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# Foreword

This monograph contains a number of the talks given at the 41st Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, held in Berkeley, California, February 7-8, 2015. The conference included a General Session and the Special Session *Fieldwork Methodology*. The 41st Annual Meeting was planned and run by the second-year graduate students of the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley: Kenny Baclawski, Anna Jurgensen, Spencer Lamoureux, Hannah Sande, and Alison Zerbe.

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The BLS 41 Executive Committee  
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## Cultural Transmission of Self-Concept from Parent to Child in Chinese American Families: Does Language Matter?

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### 0. Abstract

Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that people in different cultures have different self-concepts. Research into self-concept malleability has demonstrated that independent and interdependent concepts of the self vary with different situational characteristics (Gardner, Gabriel & Lee, 1999). For bicultural individuals, language serves as a cue to rely on one cultural frame over another (Kimmelmeir & Cheng, 2004).

Bilingual children develop culture-specific self-knowledge early in life and parent-child narrative practices serve as a critical forum for such cultural transmission (Miller et al., 1997; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang, 2006). Parents model the appropriate ways of organizing experiences and drawing cultural views about the self. In parent-child conversations, Euro-American mothers frequently center on the child and refer to the child's roles and predilections, whereas Chinese mothers refer to social norms and behavioral expectations focusing on the social-relational context (Wang et al., 2010).

Synthesizing these two lines of research, this study aims to examine the associations between parent's use of English and Chinese and the socialization of independent and interdependent self-concepts. We hypothesize that bilingual parents are more likely to use English to model independent self-concept and use Chinese to model interdependent self-concept in parent-child conversations.

The sample consisted of 50 Chinese American children (mean age = 9.2 years, 26% first generation, 75% second generation) and their non-U.S. born parents recruited from the San Francisco Bay Area. Dyadic parent-child conversations were recorded during an eight-minute conflict discussion task (Eisenberg et al., 2008). The audio recordings were transcribed by Chinese-English bilingual research assistants. Parent's speeches were coded by instances of modeling independent self-concept (i.e., autonomous talk) or interdependent self-concept (i.e., didactic talk) categorized by language (English, Chinese, or code-switched) per turn.

A total of 777 parent and child utterances were found modeling independent and interdependent self-concepts. Of the total parent turns coded, a total of 231 (39.7%) turns were coded as socializing independent self-concept. Of these, sixty-one turns (26.4%) were in Chinese, 142 (61.5%) turns were in English, and 28 (12.1%) turns were code-switched. Of the total parent turns coded, a total of 351 (60.3%) were coded as socializing interdependent self-concept. Of these, 169 (48.1%) turns were in Chinese, 110 (31.3%) turns were in English, and 72 (20.5%) turns were code-switched. In support of our hypotheses, the frequency of English was higher in modeling independent self-concept ( $p < .01$ ) and the frequency of Chinese was higher in modeling interdependent self-concept ( $p < .001$ ).

The present study provided preliminary evidence for the association between language and the socialization of independent and interdependent self-concepts in English and Chinese in Chinese American immigrant families.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Definition of the Self**

The “self” is a delicate category which can be construed in two different ways. First, Hallowell (1955) introduced the notion of the universal self that people everywhere are likely to develop an understanding of themselves as physically distinct and separable from others. Neisser (1988) similarly referred to the ecological self, or the ‘I’, the person here in this place, engaged in this particular activity with some sense of an inner, private self, which seems to be shared across multiple cultures. Second is the divergent aspects of the self, which vary across multiple cultures. Neisser (1988) introduced this notion as the conceptual self, or conceptualization of oneself as a particular person in a social world. The conceptual self is sensitive to socio-cultural influences as they develop in interactions between individuals and their immediate and distal contexts, making up a self that integrates the framework of culture (Wang, 2006). This paper will focus on this latter conceptualization of the self, or self-concept.

### **1.2 Independent and Interdependent Self-Concepts**

Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed the model of independent and interdependent self-concepts to explain the variations to which people from different cultures view the self. The independent self-construal involves a conception of the self as an autonomous, independent person, fundamentally separate from the other. One’s behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one’s own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions rather than those of others. The interdependent self-construal, on the other hand, involves the conception of the self as fundamentally connected to others and part of an encompassing social relationship. Behavior is determined by, contingent on, and organized by what the self perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and action of others in the relationship.

Various psychological and anthropological studies have indicated that such independent and interdependent self-concepts vary across Western and Eastern cultures. Studies using self-descriptions (Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002) and questionnaires, such as the Twenty Statement Questions (TST; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954), have consistently revealed that Euro-Americans provide more information about the independent self, such as personal attributes and beliefs (e.g., “I am tall, intelligent, good-natured”) and less information about the interdependent self (e.g., “I am a son, a student, captain of the baseball team) compared to Asians (Bochner, 1994; Trafimow, Tirandis, & Goto, 1991; Wang, 2001).

### **1.3 Parenting Beliefs and Early Narrative Practices**

Parents employ childrearing practices that instill such cultural ideologies and beliefs pertinent to the self (Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Wang, Leichtman, & Davies, 2000; Wang & Ross, 2005). The independent and interdependent self-concepts are reflected in parenting beliefs of European American and Chinese parents. Chao (1995) compared the European American and Chinese parents to determine if their childrearing practices reflected the cultural distinctions of the self drawn by Markus and Kitayama (1991). The results showed that European American mothers stress independence and individualism, provide child-centered environments, build the child’s esteem and self-confidence, and process child’s feelings, in contrast with Chinese

mothers who foster good relationship with the child, provide contexts which are determined by social roles or rules, stress obedience and respect, and report emotions that are more other-focused (Chao, 1995).

Early parent-child narrative practices also reflect culturally-specific childrearing beliefs. Miller, et al., (1997) found that personal storytelling functions as a cultural socialization practice and that storytelling practice is functionally differentiated as early as age 2 for children. In this study, American mothers provided more self-affirming framework that protects or enhances the child's esteem, whereas Taiwanese mothers provided a self-critical framework to encourage children's obedience to authority and appropriate conduct in relation to others (Miller et al., 1997). American mothers generally centered on the child, focused on child's personal attributes, interests, preferences and engaged in more autonomy talk, whereas Korean and Chinese mothers centered on social discipline, behavioral rules and engaged in didactic talk during family memory sharing (Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang et al., 2010). A similar trend emerged in the discussion of emotion where European American mothers explained more emotion relating to the child's self, whereas Chinese mothers emphasized moral standards and behavioral expectations relating to others (Wang & Fivush, 2005).

#### **1.4 Language and Cultural Self-Concepts**

For bilingual, bicultural adults, language primes distinct cultural self-concepts. Ervin-Tripp (1964, 1967) used Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) on Japanese-English and French-English bilinguals and found that the content of the projective responses differed depending on the language the test was given in. Ross, Xun, and Wilson (2002) asked Chinese-English bilinguals to describe themselves and rate statements reflecting Chinese cultural values. Bilinguals who participated in Chinese described the self in more collective terms and endorsed Chinese values more than those interviewed in English. This relationship between language and self-concept is also observed in children (Wang, Shao, & Li, 2010). Chinese-English bilingual children interviewed in English provided more elaborate and self-focused self-descriptions and endorsed more strongly Western independent values compared with children interviewed in Chinese. The endorsement of cultural belief system moreover mediated the effect of language on cultural self-concept (Wang, Shao, & Li, 2010).

## **2. The Present Study**

The present study synthesizes the existing literature on early narrative practices and cultural self-concept, and examines the association between language and socialization of cultural self-concept among Chinese American immigrant parents and children. A common linguistic profile in the immigrant family is one in which the family's heritage language (i.e., Chinese) is the first language acquired and the dominant language for the parent, whereas the child may first acquire this language, but subsequently become more dominant or proficient in the language of the host country (i.e., English), thus creating a bilingual family context (Fillmore, 1991; Buriel, Love, & De Ment, 2006). Immigrant families also have a challenge of socializing their children to develop a self-concept in relation to both host and heritage cultures, where the respective cultural values, norms, and expectations may not be congruent (Koh & Wang, 2013).

The main research question addressed in the present study is whether the parent's use of language (i.e., English or Chinese) is associated with the socialization of interdependent and

independent self-concepts. We hypothesize that the parent's use of English would be associated with socialization of independent self-concept and the parent's use of Chinese would be associated with socialization of interdependent self-concept.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Participants**

Data was extracted from a longitudinal study on psychological, social, and academic adjustment of 238 Chinese American children from immigrant families in the San Francisco Bay Area. The first 50 Chinese-English bilingual parent-child dyads, including 39 (78%) mothers and 11 (22%) fathers, participated in the present study. Almost all parents (99% mothers, 96% fathers) were foreign-born. Majority of the parents were born in Mainland China (77% mothers, 68% fathers), Hong Kong (9% mothers, 9% fathers), and Taiwan (3% of mothers, 3% of fathers). The mean years of education were 13.0 and 12.9 years for mothers and fathers respectively. The participants' mean annual income was \$11,910. Of the children, 26% were first-generation and 74% were second-generation Chinese American. The mean age of the children was 9.2 years old.

The sample was recruited via recruitment fairs in Asian American communities, schools, and referrals from Asian American community agencies and organizations. The study was described as a research project on Chinese American children's psychological adjustment. Eligibility criteria was as follows: 1) the child was in grades 1 or 2 at the time of screening, 2) the child lived with at least one biological parent, 3) both biological parents were ethnic Chinese, 4) the child was either first- or second-generation Chinese American, and 5) the parent and child were able to understand and speak English or Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese).

#### **3.2 Procedure**

In the main study, one parent-child dyad participated in a 2.5-hour laboratory assessment at a time. The entire assessment was conducted by bilingual Chinese-English speaking undergraduate research assistants. Graduate student supervisors, who may or may not speak both languages, were also present. All written materials (including consent and assent forms and questionnaires) were available in English, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese. At the end of the laboratory visit, parents received \$50 for participation and the children received a small prize.

#### **3.3 Measures**

##### **3.3.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics (Parent Report)**

The family Demographics and Migration History Questionnaire was used to assess family demographic characteristics. The scale used in the present study was adapted from a measure used in a study of Mexican American immigrant families (Roosa et al., 2008), which included questions on maternal and paternal education, family income, mothers' and fathers' country of birth and length of stay in the U.S. Questions involving ethnicity and country of origin were modified for use in the present sample.

### 3.3.2 Parent-Child Conflict Discussion (Parent-Child Interaction)

Parents and children were asked to participate in a Conflict Discussion Task, adapted from a measure of conflict discussion in mother-adolescent dyads (Eisenberg, 2008). Parent-child dyads were given 8 minutes to discuss conflictual issues (two topics were provided to them, based on their reports of conflictual topics) and their conversation was videotaped. Dyads were asked to talk with each other about the “hottest” topic for 8 minutes. They were instructed to discuss the first issue and try to come up with a solution. The second topic was listed in case the dyads finished the first topic before the end of time. The conflict topics included: cleaning up, chores, how family gets along, respect and manners, school, noise, and free time. Prompt cards with instructions were written in English, simplified Chinese and traditional Chinese.

### 3.4 Coding

The 8-minute parent-child conversations were videotaped, transcribed, and translated into English by Chinese-English bilingual research assistants. A conversational turn was used as the unit of analysis (Griffin & Decker, 1996). Each turn was coded by language: English, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), or English/Chinese code-switch.

The narrative social content was coded according to the coding scheme developed by Wang (2001). Two types of narrative social content were coded: autonomous talk and didactic talk. Autonomous talk includes parent’s statements or questions about children’s personal preferences or judgments regarding an object, person or an event itself. For example:

(1) P: **What did Blake want to do?** C: I wanted to take the rocks home (Wang, 2001)

Didactic talk includes parent’s statements or questions about moral standards, social norms, or behavioral expectations. For example:

(2) P: **Why shouldn’t children talk to each other in class?** C: Because they should listen to the teacher. (Wang, 2001)

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Language choice

In the 400-minutes of parent-child conflict discussion, total of 777 turns were coded for autonomous and didactic talk. Of the total parent turns coded, 230 (39.5%) turns were in Chinese, 252 (43.4%) in English, and 100 (17.2%) code-switched. Of the total child turns coded, 42 (21.6%) were in Chinese, 138 (70.6%) were in English, and 15 (7.7%) code-switched. The proportion of English and Chinese language use is consistent with the linguistic profile in many immigrant Chinese families whereby the acculturated child is more dominant or proficient in English than the parent.

## 4.2 Narrative social content

Of the total parent utterances, 351 (60.3%) turns were coded as didactic talk and 231 (39.7%) turns were coded as autonomous talk. Following are examples of utterances coded as autonomous talk:

- (3) Right now you're learning math in third grade and then **what are your favorite subjects**, what do you feel like is not so hard, like, **what are the things you like to do?** (009; F26)
- (4) P: Then you need, then **what time do you think is good time?** Do you think what mommy and daddy said, 9:30, is too, is bad, or is it too early, or is it too... (044; M19)
- (5) So how does it make you, **how does the topic of school make you feel?** (009; F1)

In autonomous talk, the parent provides statements or questions that motivates the child to formulate his or her own individual preferences (example 3) or judgments (example 5). In example (3), the parent specifically asks about the child's preferences for academic subjects in school, rather than dictating which subject would be most useful for the child. In addition to asking about preferences, eliciting individual child's emotions, such as in (4), were frequently observed in parent's autonomous talk. In (5), the parent asks the child to make an independent judgment on a conflictual issue. The parent-child dyad discusses the topic of "family rules", specifically the time the child should go to bed. Although the mother recommends a particular time for the child, the parent asks for the child's opinions about the suggested time "is [the time] bad, or is it too early, or is it too..." The child makes his independent decision and agrees to the time suggested by the parent.

Didactic talk includes parent's statements or questions that focus on behavioral expectations or social rules, often placing the child in a social-relational context. Following are examples of turns coded as didactic talk in parent-child conversations:

- (6) In other words, **good virtue is that you need to respect other people** (55; M5)
- (7) Why aren't you **being a good older sister, you should teach her how to play the piano**, things she doesn't know (14; M6)
- (8) **Help mom sweep the floor, mop the floor, do what I tell you to do**, understand? (51; M6)
- (9) Okay! Now we are going to make a rule, make a rule. **We shouldn't be noisy or very loud, in other words, is to care about others.** (53; M10)

In didactic talk, parents frequently state and explain specific values they are trying to teach their children, such as in (6). Importantly, these values are situated in a socio-relational contexts. In examples (7) and (8), the value of specific behaviors such as "teaching how to play the piano" or "sweep[ing] the floor" is explained as positive impacts on immediate family members, such as



the mother or the sister. In (8) mother introduces the topic of “cleaning up the house” and promptly places the conflictual topic in the relational context of “help[ing] mom”. She continues to list multiple chores for the child in the subsequent turns – “sweep the floor”, “mop the floor”, “fold up the clothes”, “clean up the mess” – as the child silently nods. Similarly in (7), the parent requests a behavior from the child and explains that this is her duty and expectation as an older sibling. The effect of child’s behavior on others moreover extends beyond the family to larger society. In (9) the parent-child dyad discusses the topic of “noise”. Similar to (8), the mother introduces the topic of “noise” in the context of the mother-child relationship – “When mom gets back home and is so tired from a whole day of work. How would she feel when she hears so much noise?” In addition to stating the behavioral expectation “We shouldn’t be noisy or very loud”, the mother subsequently emphasizes “to care about others”. The parent equates the house rule to a social rule that is valuable to follow as a member of society at large. In all of these examples, the parent is instructive and commands the behavioral expectation, rather than negotiating.

### 4.3 Association between parent’s language choice and narrative social content

Of the total parent turns coded as autonomous talk, 61 turns (26.4%) were in Chinese, 142 (61.5%) turns were in English, and 28 (12.1%) turns were code-switched. Of the total parent turns coded as didactic talk, 169 (48.1%) turns were in Chinese, 110 (31.3%) turns were in English, and 72 (20.5%) turns were code-switched. Overall, the use of English was significantly associated with autonomous talk ( $p < .01$ ) and the use of Chinese was significantly associated with didactic talk ( $p < .01$ ) as shown in Figure 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Frequency of parent autonomous talk by language

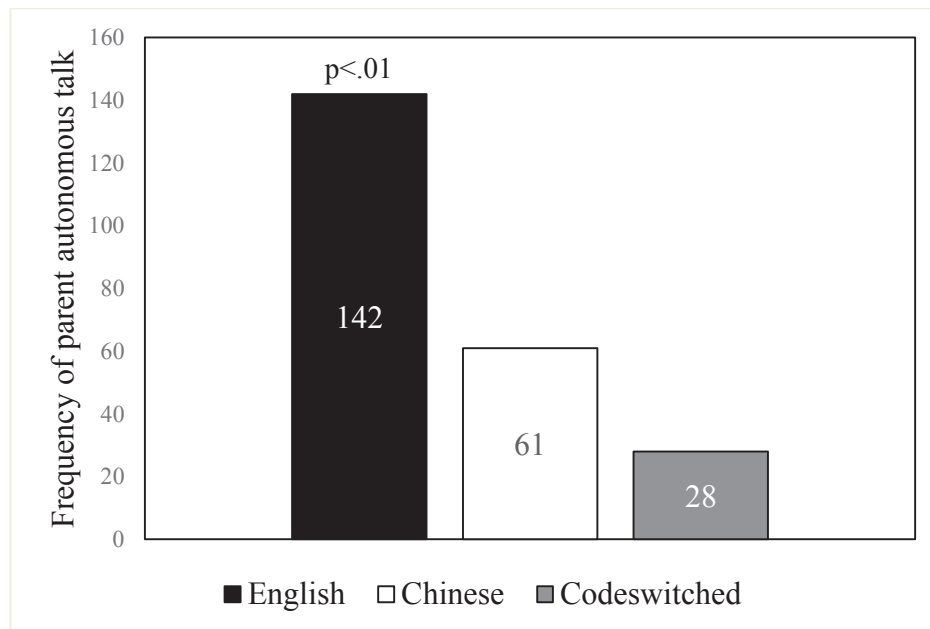
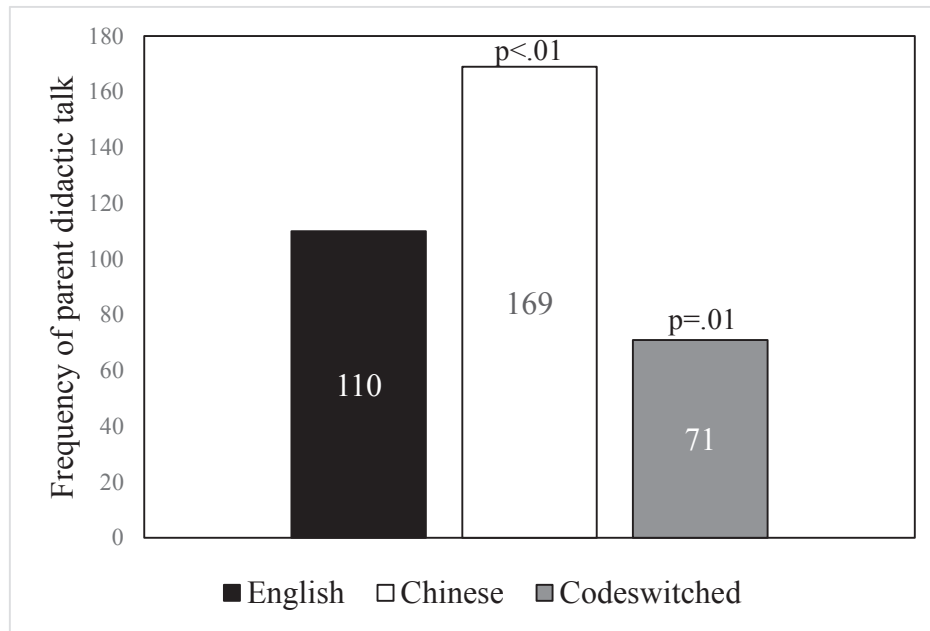


Figure 2. Frequency of parent didactic talk by language



## 5. Discussion

Preliminary findings suggest that language may be associated with parental socialization of independent and interdependent self-concepts in Chinese American immigrant families. The present study illustrated that in the conflict discussion among bilingual Chinese-American parents and children, the parent's use of English was associated with increased discussion of autonomous talk, whereby parents encouraged the child to develop their own individual preferences and judgments about conflictual topics. In contrast, the use of Chinese was associated with increased parental use of didactic talk, whereby the parent discussed the behavioral expectations and rules that socialize children to attend to the relationships with others.

Previous literature comparing early narrative practices in Western and Eastern cultures have demonstrated the use of autonomous talk or self-affirming framework in American parents and the use of didactic talk or self-critical framework among East Asian parents (Miller et al., 1996, 1997; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang et al., 2010). The present study tests these associations in the context of bilingual parent-child conversations. The results indicate that for bilingual immigrant parents who must socialize their bilingual, bicultural children in relation to values of both American and Asian cultures, language may play a key role. The language available to the bilingual parents may serve as a vehicle by which to don different cultural selves (Chen et al., 2012) and model both independent and interdependent self-concepts to their bilingual, bicultural children in the same conversation.

These findings also support the existing evidence for linguistic priming effect on culturally-specific self-concepts in bilingual speakers. Previous findings have shown that bilingual adults endorsed independent or interdependent selves depending on the use of English or Chinese (Ross et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2010). This study showed that immigrant parents in Chinese American families with varying degrees of acculturation also exhibited this use of English or Chinese to model independent and interdependent self-concepts in parent-child contexts. Early narrative

practices in which bilingual parent switches into one language over another to discuss self-concepts salient in one culture over another may over time socialize a bilingual child to develop associations between language and self-concept. This early narrative practice in bilingual families may partially explain the priming effect of language on self-concept in bilingual adults. Although child turns were too short to code for autonomous or didactic talk in the present study, future studies may examine whether children's choice of language and the narrative social content would reflect the patterns observed in their parents for each dyad.

There are limitations to this study which must be addressed in future studies. First, there is a need to investigate factors other than language that may impact the socialization of cultural self. In a study of bilingual children, Wang, Shao & Li (2010) showed that the endorsement of cultural belief system mediated the effect of language on self-concept. The immigrant parent's cultural orientation may be examined to see if it mediates language use and socialization of cultural self-concepts. Second, the coding categories of autonomous and didactic talk may be too broad to capture the parent's specific socialization behaviors. For instance, concrete strategies within didactic talk, such as nagging, value teaching, shaming, or guilt induction, can be coded by language for greater specificity (Chao, 1994; Fung & Chen, 2001; Fung & Lau, 2012). Third, while the present study used conversational turn as the unit of analysis, specific instances of inter- and intra-sentential code-switching may be useful in examining the shift of languages associated with the discussion of independent versus interdependent self-concepts in both parents and children.

## **6. Conclusion**

In summary, the present study provided preliminary evidence for the association between language and the socialization of independent and interdependent self-concepts in Chinese American immigrant families. Globalization and transnational migration has rapidly increased the number of bilingual families in the U.S. In bilingual immigrant families, the maintenance of heritage language and culture among second generation children is not always successful. The parent's use of two languages to model independent and interdependent self-concepts may play an important role in intergenerational transmission of both heritage and host cultural values from immigrant parents to their bilingual, bicultural children.

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