

# Heritage Language Loss of Asian American Youth: Racial Ideologies in Language Policy Implementation

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In 2016, the state of California voted in favor of Proposition 58, reinstating the power of local education agencies to determine the types of language education programs over which they administer and to permit the creation of bilingual and dual immersion programs in California public schools. The legislation seeks to address language diversity and promotes the bilingual acquisition of California students. In repealing English-only instruction policies, the proposition enables alternative language education pathways for the over 2.5 million California students who speak a language other than English at home. An examination of current school district programs and policies, however, reveals that Asian language bilingual programs are often lacking in number, or simply non-existent, even in large school districts that serve significant Asian American student populations, and this presents adverse implications for language maintenance and identity formation. This paper draws on language policy and critical theory frameworks to deconstruct the documented heritage language loss of Asian Americans through the triangulating forces of institutional language policy, language environments at the local school district level, and racialized ideologies about Asian Americans.

I'm used to a kind of linguistic exile. My mother tongue, Bengali, is foreign in America. When you live in a country where your own language is considered foreign, you can feel a continuous sense of estrangement. You speak a secret, unknown language, lacking any correspondence to the environment. An absence that creates a distance within you. In my case there is another distance, another schism. I don't know Bengali perfectly. I don't know how to read it, or even write it. I have an accent, I speak without authority, and so I've always perceived a disjunction between it and me. As a result I consider my mother tongue, paradoxically, a foreign language, too. (Lahiri, 2016, pp. 19–21)

In her autobiographical work *In Other Words*, author Jhumpa Lahiri reflects on the profound ambivalence toward loss and exclusion in relation to language that embodies the collective memory and experiences of the Asian diaspora, and in particular first- and second-generation Asian American communities. The psychological and emotional distance from a home or ethnic language that consequently arises from this positionality within American society continues to markedly affect the Asian American consciousness, manifesting in various ways including contemporary pop culture and social media (As/Is, 2016; Fung, Fung

& Doughboy, 2016; Yamazawa, 2015). Further corroborating Lahiri's narrative, the widespread pattern and consequences of heritage language loss among Asian American immigrant children have been documented and discussed by various scholars across disciplines (Eng & Han, 2018; Fillmore, 1991; Hinton, 2001; Jo & Rong, 2003; Kim & Chao, 2009; Li & Wen, 2015).

Considerably shaped by racially discriminatory United States immigration policy since the late 19th century, Asian American communities are composed of immigrants who carry with them the rich cultures, histories, and languages of their first or imagined homeland. 1.5- and second-generation Asian American children occupy, as a result of specific racialization processes, a distinctive space in which the tension between their naturally multilingual experiences in the community and English language acculturation practices at school dominates their most formative years of socialization and identity formation. Recent linguistic anthropology literature suggests that for Asian Americans, ethnic languages and dialects are not necessary for the performance of ethnic identity (Kim & Chao, 2009; Reyes & Lo, 2009). Yet, if racialized dominant discourses ascribe certain languages to certain Asian American communities, and if identity is a centrally linguistic phenomenon constituted in social interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), a glaring disunion between Asian Americans and their relationship to a heritage language emerges, accordingly influencing conceptualizations of self-identity and personhood within the greater context of American society. Chun (2004) documents, for example, the linguistic features of Mock Asian, a register of English that indexes "a stereotypical Asianness that unambiguously mocks Asians, rather than being characteristic of 'realistic' impersonations of Asian speech" (p. 269). This linguistic register relies predominantly on the perceived speech patterns of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean speakers and remains a pervasive racialized discourse of Asian identity. Mock Asian ascribes notions of non-native, foreigner speech to its human referents and creates a mismatch between apparent and authentic language practices. The construction of ethnic East Asian language hegemony is additionally underscored. Asian American youth constantly encounter and negotiate these ideologies of Asian speech as they construct their understanding of the social world around them.

Jo and Rong (2003) assert that the language learning process of children from immigrant families in the United States includes not only the acquisition of English but also the loss or maintenance of a heritage language; the outcome of this process is influenced by the interplay of social factors often beyond the control of the child or caretakers involved. These conclusions underscore the uncertainty of language learning pathways among immigrant children. However, mainstream Asian American narratives, such as those previously mentioned (As/Is, 2016; Fung, Fung & Doughboy, 2016; Lahiri, 2016; Yamazawa, 2015), appear to indicate strong tendencies of language loss over maintenance, invigorated by negative language attitudes and hegemonic language ideologies (Tse, 2000). Considering the notion that the maintenance of heritage languages typically requires explicit instruction (Lee & Wright, 2014), sites of public education, their language policies, and the implementation of those policies become some of the most significant processes that shape the experiences of linguistically minoritized Asian American children.

The 2010 U.S. Census found that more Asian Americans reside in the state of California than any other state, and that California is also home to the second

largest population of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders within the United States (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013). California is an ideal context in which to examine heritage language maintenance efforts for Asian American students, with its long history of Asian immigration and an existing state-initiated ideological commitment toward language diversity in public education (California Department of Education, 2018). Given that heritage language programs have yet to gain traction within the realm of public education, a more practical exploration of language maintenance in education for the time being lies in bilingual and English learner programs. The focus of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the implementation of bilingual education programs in California at the local school district level and to then interrogate sociohistorical factors and racialized ideologies regarding Asian American communities that may be influencing the landscape of California public school bilingual education. I intentionally draw from specific language policy and planning frameworks to present a perspective that acknowledges the connection between localized and institutional sociopolitical forces as they pertain to the construction of linguistically diverse environments.

### Conceptual Framework

With the rise of post-colonial societies and politics in the aftermath of World War II, the field of language policy and planning emerged in the early 1960s from language scholars intrigued by the perceived language problems of these reshaped societies (Johnson, 2013). After six decades of scholarship, language policy and planning researchers have continuously developed innovative approaches to analyze the ways in which language interacts with community and power. Importantly, the heritage language loss of Asian American children indicates a language problem entrenched in the ramifications of 20th century postcolonialism and transnational migration as a consequence of neocolonialism. While the issue is consistent with foundational models of language policy and planning theory, it also demands an inquiry that discusses factors beyond matters of the state and into broader social and institutional contexts. To address these contexts, the ecology of language framework first proposed by Haugen in 1972 (Johnson, 2013) metaphorically understands multilingualism and language diversity as active components of a given language ecosystem. Bound by local government policies that presumably account for citywide demographics and communities, the California public school districts examined in this paper function as distinct language ecosystems that are uniquely defined by their language speakers, ideologies, and interactions.

Hornberger (2002) extends the language ecology framework by offering the themes of language evolution, language environment, and language endangerment. These three themes presuppose that languages live and evolve alongside other languages; change and interact with their environments across sociopolitical, economic, and cultural dimensions; and risk endangerment and death in the ecosystem without adequate support and sustainability measures. The heritage language loss of Asian Americans reflects this language ecology framework in that Asian American heritage languages are as diverse as their community, frequently coexist with the dominant and other languages, yet follow a trajectory toward endangerment for sociohistorical factors to be explored in this paper.

To examine this trajectory, the language environment of districts as ecosystems proves crucial. Within the language environment, top-down language planning efforts from the state serve as the exemplary model of and guide the dominant discourse surrounding language. According to Ruiz (1984), particular orientations of language planning establish the framework from which languages in a society are understood. In this view, language planning agencies that wield top-down institutional power, commonly the state, guide the discourse and attitudes which delineate language as a problem, right, or resource, though this process competes with local bottom-up innovation and resistance. Whereas a state agency may propagate certain attitudes toward a minoritized or marginalized language, local actors possess the ability to either accept or reject these attitudes. In the last few decades, the state of California has seen several shifts of language orientation in policy and planning initiatives, influencing the ways in which local education agencies act and react to such initiatives. So much as language planning affects language ideologies, language ideologies equally cultivate language planning efforts.

Still, language attitudes and ideologies do not occur within a vacuum of linguistic phenomena. Rather, echoing Crenshaw's (1991) feminist theory of intersectionality, it is worth considering that issues of language co-occur with and inform issues of race, class, gender, and other categories of social stratification. Examining heritage language loss in the context of Asian Americans, therefore, necessitates a comprehensive conceptual framework that acknowledges the relationship of language and Asian Americans as a racially marginalized community in American society. Rosa and Flores (2017) fittingly describe the co-naturalizations and intersections of race and language as components of broader raciolinguistic ideologies. Much of the raciolinguistics literature, however, has concentrated mostly on language and race as it impacts African and Latinx American communities. I apply Tollefson's (2006) critical language policy framework to further integrate Asian Americanist critical race theory (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Teranishi, 2002) into the dialogue surrounding raciolinguistics and educational language policy. The critical language policy framework aligns with wider critical theory discourses in its assertion that marginalized ethnocultural groups experience loss of culture, identity, and socialization through processes of colonization, including the spread of English, by dominant state institutions (Tollefson, 2006).

Importantly, while American colonization has directly impacted the Filipino American, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islander communities, I also acknowledge the positionality of many Asian American groups as nonindigenous settlers within the borders of the United States. California state education and language policies nevertheless impact the heritage language loss of Asian Americans in that they impose the acquisition of English often at the expense of a student's ethnic and cultural identity. Hereafter, this paper aims to critically deconstruct heritage language loss through the triangulating forces of institutional language policy in California, language environments at the city and public school district level, and racialized ideologies about Asian Americans.

### Asian Pacific California: A Community

As a community, the diversity of Asian America is often understated in public discourse. The concept of *Asian* as a pan-ethnic label itself only arose against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement out of solidarity and coalition-building as the political consciousness of various Asian American groups brought to light similar processes of oppression they each faced (Ishizuka, 2016). To this day, the appropriate terminology for and definitions of the Asian American community are continuously reconsidered and contested from within the community itself. However, the U.S. government eventually co-opted this language into the Census, and for decades, Hawaiians, Samoans, Maori, and other Pacific Islanders have been considered separate racial categories (Spickard, 2007).

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau listed 23 distinct Asian American and 19 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander ethnic groups (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013). The umbrella term *Asian American* as it is used more broadly still represents the ready conflation of these 42 ethnicities, indexing a unitary body of individuals who share a singular language or culture. Yet, the term remains politically necessary in order to recognize the shared experiences of oppression and marginalization faced by communities racialized as Asian. Even with the U.S. Census revisions, current modes of statistical disaggregation for Asian American demographics quickly reveal the often immense discrepancies across the ethnic groups regarding issues including socioeconomic status, high school graduation rates, education levels, and English language proficiency. For example, within California alone, the percentage of foreign-born individuals among Asian Americans and Pacific Islander groups is 83% for Nepalese, but 5% and 2% for Guamanian or Chamorros and Native Hawaiians respectively (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013). This additionally contrasts with the statewide average percentage of foreign-born Asian Americans (59%) and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (20%).

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that many Asian Americans also trace their ancestry through Latin America, Africa, Australia, and Europe as a result of historical migration patterns among certain Asian ethnic communities. Related to this point and even more important to this paper's concerns, 72% of Asian Americans and 39% of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders speak a language other than English at home. That the majority of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders are first-generation immigrants and speak a non-English language demonstrates not only exemplifies the vibrant language diversity within the community, but also the vital need to maintain home languages and support English learners. In fact, 23% of Asian American households across the state are *linguistically isolated*, an ambiguous designation under which no member 14 years old or older reportedly possesses advanced English language skills. Some ethnic groups, such as Korean and Vietnamese, report higher percentages (Asian American Advancing Justice, 2013).

Issues of language have always been central to the Asian American experience. The first Chinese community schools first appeared in California in the late 19th century (Liu, 2006). Early Chinese schools, where Cantonese was used as the language of instruction, arose from local community organization efforts (Zhou & Kim, 2006), and as a response to the legally-sanctioned racial segregation of Chinese American students from white public schools. The focus of these schools was not



necessarily on language learning or maintenance, but rather serving as the primary schooling sites for Chinese American youth. Later, as anti-Asian racism reached new heights in the early 20th century, Asian American children received pushback from their families against heritage language use and were instead encouraged to acquire English and assimilate into American society as quickly as possible. When immigration policies shifted in the contexts of the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement, the landscape of community schools changed with an increase of linguistically diverse communities and a post-integration shift in function from primary education source to supplementary language and cultural instruction. Often unregulated and typically run by parent volunteers with or without teaching credentials, the quality of language learning instruction greatly varies across each school organization. In addition, whereas language schools for Chinese or Korean may be thriving, language schools for typically underrepresented Asian American communities, such as Vietnamese and Khmer, systematically possess fewer resources to promote and maintain their institutions (Lee & Wright, 2014).

Since 2000, Asian American populations have been growing faster than any other racial group in California (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013). The population growth of Asian Americans finds precedent in the second wave of large-scale immigration following the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, which raised quotas from Asian nations from 100 to 20,000 (Japanese American Citizens League, 2006). Today, Asian American communities continue to expand and are largely situated in four regional areas within the state: Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area, Fresno, and Los Angeles, with diverse, flourishing enclaves existing throughout. In these spaces, multiple languages and cultures interact on a daily basis. If Asian American public school students in California are increasingly exposed to their home or heritage languages within the household, community, or otherwise, what then are the social forces driving their language loss? It is the goal of this paper to pinpoint and deconstruct some of these social forces.

### **Influencing Language Policy: Asian American Racial Discourse and Ideologies**

In this section, I intend to first contextualize the language policy implementation and bilingual education environments of school districts with broader discourse and theory surrounding Asian American racialization and marginalization. The essence of Asian American racialization and marginalization lies in ambiguity, the crux of this uncertainty extending back to the first waves of Asian immigration to the United States in the mid-19th century. As Asian critical theory (Iftikar & Museus, 2018) fundamentally presupposes, the racialized experiences of Asian Americans are shaped by white supremacy and coexist alongside those of other racially marginalized communities in the United States. However, Asian Americans do not adhere to the American black-white racial paradigm, as is currently, but importantly, discussed in critical scholarship, disrupting white supremacist and nativist conceptions of citizenship and race.

While the racializations of all nonwhite groups function to maintain white hegemony and stratify people of color as outsiders or second-class members of society, unique to the Asian American racial reality are the images of the perpetual foreigner and model minority, of yellow perils and treacherous actors of wartime espionage. Just as the term suggests, the perpetual foreigner image specifically

casts and essentializes Asian Americans as always foreigners, never belonging. Furthermore, national allegiance is often questioned or challenged, substantially exemplified throughout history by the *loyalty questionnaire* handed to Japanese Americans during their World War II incarceration and the racial profiling and subsequent false imprisonment of Taiwanese American scientist Wen Ho Lee. At its best, the racialization of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners accelerates the processes of forced assimilation. At its worst, it underscores a motivation for violent anti-Asian hate crimes, including the Chinese massacre of 1871, the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982, and post 9/11 Islamophobic attacks targeting Muslim, Arab, South Asian and Southeast Asian communities. Language plays a salient role in the racial profiling of Muslim individuals. Such was the case when an Italian professor of economics was profiled and accused of terrorist behavior on a plane to Syracuse for writing what was perceived as Arabic by a fellow passenger. In reality, the professor was writing Math equations (Rampell, 2016). For the Muslim diaspora and Arabic speakers, who compose significant communities across the Middle East, and South Asia, the racialization of their language presents particular consequences that cannot be ignored. Keeping these forms of racialization in mind, the languages of Asian Americans are heavily associated with foreignness and national subterfuge, complicating discourses surrounding multilingual education, such as the distinction between world languages and the languages found in California (California Department of Education, 2018).

Indeed, the perpetual foreigner stereotype often manifests in assumptions tied to language and accent (Matsuda, 1991), highlighting patterns of discrimination against Asian Americans for their racialized language use. Not only does the stereotype mediate social Othering in education policy and pedagogy, but Asian American students, in turn, may internalize hegemonic language ideologies to cope with the racism that they experience in classrooms and public spaces. In their processes of identity formation and socialization, Asian American youth must constantly negotiate these imposed racialized discourses about their place in American society. That the belonging of Asian American faces and identities is persistently questioned and contested might, in fact, be ideologically reflected in public education policy discussions.

Another pervasive racialized stereotype of Asian American is that of the model minority. The model minority myth was first proposed as an academically-marked social phenomenon by sociologist William Peterson against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement and specifically asserted that the apparent success of Japanese and Chinese Americans who overcame racial adversity was a result of particular cultural strengths including hard work, perseverance, and quiet accommodation (Suzuki, 1977). The model minority image presents Asian Americans as ethnically East Asian, academically high-achieving, and socioeconomically successful. At its conception, the myth served to delegitimize the grievances and experiences of African Americans, and to establish an intercommunity discourse that ultimately distracted from the workings of systemic oppression and institutional racism in the United States. In addition to ignoring the oppressive systematic barriers historically faced by Asian Americans and their detrimental effects, including mental and public health, lacking access to public services, and cycles of poverty, it has been constantly emphasized in this discussion and elsewhere that the Asian American community is expansive and immensely diverse. The model minority myth resists obscurity as

we enter the 2020s. Asian Americans, despite their varying degrees of educational achievement or financial success, are still “position[ed]...as hard-working, submissive, and entrepreneurial immigrants who place admirable importance on family and education” (Lee, Park, & Wong, 2017).

The model minority myth effectively homogenizes the experiences and livelihood of all Asian ethnic groups, erasing not only the historical struggles of Asian Americans against violently racist systems, but also current issues surrounding poverty, physical and mental health, language access, high school graduation rates, and college retention across East Asian, South and Southeast Asian, and Pacific American communities. When discursively framed as academically successful along ambiguously determined scales, Asian Americans are likely to face exclusion from education policy deliberations (Chun, 1980) in that their social and linguistic struggles at school are overlooked or misinterpreted. Indeed, a recent major policy plan on high school admissions outside of California in comparatively diverse New York City excluded the input of Asian American voices (Algar, 2019; Fuchs, 2019), despite the plan’s potential effects on Asian American students. Ultimately, the pervasive model minority myth contributes to the racialized notion that Asian American students are succeeding academically, and therefore, do not require English language assistance in classrooms. The combined ideologies produced by the perpetual foreigner and model minority stereotypes evoke the image of an Asian American student who is a high academic achiever yet remains an outsider in their own classroom. The essentialization of Asian Americans in this manner lends itself to language and education policies that discount Asian American student needs and to racial marginalization.

### **An Overview of California Language Policies: 1970 to Present**

From the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, the historical Long Sixties era saw the rise and culmination of widespread cultural movements surrounding civil rights, counterculture, and anti-war resistance across the United States. This radical period of political action included the rejection of the institutional language inequality and restrictive monolingual policies experienced by racially marginalized communities. Following such a transformative era that brought awareness to the social inequalities existing in the country, California residents experienced the relative success of language rights activism through the passage of legislation such as the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act of 1973, requiring state agencies that serve significant non-English speaking populations to provide information and certain services in a non-English language. For public education, a similar statute—the 15% Language Group Requirement—was revised into the California Education Code in 1976. In San Francisco, a class action suit by the parents of Chinese-speaking students against school district officials resulted in the hallmark U.S. Supreme Court *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) decision, constituting the lack of supplementary language support for non-English speaking students as a violation of the Civil Rights Act passed a decade earlier. Through these multiple demands for language services in public sectors, California policymakers and grassroots organizers considered language as a human and civil right and meaningfully influenced the ways in which state institutions embraced language diversity. In this brief but dynamic historical



period, the multilingualism of minoritized speakers aligned with what Ruiz (1984) described as the language-as-right orientation.

Certainly, the *Lau v. Nichols* ruling enforced the promotion of alternative bilingual education programs that positioned multilingualism in stark contrast to previous English-only instructional curricula. School districts quickly carried out plans of action for bilingual education programs in their schools based on the federal guidelines often referred to as the *Lau Remedies*. Although funding and ideological backing for bilingual programs and multilingualism in classrooms increased substantially following the court case decision, Hinton (2001) observed from the roughly 250 collected linguistic autobiographies of her Asian American undergraduate students at a large California public university that “virtually no one...had ever been in a bilingual education program” (p. 205). Indeed, strong political opposition to bilingual education developed in the ensuing post *Lau v. Nichols* era in California, dramatically contesting and reshaping perceptions of minoritized languages and the availability of bilingual education programs.

Subsequent language policy enactments affecting public and education domains, including Proposition 63—English as the official language of California 1986—and the original and amended Oakland School Board Ebonics Resolutions in—Oakland Unified School District 1996 & 1997—ideologically resisted the systematic promotion of multilingualism. The passing of Proposition 63 in 1986, the English is the Official Language Amendment, and Proposition 227 in 1998, the English Language in Public Schools Statute, represented a sociopolitical era that mainstreamed English-only activism and linguistic hegemony through state measures. The multilingualism of people of color threatened powerful discourses of the nation-state that implicate monolingualism as integral to national harmony. Thus, the non-English languages and the non-standard dialects of English of multilingual children from racially marginalized communities came to be seen as obstacles to their formal education.

Although the federal government does not recognize any language as the official language of the United States, Proposition 63 declared English as the official language in the state of California, legitimizing through public policy the hegemonic power and privileging of English speakers. Twelve years later, Proposition 227 required limited English proficient students in public schools to be instructed primarily in English, rejecting previous multicultural and rights-based education policy legislation and eliminating many of the bilingual programs throughout the state. Advocates of Proposition 227 problematized the minoritized languages of predominantly immigrant students and viewed the heritage or home languages of a student as a hindrance to English language acquisition. As soon as the proposition was passed, language scholars quickly began to document and rebut its unsupported claims on the benefits of English immersion or English-only classrooms (Gándara, 2000; Tórréz, 2001; Wright, 2004). Evidently, where Asian American students were already not receiving bilingual education, the enactment of Proposition 227 further reinforced assimilationist language ideologies that positioned English as the only correct and relevant language for students and minoritized languages as unimportant and problematic.

Proposition 227 was eventually repealed in 2016 with Proposition 58, which reinstated the power of local education agencies to determine the types of language education programs over which they administer and permitted

the creation of bilingual and dual immersion language programs in California public schools. While Proposition 58 marked a definitive end to a largely English-only era in language policy, official efforts preceding the legislation, including the creation and codification of the nation's first State Seal of Bilingualism (2011), uncovered the growing institutional recognition and advocacy of language diversity by policymakers. Katznelson and Bernstein (2017), however, criticize the neoliberalist approach of Proposition 58 to language diversity in education, suggesting that the affirmational rebranding discourse surrounding the legislation effectively obscures the needs of minoritized language speakers and English language learners.

Echoing this shift in language attitudes, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson released the *Global California 2030* initiative on behalf of the California Department of Education in 2018. In its mission statement, *Global California 2030* seeks to equip students with "world language skills" in order to "more fully engage with the rich and diverse mixture of cultures, heritages, and languages found in California and the world" (California Department of Education, 2018, p. 4). Though the initiative definitively considers the education concerns of limited English proficient students, the focus of multilingualism in public schools is now framed, not in promoting English language learning or heritage language maintenance, but in increasing economic resource and marketability.

Namely, the framing of multilingualism in terms of economic benefit and commodification has resulted in language programs that privilege white, middle class students to the detriment of linguistically minoritized students of color (Flores & García, 2017). Bilingual education currently has legal backing in California and dual immersion programs have become increasingly popular across the state. However, Cervantes-Soon et al. (2017), in their critical overview of bilingual education, have similarly raised concerns of emerging inequalities in regards to access for racially and linguistically marginalized students, curriculum, teacher recruitment and practice, and so forth. It is with this current backdrop of California language policy that I investigate if and how Asian language bilingual programs are being implemented to serve the needs of Asian American students and to maintain heritage languages.

### **Bilingual Education in California Public Schools Districts**

Although current language policy orientations lean toward globalization efforts, bilingual education in California is primarily understood as a means to address the needs of English language learners. As members from predominantly non-English speaking families and communities, many Asian American students cross paths with the English learner education system. English Learner status is established through a home language survey completed by a parent or guardian upon a student's initial enrollment, typically in kindergarten. The home language survey provided by the California Department of Education presents a brief series of questions that ask the respondent to state the student's first language and language of use as well as, the language in which parents or guardians interact with the student. If a language other than English is listed in any of the answers, the student must proceed with the English learner classification process. This process includes preliminary English language assessment through the California

English Language Development Test (CELDT), designating students as either Initial English Language Proficient or English Learner (California Department of Education 2019a). English learners are subsequently enrolled in language programs and are required to retake the CELDT until the local education agency determines that the student is adequately proficient in the English language. Whether or not Asian American students actually do require English language learning assistance, it can be generally assumed that many Asian American first-, 1.5-, and second-generation students in California become involved with English language learning programs at some point during their K–12 schooling.

For this paper, I examine school district student populations and bilingual education programs. As Asian American communities are concentrated in urban and metropolitan areas of the state, I selected six unified school districts from the 15 largest cities in California based on population data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2017): San Francisco, Oakland, San José, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Irvine. With the exception of Los Angeles, the school districts all enroll higher percentages of Asian American students than the statewide average of 9.2% reported by the California Department of Education (2019b). Los Angeles Unified School District contains the largest total student enrollment, whereas San José Unified School District enrolls the least amount of students. Los Angeles is the largest city overall, whereas Irvine is the smallest city of the selected six. Table 1 presents the total California student enrollment; the Asian American student enrollment including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders; the percentage of students classified as Initial English Language Proficient (IELP), English Learner (EL), or Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP); and the availability of bilingual programs for Asian languages in the academic 2017–18 school year.

Table 1

*2017-18 California School District Enrollment, ELA Classification, and Bilingual Programs*

District	Total enrollment	Asian American enrollment	Students with ILEP / EL/RFEP classification	Bilingual programs for Asian languages
San Francisco	60, 263	36.2%	56.2%	Yes
Oakland	50, 231	14.4%	53.2%	No
San José	31, 713	15.6%	48.4%	No
Los Angeles	621, 414	5.9%	53.2%	Yes
San Diego	126, 400	13.8%	45.8%	No
Irvine	34, 617	50.2%	40.6%	No

*Note.* Adapted from California Department of Education (2019 b, c).

During the collection of data on school district demographics and language education programs, concerning patterns of invisibilization (Sue, Bucci, Lin, Nadal & Torino 2007; Wing, 2007) arose for Asian American students, suggesting that racialized ideologies play a role in educational language policy. The following discussion recognizes that a statistical majority of Asian American students come from multilingual families and presumes that this creates a likely scenario in

which many Asian American students may have once possessed IELP, EL, or RFEP status, and therefore, had encounters with bilingual education programs. Due to the limitations of the data collection, the Asian American enrollment results do not include self-identified mixed-race and mixed-ethnicity students or disaggregate based on student ethnicity.

As a historical center for English learner education, San Francisco Unified School District offers comprehensive language programs to fit the needs of a diverse population of students. The school district demonstrates an abundance of program options and languages that seemingly represent the demographics of their students. For Asian American students, this results in language offerings, including Cantonese, Mandarin, and Korean. In contrast to San Francisco, most school districts only implemented Spanish–English bilingual programs. If offered at all in those districts, Asian language courses were classified as foreign languages in junior high and high schools. Often, the Asian language in question would be Mandarin Chinese. That Asian languages are framed and taught primarily as foreign languages, rather than as languages that Asian American students already speak, evokes and reinforces the racialization of Asian Americans as perpetually foreign.

Furthermore, with the exception of San Francisco, none of the school districts provided language programs for Asian language speaking students with the explicit intention of developing biliteracy. There were no language programs for Vietnamese, the second largest minoritized language among limited English proficient speakers (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2008). In San José, this was especially jarring considering the city’s significant Vietnamese American community. Perhaps the school district most troubling to grapple with was Irvine. Irvine Unified School District reported a majority Asian American population at 50.2%, yet only offered three English learner programs—two English immersion tracks and a third alternative dual immersion program that must be initiated by a group of students and their parents. As a result of the information gathered from school district websites and the California Department of Education it appears that despite state-initiated orientations toward language as a resource and support for language diversity, Asian American students are by far failing to receive bilingual education in their home or heritage language even in large school districts where they are a significant population of the total student enrollment. Moreover, the bilingual education that Asian American students do receive, parallels the model minority narrative in that the available languages are restricted to Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, and Korean—dominant East Asian languages. Bilingual programs for students who speak languages such as Vietnamese, Tagalog, Hindi, Punjabi, Arabic, or Farsi are seldom implemented. At the same time, some school districts are legally mandated to provide school documents and information in those languages. The exclusion of South Asian and Southeast Asian languages in public schools reflects not only the persistent essentialization of Asian Americans as East Asian, but also the erasure of and insufficient attention toward the social marginalization uniquely experienced by South Asian and Southeast Asian students and their communities.

One might, nevertheless, assume that perhaps the heritage language loss of Asian American students is an ideological or conscious choice of the student or

their family. Overwhelmingly, education scholars have found that regardless of assimilationist or dominant language ideologies, Chinese American students and parents alike were interested in the students' maintenance of a home or heritage language (Lao, 2004; Sung & Padilla, 1998; Wang & Phillion, 2007). In their study of Cambodian and Khmer heritage language programs, Chik and Wright (2017) uncovered the commendable teacher dedication to the maintenance of these programs, signifying their value and importance to the community. Furthermore, the prevalence of Asian community language schools strongly suggests that despite a lack of institutional acknowledgment of Asian languages in K–12 education, Asian American families are interested and invested in heritage language maintenance.

While the status of community language schools today is considered supplemental to that of formal education (Lee & Wright, 2014), their presence continues to thrive, epitomized by robust national or regional networks. Notably, the Association of Northern California Chinese Schools (ANCCS) and the Southern California Council of Chinese Schools (SCCCS) combine for a total of 219 schools in the two networks for the 2018–19 academic school year (Association of Northern California Chinese Schools, n.d.; Liu 2006; Southern California Council of Chinese Schools, 2018). In Irvine, where the unified school district did not provide bilingual education programs for Chinese speakers, ten Chinese heritage language schools were associated with the SCCC. Additionally, the Korean Schools Association of Northern California (KSANC) reported a 50 school membership number (Korean Schools Association of Northern California, n.d.). These heritage language schools and associations prove significant when compared to the approximately 475 dual language schools in California public schools and highlight the exclusion of Asian language bilingual education in the formal education system.

### Implications and Conclusions

At the narrative climax of his poem, Yamazawa (2015) emphatically proclaims, “See, maybe Asians are known to be good at math because that’s the only homework our parents could help us with” (min.1:14). With this line, he evokes with clarity the shame and frustration of language barriers between Asian American immigrant parents and children. The pressing needs of Asian American youth are the ability to communicate with their most immediate family members and the validation of their multilingual heritage and skills. In many cases, this proposes a social environment in which Asian American youth are highly encouraged and receive adequate resources to learn and maintain the language of their home and ancestors. The goal of practitioners is to assist in the prevention of students’ ambivalence, their profound regret in adulthood, and the linguistic dissonance over the loss of a language that should have been and was already theirs.

In California, bilingual and dual immersion programs primarily orient toward Spanish–English instruction, even as they in many ways marginalize the Latinx (and Asian–Latinx) students they are intended to serve. Consequently, Asian American students face the additional reality of the invisibilization of their own language education needs and experiences. Among the six school districts investigated in this case study, only two provided any bilingual education instruction in Asian languages. There is apparently little and insufficient institutional awareness of the need to implement bilingual education for Asian American students, regardless of



their language background. When the language of home, family, and community is not represented in the school, Asian American students come to see a part of themselves dehumanized and invalidated, affective experiences that influence and carry throughout a lifetime. While there is some support for languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese, and Korean, the support is significantly limited in distribution and the effects of invisibilization are even more devastating for Asian American students who do not have an affinity for or a sociocultural tie to those languages.

More attention and action toward the implementation of Asian language programs in public schools, therefore, resist the processes of marginalization and language hegemony. With the socially conscious and deliberate implementation of bilingual programs for Asian languages, a pathway that counters the significant trend of heritage language loss among Asian American students in the California public education system may emerge. While this paper provides only a preliminary look at bilingual education from an Asian American perspective, it also highlights the urgent need for further research in this area. This paper focuses on the post Proposition 227 era. However, an extensive list of factors influencing the execution of bilingual programs remains unexplored. Potential future investigations can include, and are not limited to, extended discussions that include Asian bilingual education prior to Proposition 227. Additionally, analyses of bilingual education programs, district funding measures and allocations for bilingual education, bilingual teacher recruitment, and retention for Asian languages are needed. Such studies could focus on suburban Asian enclaves in Silicon Valley and San Gabriel Valley, where Asian Americans are often the demographic majority.

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