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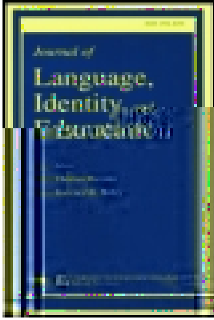

Journal of Language, Identity & Education
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hlie20

"Do You Know Your Language?" How Teachers of Punjabi and Chinese Ancestries Construct Their Family Languages in Their Personal and Professional Lives

June Beynon, Roumiana Ilieva, Marela Dichupa & Shemina Hirji

Version of record first published: 16 Nov 2009

To cite this article: June Beynon, Roumiana Ilieva, Marela Dichupa & Shemina Hirji (2003): "Do You Know Your Language?" How Teachers of Punjabi and Chinese Ancestries Construct Their Family Languages in Their Personal and Professional Lives, Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 2:1, 1-27

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15327701JLIE0201_1

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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND EDUCATION, *2*(1), 1–27
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"Do You Know Your Language?" How Teachers of Punjabi and Chinese Ancestries Construct Their Family Languages in Their Personal and Professional Lives

June Beynon, Roumiana Ilieva, and Marela Dichupa
Simon Fraser University

Shemina Hirji
Surrey School District
British Columbia, Canada

This study focuses on how teachers of minority ancestries construct and represent their family language identities. Drawing on poststructural (Hall, 1996; Norton, 2000), postcolonial (Ang, 1994; Luke & Luke, 2000) and sociocultural (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) theory on culture, identity, and language we explore the complex nature of the linguistic identities of 25 teachers of Chinese and 20 teachers of Punjabi ancestries. We consider the different ways in which respondents of these ancestries represented their identities in minority languages in various sociocultural settings and the implications of these representations for employment. Accounting for this diversity should contribute to reconstructing authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) regarding employment of racial minorities in public education and thus to making mainstream institutions more equitable and inclusive.

Key words: linguistic identity representation, employment equity in education

If I went for a job I would never say that Chinese language was a skill I had. God forbid somebody would call me on it! To speak it means to speak it per-

Requests for reprints should be sent to June Beynon, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, British Columbia V5A 1S6, Canada. E-mail: June_Wyatt-Beynon@sfu.ca

> fectly and there is a lot of shame in not speaking it perfectly (Nan, second generation, speaks Cantonese with her family and attended 5 years of after school Cantonese and Mandarin classes).

> I … wrote down that I could speak Punjabi on my resumes … I thought that if they want to have parent communication … then they actually need to have people who can speak the other language too … [During my interview] I kept pushing … "I can speak Punjabi; I can also speak a little bit of Hindi" and I kept saying that … I went to that school purposely because I knew there was a high Indo-Canadian population (Sahibjeet, second generation, speaks Punjabi with her family, but has had no formal conversation or literacy instruction).

The complex, multifaceted nature of (minority) ethnic identities is becoming a prominent concern in theory and research, and language is one salient dimension of identity (Hall, 1996; Luke & Luke, 2000). Moreover, we see in theory and research regarding language identity specifically, that it is similarly viewed as multifaceted and complex (Norton, 2000). Some of the complexity is theorized in relation to how minority language speakers' engagements with mainstream society are implicated in the process of learning to speak and identify with new (dominant society) languages (Churchill, 2002). Other complexities relate to the relative emphasis minority individuals place respectively on reading, writing, speaking and listening, in constructing their identities as learners of a dominant language (McKay & Wong, 1996).

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as problematic issues in employment equity policy requiring diversity in the workplace. Asking, "Do you know your language?" appears to be a way of responding to this requirement without getting caught up in uncomfortable (to employers) issues of race. However, this apparently "safe and simple" question about language in fact masks a great deal of complexity. It draws employer and potential employee into a frame of reference which not only fails to get at the complexity of language identities, but also fails to acknowledge that minority teachers have valuable experiences to bring to students (of all backgrounds) regardless of their particular conversational and/or literacy skills in their family languages.

This research was part of a larger study undertaken to gain broad perspectives on how teachers of minority ancestry perceived their positions within public education.[1] In the course of analyzing and interpreting data on a wide range of experiences related to their own education, families, profession, and identities we began to discern that language in particular, and teachers' perceptions of and experiences with ancestral languages, were a prominent dimension. Thus, whereas our initial broad focus was on diverse aspects of teacher identity and identity representation and implications of these for employment, through the use of a grounded theory approach to analysis of this data, considerations of construction and representations of linguistic identity and the relation of these to employability were more specifically brought into focus. Within this specific focus on minority language identities and employment we are especially interested in how, and if, minority ancestry teachers of Chinese and Punjabi Sikh ancestry respectively, represent their (heritage) linguistic identities when seeking employment.

The thesis of this research is that these variable constructions and representations, and the ways they are taken up in mainstream institutional discourses of equality in employment, have important implications for racial/linguistic minorities seeking teaching positions in public education (Abella, 1984; Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994).[2]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Language and Identity

Hall's (1996) poststructural theoretical approach to identity and the linguistic dimensions of identity helped us to frame the present research. Hall specifies that language is one potential dimension of how individuals may represent their identity.

> Actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, *language* and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where

> we came from," so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on *how we might represent ourselves*. (p. 4, italics added)

In the same theoretical frame of reference, Luke and Luke (2000) critique the essentialist theoretical notion that minority language "competence" or "fluency" is the *sine qua non* of racial/ethnic/cultural identity. Their research documents that many biracial individuals who, for various reasons, were unable to develop skills in Chinese languages when they were youngsters, nevertheless maintained a sense of Chinese identity and selected to learn family languages as adults. Ien Ang (1994), writing about her experiences in postcolonial Indonesia, Holland, and Australia, also addresses the complex relationships between language, identity, and authenticity:

> Throughout my life, I have been implicitly or explicitly categorized willy-nilly, as a "Chinese." I look Chinese. Why then don't I speak Chinese? I have had to explain this apparent oddity countless times (p. 3). … A self-assured, Dutch, white, middle-class Marxist asked me, "Do you speak Chinese?" I said, "No." "What a fake Chinese you are!" was his … kidding response. In being defined and categorized … I was found wanting. (p. 11)

Just as Luke, Luke, and Ang demonstrate that cultural identity is complex and not reducible to linguistic skills only, we wish to explore the complex nature of linguistic identities and the values ascribed to these by families and communities, employers and the teachers themselves. The data in our present research suggest that the criteria for linguistic identity/competence and the values attached to differ-

Power and Identity

The works of Bannerji (1993), Foucault (1980), Mohanty (1991), and Henry et al.

McKay and Wong (1996) interpret what Norton says about learners' investments in speaking and apply this notion to all four language skills, arguing that these have differential values for learners in relation to their identities. These studies examine social identity construction of individuals engaged in diverse aspects of language learning. In the present study we look not at language learning per se, but rather at how teachers construct their knowledge of heritage languages and how they represent these constructions. We find intriguing, in the respective narratives of the teachers of Punjabi and Chinese ancestry, indications that their families' (and hence their own) sense of heritage language identity were reflections of varying options and possibilities.

The works of Krashen (1998) and Tse (1998), respectively, suggest some useful ideas about the nature of variation in opportunities for formal and informal heritage language use. Krashen identifies a phenomenon that he calls linguistic "shyness." When speakers of a heritage language are criticized for their efforts, they can become shy about using the language. Hence, the speaker becomes unwilling to use the language for fear of being criticized. Complementary to Krashen's work, Tse calls attention to the powerful influence of opportunities to use languages in settings where the speakers feel comfortable as accepted group members.

Norton, McKay, Wong, Krashen, and Tse all research language experiences of individuals; in contrast, we are looking at how groups of individuals represent their linguistic identities and at apparent contrasts between these representations. We keep in mind dangers of essentializing groups; nevertheless our data do suggest some patterns. We consider the possible sociocultural characteristics of these respective groups that might contribute to the different ways in which teachers constructed and subsequently represented their knowledge of their heritage languages. We see that teachers of Chinese ancestry are inclined to tell us a great deal about whether as children and adolescents they had formal literacy instruction. Punjabi ancestry teachers rarely mentioned literacy instruction in Punjabi; they talked more about their confidence in their conversational abilities. We consider how these different representations may have come about and how they may be more and less advantageous from an employment perspective.

Finally, we consider issues of language identity representation in relation to official Canadian employment equity policy, and the ways in which identity representation may be implicated in employment experiences of teachers of minority ancestry. Bakhtin's (1981) ideas about the struggles between "authoritative" and "internally persuasive" discourses are useful here. Whereas authoritative discourse is fused with political and institutional power (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343), internally persuasive discourse is "tightly interwoven with one's own words" (p. 345) and is creative and productive. Bakhtin's dis-

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Viewing employment equity as an authoritative mainstream discourse helps us to see how teachers' differential success in their struggles with this discourse may be related to the ways they represent, to themselves and others, their linguistic investments and identities. Based on the nature of their investments in their family languages it may be easier for some to successfully engage their own internally persuasive discourse about their language abilities, "with its own gestures, accents and modifications" (Holquist, 1981, p. 424) in the inevitable struggle with mainstream authoritative discourse. These individuals might more easily be able to get jobs.

Policies in mainstream institutions, (e.g., employment equity hiring policies, admissions policies to professional programs of teacher education, and credentialing policies of the British Columbia (B.C.) College of Teachers and B.C. Teachers' Qualification service) may be, as Luke and Luke and Ang caution against, reducing minority identity to minority linguistic identity. These mainstream authoritative policy discourses structure the ways in which minority teachers may be able to insert themselves into mainstream institutions, at least in regard to their self-described sense of security in their heritage language identities. Using language as an employment criterion may serve to "control and contain" (Chakrabarty, 1993) rather than to include these minority ancestry teachers. Thus, these policies may privilege language skills and devalue the importance of knowledge that is rooted not solely in teachers' linguistic competencies, but in their experiences in their families, communities and as minorities in mainstream schools.

METHODOLOGY

In-depth interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) were conducted with 25 teachers of Chinese ancestry and 20 teachers of Punjabi ancestry who responded to a call for volunteers placed in *The BC Teacher*, a publication distributed to all teachers in British Columbia. One and a half hour interviews were guided by a consistent series of open-ended questions on the following topics: family background, school experiences from elementary to postsecondary teacher education, and employment experiences. These questions were formulated from a theoretical perspective on identity issues. Our specific focus in this article on (heritage) linguistic dimensions of identity reflects a grounded theory approach where data collection precedes theory building (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). This theme of linguistic identities was not a specific focus in our initial, more broadly based inquiries regarding teachers' identities and the ways in which family, community, and educational experiences were implicated in professional identities (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2001; Hirji & Beynon, 2000). However, 17 of the 20 Punjabi ancestry teachers and 21 of the 25 Chinese ancestry teachers introduced issues of language in a variety of ways in their narratives. Hence, we turned our focus to this area that they had identified as important.

Inevitably our representations of the interviewees' narratives are reflective of our

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or interpreter" (p. 114). Parents stress that it is easy to learn several languages and many parents speak Hindi and English as well as Urdu (Gibson & Bhachu, 1991).

In contrast to the diverse political and linguistic histories and the large size of the Chinese population in Vancouver, the smaller size and relative historical, cultural, and social homogeneity of the Sikh community in Vancouver is striking. Religion is a cohesive factor in the Punjabi community (Johnston, 1988) and Punjabi language is a vital part of the religion. However, literacy is not a prerequisite for either religious or social activities. In the temple (*gurudwara*), Punjabi is the language in which the services are conducted, but it is not necessary to be literate to join in. On special religious occasions, families are able to hire a reader to hold a continuous reading (*akund phat*) of the religious text (

In the present research, we bring Holland et al.'s framework on identity and agency to bear on issues of language investment patterns and identity construction. The authors articulate the socially situated nature of identity. In this perspective, identities are shaped in interaction with socially prescribed norms and other actors in a variety of social contexts. We focus on the interviewees' perceptions of the following socially situated contexts or interactional spaces in which family languages are salient: the home, formal childhood schooling experiences, adult experiences with learning ancestral languages, the job market, and the place of employment. These interactional spaces were social locations shaped in part by parents and community, in part by educational institutions and in part by the teachers themselves. In the family context, we are interested in the circumstances that teachers perceived as salient in forming their assessments of how and how well they used these languages with their family.

ple, Maureen, born in Canada, whose family speaks Toisan, said, "Because my mom speaks mostly Chinese that's why I've retained my Chinese."

Similarly Lynn, also born in Canada, recalled,

> I grew up [until age 5] speaking Toisan. My mom and dad were pretty fluent in English, but because we lived with our grandma, I think they wanted us to learn our own language first.

Paradoxically neither of these individuals considered themselves to have particularly good conversational skills in Toisan. Rather they stressed that their oral language skills were equivalent to those of a 5-year-old (the year they entered mainstream schools).

Although the family language was considered important for communication at

rier to developing English language fluency. Sharon was born in Canada and “did

In a contrasting account, Gwen, who was born in Vancouver and whose parents were from (mainland) China, spoke confidently about her conversational fluency in Cantonese. She attributed this both to the fact that her parents spoke Cantonese at home and to the fact that

> I had attended Chinese school in my elementary years, right through, in fact, to graduation. I am still quite comfortable with the language.

Nan immigrated to Vancouver as a pre-school child; her parents spoke Cantonese and Fukienese at home. She attended after school and Saturday programs for 6 years. She referred to the development of difficult (for her) literacy skills through the "kill and drill" approach. She attributes this emphasis to inhibiting her opportunities for developing conversational fluency. This contrasts with the experiences of

> though my mom was concerned, she didn't speak English with us, she refused to.

Sahibjeet echoed similar views:

> I am quite fluent in speaking Punjabi. When we were growing up mom always said, "You're all gonna learn English so you have to speak Punjabi in

and write, has since enrolled in Cantonese conversation courses through a local community college and the Chinese cultural centre. Vincent has begun an informal exchange at home with his mother. He is teaching her conversational English and she is teaching him conversational Cantonese.

Joanne, who emigrated to Canada as an adult, undertook formal language studies. Her family language, in which she feels fluent and literate, is Hakka. Her Canadian University degree is in English literature and she also develops secondary school curricula in Mandarin.

> Before going to Canada [from Malaysia] I finished senior Cambridge [Mandarin] Chinese and my father has always been an intellectual and so he made sure I learned my Chinese. I didn't have the confidence to teach Chinese even though I was involved in curriculum development. Then I had a chance to study language in China and it was like a homecoming. I found myself quite fluent again. Everything came back.

Her concern about high standards is prominent in her teaching of Mandarin.

> I say to the students, "When you learn a language, you have to do it really well. When I learned English, I wanted to learn it better than a native speaker. Despite the accent, despite whatever. I want to learn it better. In learning Chinese," I told them, "you have to be able to go to Beijing and open your mouth and speak to the locals and people should not know you are a foreigner."

From Joanne's narrative, we gained the impression that considering oneself knowledgeable in Cantonese and/or Mandarin was identified at least in part with literacy skills and that it was perceived as a formidable task to develop competency in these. Wallace, fluent and literate in Cantonese, had the following perceptions regarding literacy:

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use the language at home for quite a long time with her monolingual mother. In her early 30s, she took a university course on multicultural education and read about issues of first language retention and second language acquisition:

> I went back home after one class and said to my parents. I want to use my Cantonese. If you keep making fun of me how will I ever learn? And so now I am using it a little more every time I visit them and I keep persisting and telling them they are not allowed to laugh.

Finally, emphasizing the expectations required in Chinese languages and their connection to being accepted as Chinese, Denise, who is a French immersion

Sahibjeet, who counts herself "quite fluent," related her efforts to develop literacy in Punjabi.

> When I was in university I decided to take the reading and writing course because the script is very different [from English]. I was successful there. But I really haven't kept up with it. I can read slowly word for word and I can write it, but I've got lots of spelling mistakes, right, but we can get by, my spoken is very fluent.

Mundip (see earlier quote), who teaches Punjabi in high school, also took classes in university as an extension to the literacy skills he developed at home under his parents' guidance.

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Perceptions Regarding Languages and Employment

Teachers of Chinese ancestry. Many of the individuals interviewed were in positions with an English as a second language (ESL) component and each of these individuals had taken university course work to prepare in this area. These teachers pointed out that the preparation to teach ESL was advantageous in securing employment. It was a skill that they made prominent in their presentations of themselves to employers. Employers for their part were inconsistent regarding the "language question." Some asked about language skills in interviews and others did not mention this area. However, only 3 of 25 teachers had "marketed" their abilities in Cantonese as an employment asset: Lucy, several years after she had completed her education, and Vancouver born Gwen and China born Wallace at the outset of their job searches.

Lucy, unable to find a classroom position when she completed teacher education, was volunteering in a school when a White friend suggested she apply for a paraprofessional position as a home school liaison worker for a school district with a high Cantonese enrollment. This friend also suggested that she should highlight her ability to speak Cantonese. In this home school worker position, Lucy interpreted for parents and teachers and after several years, in which she got to know teachers and school administrators, she was hired as an enrolling teacher. This time she took the initiative to make explicit in the job interview that her Cantonese oral and written skills would be a job asset.

Gwen was born in Vancouver and did not want to relocate out of this competitive job market to find a teaching position. She "highlighted [in my applications and job interviews] that I spoke Cantonese fluently [and could also write it]." We note that Gwen linked her confidence to continuous attendance in formal language learning programs she attended in Chinese school (after school programs):

> I attended Chinese school in my elementary years right through, in fact, to graduation … I felt that I was still quite comfortable with the language and could understand the culture to be able to bring that into my teaching as well.

However, a number of individuals who used their family language in informal conversation with their own parents felt insecure in their knowledge of their heritage language in their professional positions. Sandra explained it this way:

> All the times, you know, if a [White] teacher is having a problem with communication with the parents, they'll come and ask me, come and translate, you know. And all the times I'll say well, I don't really feel comfortable doing it. And certainly I'm illiterate, I can't read and write Chinese which I find is a real detriment in some ways.

We will take up these somewhat ambivalent dimensions of Sandra's narrative about minority language use in the school when we consider how employers might best broadly envision the skills that minority ancestry teachers can bring to the mainstream educational system.

Teachers of Punjabi ancestry. Like their colleagues of Chinese ancestry, some of the teachers of Punjabi Sikh ancestry had teaching positions with a strong ESL component, a teaching area for which they had a variety of types of professional preparation. Employers (similar to the cases of Chinese ancestry teachers) did not deal with this area in a consistent way. However, in contrast to their colleagues of Chinese ancestry, all but a few (whether or not they were asked) highlighted, for potential employers, that their conversational fluency in Punjabi was an important skill they could bring to their work. Some, like Sahibjeet and Baljeet, attributed a large part of their success in securing employment to their minority language skills. Baljeet most succinctly articulated a perspective commonly referenced by many of the interviewees:

> Just being Indo-Canadian and being able to speak the language, I think that was an asset to get this job. Because with this school having such a big population of Indo-Canadians, I mean they didn't have any Indo-Canadian role model as teacher here, I think that was a big factor in me getting the job.

Punjabi ancestry interviewees unproblematically presented themselves as knowledgeable. The complexities and variations evident in the narratives of Chinese ancestry teachers were not apparent for the Punjabi ancestry teachers and this helps explain the relative brevity of this section.

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INTERPRETATION

Issues of Identity and Language

In our earlier research, we saw that both Punjabi or Chinese ancestry teachers were negotiating in similar ways in their professional work sites to creatively use their knowledge of their respective languages as an important (if often professionally unacknowledged) dimension of their roles (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2001; Beynon, Toohey, & Kishor, 1998; Hirji & Beynon, 2000). However, analysis of the interview data on family language practices in home and community in the present research highlights differences between the two groups of teachers.

In spite of a range of teacher perceptions about language use, both within and between groups, different notions emerge from the respective groups of what constitutes "knowledge" of their language. We see that individuals in each group have a range of linguistic identities situationally constructed in the variety of family and professional circumstances in which they operate. In this section, we specify these different notions. In the final section, we consider possible implications of these varying notions for the training, employment, and professional practice of teachers from these respective groups.

We see that the respondents of Punjabi and Chinese ancestry were diversely engaged in a range of options and identification with their family languages (Norton, in press). In the narratives of the teachers of Punjabi ancestry we repeatedly heard about the ways in which parents emphasized using Punjabi as the primary language of communication in the home. In some instances, this was because the parents could not communicate in English. In other cases, the parents were competent in English but deliberately decided to use Punjabi, confident that their children would learn English in school (even if it took a bit longer). The family's sense of itself was highly identified with conversational fluency in Punjabi. Most teachers of Punjabi ancestry were comfortable with that identification and used their conversational skills to communicate with parents and students in their schools. Literacy, although a valuable addition, was not an intrinsic part of their sense of identity as persons knowledgeable in their language.

In contrast, Chinese interviewees constructed their linguistic identities largely in relation to their written as well as their conversational skills, and they recounted the high family expectations for what constituted competency. Hence, we heard a great deal about the institution of Chinese out-of-school programs regardless of whether individuals spent much time in these programs or felt they learned much from them. From interviewee accounts it appears that Chinese school emphasized literacy rather than conversational skills and this made it difficult for individuals to easily participate in a social group that used the language, and thus might support the development of identity and security in the heritage language (Tse, 1998).

Another important theme relates to the interviewees' (and their parents') understanding that learning family languages will interfere with learning English. One way in which the concern about English proficiency was expressed was the issue of English pronunciation consistently present in the interviews with teachers of Chinese ancestry and not present in the Punjabi teacher interviews. In reflecting on a friend's difficulty in getting a job, one of the teachers of Chinese ancestry remarked, "[my friend] has had trouble getting a job, she still doesn't have a full time job, I think it is because of her accent." Accented English was repeatedly represented as an important negative marker of identity. Therefore, not only was it important to do everything possible to learn English (written and spoken), but also to acknowledge that even grammatically written and spoken English would be undervalued if the individual spoke with an "accent." In some instances, time that might have been invested in becoming literate in Chinese was put into English conversational and literacy skills.

Another factor possibly implicated in, and complicating the opportunities for teachers of Chinese ancestry in confidently representing their heritage language identities, is described by McKay and Wong (1996) when they note the complex political/national historical experiences of the students and their families in their study and suggest that combined with

> the fact that Chinese has a single written language but numerous regional dialects (some mutually incomprehensible), it is not surprising to find the immigrant students making delicate maneuvers about "being Chinese." (p. 588)[4]

It is not difficult to imagine a teacher of Chinese ancestry, aware of the complex

ute to the weakening of this official discourse and the possible modeling it might provide.

Few school districts in British Columbia engage in employment equity policies or practices, and even among these few that do, the focus is on voluntary ethno/racial/ identification by potential employees (Fisher & Echols, 1989). In spite of this apparent lack of official concern, there appears to be a shared unofficial, but nevertheless authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), of employment equity among educators. These professionals construct their authoritative employment equity discourse around notions of skills and abilities, rather than (official notions of) proportional representation (Henry et al., 1993).

In this unofficial authoritative discourse, minorities are, in the first instance, frequently constructed as potentially "under-qualified." In the normative gaze of mainstream educational institutions, they are often assumed to be wanting (Ang, 1994; Bannerji, 1993; Foucault, 1979). Many mainstream and minority professionals seem to have shaped a common discourse around the consensus that professionals of minority ancestry must be "as good as" the White mainstream candidates. In regard to the question of language, which is the focus of this article, this is often implicitly assumed to mean, by all parties, firstly, that minority candidates' spoken English should conform to mainstream English dialects.

Second, growing out of this discourse, comes the following question with which we started this article: "Do you know your language?" (of your family or ethnic community). The question is based on the notion that these teachers have an "extra" skill that "others" (White Anglos, usually) do not. Like coaching extra mural sports or organizing a drama club, it is considered a legitimate and advantageous asset in a competitive job market. However, the question often also serves another purpose. It functions as a way of avoiding the issue of race as a legitimate consideration in issues of employment. Thus, it becomes "possible to perpetuate racial domination without making any explicit reference to race at all" (Omi & Winant, 1994, pp. 7–8).

In the context of this unofficial employment equity discourse, we see that the concerns regarding representations of language identities that we have analyzed in this research provide us with important information about how employment opportunities might be more equitably structured for these minority teachers. We have considered the complexity of factors implicated in linguistic identity representations. On the other side of the dialogue is the employer. We see that informal employment equity discourse among professional educators privileges minority language abilities and (perhaps inadvertently) undervalues or ignores other aspects of minority experience. We see that this informal discourse provides an opening in the employment

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> When I started in the teacher education program people would say to me, "You have a definite advantage because you are Chinese." But the way I look at it is I am a minority, but I don't speak the language so that's almost a knock against me. But it was never something I brought up … even when I wrote my letters of application (to teacher education), I didn't put down anything about being Chinese.

The research presented here, which focuses on individuals' family and community experiences with their heritage languages and how, in turn, interviewees represent their internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) about their linguistic selves in these languages, has, we feel, important implications for how the discourse regarding employment equity in education might be constructed to be more equitable and inclusive.

Minority Languages Are Valued; What About Minority Voices and Experiences?

The data in this research illustrate what many individuals of Chinese or Punjabi language backgrounds have in common. They have conversational abilities, but not literacy skills, in their family languages. They can, for example, use their family language to help a student feel comfortable in the classroom, but they cannot write translations of letters that go home to parents. Rather than asking, "Do you know your language?" employers might more usefully engage candidates in conversations about their experiences with language learning and how they might be able to build on these experiences to help learners. They could also ask how candidates might be able to use knowledge of languages other than English for a variety of purposes in classroom, school and community.[5]

Teachers of minority ancestries can potentially bring a rich variety of experiences to their work with young people and colleagues. When employers' authoritative discourses focus on language as a marketable commodity and avoid inquiries into the diversity of teachers' racial, linguistic, and cultural experiences and identities, these discourses implicitly negate the value of these multifaceted identities (Hall, 1996). Avoiding this complexity of identities and experiences becomes a way of silently asserting the power structure of mainstream education. This silencing is a negation of the reality that racial minority professionals have long participated on unequal terms in the racialized environment of the school (Dei, 1996).

When minority teachers are encouraged to bring their variety of internally persuasive discourses about their diverse and multifaceted identities and experiences with language learning into classroom discourse, they contribute valuable knowledge to students engaged in the processes of language learning. Moreover, as illustrated in earlier research (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2001; Beynon & Toohey,

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