

TURNING THE TIDE:
REVERSING HERITAGE LANGUAGE ATTRITION AND
SHIFT IN A CHINESE AMERICAN FAMILY¹

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ABSTRACT

Families immigrating to English-speaking countries, such as Chinese families in the USA, typically undergo language shift to English within three generations. In principle, however, language shift can be reversed, as documented in the case of certain endangered languages. In a case study of a three-generation Chinese American family, we show how heritage language attrition and inter-generational language shift can be reversed. The birth of a third generation motivates the second-generation parents to resume speaking and acquiring Chinese. Awareness of the advantages of bilingualism and recognition of a Chinese American identity lead the second-generation parents to transmit Chinese language and culture to the third generation.

KEYWORDS

Language shift Heritage language Chinese American

1. INTRODUCTION

Families immigrating to English-speaking countries, such as Chinese families in the USA, typically undergo language shift from their

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逆转潮流：一个在美华裔家庭如何逆转继承语磨蚀趋势

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摘要

移民至英语国家的家庭，比如在美华裔家庭，通常会在三代人的时间内就不再传承母语，转而使用英语。然而这种趋势并非不可逆转，如某些濒危语言研究所示。本文通过一个在美华裔家庭三代人的案例研究，阐述如何扭转继承语磨蚀的趋势和第二、第三代的语言转向。第三代的出生促使第二代重拾母语，增加母语的使用，继而提升其母语能力。同时，第二代对拥有双语能力优势的体认以及他们对华裔身分的认同，也更进一步促使汉语语言文化代代相传。

关键词

语言转向 继承语言 在美华裔