; Maylor et al., 2010). The lack of the teaching resources in the Irish mainstream education is highlighted in the top-down government-initiated policy (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). As a teaching and learning organisation that has intensive experience in Chinese language teaching, it is not surprising to see the Chinese complementary schools also become a place for those who are interested in the language but have no Chinese cultural background. The role complementary schools and language minority communities can play in promoting foreign language teaching has been emphasised by researchers (Hutchings & Matras, 2017; Maylor et al., 2010). Language policy researchers have long been calling for a bridging of the gap between top-down and bottom-up language policies and for a more holistic approach (Kelly-Holmes et al., 2009; McCarty, 2011; Shohamy, 2006). Hutchings and Matras (2017) have argued that foreign language teaching should embrace community languages, and that universities and other language education actors should build close partnerships with their multilingual communities. Following from that, many studies have been carried out to investigate the integration of community-based learning into the language learning curriculum and have demonstrated the success of such courses (O’Connor, 2012; Polansky, 2004). Community-based language learning can not only enhance language acquisition but also increase intercultural awareness and understanding (Jouët-Pastré & Braga, 2005; Weldon & Trautmann, 2003). The Chinese complementary schools can be used as another instrumental space to create and consolidate the linguistic market, especially in countries where CIs are unwelcome due to political concerns. Such efforts help to create a positive synergy between the community-based resource and the government educational agents to help create community-based learning and a more inclusive, multilingual society. Under the Irish context, there seems to be an opportunity that the Chinese complementary schools, as the micro-level planning agent could inform and shape macro-level policy work while addressing local needs in the absence of macro policy (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014). The micro-level planning of the Chinese complementary schools deserves more attention from researchers. This research further calls for more and closer links to be established between the mainstream and complementary school educational systems as together they compose the full educational experience of a non-negligible number of multilingual students.

**Conclusion and implications**

With the increasing popularity of Chinese worldwide and the limited teaching resources available in some countries, it seems that the changing of the language ecology from
Chinese heritage learners to a more diverse and dynamic learning group with multiple backgrounds in the Chinese complementary school is a trend. It indicates the transformation of the Chinese complementary schools in the new era.

Rather than viewing this from a critical perspective, it is believed that this commodifying ideological change provides opportunities for the development of the Chinese complementary schools. As discussed in this study, there is a possibility for the Chinese complementary schools to contribute to the implementation of top-down government-initiated language policy. It is encouraging as language marginalization is a common fear for heritage language education. On the other hand, it poses new challenges for Chinese complementary schools. As pointed out by Lu (2013), the amount of research on teaching of foreign languages and heritage languages individually is huge; however, very limited attention has been given with regard to combining these two together. Lu (2013) investigated the teaching of Mandarin Chinese in three different educational contexts, including the teaching of Mandarin as a heritage language for learners from the same ethnic community, and the teaching of Mandarin as a foreign language in the secondary school and community centre settings. The findings in this study indicate a more complicated learning environment faced by the Chinese complementary schools, which is the integration of learning Chinese as a foreign language and a heritage language in the same linguistic space. More research needs to be carried out to investigate this newly emerging situation with the growing commodification of the Chinese language and the complementary schools worldwide. The effective language teaching methodology, learner identity development in this new language ecology in the Chinese complementary schools needs to be scrutinised in future research.

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References


Appendix

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<td>1. 爱尔兰华协中学校 Chinese community school Dublin</td>
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<td>8. 新桥镇育园教育学院Chinese Cultural Education Academy Kildare</td>
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