

<b>Institution: Birkbeck, University of London</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
<b>Title of case study:</b> <b>Policy and practice of complementary schools for multilingual, transnational, and minority ethnic children</b>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> <p>Building on the well-established focus on multilingualism in Birkbeck's Department of Applied Linguistics, Professor Li Wei's ESRC funded research on 'codeswitching' practices of transnational and minority ethnic children in complementary schools in the UK has had significant and far reaching impacts in the field of multilingual education. It has increased awareness of the social, educational and linguistic significance of complementary schools; enhanced interactions across complementary schools in different ethnic communities, and influenced policies and practices, including teacher development, within heritage/community language schools in Europe and beyond and bilingual education policies in China.</p>
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> <p>Multilingual research in Birkbeck's Department of Applied Linguistics and Communication is driven by an epistemological conviction that the diverse phenomena of multilingualism are the rule rather than the exception and that through rigorous, critical examination of these phenomena, the nature and functions of language can be understood. A particular focus of the department's research has been codeswitching, where a bilingual/multilingual speaker simultaneously uses different languages in social interaction. The research in this field has been synthesised by Gardner-Chloros (2009) (Ref 1).</p> <p>Building on this foundation, Professor Li Wei undertook a major ESRC funded project with colleagues at Birmingham University and King's College, London, 'Investigating multilingualism in complementary schools in four communities'. This is the only comparative socio-linguistic project examining dynamic codeswitching by teachers and pupils in complementary schools in the Chinese, Turkish, Gujarati and Bangladeshi/Bengali communities in Birmingham, Leicester, London, Manchester and Newcastle. Complementary schools (also called Heritage or Community Language Schools), a major world-wide educational and cultural-political movement since the 1950s, are represented by international organisations in a wide range of languages. In the UK, the education charity, ContinYou, has a register of over 2,000 complementary schools. Li Wei led the study of the Chinese schools in London, Manchester and Newcastle.</p> <p>Using Linguistic Ethnography, the project collected and analyzed empirical data of multilingual practices by teachers and pupils in and outside the classroom in complementary schools, and interactions between the children and their parents. Interviews with key stakeholders (e.g. community leaders, officials of local education authorities, mainstream schools teachers) reveal the tensions and conflicts in the discourses and ideologies regarding multilingualism and multilingual practices of minority ethnic children. Professor Li Wei's research, which used the Chinese complementary schools as an example, led to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. A reassessment of multilingual practices such as codeswitching, challenging the widely held view that codeswitching, especially by young children, is a sign of linguistic and cognitive deficit and incomplete knowledge of the languages they use and counteracting concerns of parents and professionals that codeswitching hinders the children's educational development. Instead</li> </ol>

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Professor Li Wei presented codeswitching in terms of creativity and criticality. He defines *creativity* as the ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behaviour, including the use of language; pushing and breaking the boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, the acceptable and the challenging. *Criticality* he defines as an ability to use evidence appropriately, systematically and insightfully to inform considered views of cultural, social and linguistic phenomena, to question and problematize received wisdom, and to express views adequately through reasoned responses to situations (Ref 2-6).

- ii. A critique of the public and professional discourses regarding minority ethnic and immigrant communities, particularly the children, as well as policies and ideologies of the complementary schools. Professor Li Wei identifies three kinds of discourses – crisis, neglect and celebration – that are differentially associated with different communities, and challenges the ideological assumptions behind such discourses. While acknowledging the achievements and the important role of complementary schools for minority ethnic children, he also raises the issue of implicit monolingual policies (e.g. One Language Only (OLON) or One Language at a Time (OLAT)) in these schools that aim to prevent multilingual practices such as codeswitching (especially Refs 2, 3 and 4).

### 3. References to the research

1. Gardner-Chloros, P. *Code-Switching* (2009), Cambridge University Press
2. Li Wei (2011) [Multilinguality, multimodality and multicompetence](#): Code- and mode-switching by minority ethnic children in complementary schools. *Modern Language Journal*, 95,3. (Included in REF2)
3. Li Wei and Wu, Chao-Jung (2009) [Polite Chinese children revisited](#): Creativity and the use of codeswitching in the Chinese complementary school classroom. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 12,2: 193-212 (Included in REF2)
4. Li Wei and Wu, Chao-Jung (2010) [Literacy and socialisational teaching in Chinese complementary schools](#). In Vally Lytra and Peter Martin (eds) *Site of Multilingualism*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books. pp. 33-44 (Available upon request)
5. Li Wei and Zhu Hua (2010) [Changing Hierarchies in Chinese language education for the British Chinese learners](#). In Linda Tsung and Ken Cruickshank (eds) *Teaching and Learning Chinese in Global Contexts*. pp. 11-27. London: Continuum (Available upon request)
6. Li Wei, Zhu Hua and Wu, Chao-Jung (2009) [Doing Britishness: Multilingual practices, creativity and criticality of British Chinese children](#). In Nigel P Thomas (ed) *Children, Politics and Communication: Participation at the Margins*. Bristol: Policy Press (Available upon request)

### Grants

March 2006 to November 2007 ESRC. *Investigating multilingualism in complementary schools in four communities* (RES-000-23-1180. £208,000) with Angela Creese (Birmingham), Adrian Blackledge (Birmingham), Vally Lytra (King's), Peter Martin (deceased; East London).

2008 Final Report, ESRC No: RES-000-23-1180. A. Creese, T. Barac, A. Bhatt, A. Blackledge, S. Hamid, Li Wei, V. Lytra, P. Martin, C. Wu and G. YagciogluAli. Multilingualism in complementary schools in four linguistic communities; with four community reports in Chinese, Turkish, Gujarati and Bengali. Rated "Outstanding".

### 4. Details of the impact

This research project has had a number of impacts, not least because knowledge exchange

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processes were built in from the outset. It involved in its planning and design a wide range of non-academic partners, including teachers and parents, and representatives of community associations, local education authorities, and mainstream schools attended by multilingual pupils (Source 1). A series of ESRC funded workshops and seminars were organised where the researchers reported their work-in-progress to the partners and stakeholders. At the end of the project, a conference reported on the findings to all stakeholders and complementary schools for different ethnic communities in the country. A further series of public events to disseminate research findings, funded by three consecutive ESRC Social Science Festival grants (2009-11) were run in collaboration with Camden Council and Coram's Fields Children's Centre, for parents and childcare professionals. (Source 2)

The most significant impacts of the project fall into two overlapping categories of public services and education and are evident in the following developments:

- Increased awareness and understanding among stakeholders of the significance of community languages and complementary schools and willingness to build partnerships. For example, the Teacher Development Agency has approved teaching practise in complementary schools as part of their PGCE practicum. Local Authorities in the cities researched have given new grants and awards to complementary schools and best teachers in these schools. Pupils' achievements in complementary schools, especially in community language examinations, are celebrated in mainstream schools. (Source 3 (testimonial) and 4)
- Professor Li Wei's recommendations have been built into the training programmes for teachers in complementary schools and the Community report of the ESRC project in Chinese (2008) has been cited in the new Chinese syllabus for teacher training by the Federation of Chinese Schools. Because the first Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of Community Languages programme at Goldsmiths, University of London (2012) was set up as a result of his research he was appointed its External Examiner (Sources 3 (testimonial) and 5).
- At the UK Association for the Promotion of Chinese Education conference, on the Chinese Teachers Day 2011, Professor Li Wei's work was cited in support of a multilingual approach by the Association in the debate over the use of codeswitching by teachers in complementary school classrooms. There has been a major attitudinal change amongst the teachers towards codeswitching by the children. Rather than seeing it as a linguistic deficit, codeswitching is now regarded as evidence of linguistic creativity and criticality as Professor Li Wei has argued. (Source 5)

The international reach of this research and its impact on the Chinese schools across the globe is evidenced in:

- Numerous invitations to Professor Li Wei to give presentations to Chinese heritage schools associations in the USA (Los Angeles, 2009; New York, 2010), Australia (Sydney, 2010), Switzerland (Basil, 2010), Japan (Yokohama, 2011), and Kazakhstan (Astana, 2012). (Source 6)
- His appointment as special consultant/advisor for the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs of the State Council of China, the State Language Commission of the Chinese People's Representatives Committee, and the Centre for Linguistic and Strategic Studies of the Ministry of Education of China to advise them on the education of overseas Chinese children. In a letter of thanks, the Director acknowledges the importance of Professor Li Wei's work to Chinese language education: 'Your research into multilingualism in the Chinese immigrant community in Britain, especially your analysis of the multilingual practices of the Chinese children in UK schools, has had a fundamental impact on our thinking of language policy including education policy regarding migrant and ethnic minority communities in China.' (letter, May 10, 2013)

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(Sources 7 and 8, testimonials)

- An invitation to present his research to the Office of Chinese Language International, *Hanban*, headquarters of Confucius Institutes, in Beijing in 2011, in relation to the teaching of Chinese to ethnic Chinese children born outside China. (Source 4)
- An invitation to become a consultant on the development of textbooks on Chinese language and culture for overseas Chinese children and the English version of a Global Chinese dictionary commissioned by the State Language Commission of China. The textbooks will, for the first time, use examples from Chinese complementary schools in the UK. The dictionary will incorporate items from Professor Li Wei's fieldwork research within the Chinese community in Britain. (Source 9, testimonial)

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. The Final Report of the ESRC project, detailing its impact by the end of the project, is available from ESRC archive (No: RES-000-23-1180) and can be supplied on request
2. Community report of the ESRC project in Chinese (2008) is available from ESRC archive and can be supplied on request
3. Testimonial 1 from former Chair and Education Adviser, UK Federation of Chinese Schools ([UKFCS](#)) (Contact)
4. Invitation from President, UK Association for the Promotion of Chinese Education ([UKAPCE](#))
5. Professor Li Wei is Chief Examiner for [Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of Community Languages programme](#) at Goldsmith College, London.
6. A folder of invitations from the organisations listed above, and others, can be supplied to auditors.
7. Testimonial 2 from First Secretary, Education Section, [Chinese Embassy](#), London (Factual statement).
8. Testimonial 3 from Director of [Centre for Linguistic and Strategic Studies](#), Ministry of Education, China (Factual statement)
9. Testimonial 4 from Advisor to [State Language Commission](#), Chinese People's Representative Committee, (Factual statement)