

**INTERCULTURAL DISCOURSE:
A STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
IN
CHINESE AMERICAN NARRATIVE WRITING**

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DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by me and the work is entirely my own.

Carol Yuen Mun Chan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between language and culture in narrative writing by focusing on a specific group of texts: published narratives written in English by Chinese American authors. These narratives tend to focus on the minority experience and the use of English to depict the ethnic culture magnifies the intricacies of cultural representation. The intimate relationship between language and culture in these texts is underscored by the fact that language is repeatedly singled out as a primary marker of cultural difference.

The concept of intercultural communication provides a useful platform from which to study the interconnections between language and culture in narrative writing. Although the concept is mainly applied to spoken discourse, it highlights a number of important aspects of the narratives in this study. Analysis of the texts reveals that intercultural communication is not only a common feature in the narrative worlds as characters from different cultural groups interact but that the texts also become sites of intercultural discourse by foregrounding those characteristics that make them culturally distinctive.

The role of language in these texts is closely related to the way they communicate as intercultural narratives. Thus, this research examines how language is used to establish cultural identity and signify cultural difference. It also describes the various ways in which language is stylistically exploited to express ethnicity. In analyzing the relationship between language and culture in these narratives, an approach combining the resources of both stylistics and sociolinguistics is adopted. The cultural significance of discourse patterns and language representation in the narratives can only be fully appreciated with the aid of sociolinguistic knowledge.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The reality of the global village seems closer than ever in this twenty-first century, as satellite television, rapid internet communications and international air travel dissolve the barriers of distance and time. Modern technology makes it possible for an Indian urbanite in Bombay to access international news via satellite television, while a German student chats on-line with a Japanese friend. At the level of international institutions and multinational corporations, developments in information technology allow the meeting of nationals from different countries without them even leaving their local offices. In this age, it does not seem necessary to step outside one's doorstep to encounter a different mindset, another way of life, or an alternative culture.

However, this greater access to other cultures has not lessened the drive to assert distinct cultural identities. While globalization has generated an awareness of a shared world, it has not led to the dissolving of differences between peoples and nations. Inter-ethnic strife in many parts of the world, such as the war in Bosnia, the genocide in Rwanda, the continuing discord between Palestinians and Israelis, and the racial tensions in Indonesia, is sober testimony to the seriousness with which communities regard themselves and those different from them. Worldwide migration may have resulted in more multicultural societies, but the emphasis appears to be on

magnifying variety rather than developing similarities. In an ironical fashion, a greater awareness of other cultures heightens one's consciousness of the differences between cultures, since distinctions are accentuated especially when they are juxtaposed.

1.1 Central Concerns

The issue of how cultural distinctions are established and communicated through language is a central concern in this thesis. It examines this issue in relation to a specific group of texts: narratives written in English by Chinese American authors, who experience the complexities of living in more than one culture as members of an ethnic minority in the United States, and who write out of that experience. Thus, in these narratives, the theme of cultural difference and the attempt to assert a distinct cultural identity predominate.

In the narrative depictions of cultural difference, language is repeatedly singled out as a primary marker of that difference: the ethnic culture is associated with the Chinese language while mainstream American culture is associated with English. Language choice becomes an important issue and a commonly depicted scenario is a discourse situation in which the language practices of members from different groups become focal points of cultural difference. The texts therefore reveal a keen awareness of the workings of language within cultural contexts, and

they heighten our awareness through narrative comments on the role of language and by employing stylistic devices that capitalize on its effectiveness as a cultural marker.

My aim is to study the relationship between language and culture in these texts. More specifically, I shall examine the cultural significance of language in the narratives and describe the ways language is called upon to express cultural identity. This research will draw on a combination of resources from both stylistics and sociolinguistics: the former deals with the study of language patterns and the manipulation of linguistic resources in written discourse, while the latter deepens our understanding of the workings of language in cultural contexts. I hope to demonstrate that stylistics and sociolinguistics form an essential partnership and that the cultural underpinnings of stylistic patterns in narrative writing can only be fully appreciated in conjunction with sociolinguistic reality.

1.2 Creative writing in English

The relationship between language and culture in these texts derives special emphasis from the fact that the writers have chosen to represent the experiences of the ethnic person through the language of the dominant culture. The question of how English can be made to convey the tones and nuances of the ethnic culture is central to this thesis and will be examined in detail.

However, the choice of English as the code of creative expression is related to its dominance as a world language and as the language of an ever-growing population of second-language speakers. It has become the dominant language of international communication, with official status in sixty countries and an important place in twenty more (Johnson 1996). It is also the main language of books, academic journals, the media, international sports and entertainment (Chew 1999:43). Consequently, it serves as a crucial means of access to the information age and international lifestyle in the twenty-first century. It is no longer the exclusive property of its native speakers, as the number of speakers of English as a second language gradually overtakes the number of native speakers (Crystal 1997, Graddol 1999). Graddol (1999: 63) estimates that by 2050, the estimated number of English second-language speakers will reach 668 million. The extensiveness of its use across so many countries and amongst such a variety of people groups makes it an important *lingua franca* in the multilingual and multicultural context of the global village.

The development of English as a world language allows it to facilitate international communication and cooperation, permitting an exchange of ideas and information in a world otherwise divided by language borders. But it has not dissolved all barriers to create a commonness that erases cultural distinctions. Instead, cultural differences continue to be asserted through the language as it evolves into varieties of English that permit the expression of national and ethnic fervour. The emergence of 'New Englishes' (Kachru 1977; Platt, Weber and Ho

1984), reflecting the norms of the communities that have chosen English as one of their official languages, indicates that the English language can become a vehicle of expression for national cultures not originally associated with it. Together with varieties of native-speaker English, such as British and American English, the second-language varieties, such as Indian English, Nigerian English and Singapore English, contribute to the diversity of this international *lingua franca*.

Both its facility as an international *lingua franca* and its adaptability in different cultural contexts has made English especially attractive to writers from a non-English background. As an international language, English allows them to reach a larger audience. At the same time, its diversity and flexibility can be exploited to express cultural distinctiveness in their writing.

The upsurge of creative writing by speakers of English as a second or foreign language must therefore be partially related to the spread of English. As English brought to former British colonies took root and developed indigenous strains, and minority groups in English-dominant countries took hold of the language for their own purposes, a generation of writers has sprung from these communities to choose English for creative expression. Their publications can be found under the categories of 'post-colonial literature', 'commonwealth literature', 'minority literature' or 'new literature in English' (as opposed to 'English Literature'). It would be reasonable to assume that without the spread of English, such writing would have had a smaller audience, much less impetus for development and publication, and some might never have been written. Instead, the number of English works by non-Anglo-Saxon

writers is increasing; it has become acceptable, even fashionable, to publish works on the minority and post-colonial experience in English.

Even though these works are written in English, they contain qualities quite different from those associated with Anglo-Saxon English-speaking culture. First of all, the physical, emotional and psychological landscapes in these works are centred on the post-colonial or minority experience. A large part of that experience is bound up with a multicultural and multilingual setting, which introduces exciting tensions and contrasts that would not be found in Anglo-Saxon English works. In terms of subject matter and themes, cultural and language variance is typically foregrounded. But even more distinctive is the effort to incorporate language variety stylistically, so that readers are confronted with English texts containing un-English patterns and bearing the imprint of other cultural rhythms. Thus, while English is used to reach an international readership, it is also made to assert differences of culture and language.

As mentioned above, these texts exhibit a strong sensibility to the workings of language. Moreover, language is used in the service of culture: although language is not equivalent to culture, since culture is much broader than language and encompasses it, it is made to represent culture. Consequently, in these texts, language differences often have cultural implications.

1.3 Choice of Texts

The range of new literatures in English is wide, covering different ethnic groups and nationalities. Out of this scope, I have chosen to focus on narratives by Chinese Americans. An important reason for this is that Chinese Americans, as a minority group, have produced a substantial amount of writing in English, and the published material is available for analysis. The fact that Asian American literature is now a recognized subject in many North American universities (Chan, S. 1991: 181, Chow 1993: 120-143) contributes to its significance.

My interest in these texts began when I read the works of Chinese American author, Maxine Hong Kingston. As a writer from a minority group, yet fiercely asserting her American identity, Kingston used English to describe the experience of being a Chinese in America, and her writing displayed a sophisticated awareness of how language could affect the dynamics of cultural representation. I was intrigued by the way her narratives approached the issues of language, cultural meaning and cultural identity, and exploited situations of cultural miscommunication.

My choice of texts is also partly motivated by a personal interest stemming from my own background as a mainly English-speaking Chinese in postcolonial Singapore, whose grandparents were immigrants from China. The fact that Chinese American narratives are written by immigrants or children of immigrants, and contain themes of displacement, race, identity, and crosscultural communication, made them fascinating to someone of my background. Growing up in the

multicultural and multilingual environment of Singapore has also enabled me to appreciate the narrative accounts of coping with dissimilar cultures and differing linguistic habits and the need to adjust to shifting cultural and linguistic codes. An issue of central interest is how these writers used a second language to convey local realities: what linguistic adaptations have to be made in order to convey the tones and nuances of the native setting authentically in a language not traditionally associated with the culture? The narratives that dealt with this difficulty often ended up exploiting linguistic and cultural variance for narrative purposes.

1.4 The Chinese American Narratives

Like Kingston's narratives, the other Chinese American texts analysed in this thesis are concerned with the minority experience. This experience always includes an acute awareness of the interrelationship between language and culture, of the difficulties of expressing aspects of culture in a language not traditionally associated with it, and the ways language can affect the representation of culture.

This sensitivity to language and culture in the Chinese American narratives is not surprising when we locate the authors in terms of their generation. Unlike their immigrant parents, most of the writers were born in the United States and underwent an American education. They are described as second-generation Chinese Americans. One exception is Louis Chu, the author of Eat A Bowl of Tea ([1961]

1989), who came to the United States when he was nine years old. However, even though he was not born in the United States, he attended American school and college, where he graduated with a major in English. Thus, a common factor in the background of all the Chinese American writers in this study is an extensive American education.

An American education not only enabled them to master the English language, it also brought them into close contact with mainstream, English-speaking America and socialized them towards an American way of life, which always included the ability to speak English. In chapter four, the prestige of learning English is discussed in detail in the context of the changing sociolinguistic profile of the Chinese in America. This overview of the primary texts seeks to emphasize that an American education not only contributed to the writers' facility with English as a literary language, it also brought them into close contact with mainstream English-speaking America and provided them with concrete experiences of cultural conflict. Consequently, cultural conflict and the complexities of living with two cultures and two languages are main themes in both their autobiographical and fictional narratives.

Differences between Chinese and American culture are recurrent topics in the narratives. As second-generation Chinese Americans, the writers are still close enough to their ethnic roots to appreciate the differences, which are reinforced by the presence of their immigrant elders, who provide the vital links to Chinese language and culture. But in their contacts with mainstream America, second-

generation Chinese Americans also face the pressure to assimilate with America, that is, to adopt an American identity, which often seems incompatible with the traditional Chinese values. The search for a sense of self in the midst of conflicting cultural demands is expressed in their writing through the depiction of Chinese American characters who move from a traditional Chinese environment to mainstream English-speaking America. The move is accompanied by a sense of bafflement as the characters come into contact with American culture and are changed in the process. This change is accompanied by a sense of loss, the difficulty of bridging the differences between ethnic and host cultures and the need to establish a valid identity in the new context.

Repeatedly, in the narratives, the sense of loss is often expressed in terms of language difficulties and a sense of speechlessness. The narratives constantly emphasize how language is linked to cultural identity: the Chinese American characters' difficulty in the new context often takes the form of linguistic incomprehension and miscommunication and their assimilation with America is represented in terms of a linguistic shift from Chinese to English. The sense of being caught between Chinese and American ways of living is played out in situations of language choice and language differences, and the difficulty of transferring significance from one culture to another is vividly expressed in terms of a translation problem. Key episodes often comprise of situations of cross-cultural communication, with the risks of miscommunication and misunderstanding. The

interrelationship between language and culture is therefore a vital theme in the narratives.

Writing becomes not only a way of depicting the situation of being a minority person in homogenizing America, it is also an attempt to find the Chinese American *voice*. Towards this end, part of the uniqueness of the Chinese American narratives arises from the way dialect terms and non-standard English are incorporated into the predominantly standard English text. This strategy creates linguistic variance that not only highlights the fact of multiple languages in the Chinese American context, it also underscores the theme that both Chinese and American cultures contribute to the Chinese American sense of reality. Linguistic variance in these narratives does not occur solely for literary effect; it has cultural significance.

It may be that later generations of Chinese Americans, who have found a comfortable middle ground between Chinese and American cultures or have relinquished one for the other, would produce different types of narratives, with different themes. If so, then these narratives capture the voice of a certain generation and provide a portrait of a transitional phase in the sociolinguistic development of the Chinese American community. Most importantly, they emphasize the close relationship between culture and language in the depiction of immigrant reality and in the search for an effective means of communicating cross-culturally.

1.5 Studying Written Discourse

Research on the interrelationship between culture and communication tends to concentrate on face-to-face, verbal communication. For example, the study of intercultural communication, an important and expanding area of research in this era of globalization and crosscultural communication, focuses mainly on spoken discourse, particularly in the contexts of international business and the multicultural workplace (Samover and Porter 1991; Scollon and Scollon 1995). A number of studies on the effects of culture on written communication have been carried out under the title of ‘contrastive rhetoric’ (Kaplan 1966, 1972; Hinds 1983; Malcolm and Pan 1989). These usually restrict their data to academic texts produced by second language learners, and one of their primary aims is to provide a suitable framework for teaching the appropriate rhetorical strategies of English academic writing to non-native speakers of English. A brief discussion of some key features of this research will help to highlight the ways it differs from the objectives of this thesis.

The study of contrastive rhetoric is based upon the premise that linguistic patterns from the first language can be transferred to and detected in the learner’s second-language output. In a well-known study, Kaplan (1966) presents five different types of paragraph developments, which he provocatively argues are the result of the transfer of native-language patterns of rhetorical organisation to compositions in English as a second language. In a later and more expanded essay,

he emphasizes that “each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and that part of the learning of a particular language is the mastering of its logical system” (Kaplan 1972: 63). Based on his analysis of approximately six hundred English expository essays by students whose native languages were not English, he suggests that paragraph development of five linguistic groups can be represented in the following manner:

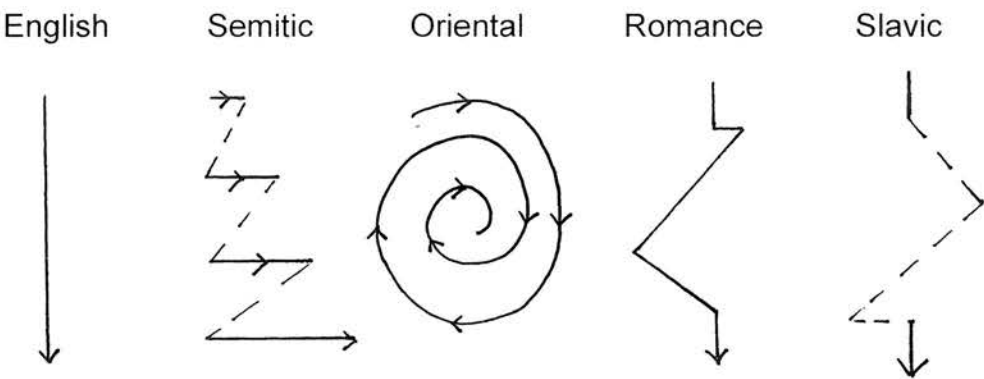


Figure 1 (from Kaplan 1972: 64)

Of particular interest to us is Kaplan’s representation of the Oriental paragraph development in the form of a gyre. This is meant to indicate “an approach by indirection” (Kaplan 1972: 46), in which the subject is viewed from a variety of angles but never directly. Kaplan traces this pattern to the traditionally prescribed form of the Eight-Legged Essay that originated in the imperial examinations in China and argues that because the Eight-Legged Essay is such an important part of the Chinese literary tradition, it tends to influence an educated Chinese whenever he

or she is asked to write an English essay (1972: 50). More controversially, he states that the requirements of balance and fulfilment of this pattern “eliminates any real concern with the kind of logic considered so significant in western analytic writing” (1972: 53); this logic - the straight line in Kaplan’s representation - consists of the straightforward flow of ideas from the opening sentence to the last. Kaplan not only argues that the transfer of such patterns from the learner’s first language into English results in paragraphs that do not conform to the logic of English, but that they reflect the Oriental cultural trait of ‘indirection’.

Kaplan’s studies have been criticized for ethnocentricity and overgeneralisation, two common dangers that plague research in contrastive rhetoric. For example, Carter (1988) points out the ethnocentricity built into Kaplan’s superficially neutral descriptive terminology: the terms “logical” and “relevant” are applied to Western discourses while “digression”, “repetition” and “circularity” describe Eastern discourses. Hinds (1983) argues that Kaplan’s model may not necessarily reflect native-language organisation, while Péry-Woodley (1990) adds that sociolinguistic factors, such as what is felt as ‘prestige’ linguistic forms, the perceived aims of education and what is taught in schools, may affect the way people organise their writing more than the linguistic characteristics of language families. Commenting on his own study more than ten years later, Kaplan (1988) concedes that some of the concepts may have been naive and oversimplified because of the pedagogical urgency to codify clear-cut differences between English and other languages for writing courses in English as a second language.

The approach adopted by Kaplan and other similar studies in contrastive rhetoric deviates in some significant aspects from the one in this thesis. First and foremost, Kaplan's study focuses on learner output, and it is the learners' lack of awareness of the rhetorical framework of the English essay that provides justification for his argument that learners fall back on first-language rhetorical strategies in their early attempts at composition in the second language. In contrast, my research seeks to analyse the written discourse of proficient second-language users, all of whom have had the benefit of an American education and have published in English. Thus, any deviations from English rhetorical patterns in their writing must be regarded as conscious and deliberate. Secondly, Kaplan's findings, like those of many other contrastive studies with pedagogical aims, are restricted to writing in formal settings and the academic domain, although his five representations of cultural styles appear to claim wider application. Such writing is usually directed by strict rhetorical rules and patterned after stylistic norms. Creative writing on the other, because of its very nature, is freer to experiment across a great range of styles; thus it is always difficult to ascertain whether the deviations found in a piece of literary text are due to a specific cultural pattern or the writer's creativity. Thirdly, contrastive studies tend to give the impression that language reflects culture directly. For example, the "indirection" of English writing by Chinese is explained as a reflection of Chinese thought patterns in both Kaplan (1966, 1977) and Malcolm and Pan (1989). This not only simplistically assumes that cultural traits

may be directly deduced from specific linguistic patterns, but also leads to a limited view of the relationship between culture and language.

A broader view of the relationship between language and culture in written discourse can be found in stylistic studies of postcolonial and second-language creative writing. We shall discuss three of them in chapter five. These studies take into account the sociolinguistic and historical contexts in which the texts are written and deviations from English linguistic norms are examined within the cultural frameworks of the texts to see if and how they deliberately communicate some aspect of culture. In this way, the role of the writer, the constraints he or she faces, and his or her control over the text are recognized and there is no easy assumption that linguistic deviations reflect cultural traits directly. This broader view also allows us to view the narratives as instances of real communication, as real language data from a community finding its own voice while negotiating the difficulties of crosscultural communication.

1.6 Key Concept

The concept of intercultural communication brings together several key features that characterize the relationship between language and culture in these

narratives. Although the concept is mostly applied to spoken communication¹, it seems equally applicable to the written narratives in this study.

The following definition of intercultural communication is particularly relevant to this thesis:

We characterize intercultural communication as contact between persons who identify themselves as distinct from one another in cultural terms. We are concerned most with direct, person-to-person contact in which the operative cultural identities of interlocutors are revealed in discourse.

(Collier and Thomas 1988: 99)

Although Collier and Thomas are mainly concerned with direct, person-to-person contact, their definition emphasizes a significant point: the fact that intercultural communication can only occur when cultural contrasts are perceived by the discourse participants. This may not necessarily involve actual cultural difference, since what is crucial is the perception of difference, particularly on the part of the sender, and its inscription in the message. Therefore, an examination of the message will reveal the cultural identities already decided upon by the discourse participants. For Collier and Thomas, the message takes the form of direct spoken communication, but in this thesis, the message consists of the written narrative.

The narrative thus becomes the site of intercultural communication: it is the place where intercultural communication occurs, as the narrative emphasizes those characteristics that define it as a distinct cultural entity and compels the reader to

¹ See for example, research on intercultural communication by Scollon and Scollon (1995) and Porter and Samovar (1985).

recognize it as such. The concept of the intercultural narrative will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

1.7 Thesis Outline

Chapter two establishes the important concepts used in this thesis. It will also provide an outline of Chinese American history and describe some of the key features of Chinese American writing in English. This information is important since we wish to analyse the texts in their historical and social contexts. Moreover, particularly with respect to minority writing, the socio-historical background will enable us to better understand the motivations and central concerns of such writing.

Chapter three examines the relationship between language and culture in the narratives by focusing on the significance of words and the way they are appropriated by Chinese American characters to assert cultural identity. I use the term “cultural semantics” to denote this strategy of establishing the cultural import of words. In the narratives, the definitions of common lexical items are re-examined as the presence of both Chinese and American cultures foregrounds the different ways of naming and defining in each culture. Difference in meaning becomes an important sign of cultural difference. I shall examine in detail how the cultural meaning of a lexical item is established through repeated association with cultural contexts that generate prototypical meanings.

Even more significant than the assertion of cultural meaning to signify the presence of the ethnic culture is the representation of language variety in the narratives. Language variety disrupts the monologic appearance of the text and serves as a forceful reminder of cultural difference. It is signalled either through narratorial description and commentary or stylistic representation. In chapter four, I shall concentrate on the former and analyse them in the light of sociolinguistic research that reveals how the narrative descriptions are grounded in sociolinguistic fact and how the representation of sociolinguistic pressures surrounding the Chinese American speech community in the texts characterizes immigrant culture in terms of a transition between languages, with the loss of the ethnic language coinciding with the loss of ethnic values.

Chapter five analyses the stylistic representation of language variety in the narratives and considers how language difference becomes a metaphor for cultural difference. The textual representation of the ethnic languages and the immigrants' versions of the dominant language in the narratives sharply contrasts with the standard English of the narratives and introduces a non-English voice and point of view into the narratives. With the aid of three stylistic studies of postcolonial and second-language creative writing, we shall survey the range of stylistic strategies used to represent the non-English codes in Chinese American narratives.

The depiction of language differences is used to great advantage in the narratives to emphasize culture as a source of difference in group dynamics and interpersonal conflict. Chapter six examines descriptions of such discourse situations

that tend to form central episodes in the narratives. The discourse participants may consist solely of Chinese Americans, or they may include members of the dominant culture in inter-ethnic interactions. In both situations, discourse strategies based on language choice, such as code switching and code mixing, emphasize that who speaks which code to whom become matters of cultural distinction as language serves as a marker of group identity and as a function of power or powerlessness that is related to group membership. Once again, I shall draw on sociolinguistic concepts to illuminate the dynamics of language choice in the context of the narratives.

In chapter seven of this thesis, we re-examine the concept of intercultural communication by focusing on the narrator. The narrator is not only an observer and recorder of ethnic culture, but acts as an intermediary between the minority and dominant culture. Within the texts, the narrator is often placed in situations of intercultural communication, having to explain aspects of the ethnic culture and translate from the ethnic to the majority language or vice versa. But the narrator is also required to serve as a 'translator' of cultural difference on the level of the reading encounter, where he or she mediates between the text world and the reader. The question of reliability arises when the narrators state their cultural and linguistic inadequacies or deliberately engage in acts of misinformation. Nevertheless, intercultural communication still occurs as questions of cultural authenticity take a backseat to the perception and inscription of cultural difference.

CHAPTER TWO

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

This chapter describes the concepts and background knowledge that provide the crucial framework for this research. It is divided into three parts: the first focuses on the key concepts used this thesis, while the second and third describe relevant aspects of Chinese American history and writing respectively and are aimed at facilitating an understanding of the socio-historical environment in which the narratives are written.

2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 Culture

As this thesis is concerned with the relationship between language and culture in written narratives, a definition of culture is essential. However, defining culture is far from easy, and part of the difficulty stems from the fact that it is so all-encompassing and multi-faceted. Knapp and Knapp-Pothoff remark that the problem is partly “a problem of units of description, and in part it is also a problem of the

range of phenomena to be considered” (1987: 4). There are as many definitions as the number of angles from which the concept can be approached.

A broad view of culture commonly adopted by anthropologists would include “the whole way of life of a people – including artefacts, practices, social structures, technologies, languages, myths, rituals, stories and economic systems” (Young 1996: 38). Porter and Samovar provide us with an even more inclusive definition that attempts to specify what “the whole way of life of a people” would consist of:

Formally defined, *culture* is the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, timing, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. Culture manifests itself in patterns of language and in forms of activity and behaviour that act as models for both the common adaptive acts and the styles of communication that enable people to live in a society within a give geographic environment at a given state of technical development at a particular moment in time.

(Porter and Samovar 1985: 19)

Porter and Samovar’s definition includes both internal and external aspects of culture: the internal is related to the feelings, acquired knowledge and memories that make up a world view, while the external refers to the manifestation of this often unconscious internalised knowledge, which can take the form of material objects and visible patterns of behaviour. Other definitions focus on the internal aspect of culture, for example, Holland and Quinn’s definition of culture as “shared presuppositions about the world (1987: vii) emphasizes the cognitive aspect, while

Alasuutari's description of cultural studies as the analysis of social meaning (1995: 26-30) foregrounds a view of culture that consists of the subjective rules and structures that direct and allow for the social construction of meaning. Although the material manifestations of culture are more noticeable, and hence more readily identifiable as part of a group's culture, the definitions by Holland and Quinn and Alasuutari underline the importance of the underlying frameworks and presuppositions that unify a particular group of people. Houbein presents the relationship between the internal and external aspects of culture in the following manner:

Culture is all that a group of people do that stamps them as having a unified world-view, from their technology and systems of economy, justice and politics, to social customs, religion, language and art. Of these, language connects all the components and presents it most succinctly to the outside world.

(Houbein 1983: 190-191)

Thus, according to Houbein's definition, the surface character of culture, that is "all that a group of people do", is essentially an expression or realization of an internal worldview held by the group. Interestingly, Houbein emphasizes language as the main means of uniting the different facets of culture.

The phrase "a unified world-view" in Houbein's definition highlights another important issue in conceptualising culture: when we point to a particular trait, habit or belief as part of the culture of a group, we imply that it is shared by all members of that group. Therefore, we conceive of culture in terms of that which defines and unifies a group of people. However, Casson warns us that the anthropologist's

description of culture is “an idealized composite abstracted from the diverse models of individuals” (1981: 18). Walsh emphasizes that:

The very concept of a *culture* is itself an abstraction . . . to identify a group of people as belonging to a certain culture is a creation of the human mind based on one’s perceptions and observations of the group’s distinctive ways of thinking and behaving.

(Walsh 1973: 1)

Describing the culture of any group thus inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity and idealization. The danger of such an idealized description is the assumption of homogeneity among members of the group, obscuring individual preferences and variations. As Casson emphasizes, “culture is located in individual human minds” (ibid.). Therefore, we need to differentiate between the shared, public character of culture and its private, individual formulation; the former tends to be an idealized abstraction, and is usually what we think of when we speak of a group’s culture. However, individual members of a group may choose to act contrary to the common patterns of thought and behaviour that are identified with the group’s culture. As Walsh points out, each culture “has its unifying principles and all members of the culture share to some extent in its thought, feeling, and behaviour patterns . . . but no two interpreters of the culture are likely to express those principles in exactly the same way” (Walsh 1973: 2).

Another important aspect of the relationship between culture and the individual is the fact that a person is usually a member of more than one group, and may consequently, identify with more than one culture. Davies’ metaphor of culture

peeling away “like the layers of an onion” (1991: 97) emphasizes the different cultures that contribute to a person’s identity. An individual acquires membership in different groups while performing a number of roles in various contexts, for example, as the son of traditional Chinese immigrant parents, as a researcher in an American company, as a husband to a Caucasian wife, as a father to American-born children, and as a member of a Christian church with an international congregation. The dilemma of first-generation American-born Chinese stems from the fact that they are part of both Chinese and American cultures and these cultures exercise a strong and competing hold on them.

It is also important to note that many of those traits and values that we identify as belonging to a particular culture are often found in other cultures, for example, respect for elders, high regard for literacy, love of children. In such cases, what differentiates one culture from another is the degree of emphasis placed on a particular trait or the different ways it is expressed in different cultures. For example, in Chinese culture, respect for elders means not arguing with them even when one disagrees with them, but in American culture, respect for elders does not necessarily preclude argument.

Perhaps the most significant feature about culture is that it is most obvious when distinctions between people groups are important. Walsh states that:

A group of people, whatever its size, is designated as a culture on the basis of what these people have in common and on how they are differentiated from other peoples and other groups.

(Walsh 1973: 1)

Walsh's comment implies that the characteristics that best define a group are those that help to set them apart from other groups and that these characteristics provide a focal point for group identification. On the topic of cultural identity, Knapp and Knapp-Pothoff point out that "the total of the shared knowledge in a social community seems to be of less importance in interactions among members of different communities than that subset of its features which the respective members themselves use and perceive as important" (1987: 5). Thus, culture becomes significant when group identification is important, and the cultural characteristics of a group become important in the presence of other groups. Culture seems best perceived in terms of difference.

Winner underlines the role of human subjectivity in cultural characterization when she notes that the "various significant differences that we call ethnic characteristics are subjectively determined and changeable, and – in turn – define ethnic groups, whose membership is also changeable" (1988: 128). Her view of culture emphasizes the changeable and adaptive nature of cultural identity. For example, an Chinese American male may behave in a manner that emphasizes his Chinese origins in the context of a Chinese banquet, and downplay those characteristics when interacting with other non-Chinese at a football match. Conversely, he might behave in a way that overtly signals his Chinese identity while discussing cultural issues with his American colleagues, so as to accentuate cultural differences. Thus, an individual is able to indicate different levels of cultural membership depending on the situation and the audience.

From this perspective, it is important to recognize that culture is not only perceived in terms of difference, but is usually **defined** in terms of difference. As Winner points out:

The members of particular cultures or subcultures symbolically distinguish themselves as 'we' as opposed to 'others' on the basis of a plethora of cultural criteria and markers, expressed through the exploitation of many sign systems cast in all possible modalities, both verbal and nonverbal.

(Winner 1988: 128)

Winner draws attention to the fact that cultural markers are often used to emphasize the identity of the group and to differentiate between "us", the insiders, and "others", the outsiders. Since culture is what makes one group distinctive from other groups, cultural identity is most conspicuous in contrast to other cultures.

In this thesis, we shall adopt a view of culture as difference. Instead of attempting the impossible task of describing a cultural system in its entirety, this view focuses on definitive qualities, since culture consists of that which differentiates one group from others. It does not discount the fact that an individual is a member of more than one cultural group, but recognizes that he or she may choose to accentuate one particular cultural identity in certain contexts. In order to do so, the individual will exploit markers of cultural difference. Culture as difference becomes particularly noticeable in inter-ethnic interactions, when members of different ethnic groups insist on maintaining their cultural uniqueness. In such situations, cultural features that emphasize the distinction between insiders and outsiders tend to be focused upon.

Viewing culture in terms of difference also permits us to recognize the roles of subjectivity and the imagination in the construction of cultural identity. Cultural differences may be real or they may be generated and perceived as real. As Kramsch points out:

On the reality of facts and events that constitute a nation's history and culture is superimposed a cultural imagination that is no less real. This cultural imagination or public consciousness has been formed by centuries of literary texts and other artistic productions, as well as by a certain public discourse in the press and other media.

(Kramsch 1993: 207)

What Kramsch describes as “cultural imagination” or “public consciousness” is a community's perception of its own identity, formed over an extensive period of time. Kramsch highlights the role of literature, artistic productions, the press and the media in the creation of this cultural imagination. This imagined cultural identity is such a significant part of a community's sense of itself that it must be regarded as much a part of the community's culture as the more tangible and demonstrable parts. It can play a determining role in a group's actions or in its perceptions of others, even though it may only have a tenuous link to reality. Thus, for example, the Chinese imperial court in the twentieth century maintained, promoted and practised the myth of China as the centre of the universe in the face of Western encroachment and Western military and economic strength. Locked into this myth of cultural superiority, it refused to acknowledge China's disintegration until too late.

Not only does the cultural imagination affect a community's subjective definition of itself, it also influences the way that community views others. Edward

Said (1978) points out that Western perceptions of the Orient have been based as much on fact, as on a specific cultural imagination fuelled by a sense of romanticism and stories of the exotic East. The perception of the Chinese as somehow exotic, inscrutable and ultimately dangerous was encouraged by Hollywood in America and continues to linger in the American popular imagination. More recently, in the mid-twentieth century, America has tended to view her Chinese immigrants in terms of the model minority thesis, which characterizes Asian Americans as economically successful, highly-educated, and enjoying a high standard of living. However, the facts reveal that in Chinese American families, more than one person worked, so that based on per capita income, as opposed to family income, Chinese Americans were earning considerably less than the national average; moreover, the percentage of Asian Americans in low-status, low-income occupations - that is service workers, labourers, farm labourers, and private household workers - is considerably higher than among whites in areas with the highest density of Asian Americans; also, the low unemployment rate among Asian Americans disguises high underemployment, for example, despite their high educational level, Asian American women receive lower returns to their education than do white women (Chan, S. 1991: 167-171). Thus, the model minority thesis privileges a particular view of Asian Americans which tends to ignore the less pleasant truths about their socio-economic situation. Sucheng Chan (1991: 171) suggests that the model minority thesis is promoted by Americans who believe that American society is truly an egalitarian one, with opportunities for all individuals who make the necessary effort to achieve a measure of material well-being, and if someone or a certain group does not "make it", at least

part of the fault lie with that person or group. Therefore, the perception of the Chinese as model minority is ultimately linked to the powerful cultural concepts of democracy, independence and freedom in the American cultural imagination.

Defining culture in terms of difference also allows us to understand the pervasive presence of stereotypes. Stereotyping is a form of “social typing”. Social typing in itself is not necessarily harmful:

Social ‘typing’ or categorization is probably a necessary part of our procedures for coping with the outside world. It allows us to quickly define our orientation to other individuals, and is the basis for our cultural sense of ‘manners’ and other conventions of interpersonal relations. It is a means for establishing preliminary relationships.

(Saville-Troike 1982: 181-182)

Thus, social typing is a form of generalization, which plays a crucial role in daily interactions since it provides us with an initial framework for relating to others and defining those relationships. It also serves as the basis for cultural patterns of interaction, and we rely on these patterns to initiate, establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. Far from viewing social typing as negative, we need to acknowledge the essential part it plays in everyday life.

However, social typing can result in stereotyping with negative overtones.

Saville-Troike explains that:

The typing may assume negative aspects, however, and then it ceases to be just a mode of socialization. It may become a means of disaffiliation or rejection, or of rationalizing prejudice, and it is this negative connotation that is usually associated with the term ‘stereotyping’.

(Saville-Troike 1982: 182)

Stereotyping occurs when a negative impression of another group ossifies and is repeatedly applied, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. As Saville-Troike points out, it becomes the basis of prejudice and rejection. Stereotyping thus exploits the differences between groups and chooses to view them negatively. Consequently, it strengthens group boundaries and makes it difficult for an outsider to gain admittance into the group.

Stereotypes may have some basis in reality; it could begin as an observation of some behaviour that seems characteristic to a group that is then negatively interpreted by the group doing the stereotyping. However, it may have less to do with the facts than the group's self-centredness:

Another type of stereotyping is not based on observable traits at all, but is a negation of the values held by the group which is typing . . . The group doing this kind of stereotyping defines culture in terms of its own beliefs and practices, and then interprets all differences as deficiencies.
(Saville-Troike 1982: 183)

This type of stereotyping is rooted in the group's sense of its own cultural superiority. The group does not ignore the fact that there are differences between groups, but it tends to regard the differences of other groups as inadequacies. This is perhaps the most damaging form of cultural stereotyping since it grants the group the moral justification to impose its standards on other groups.

Stereotypes can be so powerful that some groups may adopt another group's image of them. Consequently, stereotypic expectations "may well become self-fulfilling prophecies" (Saville-Troike 1982: 183). Subordinate groups in a society are especially vulnerable to the expectations of the dominant group, and may adopt

the latter's perspective, accepting its definition of them. Wong writes of the stereotypes of Chinese promoted by the mass media and literature in America – from “yellow peril to World War II ally to red scare to model minority” (Wong 1996b: 3) – and comments that the Chinese American desire for acceptance by the dominant society has resulted in “cultural silence and the sacrifice of an Asian American sense of self” (ibid.). Chin et al. similarly describe how these stereotypes have generated an Asian American sense of self-contempt that is “nothing more than the subject's acceptance of white standards of objectivity, beauty, behaviour, and achievement as being morally absolute, and his acknowledgement that, because he is not white, he can never fully measure up to white standards” (1974c: xxvii-xviii). In the search for society's approval, the Asian American may succumb to these powerful stereotypic descriptions, and his or her accommodation is then perceived as successful assimilation and acculturation. Chin et al. highlight the power of stereotypes:

The stereotype operates as a model of behaviour. It conditions mass society's perceptions and expectations . . . The subject minority is conditioned to reciprocate by becoming the stereotype, live it, talk it, believe it, measure group and individual worth in its terms.

(Chin et al. 1974c: xxvii)

The danger of such conditioning is that the minority member allows the dominant group to define his or her cultural identity and enforce certain codes of behaviour, which is often to the benefit of the dominant group rather than the minority group. Unfortunately, stereotypes are extremely difficult to uproot since they are so deeply

ingrained in a society's consciousness. However, Chinese American writers are aware of the negative impact of stereotyping and seek to challenge them in their work. One reason they write is to present a more realistic account of their community.

As we study the Chinese American narratives, we shall encounter a view of culture that emphasizes difference and observe how this difference is exploited in the representation of cultural identity. The narratives do not take the concept of cultural identity for granted; instead they attempt "to examine the lines and discourses of its construction and to recognise the existence within it of many meanings" (Campbell and Kean 1997: 20).

2.1.2 Language

In this thesis, language is perceived as intimately related to culture. One aspect of this relationship is described by Casson:

Language and culture are not independent or mutually exclusive cognitive systems composed of analogous structures and processes. Rather, culture is a wider system that completely includes language as a subsystem. Linguistic competence is one variety of cultural competence, and speech behaviour is one variety of social behaviour. The relation of language to culture is thus a relation of part to whole.

(Casson 1981: 19)

Language is therefore a type of cultural behaviour, and speech behaviour cannot be separated from the cultural environment that produced it. This intimate relationship partially suggests why language becomes such a powerful symbol of cultural significance.

Language itself is a symbolic system. It can be defined as a system of association between forms for the expression of shared meanings. It reflects the ways in which a society has chosen to encode, describe and make sense of reality. This social character of language influences each individual usage:

. . . since man is a social animal and the structure of language is determined and maintained by its use in society, self-expression in general and self-expression by means of language in particular is very largely controlled by socially imposed and socially recognised norms of behaviour and categorisation.

(Lyons 1981: 144)

Thus, every user of a language draws upon the socially contracted meanings and structures existing in that language whenever he or she seeks to communicate with other members of the speech community. Successful communication of a message is dependent on the extent to which both the speaker and the hearer share a similar language system.

The close relationship between a language and the society that uses and shapes it is reflected in the way words from different languages tend to differ in their

denotations¹. For example, in Mandarin, the phrase { 桌子 } [zhuo zi]² denotes both tables and desks; speakers of the language could use the phrase { 书桌 } [shu zhuo] to refer specifically to desks, but only if they considered the distinction necessary in a particular context. An English speaker, on the other hand, would habitually use two different labels ('desk' and 'table') to refer to these objects. This example of lexical non-isomorphism is suggestive of the ways different societies choose to segment the world.

In discussions on language and reality, there is both the danger of assuming that language reflects the world directly, and of regarding linguistic forms as tied to unique chunks of semantic reference in a deterministic fashion. However, Wierzbicka, in her study of semantics in relation to culture and cognition, emphasizes that language "reflects human interpretation of the world" (1992: 7), and Frake, on ethnographic linguistic study, reminds us that "it is the use of speech, the selection of one statement over another in a particular sociolinguistic context" that indicates a culture's perception of the world (1968: 437-438). Both of these factors - human conceptualisation and the actual usage of language by a community - contribute significantly to the way meanings are attached to linguistic items. They are also interdependent since a regular application of a word to denote a particular entity affects the way speakers come to understand the word.

This is particularly true in the case of abstract concepts. For example, the meanings we attach to the phrase "a beautiful woman" depend on the ways beauty is

¹ Semantics defines denotation in contrast to its sense, as the meaning of a word in terms of its relationship with the outside world.

² Throughout this thesis, Chinese ideographs are enclosed in curly brackets and their Mandarin pronunciations are given in Hanyu Pinyin enclosed in square brackets.

conceptualized in our culture and the associations the words pick up as we use them repeatedly in similar contexts. The phrase “a beautiful woman” will signify one cultural ideal when said in Tamil by a South Indian and another when expressed in English by an Anglo-British person. It is the close association between a language and the cultural group using it that makes it important for those learning another language to understand something of the culture of its native speakers. It is not the language per se that creates differences in meaning, but the socio-cultural frameworks underpinning the linguistic forms. Thus, the use of a common language by speakers from different cultural backgrounds does not preclude misunderstandings. Part of the challenge of cross-cultural communication is the attempt to understand and communicate these differences.

However, the fact that speakers of a common language are able to communicate with one another, at least on a basic functional level, indicates that there is a system of shared meanings which consists of core features based on the universals of human experience that can be grasped by every speaker of the language. It is this core system of meanings that facilitates communication between speakers from disparate cultural backgrounds. Thus, the South Indian and the Anglo-British can converse together in English, even though cultural differences in meaning exist. However, the system remains sufficiently indeterminate to allow for individual and socio-cultural variation.

Defining language from a social semiotic perspective does not entail that individual languages are imprisoned by their “socially imposed and socially recognised norms” (Lyons 1981: 144). Two important characteristics of language

are its productivity and adaptability. These creative qualities allow speakers of a language to generate and interpret new linguistic structures, or to adapt familiar linguistic structures for the expression of novel or unfamiliar concepts. Thus, translation, particularly when it involves encoding concepts that are not commonly codified in a language, and cross-cultural communication are possible.

The possibility of translation makes it clear that the strong, deterministic form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is untenable. The strong form of the hypothesis states that language determines thought, and consequently, shapes our sense of reality; we can only think within the framework of our language and are thus trapped by the language we speak. However, the fact that we can engage in acts of translation, using circumlocution to explain and discuss concepts from another culture and language, indicates that it is possible to overcome linguistic limitations and to entertain concepts outside the familiar.

A less deterministic version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that allows for the influence of language on thought is more plausible. Drawing on the formulations of various researchers, Schlesinger (1991: 21) summarizes three types of influence: (i) language creates certain cognitive predispositions by directing perception and thinking into habitual patterns; (ii) language draws attention to certain aspects of reality; (iii) languages differ not so much as to what can be said in them, but rather as to what is relatively easy to say. The three types of influence may be regarded as interrelated, since what is relatively easy to say in a language are often those patterns that direct our perception and cognition towards established routes, and these patterns also tend to predispose us towards perceiving certain aspects of reality

instead of others. Thus, the way a language codifies and categorizes reality tends to orientate the speaker towards certain ways of thinking, seeing and speaking. But the emphasis on linguistic relativity rather than linguistic determinism in this weaker formulation of the hypothesis does not confine the speaker to one language and one worldview: the possibility of alternative expression and translation exists. It supports the principle that everything that can be said in one natural language can be said in another; the difference lies in what is relatively easier or more difficult to say.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to establish the validity of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis³, a task that continues to challenge researchers. However, we cannot ignore the hypothesis, since it has had, and continues to have, a great impact on views on language and culture.⁴ The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis assumes a close relationship between language and culture and promotes the views that the language of a culture will tend to orientate its speakers in culturally significant ways, and that to speak another language is to contend with and be influenced by the world-view of another culture. Whorf recognized the influence of language and culture upon each other, but went on to argue controversially that when a language and a culture are in long historical contact, language plays the larger role, since grammar is more resistant to change than culture (Whorf 1956: 156). In the Chinese American narratives, where cultural and linguistic contrasts are brought to the fore, the close relationship between language and culture is either explicitly or implicitly referred

³ For more detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, see Schlesinger (1991), Fishman (1980), Lucy (1992), and Lakoff (1987).

⁴ Schlesinger (1991) points out that the concepts of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism already existed in Western thought before Whorf. However, Whorf's radical formulation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis drew attention to the phenomenon and made the hypothesis influential in contemporary views of language, cognition and culture.

to. This relationship is not stated in formal research terms, but there is a strong sense that the language of one's culture somehow constrains one towards certain cultural perspectives. The influence of language on culture is also highlighted when the narratives depict how learning the language of the dominant culture brings about inevitable changes in the mindset of the individual from the minority group.

In discussions on the interrelationship between language and culture, there is sometimes an almost mystical assumption of a permanent intrinsic connection between words of a particular language and the culture, so that the words are always identified with that culture. Ashcroft et al. refer to this assumption as the idea that language 'embodies' culture:

It is commonly held that in this way words somehow embody the culture from which they derive. Thus a word that is 'characteristically' Australian or Caribbean may be held to be predicated on certain untransferable cultural experiences . . . The idea that language somehow 'embodies' culture in this way is a seductive one for post-colonial readers . . . But it is a false and dangerous argument. It is false because it confuses usage with property in its view of meaning, and it is ultimately contradictory, since, if it is asserted that words do have some essential cultural essence not subject to changing usage, then post-colonial literatures in english [sic], predicated upon this very changing usage, could not have come into being. Language would be imprisoned in origins and not, as is the demonstrable case, be readily available for appropriation and liberation by a whole range of new and distinctive enterprises.

(Ashcroft et al. 1989: 52-53)

Ashcroft et al. caution us against the view that words contain some "essential cultural essence", as it implies that the words will always remain attached to the culture from which they originated and cannot be appropriated by speakers from other cultures. In one sense, it is undeniable that some words are highly evocative of

a particular culture; for example, even though the word “voodoo” has entered the English lexicon, it still evokes the Caribbean culture from which it originated; similarly, the term “walkabout” is recognized as part of Australian bushtalk and “wok” immediately conjures images of Chinese cooking practices. While these words retain a sense of their origins, they have also entered the lexicon of international English, and are therefore available to any speaker of English, who may employ them in new contexts. The original cultural contexts may fade into obscurity with the passage of time, but they can also be reclaimed and foregrounded in texts that seek to evoke the source culture. What Ashcroft et al. emphasize is that no language is so tied up with a culture that it cannot be appropriated by speakers from another culture, and that it is usage and context that determine the meaning of words. They point to the existence of postcolonial literatures in “english” as evidence of this, since these literatures demonstrate that British English can be successfully appropriated by non-British writers for the expression of native cultures. The mechanics of this appropriation are discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

Although individual languages are not inextricably tied to cultures of their native speakers, and therefore may be appropriated by non-native speakers for their own purposes, the fact that all languages are social systems means that none of them can be regarded as neutral channels of communication. Each language comes with a socio-historical context that is shaped by the speech community that owns it as a native language, acquiring cultural connotations in meaning and socially-determined discourse patterns. When a writer seeks to convey his or her cultural identity in a

non-native language, he or she is faced with the habitual uses and the *taken-for-granted* meanings that that language is already charged with. Moreover, the lack of language structures and meaningful associations pertaining to the non-native speaker's cultural reality must also be overcome. This attempt to use the non-native language in native contexts is described by Kachru as "redefining the semantic and semiotic potential of a language, making a language mean something which is not part of its traditional 'meaning'" (1982: 341). For the poet, Edwin Thumboo, the experience of using British English in the Singaporean context is akin to remaking the language and 'adjusting the interior landscape of words in order to explore and mediate the permutations of another culture and environment' (Thumboo 1976: ix).

Consequently, second-language authors cannot simply draw unquestioningly upon the resources of one code: a Chinese who uses English to communicate a unique aspect of Chinese culture may find that there are no convenient terms for referring to it and will have to engage in circumlocution or the translation of native terms, and perhaps even invent new linguistic forms. Even when equivalent terms in English are available, the cultural connotations usually differ, and the writer will have to find ways of attaching the local connotations to these linguistic items, often extending their semantic scope in the process. However, this adaptation does not mean the erasure of the first semiotic system, but the addition of another layer of meaning, which is based on the second-language user's culture. I would like to suggest that the use of English to convey non-English culture places a particular emphasis on the way culture affects linguistic and textual strategies, as well as on the way language affects the representation of culture itself. The concentration on

the interrelationship between culture and language in such discourse serves as a magnifying lens that highlights those forms of cultural communication that are often taken for granted when the writer's language is accepted as part of the cultural world of the text.

The difficulties encountered by those who seek to maintain cultural authenticity while using a non-native language support the impression that language somehow "embodies" culture and underscores the fact that language is frequently identified as an essential aspect of the speaker's ethnicity. Ethnicity is here regarded as an aspect of culture and is related to a group's perception of its own distinctiveness, often with respect to hereditary traits and racial characteristics. As Fishman informs us, ethnicity is "at its core, experienced as an inherited constellation acquired from one's parents as they acquired it from theirs, and so on back further and further, *ad infinitum*" (1977: 17). Most strikingly, although ethnicity appears rooted in timeless, unchanging qualities, the characteristics of any ethnic group are subjectively defined and conditioned by changing circumstances. In their study of ethnic identities in Belize, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 227) cite the case of a shoemaker who described his wife as a "true Spanish", despite the fact that she had all the physical features stereotypically associated with 'Negro'; however, she spoke only Spanish, and this seemed to be the basis of the shoemaker's description. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 210) also record an interview with a Belizean informant whose attempt to describe the physical differences between 'Spanish' and 'Creole' repeatedly breaks down as numerous exceptions to the stereotypes surface. Then there is the case of a village in Belize where most of the

inhabitants who identified themselves as Mayan Indians in 1970, described themselves as Spanish in 1978 (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 211). As Eriksen (1993) and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) emphasize, ethnic identities are largely based upon what the group perceives as unique to itself, as well as outsiders' perceptions, and that ethnic boundaries are often mutable. Therefore, like culture, ethnicity is subject to change and redefinition, and its chief purpose seems to be the demarcation of ethnic boundaries in inter-group relations.

As one of the means of characterising group identity, language becomes an important symbol of ethnic identity. Fishman points out that:

. . . since it[language] is commonly relied upon so heavily (even if not exclusively) to enact, celebrate and "call forth" all ethnic activity, the likelihood that it will be recognized and singled out as symbolic of ethnicity is great indeed.

(Fishman 1977: 25)

We see an example of the way language is singled out as an ethnic symbol in the case of the shoemaker's wife who is identified as a "true Spanish" because she spoke only Spanish. Another example is found in the way written Chinese is regarded by the Chinese as a powerful symbol of their culture. In spite of the fact that illiteracy exists among the Chinese, the written language is perceived as a unifying force in the face of the mutual unintelligibility of the spoken Chinese dialects. A corollary to this is the assumption that the Chinese language is a vital link to Chinese culture, so that a Chinese person who is ignorant of written Chinese is regarded as one who has lost touch with his or her roots. When ability in the

language is regarded as essential to ethnic authenticity, language becomes more than a means of communication; it becomes a potent symbol of ethnicity, assuming ethnic value in and of itself. The central position of written Chinese in the ethnic identity of the Chinese people can be discerned in its elevation to the status of art in the form of calligraphy.

However, this identification of language with ethnicity is not inevitable. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 221) provide evidence of a younger generation in Belize that is able to establish an ethnic identity separately from language identity. This indicates that linguistic and ethnic boundaries are not isomorphous. While highlighting the tendency for language to become a crucial symbol of ethnic identity, Fishman also notes the possibility of dispensing with it completely (1977: 26). The separation between language and ethnicity seems to be prevalent among younger generations of immigrant communities all over the world, particularly for those born and raised in the adopted country and who face powerful reasons for adopting the dominant language, often at the expense of the minority group language.

Nevertheless, because of its symbolic value, language is always more than a means of communication. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller consider all linguistic practices as “socially-marked – that is, as being used by an individual because they are felt to have social as well as semantic meaning in terms of the way in which each individual wishes to project his/her own universe and to invite others to share it” (1985: 247). The use of language for signifying important social meanings is

described by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller in terms of “acts of identity” (1985).

Focussing on language as a type of social behaviour, they elaborate:

Language however has the extra dimension in that we can symbolize in a coded way all the other concepts in which we use to define ourselves and our society. It is true that we do this unconsciously in our eating habits, more consciously perhaps in other rituals and practices. In language however we are offered, by the society we enter, and we offer to others, a very overt symbolization of ourselves and of our universe, not only in the various grammars and lexicons and prosodies we can create for various domains of that universe, but also through the social marking which each occasion of use carries.

(Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 247-248)

By describing language use as an act of identity, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller highlight the way language becomes a means of asserting, either consciously or unconsciously, some form of social identity; it can be used as a means of self-definition and projection, and it is also one of the means by which others identify us. To regard language as social behaviour is to recognize that language functions in a social setting and that, as we use language, we communicate social meanings above and beyond the words we say. Part of the social significance of language is linked to the way individual languages tend to be strongly identified with particular speech communities, so that using a particular language has symbolic value socially, as evident in the relationship between language and ethnic identity.

Reading Chinese American narratives involves an encounter with language as an act of identity, since these texts not only set out to ‘tell a story’ but to assert a certain cultural identity. Motivated by a desire to narrate the Chinese American story in English, these texts are efforts at cultural definition in the language of the

dominant culture. In being published and made available to an English-speaking audience, they present a set of values and symbols by which the immigrant Chinese community comes to be associated. It is no wonder that within the narratives themselves, the social significance of language for defining the cultural self is a subject of much discussion.

2.1.3 The Intercultural Narrative

In this thesis, we view the Chinese American texts as intercultural narratives, a concept derived from the study of intercultural communication. It is therefore appropriate that we begin by discussing what “intercultural communication” means.

The term “intercultural communication” is applied to discourse that occurs between participants from different cultures (Scollon and Scollon 1995, Knapp and Knapp-Potthoff 1987, Ludwig 1996, Porter and Samover 1985, Pennington 1985). Research in intercultural communication tends to highlight the difficulties that arise due to a lack of shared knowledge and language differences. In a typical intercultural situation, one of the participants does not speak the language of interaction as his or her mother tongue. According to Knapp and Knapp-Potthoff, the problem here is that “the interactants not only do not share the relevant knowledge, but neither do they share the linguistic means that cue this knowledge in the interaction” (1987: 8). Communication between members of different cultures is thus not only hampered by a disparity in knowledge, but by cultural differences in

the way each party uses language. While members of the same group can fall back on familiar linguistic cues and common speech acts to introduce new information and refer to shared knowledge, interactants from different groups do not have this reassurance. Thus, the use of a common language in inter-ethnic interaction does not preclude miscommunication and conflict. Cultural and linguistic differences can reinforce group boundaries and seriously impede communication.

Theories of intercultural communication tend to assume the presence of cultural and linguistic differences. But the nature of these differences needs to be explored in greater detail. The following definition of intercultural communication focuses explicitly on the idea of difference:

We characterize *intercultural communication* as *contact between persons who identify themselves as distinct from one another in cultural terms*. We are concerned most with direct, person-to-person contact in which the operative cultural identities of interlocutors are revealed in discourse . . . In a conversation, to the extent that persons relate to themselves and the other as members of different cultural groups, contact can be said to be intercultural.

(Collier and Thomas 1988: 100)

Unlike most descriptions of intercultural communication, the above definition does not emphasize the contrasting cultural backgrounds of the discourse participants as much as it characterizes intercultural communication as dependent on the perceptions and interpretations of the discourse participants. Moreover, in contrast to Porter and Samovar's assertion that intercultural communication "occurs whenever a message producer is a member of one culture and a message receiver is a member of another culture." (1985: 15), it does not assume that cultural dissimilarity is

sufficient motivation for intercultural communication. In fact, it is possible to imagine a situation in which intercultural communication does not occur even though the participants are from different cultures. In such a situation, the participants would not relate as members of different cultural groups: there is no assertion of differences, no conflict, and communication would perhaps be limited to the most commonplace exchange of pleasantries. Consequently, what makes a communicative exchange intercultural is the perception and expression of cultural difference; it is this that singles it out from other types of communication.

Another advantage of such a definition is that it brings into perspective the fact that cultural identity is not an objective certainty, but is formed and managed in intercultural communication. It also tacitly admits that cultural distinctions may not correlate with concrete facts since they are formed through subjective interpretations. Therefore, cultural identity must be located in the participants' experience and the actual discourse of the communicative exchange. According to Collier and Thomas, the intercultural status of a communication episode would be "determined by the discursive interpretations of the participants, as they attribute and acknowledge each other's different cultural identities from one another" (1988: 99). Therefore, we ascertain the occurrence of intercultural communication by scrutinizing the actual discourse for elements that emphasize cultural difference and contribute to the expression of distinct cultural identities. The occurrence of intercultural communication depends not so much on the fact that the discourse participants come from different cultures, but that they perceive each other as culturally different and express this in their discourse.

Collier and Thomas' emphasis on the actual discourse rather than the participants in determining the presence of intercultural communication is particularly useful to the analysis of written discourse. In written discourse, the participants consist of the author and his audience. However, the author or message producer is usually not present at the time of reading and the readers or message receivers often change with each reading. Consequently, intercultural communication in written discourse cannot be ascertained simply by referring to the different cultural backgrounds of the writer and reader, but must be located in the ways the text seeks to establish intercultural communication, since the text is often all we have. According to Collier and Thomas' definition, we can identify intercultural tendencies in written texts by the means they use to assert cultural difference. Intercultural communication itself occurs at the time of reading between the text and the reader, and is also dependent on the extent the reader perceives the cultural distinctiveness of the text. However, intercultural communication is already inscribed in the texts when they present themselves as distinct cultural products, amplifying those ethnic features that are characteristic of the minority group, and drawing attention to the means of amplification. In this thesis, such texts are described as intercultural narratives.

Intercultural communication in the written mode differs from face-to-face intercultural communication in several unique ways. Studies of intercultural communication mostly focus on spoken communication, but Hoffman (1988) has used the term in relation to written discourse. Hoffman (1988) applies the term "intercultural" to second-language creative writing that occurs in a context in which

the writer and reader belong to different cultures and do not share the same mother tongue; the writer presents his or her story in the language of the reader.⁵ Hoffman's use of the term "intercultural communication" follows conventional definitions that are based upon the cultural backgrounds of the participants and, as already highlighted, the shortfall of such definitions for written discourse is related to the difficulties of locating the author and determining the cultural backgrounds of the readers. In Hoffman's study, this was possible due to the very specific situation in which his sample texts, the manuscripts of Turkish authors, were produced: foreigners in Germany were invited to write in German on the theme "Living in Two Languages". The literary competition was thus targeted at non-Germans who had to write in German, the language of the host country, and the language restriction implied that an important group of readers, the judges of the competition, would come from backgrounds quite different from non-German-speaking Turkish communities.

Hoffman notes that whoever writes interculturally cannot fall back on familiar patterns of action or types of text and can only presuppose that which is common to both cultures, yet the text must be intelligible to a general audience (Hoffmann 1988: 157). In face-to-face interaction, participants from different cultural and language backgrounds similarly cannot rely on familiar patterns of speech to cue the appropriate knowledge or assume that what is said will be understood in the manner it was intended, since what is common to both cultures must be inferred. But what makes intercultural communication in the written mode more challenging is the fact that its audience may not be confined to a particular

⁵ Hoffmann's study is discussed in greater detail in chapter five of this thesis.

group, nor is it restricted to a particular time or place; once produced, the written text is available to multiple audiences at all times. The audience is thus a very general one, and whoever writes interculturally must take this into account.

Creative writing in English as a second language that intends to communicate interculturally faces a particularly wide audience, with English being an international *lingua franca*. Since such writing springs from a spectrum of cultures - wherever English has spread - and are read by both native and non-native users of English, it is commonly the case that the reader's cultural background will not match that of the text's. Writing about the increasingly international character of literature in English, Dasenbrock notes that:

This is not simply a matter of readers in the traditional centers of the English language struggling to understand work rooted in other cultural traditions; a Kenyan reader of a Nigerian or Guyanese or Indian novel is caught up in the same multicultural dynamic as an American reader of that novel.

(Dasenbrock 1987: 10)

Thus, despite what appears to be a common language, the reading of non-native English texts for a great number of English readers would feel like entering into a conversation with an *other*: a communicative exchange that requires extra effort in decoding the message and the good will to accept that the sender intends the message to be taken seriously. Despite a common language, the writer and his audience can face real barriers to crosscultural understanding, and unlike face-to-face communication, the writer is usually not present at the time of reading to provide clarifications.

Dasenbrock emphasizes that “any text must be read in the light of prior knowledge, background information, expectations about genre and about sequence”, and that many of these factors are “culturally specific” (1987: 10). To make the text accessible to a general audience, the writer could provide the relevant cultural information in his or her text. But an overemphasis on this aspect would result in the text reading like an encyclopaedia or a cultural manual. Thus, the writer who seeks to communicate across cultures must decide how much background information to include in his or her text. Moreover, he or she is faced with the task of creatively incorporating such information so that it is in keeping with the style and tone of the narrative work. In terms of genre, a writer from an Oriental culture may have quite different concepts of what constitutes a heroic tale, an autobiography, or a historical report compared to a writer in the Western tradition. For example, in her autobiography Fifth Chinese Daughter ([1945] 1989), Jade Snow Wong uses the third-person narrative. Reading her text against the background of Anglo-American literary tradition that assumes the use of the first-person narrative in autobiography to be the norm, her use of the third-person pronoun is unusual. But as literary critic Elaine Kim points out, in Chinese traditional culture, it would be considered extremely egotistical for someone to write a book about himself or herself, and autobiography was not part of the traditional cultures that produced the first immigrants (1990: 153). Moreover, Wong herself explains that her use of the third person narrative is “rooted in Chinese literary form (reflecting cultural disregard for the individual)” (Wong 1989: vii) and is a valuable means of maintaining psychological detachment from her personal importance (ibid.). This cultural information not only helps us to

understand Wong's use of the third-person narrative in her autobiography, it also influences our view of later autobiographical works by Chinese American writers, such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Ben Fong Torres, where the use of the first-person narrative indicates an ease with Anglo-American norms of autobiography and suggests a degree of distance from traditional cultural expectations.

Therefore, reading an intercultural text is in some ways akin to being a participant in face-to-face intercultural communication, in which the presence of common ground cannot be taken for granted. Both forms of interaction must contend with the lack of shared cultural knowledge and language behaviour. But unlike face-to-face interaction, where clarification, negotiation of meaning and modification of language structures can take place in response to each participants' contribution to the conversation and is on-going, written discourse must already include these strategies in anticipation of an audience that does not share similar cultural frameworks. If an intercultural text is to be accessible to readers from a wide range of backgrounds, it must draw on those structures and themes that have international currency. Yet, since it also seeks to present itself as culturally distinctive, it will require textual and linguistic strategies that emphasize its difference from texts from other cultures.

In her study of narratives of immigrant experience by Slovene Americans living in Cleveland, Winner presents the concept of the ethnic culture text (1979, 1988).⁶ Winner describes the ethnic culture text in the following manner:

⁶ Winner's concept of the ethnic culture text is based upon Jurij Lotman's concept of culture texts (1976), Jakobson's multifunctional communication model (1964), and Mukařovský's concept of the aesthetic function (1970). See Winner (1979) for an elaboration of their theories in relation to the concept of the ethnic culture text.

The typical ethnic text, built of various intersecting sign systems, communicates to members of the group and to outsiders significant cultural characteristics and feelings of self-evaluation in the context of differences and similarities to texts of other cultures.

(Winner 1988:128)

She elaborates:

. . . ethnic culture texts may be understood as a type of culture text that brings to the fore the specific and unique characteristics of the particular group in contrast to the characteristic of other groups, thus providing self-identification and self-evaluation. In this sense, ethnic texts have a dual aspect embodying two cultures. We may call this characteristic an ethnic function of a text.

(Winner 1988:130)

Winner develops her theory of the ethnic text from Jurij Lotman's concept of the culture text (Lotman 1976), which is defined as any message organized by cultural codes, and may be verbal or nonverbal. Winner perceives ethnic texts as a subgroup of culture texts, and emphasizes the way they differentiate between "our culture" from "their culture" as a distinctive feature. This foregrounding of features that differentiate between "us" and "them" corresponds to the special feature of intercultural communication highlighted by Collier and Thomas (1988): namely, the identification and expression of cultural difference. Since difference is always expressed in relation to the *other*, Winner points out that ethnic texts are characterised by a duality that consists of at least two cultures.

The concept of the intercultural narrative used in this thesis has been influenced by Winner's theory of the ethnic culture text. In highlighting difference and duality in minority writing, Winner's theory suggests that when we analyse the contacts between the minority culture and dominant Anglo-American culture in

Chinese American narratives, we must not only view them in terms of cultural conflict and the assertion or suppression of ethnic identity, but also consider how that identity is affected, altered and rendered multifaceted by such contacts. Thus, in the Chinese American narratives, the interaction between dominant and minority cultures frequently results in another way of seeing, another layer of meaning, and another form of speaking.

However, the concept of the intercultural narrative is more straightforward and suited to our analysis than Winner's concept of the ethnic culture text, which is heavily influenced by theories in the semiotics of culture and complexly related to Lotman's system of primary and secondary texts (Lotman 1976). Winner's concept of the ethnic culture text is also strongly anthropological in perspective, so that her study of Slovene immigrant narratives concentrates on the indirect relation that they bear to the broader cultural context, on their "potential of imparting narrative information which serves to mark and identify the bearers of ethnic culture" (Winner 1988: 127), although she does acknowledge the artistic value of these narratives. In contrast, this thesis focuses on the stylistic qualities of the narratives as they are affected by culture and on the stylistic strategies of intercultural communication in written narrative discourse. To maintain this emphasis and avoid Winner's anthropological slant, the term "intercultural narrative" is preferred in this thesis.

Intercultural narratives can be found wherever cultural difference is an issue, for example, in travellers' tales, in colonial accounts of discovery and conquest, and in postcolonial accounts of nationhood. But the ones that interest us most in this thesis take the form of minority writing in a non-native or second language. Chinese

American narratives, written by members of an ethnic minority in the United States in the language of the dominant group and centred on the minority experience, belong to this category.

Simon emphasizes that the intercultural experience assumes quite different forms depending on whether one experiences it from a minority or majority position:

The predominant model of intercultural exploration in European and American literature remains the novel of travel and conquest in which the intrepid adventurer confronts difference abroad. The themes of difference “at home” has in almost every case become the domain of the immigrant or minority writer – and the inscription of this difference within a new cultural context is complicated by problems of literary legitimacy.

(Simon 1987: 119)

Simon points out that in European and American intercultural narratives, cultural difference is located outside the boundaries of “home”, whereas in intercultural narratives by ethnic minorities, the difference is found “at home”. The notion of home from the dominant perspective thus connotes familiarity, harmony and homogeneity, but the minority person’s perspective of “home” is complicated by the need to reconstruct it in an alien environment and by the fact that “home” is constantly exposed to intrusions from the dominant culture. The minority person is not a traveller who leaves home to find *otherness*; instead having to establish “home” within a new cultural context means that the *other* is already an intrinsic part of “home”, even as the minority person represents *otherness* to those in the dominant culture.

The minority writer thus produces an intercultural narrative that is quite different from that found in European and American literature. The thematic pattern of leaving one's abode to encounter the new and the exotic abroad is exchanged for one of coping with the incomprehensible and alien within the domain that must now be called "home". Instead of the traveller, we have the alienated protagonist and the displaced hero. Within the narrative, "difference" also surfaces in language as the literary text itself becomes "the terrain for a clash of codes, a constant making and unmaking of meanings and identities" (Simon 1987: 120). The study of the Chinese American texts as intercultural narratives in this thesis is influenced by this notion of difference, both as a theme in the texts and as a stylistic strategy.

2.2 Chinese American Immigration

We shall now turn to a discussion of the socio-historical circumstances surrounding Chinese immigration to North America and consider some characteristics of this minority group in the United States.

Although the reading of any literature profits from an understanding of its socio-historical context, it is especially important for minority literature, due to its deep interconnections with the social and historical circumstances of immigration. Chin et al points out that:

The distinction between social history and literature is a tricky one, especially when dealing with the literature of an emerging sensibility.

The subject matter of minority literature is social history, not necessarily by design but by definition.

(Chin et al 1974c: xxxv)

That social history often forms the subject matter of minority literature is related to the fact that one of the reasons for such literature was to give voice to the realities of minority existence, including the experiences of cultural dislocation and conflict, of discrimination and abuse, and to trace forgotten immigrant histories. The frames of reference for such writing deviate from the mainstream and the status quo, and if we wish to understand Chinese American literature at a deeper level, we need to have some idea of the socio-historical contexts from which it emerged. As both Kim (1982) and Wong (1993) emphasize, knowledge of the social and historical contexts surrounding Chinese American writing is indispensable to a “responsible reading” (Wong 1993: 10).

2.2.1 First Phase of Chinese American immigration

According to Lee (1960:9), history records the presence of Chinese in the United States as early as the sixteenth century. But the Chinese did not migrate in large numbers until the discovery of gold in California in 1848 and the westward expansion of the trans-Mississippi frontier in the later half of the nineteenth century. Wang (1994: 190) dates the first period of Chinese immigration to the United States as beginning in 1852 and lasting till 1882, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was

passed. However in 1849, the first big wave of gold miners to reach California already included 325 Chinese men (Daley 1996: 26).

The first group of Chinese immigrants consisted almost exclusively of young male peasants from the rural counties around Guangzhou in Cantonese-speaking Guangdong province in southern China. Faced with overpopulation and famine in China, they came to California, or “Gold Mountain” according to the Chinese, as *Gam Saan Hak* (a Cantonese term meaning “Gold Mountain Sojourners”) hoping to make their fortunes and then return home. Not all of them worked as miners, many were hired as labourers by the Central Pacific Railroad Company in 1865 to build a railway eastward from the California Coast across the Sierra Nevada range and the Great Basin of Nevada, and by 1867, 90 percent of the company’s workforce was Chinese (Daley 1996: 32). When the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, some of them found jobs in California’s agricultural and manufacturing industries. Others worked as cooks and laundrymen; Sucheng Chan (1991: 33) emphasizes that laundering was not a traditional male occupation in China, but it became one of the “pioneer” occupations that enabled Chinese to move eastward across the United States because there were very few women in gold-rush California. Still others found work on sheep and cattle ranches, in lumber camps and in fishing fleets from California to Alaska (Daley 1996: 334). Life was hard, for example, in San Francisco in the 1870s and early 1880s, thousands of Chinese artisans and factory workers worked in crowded, poorly lit and ventilated sweatshops and factories, making “shoes, boots, slippers, overalls, shirts, underwear,

woolen blankets, cigars, gunny sacks, brooms, and many other items” (Chan, S. 1991: 33).

2.2.2 The Sojourner

These *Gam Saan Hak* were characterised by a “sojourner’s mentality”⁷ (Tsai 1986: 34), which placed a high social and cultural value to returning home to a Chinese cultural environment. They saw themselves as belonging to their home country and their absence from it as temporary. Even though they would spend much of their lives striving for economic betterment in America, they cherished hopes of eventual return to the villages and districts in China where they had been born. Whatever wealth they acquired was sent back to their family members in China, who invested it and prepared for the sojourner’s return (Lee 1960: 69). Even when their prolonged stay in America caused them to send for their China-born wives and children, and the possibility of returning back to China diminished, they continued to identify China as their real home. This “sojourner’s mentality” hindered their assimilation into the larger American society and encouraged attachment to Chinatowns, which supplied them with Chinese goods and services, enabled them to maintain links with other Chinese, and continue their cultural practices.

⁷ The term “sojourner” was developed by Siu (1987) in his study of the Chinese laundryman in America, and it has been used by social scientists to refer to people who spend many years in a foreign country without being assimilated by it.

Although the sojourner's mentality came to be associated mainly with these early Chinese in America, it is also present in later groups of Chinese, such as those who returned to China in nationalist fervour during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and immediately after World War II to help China defend her territorial integrity or assist her efforts to modernize (Wang 1994: 201). It is a state of mind that characterizes any overseas person who continues to harbour thoughts of returning back to the homeland and refuses to consider the foreign country as home.

2.2.3 Anti-Chinese Discrimination

One compelling reason for the persistence of the sojourner mentality was the racism experienced by the Chinese in the United States; discrimination and racial prejudice have led many Chinese, including some American-born Chinese, to conclude that their presence is not welcomed in their adopted country.

Sucheng Chan (1991) informs us that unfavourable views of the Chinese existed even before the first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States. While Americans in the nineteenth century conceded that China once had a magnificent civilization, they regarded her as a country in an advanced state of decay, and her people as "nothing more than starving masses, beasts of burden, depraved heathens, and opium addicts" (Chan, S. 1991: 45). They also regarded the overseas Chinese as "parasites, arrogantly or chauvinistically holding onto their peculiar culture, reserved and clannish mannerisms, and austere lifestyle and strange

habits, incessantly siphoning off the host country's assets and resources" (Wang 1994: 198).

Such strong anti-Chinese sentiment encouraged a policy of exclusion. Thus, the first wave of Chinese immigrants were labelled " 'nonassimilable', people unable to take part in the emerging free, democratic society of the Pacific coast" by Governor John Bigler in California and other politicians and labour leaders (Wang 1994: 199). The rhetoric that supported the exclusion of the Chinese from American society was practically enforced through legislation that denied them the right of naturalization and disqualified them from becoming American citizens.⁸

Although such anti-Chinese feeling stemmed partially from the nativism and colour prejudice of white Americans, it was also economic in origin. The American working class was vigorously opposed to the Chinese who were willing to work hard for low wages; they saw the Chinese as unfair competition and a threat to their livelihoods, even though, as Daley (1996:40) informs us, the Chinese only formed a small percentage of the American population. Pan (1990: 94) notes that in 1870, the Chinese represented only a twelfth of the population of California, and even when Chinese immigration was at its peak in the 1870s, the Chinese population was no more than four and a half percent of all immigrants (Pan 1990: 97). However, when the United States entered a severe economic depression in 1870, the jobless vented their frustration by attacking and lynching the Chinese, who are an easily recognizable minority. In July 1871, thousands of people attacked the Los Angeles

⁸ Petitions for naturalization were reviewed by the local courts and in 1878, fifteen Chinese in New York gained citizenship. However, in that same year, the U.S. circuit court in California declared all Chinese ineligible for naturalization. It was only in 1943 that the right of naturalization was extended to the Chinese.

Chinatown in a riot that lasted for three days and 19 Chinese were murdered (Daley 1996: 37). A similar tragedy occurred in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1885, when a mob of white miners killed 28 Chinese and wounded 15 more (Daley 1996: 38). Pan (1990: 95) informs us that in anti-Chinese riots across the United States, the Chinese were driven out of their homes, booted out of town, put on barges and told never to return; or else they were stabbed, shot or hanged.

Although the Chinese were the victims of racial abuse and violence, they seldom obtained legal redress, especially since Chinese testimony was prohibited in court. In fact, the law lent support to the popular view that the Chinese were an economic threat, for example, in an attempt to curtail Chinese immigration, California passed laws that required foreign miners to buy licenses and prohibited Asians from owning land. Similar laws were enacted in other states. The blatantly discriminatory local and state laws were aimed at discouraging the continuing presence of the Chinese in many localities. They underscored the message that the Chinese were not welcomed and only tolerated when their labour was needed.

In 1882, caving in to anti-Chinese forces and powerful labour unions, the United States Congress passed a bill entitled the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was to last for ten years.⁹ Cao and Novas emphasize that it was “the first and only immigration law in American history to target a specific nationality” (1996: 30 -31). The Act barred the entry of all Chinese except for the following: merchants, students and teachers, diplomats, and travellers. Determined Chinese immigrants could

⁹ The Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed in 1892 and 1902.

obtain a certificate from Chinese officials declaring him to be a member of one of the exempt classes and Chinese labourers often passed themselves off as merchants. However, in 1884, the Exclusion Act was tightened; for example, the broad category of 'merchant' was now defined more strictly to exclude "hucksters, pedlars, and dealers in fish" (Pan 1990: 96). The effectiveness of the Chinese Exclusion Act is demonstrated by the drastic drop in the number of Chinese entering the United States: Daley (1996: 40) records that in 1881, the year before the act was passed, 40,000 Chinese came to America, but in 1887, five years after the passage of the act, only 10 Chinese gained entry.

The prejudice faced by the early Chinese immigrants must have reinforced their desire to return home. It also affected the American-born Chinese by instilling in them a sense of cultural inferiority, and continues to affect later groups of immigrants to the United States. The experience of the Chinese in America as a minority group is shaped by the discrimination that they faced. Sucheng Chan stresses that:

The history of Asians in America can be fully understood only if we regard them as both immigrants and members of non-white minority groups. As immigrants, many of their struggles resemble those that European immigrants have faced, but as people of nonwhite origins bearing distinct physical differences, they have been perceived as "perpetual foreigners" who can never be completely absorbed into American society and its body politic. To undergird their separateness, discriminatory laws and practices similar to those forced upon Native, African, and Latino Americans have likewise been imposed on Asian immigrants and their American-born progeny.

Thus the acculturation process experienced by Asians in America have run along two tracks; even as they acquired the values and behaviour of Euro-Americans, they simultaneously had to learn to accept their standing as racial minorities - people who, because of their skin color

and physiognomy, were not allowed to enjoy the rights and privileges given acculturated European immigrants and native-born Americans. In short, if they wished to remain and to survive in the United States, they had to learn to “stay in their place” and to act with deference toward those of higher racial status.

(Chan, S. 1991: 187)

Like Chan, Chow emphasizes that like Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans, “Asians were for a long time categorized by way of the notion of ‘problem’” (1993: 139). Consequently “the consciousness of ethnicity for Asian and other non-white groups is inevitable – a matter of history rather than of choice” (ibid.).

In the above passage, Sucheng Chan repeatedly highlights the relationship between discrimination and physical appearance, as she points out that the Chinese are viewed as “perpetual foreigners” because they do not have the physical features of a Caucasian. This point is echoed by David Hwang, the Chinese American playwright, who terms it “the tyranny of appearances”:

. . . the whole issue of the tyranny of appearances and how it is that the way we look establishes to a large extent the way we are perceived, at least on first notice. . . I think that among Asians, we have to deal with the idea of being perpetual foreigners. One’s family can have been in this country for five or six generations, but people still go, “Oh, you speak good English,” whereas it’s not necessarily assumed that someone of Swedish descent speaks Swedish.

Similarly, if I am walking on Christopher Street, for instance, and someone yells, “Go back to where you came from,” I assume that they are not expressing a distaste for Californians.

(Hwang 1996: 571)

Hwang's remarks underscore the fact that mainstream America still does not fully recognize that a plurality of races makes up the nation of America; it still tends to regard the non-white person as an outsider and to make judgements based on skin colour and other physical differences. The cases of violence against Chinese up till the twentieth century described in the following paragraph demonstrate this clearly.

Although in the decades after World War II, discrimination by race was gradually made illegal, this did not mean that prejudice and racial discrimination were no longer present. In fact, racial violence of a type that would have been familiar to the early Chinese immigrants resurfaced in the early 1980s. Sucheng Chan (1991: 175) notes that "instances of physical assault, harassment, vandalism, and anti-Asian racial slurs were reported to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission as well as to state and local civil rights bodies" and the 1986 report by the Commission issued a report concluded that "the issue of violence against Asian Americans is national in scope"(quoted in Chan, S. 1991: 175). An incident that forced the American public to recognize the existence of racial violence occurred in June 1982: twenty-seven year old Chinese American Vincent Chin was hit on the head, chest and knees with a baseball bat wielded by Ronald Ebens, a white American, while Michael Nitz, his stepson, held Chin's arms; Chin died four days later from the wounds. The violent attack occurred in the context of trade tensions between the United States and Japan, and both Ebens and Nitz were unemployed car workers, who apparently mistook Chin for a Japanese. What outraged the Chinese American community was that in the final outcome after a retrial, the Cincinnati Court of Appeals acquitted the two Euro-Americans of all charges and neither of them spent a

day in jail. The acquittal had the strong flavour of racial bias and implied that minority rights did not matter. In July 1989, another case of a violence against Asians came to the courts: 24-year old Ming Hai Loo died two days after being assaulted by two Euro-American men, Robert and Lloyd Piche; they had apparently mistaken Loo for a Vietnamese. In this case, the jury found Robert Piche guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced him to thirty-seven years in prison. The verdict went some way towards recognizing the rights of minority persons.

However, in the nineteenth century, the Chinese in the United States had to contend with racial violence as a way of life, with little hope of fair treatment from the law. It is perhaps not coincidental that the phrase “a Chinaman’s chance”, meaning no chance at all, entered the American vocabulary around 1910 (Dictionary of American Slang 1995: 90); the phrase, by suggesting that being Chinese was synonymous with unfair treatment, underscores the relationship between race and discrimination.

2.2.4 Second Phase of Chinese American Immigration

Wang (1994: 191) sees the passing of Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 as the beginning of the second phase of Chinese immigration to the United States. The period from 1882 to the 1920s was one of near-total exclusion. Unrelenting anti-Chinese feeling forced many immigrants to return to China, resulting in a steady decline in the Chinese population in the United States over these four decades

(Wang 1994: 192). In 1888, as part of the effort to decrease the number of Chinese in the United States, Congress passed the Scott Act, which prevented Chinese, who had returned to China, from re-entering the United States. The Scott Act was challenged by Chae Chan Ping, a labourer who had obtained a return certificate before departing for China and was en route to California when the new law went into effect (Chan, S. 1991: 90-92). However in *Chae Chan Ping versus United States* in 1889, the United States Supreme Court upheld the 1888 law and deemed that the right of Chinese labourers to re-enter the United States was “held at the will of the government, revocable at any time, at its pleasure” (quoted in Chan, S. 1991: 91).

The Chinese who remained were forced to take jobs that were non-competitive with or rejected by white Americans. Many worked as laundry operators, owners of Chinese restaurants, curio shops and merchandise stores (Lee 1960: 79). In the cities, they lived in separate enclaves of overcrowded ghettos known as Chinatowns. Meanwhile, Congress and local governments continued to enact harsh discriminatory laws, including anti-miscegenation laws, that “systematically evicted the Chinese from jobs, businesses and land . . . Even though these laws were challenged by the Chinese in the courts, the only recourse available to them, the constitutionality of many of these laws was upheld by judicial interpretations that permanently suspended Chinese rights, privileges, and sanctuaries in white society” (Wang 1994: 192).

2.2.5 Paper Sons

Many Chinese did attempt to circumvent immigration restrictions, and a good number entered illegally through the system of *paper sons*. This involved the purchase of falsified documents that gave the bearer legal residence in the United States. The practice was facilitated by the San Francisco earthquake and fires that destroyed most of the city's records in 1906, and made it impossible to prove or disprove the claims by many Chinese that America was their place of birth. Claiming citizenship by birth gave the Chinese the freedom to leave and re-enter the United States and any children they fathered abroad could become citizens under American law. During their visits to China, those Chinese who claimed American citizenship and were eligible for re-entry would announce the birth of a son, whether real or fictitious, and this created a 'slot' that could be sold to anyone who wanted to immigrate to the United States (Pan 1990: 107-108). The many young Chinese who purchased falsified documents and came in under surnames not their own were called "paper sons". So effective was this system that the United States Immigration Bureau had to build an immigration centre on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay to detain and question the new arrivals. Pan (1990: 108-109) informs us that the immigrants were sometimes detained for months as they waited to be interrogated in minute detail about their family histories and native villages by immigration officials, who were aware of the paper son ploy. If the immigrant's story did not tally with those of his purported American relatives, he would be sent back to China.

2.2.6 Uneven Sex-ratio

A significant feature of the Chinese community in America during this period was that it was dominated by males. In 1870, 58,625 Chinese men arrived in the United States, but Chinese women totalled only 4,574 (Coolidge 1968: 502). Many immigrants could not afford to bring their wives and families with them and Chinese custom did not approve of women leaving home. After the 1888 Scott Act, immigrants were unable to return to China to marry and bring their wives to the United States. Thus, the Chinatowns of this period were mainly bachelor societies. Mazumdar (1989: 5) notes that the 1900 census records only one Chinese female to every twenty-six Chinese males in the United States. However, unions between Chinese men and non-Chinese women were discouraged by laws against interracial marriage.

Mazumdar (1989: 2) also points out that the skewed male-female ratio in frontier towns, such as San Francisco, was not unique to the Chinese immigrants, since the uncertainty of frontier life prevented many men from bringing their families. However, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Scott Act, and other laws aimed at restricting the Chinese population in the United States created additional difficulties for Chinese women who wanted to accompany their husbands to Gold Mountain. The wives left behind had to resign themselves to years of separation and waiting, as it was not until 1943 that the Chinese Exclusion laws were repealed.

The uneven sex ratio and lack of work options and support systems for women encouraged prostitution among all nationalities. But in the 1860s and 1870s, Chinese prostitution was singled out as a particularly corrupting influence. The Page Law was passed in 1875 to prohibit the entry of Chinese, Japanese and “Mongolian” women intended for “Criminal and Demoralizing Purposes”. The reality for the majority of Chinese women who worked as prostitutes was that they were not free agents but had been sold, kidnapped and enticed under false pretences by brothel owners (Mazumdar 1989: 2). Under the Page Law, all Chinese women seeking entry into the United States were immediately deemed suspect. It effectively restricted the entry of Chinese women: between 1875 and 1882, only 1340 women were admitted into the United States.

The number of Chinese women in the United States only significantly increased after 1910, when Chinese males who had claimed American citizenship were allowed to bring their wives into the country; each year from 1910 to 1924, more than 1,000 Chinese women came to America this way (Daley 1996: 56). This helped to balance the sex ratio and produced a generation of Chinese born in America. Beginning in the 1920s, the arrival of members of the exempt classes of merchants, students, tourists and diplomats, together with their wives and children also added to the population of Chinese in America. However, in 1924, a new federal law banning all immigration from Asia once again reinforced the policy of exclusion.

2.2.7 Second-Generation Chinese Americans

With the admission of wives came an increase in the number of Chinese children born in the United States. This first generation of Chinese born in America is commonly regarded as the second generation of Chinese Americans. They are of special concern, since it is this generation that produced many of the first Chinese American narratives in English, with their experiences as the raw material for their writing.

The pre-World War II, American-born Chinese were brought up in segregated Chinatowns by China-oriented parents, but they were also exposed to the American environment and given an American education in public schools that emphasized the Americanization of immigrant children as a primary goal (Wang 1994: 202). Their situation was not a happy one as they experienced racial discrimination from the dominant society at an early age and were simultaneously encouraged to perceive American values as superior and desirable. These American-born Chinese were not only highly conscious of racial and cultural differences but also sensitive to the social and legal differences that separated them from their white American peers. Many, believing in the myth of white superiority, came to regard their own community as backward and their ethnic culture as a stumbling block to integration with the dominant society. Rejecting the values and behaviours taught by their parents and their ethnic community, they believed that only total assimilation could win them acceptance from the dominant society. Wang (1994: 201-202) describes how their desire for total assimilation translated into a form of self-hatred,

including a sense of shame over those aspects of their personal appearance that marked them out as non-white. As Wang (1994: 202) notes, their “sole objective, therefore, was to be accepted by and assimilated into mainstream American society, which, ironically, was the very institution that had been instrumental in the creation of the inferior conditions under which they were brought up” .

The strategy of total assimilation necessitated a change in personal and cultural identity, since the ethnic culture and language were being discarded for American values and an American way of life. It severed the sense of cultural continuity between the American-born Chinese and their immigrant parents and prevented them from identifying with their cultural heritage. Although they *looked* Chinese, they felt alienated from their ethnic culture. Instead they sought to acquire the trappings of an American identity, which included the ability to speak American English, the completion of a college education at reputable universities, participation in the social and recreational activities of their white peers, and moving out of Chinatowns if possible.

Unfortunately, as both Sucheng Chan (1991: 115) and Wang (1994: 203) point out, the efforts of the second generation of Chinese Americans towards assimilation did not win them the acceptance of the dominant American society. Racial prejudice and both overt and covert discrimination continued to shut them out of mainstream America and prevented many from competing for jobs commensurate with their education and skills. Sucheng Chan (1991: 115) reveals that young Chinese college graduates could only practise their professions in metropolitan areas with sizeable Asian populations and in the East Coast, where prejudice was less

intense. On the whole, the Chinese Americans were regarded as second-class citizens by mainstream America in the period before World War II.

This resulted in a deep sense of disillusionment:

What pained them was that having been educated in public schools where they learned the American creed, they thought they would enjoy all the rights, privileges, and duties of citizenship. Instead, they found themselves no better off than their parents. The latter, at least, could find solace in their heritage; moreover, as immigrants, they knew they could not expect equal treatment. But their children knew not where they belonged.

(Chan, S. 1991: 115)

Thus, assimilation did not enable them to overcome the colour prejudice of white American society, which persisted in viewing them as outsiders. Even those who had become thoroughly Americanized failed to win the approval of mainstream America. Some of the disillusioned wondered if their future lay in China, which could benefit from their skills and knowledge. But, as Wang points out, “going to China for these thoroughly assimilated Chinese Americans was as dauntingly foreign an experience as it would have been for their Euro-American peers” (Wang 1994: 203). This had to do with the fact that many of them had lost command of their ethnic language, and were no longer familiar with the subtleties of their ethnic culture.

Having discarded their ethnic culture and denied acceptance by mainstream America, the second-generation of Chinese Americans found themselves facing a crisis of identity. Unlike their parents, who could look to their Chinese roots and take pride in their Chinese heritage, they had lost their cultural heritage in pursuit of

an American identity. But they could not safely say that they were American, even though they held American citizenship, since such an identity depended on the opinion of mainstream America, and America persisted in defining them first as Chinese and in viewing them as different and alien. Thus, they found themselves in an ambivalent position, being neither able to claim an American nor a Chinese identity.

The personal dilemma of this first generation of Chinese born in America has not been fully resolved and later American-born Chinese find themselves grappling with the same conflict. Wang notes that:

For each new generation of American-born Chinese after the war [i.e. World War II], even in today's much more open and enlightened society, the racial and cultural difference and social distance between the dominant society and the small Chinese American community has continued to present difficult choices in values and perspectives. The inherent identity crisis facing Chinese Americans still persists today.

(Wang 1994: 204)

Thus, as long as cultural and racial differences are accentuated and the culture of the dominant society is associated with social acceptance, economic success, and power, the Chinese American seems unable to avoid having to choose between conflicting loyalties: to acquiesce to the dominant society's definition of what it means to be an American or to remain loyal to one's ethnic group. This choice is partly due to the fact that the American social policy of assimilation has no place for ethnic and cultural differences: becoming American means renouncing one's ethnic distinctiveness for mainstream white American identity. But as the predicament of

the second-generation of American Chinese reveals, assimilation does not necessarily guarantee American success. Consequently, as Pan (1990: 228) points out, many second-generation Chinese Americans began to wonder if they have paid too high a price and lost something of themselves in the process.

The sense of ambivalence and unease is particularly intense when the American-born Chinese are faced with each new group of Chinese immigrants:

When an ABC [American-born Chinese] looks around him, he becomes aware that the new arrivals, even if they are nothing else, can tell themselves that they are Chinese and draw comfort from the fact; he has no such recourse.

(Pan 1990: 288)

The fact that the new arrivals seem to have a definite sense of who they are and where they come from, just as the first generation of Chinese Americans had, seems to show up the American-born generation's lack of identity and loss of ethnic roots. On the other hand, most ABCs also feel superior to the new arrival, whom they disparagingly call FOB (Fresh Off the Boat), because the latter "speaks the wrong language, wears the wrong clothes, and exhibits the wrong habits" (Pan 1990: 288). Desiring to blend in with American mainstream society, the American-born Chinese disdains the new immigrants who seem so starkly out of place and does not wish to be identified with them. Yet, separated from his or her ethnic roots and still seeking the approval of white American society, this sense of superiority has not helped the ABC resolve his or her identity crisis.

2.2.8 From Friend to Foe

In 1943, China became an ally of the United States in the fight against Japan, and American attitudes and policies towards the Chinese in the United States became more positive. Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Law and as a gesture of cooperation, allowed a token of 105 Chinese per year to enter the United States as immigrants. A small number of Chinese, who met stringent requirements and were already resident in the United States, were also allowed to become naturalized citizens. It would be easy to assume that the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Law signals a more open and less prejudiced phase of Chinese American immigration. But as Wang emphasizes, the limited wartime gestures “yielded few measurable gains for Chinese in the United States: they had virtually no impact on removing the discriminatory laws and practices that still existed at the state and local level” (1994: 194).

However, the war did create new job opportunities for the Chinese and enabled some 15,000 Chinese to become eligible for citizenship by serving in the United States armed forces during World War II. Under a 1947 amendment to the 1945 Brides Act, some 10,000 wives of Chinese American G.I.s came to the United States and contributed significantly to the number of women and children in the Chinese American population.

The goodwill between China and the United States dissolved in 1949 when the U.S.-backed regime of Chiang Kai-shek collapsed and a Communist government came to power in China. In the climate of the Cold War, the United States declared

China “Public Enemy, Number One”, imposed a total economic embargo against it, and pursued a policy of containment of China by military means, as demonstrated in the Korean and Vietnam wars (Wang 1994: 204). In 1951, the United States government prohibited all Chinese residing in the United States from maintaining contacts or sending remittances to their relatives in China. This effectively forced them to sever their ties with China. Wang (1994: 204-205) highlights the following consequences on the Chinese community in the drastic change from friend to foe in U.S.-China relations: firstly, with their hopes of returning to China shattered, many first-generation of Chinese in the United States had to abandon their sojourner mentality and settle permanently in the United States; secondly, to avoid the fate of the Japanese Americans, who were incarcerated in relocation camps because their loyalty was deemed questionable during World War II, leaders of the Chinese American community went out of their way to prove their loyalty to the United States by forming anti-China organizations and suppressing dissident views within the Chinese American community during the McCarthy era.

This period also saw an increase in the Chinese American population through an influx of political refugees. When the Communist took power in China, at least 5,000 government-sponsored Chinese students pursuing advanced degrees at American universities were prevented from returning to China, either in fear of political persecution from a hostile Communist regime or because their knowledge of science and technology was deemed too valuable to China (Wang 1994: 205). The U.S. State Department allowed them to adjust their visa status and remain in the country. Several thousand Chinese with strong education, professional and

commercial backgrounds also entered the United States under various Refugee Acts and contributed to the growing number of Chinese settling permanently in the United States. Sucheng Chan notes that these new immigrants differed from the first-generation of Chinese Americans:

These men and women sought work in universities, research laboratories, and private industries, bought homes in the suburbs, and had little to do with the old-time Chinese immigrants except for occasional meals in and shopping trips to the various Chinatowns of America.

(Chan, S. 1991: 141)

In fact, these highly educated Chinese refugees, many from well-to-do families, added to the growing Chinese American middle-class.

2.2.9 Third Phase of Chinese American Immigration

The 1960s signalled a third phase in Chinese American immigration, characterised by a sharp rise in the number of Chinese residing in the United States. Wang (1994: 195) dates its inception with the 1965 Immigration Act that promoted family reunification and the recruitment of skilled and professional personnel. Replacing the race-based exclusionary system, the Act allowed each country outside the Western Hemisphere an annual quota of 20,000 immigrant visas. As a result, the number of Chinese entering the United States not only rose significantly, but they

also constituted a more diverse group, with immigrants from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the countries of Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Before the United States recognized the People's Republic of China, it was the Taiwanese who benefited from the new law. However, when the United States established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1979, the 1965 immigration law was amended to allow for separate quotas of 20,000 each for Taiwan and China, which significantly increased the number of Chinese immigrants to the United States. Hong Kong was allowed a quota of 600 persons per year, which was increased to 5,000 in 1988. The Act not only facilitated the entry of relatives of Chinese already resident in the United States, it also encouraged people with suitable skills and qualifications to come to America. Wang (1994: 196) points out that since 1965, political instability and discrimination have caused many affluent, well-educated professional and entrepreneurial Chinese in South East Asia and Latin America to seek more secure investment and better educational opportunities in the United States. In addition, the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act in 1975 admitted several hundred thousand ethnic Chinese among the one million refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. These new immigrants have not only significantly increased the Chinese population in the United States but have also made it more diverse.

The 1990 Census of Population by the U.S. Census Bureau reveals that the number of persons of Chinese ancestry in the United States has increased from 431,583 in 1970 to 812,178 in 1980 to 1,645,472 in 1990. Overall, the Asian population in the United States has grown from 3.5 million in 1980 to 6.9 million in

1990, which is a 99 per cent increase. It also highlights the fact that since 1990, the Asian and Pacific Island population has been growing at the rate of 4.5 per cent annually, with immigration accounting for 86 per cent of the growth. The 1965 Immigration Act therefore opened the way for a significant increase in the number of Asian immigrants to the United States, which has continued to this day, and the Chinese formed a large percentage of this number.

The influx of Chinese intellectuals and students that began in the second period of Chinese immigration to the United States continued unabated. According to the 1987-1988 report of the International Institute of Education, there were approximately 68,000 Chinese students enrolled in American colleges and universities in 1987; of these, 26,000 were from Taiwan and 25,000 were from China, and three-quarters of them were graduate students. American policies towards foreign students have generally been liberal; Pan (1990: 266) notes that in the history of Chinese American immigration, the student-immigrant has long been a special category: it was one of the classes exempted from the Exclusion laws and, unlike the despised Chinese coolie, was favourably regarded by the host country. The earlier students were sojourners: their final goal was to return and help modernize China. However, many of the later students from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and countries in Southeast Asia chose not to return and found "legal loopholes that enabled them to stay after the completion of their graduate studies, while others became undocumented aliens employed in research, business, industry, and higher education" (Wang 1994: 194-195).

Another feature of this period was the involvement of Chinese Americans in the social transformations of the sixties and seventies. The most affected were Chinese American college students who were inspired to study their own history and cultural heritage, and to re-identify with the Chinatowns (Wang 1994: 207). Their actions constitute part of an indigenous movement that sought to develop a distinct Chinese American identity. Consequently, since the 1960s, ethnicity has become an important issue, and for the American-born Chinese, the “erstwhile badge of shame has become a badge of pride” (Pan 1990: 295). To recover a sense of who they are, Chinese Americans have sought to reconstruct family histories and to trace their roots. The irony is wryly noted by Pan:

In their hurry and anxiety to win acceptance in white American society, immigrants had forgotten, ignored, discarded without a backward glance the habits which had set them apart. Only now, when it is all but irretrievable, has the past acquired value for America’s immigrants. Now they are at pains to recover their distinctiveness, and to re-invent their identity. A Chinese American is never more American than when he tells me, ‘I’m proud of my Chinese heritage.’ ”

(Pan 1990: 295)

Ironically, after vehemently denying their ethnic identity, Chinese Americans now value it and seek to reclaim it. Part of this attempt to reclaim ethnic identity has involved the recording of immigrant histories as Chinese Americans endeavour to understand their heritage through a reconstruction of their past and the flowering of artistic expression as drama, poetry and narrative writing are employed as means of self-expression and self-definition. The search to develop a distinct identity is both a

constant theme and a source of inspiration in Chinese American literature in English. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

The students also pressured universities to establish Asian American studies programmes and established civil rights and social service organizations around Chinatowns to fight for justice and provide needed services for the poor and elderly. This can be seen as part of the broader movement of Americans of Asian descent. Wang describes its political character:

As a political movement, it owed its genesis to and derived its inspiration, agenda, and tactics from the Black civil rights and Black power movements. However, its content was rooted exclusively in Chinese American and Asian American experiences. Its objective was not only to reconceptualize Chinese American identity, but also to demand a rightful place in the United States for all Chinese Americans.

(Wang 1994: 206-207)

In the movement for equal rights, a segment of middle-class Chinese America chose to fight racial discrimination under auspices of Chinese for Affirmative Action, a community-based civil rights organization in San Francisco, and the Organization of Chinese Americans, a national organization based in Washington, D.C. Their active participation suggests a growing consciousness of their place in American society and an identification of America as “home”.

Nevertheless, the struggle to be accepted for who they are, irrespective of race or ethnicity, is far from over. Referring to the United States’ perception of the Asian American, Lowe points out that,

A national memory haunts the conception of the Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of actual laws prohibiting Asians from citizenship from 1943 to 1952 and sustained by the wars in Asia, in which the Asian is always seen as an immigrant, as the "foreigner-within," even when born in the United States and the descendant of generations born here before.

(Lowe 1998: 9)

The perception of the Asian as a foreigner is perpetuated by the way the dominant society tends to use racial and ethnic differences as signifiers of otherness. The Asian American is especially vulnerable because he or she is visibly different. While the observation of physical and ethnic differences is not inherently damaging, it becomes so when these differences become the basis of prejudice and non-acceptance. Difference is then used to divide and set apart. Consequently, Asian Americans are regarded as "direct transplants from Asia or . . . custodians of an esoteric subculture" (Wong 1993: 9). Such misconceptions not only situate the Asian American outside American society, they also hamper efforts towards a more realistic understanding of the Asian American community.

Thus, while the third phase of Chinese American immigration has seen a greater degree of openness towards the Chinese as an ethnic minority, Chinese Americans must still work at correcting misconceptions and acts of discrimination, and at finding acceptance for who they are.

2.3 Chinese American Writing in Context

Chinese American writing must be read against the background of Chinese immigration to the United States because it relates so intimately to its social and historical contexts. Like most minority writing, it surfaces out of a desire to make known the distinctiveness of one's community, the realities of minority existence and the uniqueness of the Chinese American voice. Instead of the stereotypes provided by the dominant culture, it seeks to dismantle misleading representations and speak for itself. As noted by the Chinese American playwright, David Henry Hwang, "art has always served as one means by which people define themselves and define their vision of themselves" (1996: 575).

Frank Chin, another Chinese American playwright and novelist, asserts, "We all write from specific cultures, times and places" (1996: 18). While this statement is meant to be applied generally, it seems particularly apt with regard to Chinese American writing, which tends to emphasize those aspects that are distinctly Chinese American and concentrate on those issues that define the writers' vision of their community. The literature is defined by its Chinese American content, and the themes of immigration, alienation, assimilation and living in two cultures predominate.

The character of Chinese American literature in English is shaped by the background of its writers, who tend **not** to be first-generation immigrants, preoccupied as they are with the business of living and adjusting to the culture and language of the host country. Kim points out that Asian American literature is

“written primarily by American-born, American-educated Asians.” (Kim 1990:147). Chin et al. (1974b: vii) similarly state that most Chinese American writers are American-born, or have lived most of their lives in the United States. Being born and/or educated in the United States significantly affects their perception of self and their art.

An American education almost certainly guarantees that these writers are not only fluent in English, but are familiar with it as a literary language and with Anglo-American literature. Their works reveal this proficiency through the use of Western literary techniques in the depiction of Chinese America. In fact, Chinese American writing often partakes of a variety of traditions, drawing on both Chinese and Western cultural resources. In this respect, they are similar to other Asian American works, which Wong describes as “multiply situated texts” (1993: 8), as they may “allude to Asian classics or folklore, draw upon an oral tradition maintained by immigrant forebears, participate in dominant Western genres like the realist novel or movements like postmodernism, serve class interests, engage in gender politics, and do a host of other things that multiply situated texts do” (ibid.). So, for example, Fae Myenne Ng’s novel, Bone (1993) is recognizably Chinese American through its Chinatown setting and the recounting of traditional beliefs, but it is also distinctly postmodern in its inversion of time, so that with each chapter, the reader is brought back further into the past, to events prior to the suicide of the narrator’s sister. In The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), Maxine Hong Kingston fuses autobiography with the Chinese folktale of the female warrior, Fa Mu Lan, and transforms the traditional tale into a very personal reconstruction

from an American perspective. Frank Chin's Gunga Din Highway (1994) not only incorporates Chinese mythology, but also alludes to Western myth by naming the protagonist "Ulysses". These Chinese American texts reveal the writers' ease with Western literary styles and demonstrate how elements from both ethnic and Western cultures can be exploited and creatively combined.

Having lived most of their lives in the United States, these writers are not only very familiar with American culture, but, as noted in section 2.2.7, come from a generation particularly affected by the pull of assimilation and the unease of cultural displacement. Writing out this background, it is not surprising that a recurrent theme in their writing is the question of identity: what does it mean to be Chinese American? Hwang draws attention to this when he states: "Writing for me continued to be a search for authenticity" (Hwang 1996: 572).

Hwang's use of the term "authenticity" suggests that the issue of identity in Chinese American writing is often tied up with the need to differentiate between real and false versions of what it means to be Chinese. Chinese Americans are acutely conscious of the fact that their own experiences often diverge from the dominant culture's image of the Chinese in America. However, their perceptions of self and community have also been powerfully affected by the dominant Western culture. Hwang comments,

For instance, we who are born in America absorb our images of self and culture basically through western eyes, through the mainstream point of view, and even if we decide to, say, read original Chinese literature, we're often looking at translations that were made by western scholars with their own sets of idiosyncrasies or prejudices or preconceptions.

Under such circumstances, how can we possibly discover who we really are? How can we discover the reality, or the authentic Asian or Asian American culture?"

(Hwang 1996: 574)

Hwang points out that Western images of the Chinese dominate the mindscapes of both Chinese and non-Chinese, to the extent that the stereotypes often replace the real. However, for the Chinese American, the discrepancies between the stereotypes and reality are too great to ignore. Consequently, the quest for the real Asian America underlines much of Chinese American writing. It is in their writing that misconceptions are confronted and ethnic identity is investigated. In The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), Kingston asks, "What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?" (Kingston 1975, 1976: 6), and her question specifically highlights the power of the mass media in shaping perceptions of the ethnic culture. Chinese American writers aim to correct misrepresentations through their writing. As Kingston states, "Pridefully enough, I believed that I had written with such power that the reality and humanity of my characters would bust through any stereotypes of them" (1982: 55). Unfortunately, stereotypes can be very persistent, as demonstrated by the reviews that praised Kingston's work for being exotic and mysterious.¹⁰

The issue of what constitutes authentic identity is, as Hwang (1996: 574) notes, "an extremely heated debate among Asian Americans". The debate has not only affected the Asian American literary community, but also coloured reviews of

¹⁰ Kingston highlights and criticizes reviews of The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) that measure it according to the stereotype of the inscrutable, mysterious and exotic orient in her essay, "Cultural mis-readings by American reviewers" (1982).

the writing by Asian American critics. For example, Asian American literary critics, Jeffery Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Inada and Shawn Wong, who edited two important collections of Asian American writing¹¹, vehemently condemn Chinese American writers who write for white acceptance, which in their view, is a seeking after acculturation and honorary whiteness, and therefore, an act of inauthenticity (Chan et al. 1991b: xi-xvi; Chin 1974c: xxi-xlvi). They include Jade Snow Wong, Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, and David Henry Hwang in this category. Hwang puts this criticism in perspective by observing that the most common criticism levelled at an Asian American writer is that his or her work conforms and reinforces stereotypes; he recounts,

I criticized *Miss Saigon* for reinforcing the stereotype of submissive Asian women. *M. Butterfly* [written by David Henry Hwang] was criticized for reinforcing the stereotype of Asian men being effeminate. *The Joy Luck Club* [written by Amy Tan] was criticized for reinforcing the notion that Asian men are not very nice. Frank Chin criticized both *The Woman Warrior* [written by Maxine Hong Kingston] and *FOB* [written by David Henry Hwang] for inauthentic use of mythology. And Frank Chin's own plays, when first staged in Seattle, were picketed by Asian Americans for reinforcing stereotypes of broken-English-speaking Chinatown tour guides.

(Hwang 1996: 574)

Hwang laments the fact that each Asian American work is often taken to be representative of an entire culture, of the whole community, and that this mistake is made by both Asians and non-Asians. Kingston also feels the burden of being regarded as the voice of Chinese America and asks, "Why must I 'represent' anyone besides myself? Why should I be denied an individual artistic vision?" (1982: 63).

¹¹ Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers (Chin et al. 1974a) and The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature (Chan et al 1991a).

Nevertheless, it is a fact that a literary text is often assumed to reflect something of the community to which it refers, and this is particularly true for texts of an “emerging sensibility”, to use a phrase from Chin et al. (1974c: xxxv). Asian American writers and critics are particularly sensitive to this fact in the context of a history of discrimination stemming from misconceptions by the dominant society and vigilantly guard against false representations. However, some Asian Americans may also become narrowly prescriptive. Thus, the unsatisfying nature of the criticism by Chan, Chin, Inada and Wong stems from the fact that they admit no alternative perspectives to their largely male, non-Christian, and non-immigrant formulation of the ‘true’ Asian American sensibility. But definitions of authenticity and identity are highly subjective, dependent on each individual’s experience, and therefore, debatable. Setting themselves up as arbitrators of the real and fake in Asian American writing, Chin et al. (1974c) and Chan et al. (1991b) define the fake as writing that pays heed to the white American reading public. However, they also seem bent on denying the fact that considerations of and motivations toward the dominant culture, whether legitimate or otherwise, can play a role in the shaping of minority writing, especially when written in a non-native language, and are thus, very real aspects of Chinese American writing. The inflexibility of their stance reveals a political agenda for Asian American writing that is militantly against any alternative to their view of Chinese America.

This intense interrogation of what constitutes the Chinese American identity is absent from works written by another group of Chinese living in the United States. These China-born writers, such as Lin Yutang and C.Y. Lee, emigrated to the

United States as adults. Chin et al. emphasize that these writers are secure in their Chinese cultural identity in a way that Chinese Americans, who experience a large portion of Chinese culture through American mass media and popular culture, can never be (1974b: vii, x). Moreover, these writers choose to become American by complying with the white American's stereotype of the 'good Chinese-American' as "good, loyal, obedient, passive, law-abiding, cultured" (Chin et al. 1974b: x). Thus their writing tends to exhibit a conformity to Western perceptions of Chinese culture and Chinese people and their works do not represent Chinese America nor the Chinese-American sensibility. This thesis excludes an examination of their works as the authors do not meet the criteria of being born or educated in the United States.

The importance of an authentic identity for the Chinese American community must also be related to the social transformations of the 1960s and 70s in the United States. This was a period of political activism that affected the ethnic communities in North America and encouraged them to demand for equal rights and challenge discriminatory practices; the heightened awareness of their position in America was accompanied by the need to establish a Chinese American identity. Many Chinese American writers, as members of their community, are therefore highly conscious of their place in America and fiercely aware of their rights as citizens, in a way their immigrant parents were not and perhaps, could not be. But at the same time, they are conscious of the fact that they are still regarded as outsiders by many white Americans. For them, the issue of identity is also intimately linked to the desire to be recognized as Americans.

Consequently, another major theme in their writing is the claiming of America as home. Kim elaborates:

. . . the most recurrent theme in our writing is what I call claiming America for Asian Americans. That does not mean disappearing like raindrops in the ocean of white America, fighting to become “normal,” losing ourselves in the process. It means inventing a new identity, defining ourselves according to the truth instead of a racial fantasy, so that we can be reconciled with one another in order to celebrate our marginality.

(Kim 1994: 147)

Kim’s statements emphasize that claiming a place in America does not mean assimilating with white American culture; the new Asian American identity holds onto the distinctiveness of the ethnic culture, but it is also affected by the greater American culture. For the American-born Chinese, America **is** home, and living there also means finding ways of reconciling the tensions between mainstream and minority culture, between Western modes of living and the traditions of the immigrant generation.

To recover the past and establish a place in America, many Chinese American texts include the imaginative recording of immigrant history and narrate the experience of growing up in the United States as a minority group member. Some autobiographical examples are Jade Snow’s Fifth Chinese Daughter ([1945] 1989), Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), and Ben Fong-Torres’ The Rice Room: Growing Up Chinese-American from Number Two Son to Rock ‘N’ Roll (1994). Autobiography, either direct or loosely disguised as fiction, is, as Hawley (1997: 184) points out, a common stylistic mode, and this is perhaps not surprising since autobiography as a

recording of a person's life, can anchor it in a particular time and place; as Hawley emphasizes, the "theme of immigration and the need for roots is at the heart of these writers' concerns" (ibid.). The same themes of immigrant experience and cultural displacement are present in fictional depictions of Chinese America, such as Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club (1989) and The Kitchen God's Wife (1991), Mei Ng's Eating Chinese Food Naked (1998), Fae Myenne Ng's Bone (1993), Maxine Hong Kingston's Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book (1989), Gus Lee's China Boy: A Novel (1991) and Shawn Wong's Homebase (1979, 1990). Such narratives establish America as 'home' for the Chinese American, and simultaneously set out to define his or her relationship to both America and the Chinese cultural heritage. They reveal that the Chinese American identity does not only stem from Chinese culture, but is equally affected by America.

Consequently, Chinese American writers are indignant when readers ignore the American influences in their writing. Responding to a critic's review of The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) as "ineffably Chinese", Kingston indignantly retorts,

No. No. No. Don't you hear the American slang? Don't you see the American settings? Don't you see the way the Chinese myths have been transmuted by America?

(Kingston 1982: 58)

Kingston is upset by the way her work is viewed only in terms of how it measures up to the stereotypes of Chinese culture, and that its American grounding is not recognized. She also expresses the wish that her work be recognized as part of

American literature, as an American text with a specific Chinese American identity. As Mimi Chan emphasizes, the focus of Chinese American writers is “not just on ‘Chinese-ness’ but Chinese-ness in an American context” (1991: 65). As Chinese American literature develops with each new generation of writers, it will be interesting to how the complex issues of identity and culture are dealt with.

Chinese American texts are therefore situated at the centre of highly complex relationships with mainstream American culture and the ethnic community, with the historical sediment of an immigrant past and the changing modernity of the present. To read such texts is to become aware of a range of “subject positions”, to borrow a term from Pope (1995). Using the term “subject” in its perceptual, socio-historical and ideological aspects, Pope (1995: 46-47) defines the subject position as a perceptual location within or an orientation towards an event and argues that potential subject positions include not only the obviously present and immediately implicated, but also the remotely absent but ultimately implicated. The various dimensions in which subjects operate include the temporal-spatial and the socio-historical, as represented in the following diagram:

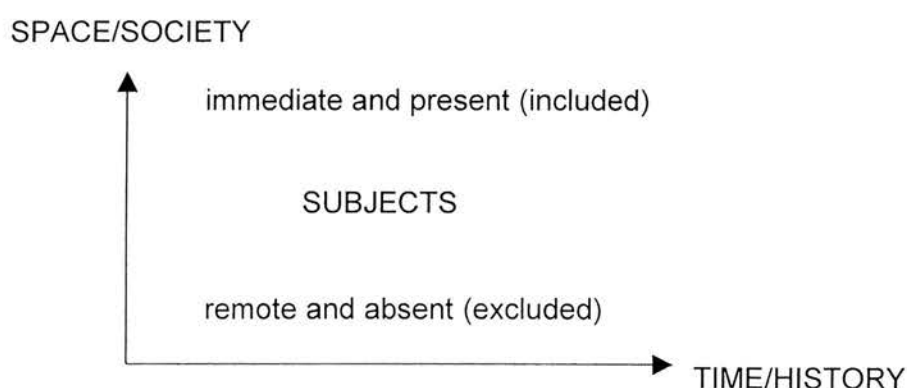


Figure 1. A model of social-historical subjects (from Pope 1995: 48)

Although Pope suggests that multiple subject positions are implicated in the description of any event, narratives of immigrant experience and cultural conflict often bring them to the fore. When we read a Chinese American text, we become aware not only of the present situation but also the past history that brought the protagonist to the present place in time; there is a repeated recording of history, a contrast between the immigrant's perspective, that is affected by memories of the homeland, and the American-born generation's perspective, which is more intimately acquainted with American culture; there is an alternation between a non-American voice and an American voice. In reading a Chinese American text, we are sensitized to the presence of the different cultures and time frames relating to immigrant roots and present American reality, and so become aware of the multiple perceptual locations within a single event. In the Joy Luck Club (1989), Tan creates multiple subject positions through the use of multiple female narrators, contrasting the immigrant mothers' point of view against those of their American-born daughters. In Bone (1993), Ng creates an awareness of how the ethnic culture constantly contributes another angle on an event, as can be seen in the following episode describing the narrator's thoughts when she has dinner at an expensive western restaurant with her sister¹²:

The place was called The Santa Fe and it was done in peach and cactus green. I looked down at the black plates on the pale tablecloth and thought, Ink. I felt strange. I didn't know this tablecloth, this linen, these

¹² Interestingly, Ng presents this same scene in the short story "A red sweater"; the names of the characters are slightly altered and the narrative perspective seems to belong to the sister, but the same disconcerting multiple perspective is reproduced when all but the first three lines of the above excerpt is repeated.

candles. Everything seemed foreign. It felt like we should be different people. But each time I looked up, she was the same. I knew her. She was my sister. We'd sat with chopsticks, mismatched bowls, braids, and braces, across a Formica tabletop.

(Ng 1993: 26-27)

In the brief passage above, Ng brings together two different time zones and two levels of existence: past poverty, as suggested by the mismatched bowls and Formica table top, and present luxury, indicated by the dinner at an expensive restaurant. The contrast in cultures is signified through the different eating utensils: plates and forks versus bowls and chopsticks. The narrator is positioned at the junction of these contrasts, and thus, offers us multiple subject positions that relate to both the immediate situation and the remote events of childhood; her current sense of dislocation arises precisely because she sees the present situation through the lens of the past, and the past differs so significantly that she feels she should be a different person in the present situation. Multiple subject positions are constantly implicated or inscribed in Chinese American narratives as the immigrant background often includes a past that contrasts sharply with the present and a Chinese home culture that diverges so distinctly from white American culture. Many of the narratives are about the inability to resolve these oppositions and the multiple subject positions in the texts register fractured identities and a disjointed sense of history.

One of the important ways by which the narratives foreground multiple subject positions is through language and its intimate relationship to culture. Language in the texts is constantly related to cultural group membership and is never to be taken for granted. As the texts insert the immigrant voice through the

representation of the ethnic languages and non-standard English, we become attuned to the various multiple subject positions that are offered by the different voices. The depiction of inter-ethnic discourse situations as focal points for contrasting viewpoints and cultural differences also emphasize that more than one subject position is possible. Thus, language variety not only signals cultural diversity but it can be used to create a space within the texts for alternative subject positions.

CHAPTER THREE

CULTURAL SEMANTICS

3.1 Locating Meaning

One of the most significant aspects of the ethnic minority experience expressed in the Chinese American narratives is that of living with two languages: the ethnic language and American English. Each language is associated closely with a distinct culture, and for the Chinese American characters, speaking one language or the other usually entails moving from one cultural space to another. In the narratives, this can become an issue in semantics: an exercise in locating the meaning of words in appropriate contexts so that their cultural import will be carried over from one language to the other.

The narratives are premised on a view of language as intimately connected to culture: each linguistic sign comes embedded in a cultural context, that, like an aura, lends it certain effects and emphases and affects our perception of its meaning; it is this cultural context that makes translation more than a simple exercise of finding equivalent terms. Words lose their cultural connotations when this cultural context is not represented. For the Chinese Americans characters, the complexity of living with two languages is related to the differences between the ethnic and American

contexts and the difficulty of transferring cultural meaning from one language and cultural sphere to the other.

A complicating factor is that the contexts encasing the ethnic language are rooted in the cultural space and time of the immigrant's homeland, that often jar against the realities of life in America. In his autobiography The Rice Room: Growing Up Chinese-American from Number Two Son to Rock 'N' Roll (1994), Ben Fong-Torres makes an interesting observation:

The Chinese language is stuck in its own place and time.

(Fong-Torres 1994: 4)

This statement is clearly inaccurate when we consider how languages develop and change with each generation of users: new words are added, pronunciations and accents shift, formerly ungrammatical arrangements are accepted. Change is an inescapable constant in the diachronic development of all languages. Yet Fong-Torres' comment candidly sums up the way the ethnic language resists change even when transplanted into the new cultural environment of the adopted country, bringing with it the framework of not just another culture but an older culture.

Fong-Torres gives the example of the Cantonese term "look yee" /luk yi/¹ to illustrate how the ethnic language seems suspended in a past time. As a child, he was taught by his parents to refer to the police using this term. However, the term, when translated into English, means "green clothes", and an older Fong-Torres reflects on its inappropriateness in the America context, where the police do not wear green uniforms. The incongruity can only be understood by tracing the term's original

¹ Throughout this thesis, the Yale romanisation of Cantonese is given between slash lines.

cultural context, where it was used to refer to the green uniforms worn by police in Canton. The immigrant Chinese, such as his parents, transferred it to the new context of their adopted country and continued using it without alteration. This example of a transferred local term illustrates how immigrants bring with them a system of reference and a repertoire of speech acts that belong to their places of origin and some of which may not make sense in the adopted country. The term “look yee”, even as it introduces the sound of the minority person’s home language in the English text, juxtaposes a Chinese cultural context against American society and emphasizes a Chinese frame of reference in the immigrant’s perception and description of America.

Fong-Torres’ simple example underscores the role of context in the shaping of linguistic signs. Repeatedly, the narratives highlight the relationship between word-meaning and cultural context. I use the term “cultural semantics” to denote this strategy of establishing the cultural import of words. In the following sections of this chapter, we shall examine how words and their contexts contribute to cultural identity in the narratives.

3.2 Names and Their Contexts

In their discussion on word-meaning, Stephen and Waterhouse point out that:

Around the core of ‘meaning’, each [signifier] has a penumbra of associations or overtones, which are qualitative or descriptive, some

culturally coded, some individually influenced for the particular reader,
and each signifier then fits certain registers and contexts . . .
(Stephens and Waterhouse 1990: 14)

Stephen and Waterhouse describe each word, or “signifier”, in a language as having a core of meaning. This core would consist of those essential semantic features that constitute the word’s basic meaning and which are understood and taken for granted by speakers of the language. Dictionaries are typically regarded as recording the core meanings of words in the language.²

However, Stephen and Waterhouse also emphasize that signifiers are also surrounded by “a penumbra of associations or overtones”, which actually contribute significantly to their meanings in the minds of those who use them. In the Chinese American narratives, both the personal and cultural associations of words are highlighted and they play a crucial role in establishing the cultural identity of the texts.

Names can be particularly evocative of cultural experience, as the following excerpt from the novel Bone (1993), by Fae Mynne Ng, suggests. While waiting for their orders at a restaurant, the Chinese American narrator and her sister reminisce the past:

“Here’s to Johnnie Walker in shark’s fin soup,” I said.(1)

“And squab dinners.”(2)

“*I Love Lucy*.”(3) I raised my glass, and said again, “To *I Love Lucy*,
squab dinners, and brown bags.”(4)

²However, section 3.4 of this chapter suggests that prototype semantics provides an alternative method of establishing core meanings, especially when dictionary definitions do not correspond to actual examples of word usage.

...
Pigeons.(5) Only recently did I learn that the name for them was
squab.(6) Our name for them was pigeon – on a plate or flying over
Portsmouth Square.(7) A good meal at forty cents a bird.(8)
(Ng 1993: 29-30)

In the midst of her conversation with her sister, Leila, the narrator, muses on the use of different labels for the same object in different cultures. Although she does not explicitly refer to “squab” as a term from Anglo-American culture, the context of the narrative as an account of the minority experience in America suggests that this is the case. She states that, in contrast to the Anglo-American term “squab”, she used the term “pigeon” to refer to that species of bird, whether alive or served as food. The possessive pronoun “Our” (sentence 7), significantly placed at the start of the sentence, emphasizes this system of naming as one that characterizes her own community. Moreover, by highlighting the term “squab” as a recent addition to her vocabulary, she reveals her minority status, and identifies herself as part of an ethnic community with a system of naming that does not always correspond with the one associated with mainstream Anglo-American culture.

Continuing from her observations on the use of different terms “squab” and “pigeon”, the narrator reminisces how she and her sisters took care of the pigeons they bought from the butcher’s:

Nina, Ona, and I picked the white ones, those with the most expressive eyes.(1) Dove birds, we called them.(2) We fed them leftover rice in water, and as long as they stayed plump, they were our pets, or baby dove birds.(3)

But then one day we’d come home from school and find them cooked.(4) Mah said they were special, a nutritious treat.(5) She filled

our bowls high with little pigeon parts: legs, breast, and wings.(6) She let us take our dinners out to the front room to watch *I Love Lucy*.(7) Mah opened up a brown bag for the bones.(8) We leaned forward, balanced our bowls on our laps, and crossed our chopsticks in midair and laughed at Lucy.(8)

(Ng 1993: 30)

What is striking in this description is the lack of sentiment over the way the pet “baby dove birds” (sentence 3) are converted into a “nutritious treat” (sentence 5), as signalled by the sisters’ enjoyment of their meal while watching one of their favourite television programmes; the name “baby dove birds” is used here to denote the status of the birds as animals to be treated with affection, which is superseded by the label “nutritious treat” that emphasizes food value. The fact that the pigeons were purchased with the foreknowledge that they were destined for the dinner table could have encouraged the sisters’ indifference; moreover, poverty does not allow for squeamishness. Nevertheless, the ease with which the birds are first viewed as pets and later as food suggests that the categories of ‘pet’ and ‘food’ are not rigidly enforced in the narrator’s ethnic culture. This fluidity between categories goes against the grain of contemporary Western ideas about rigid separation between ‘food’ and ‘pet’. Both Webster’s New World College Dictionary (1996) and The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995) define “pet” as a domesticated animal kept for companionship and treated with affection; consequently, an animal that has been designated as a pet would be safe from the cleaver. The idea of eating one’s pet pigeon would be an anathema to most Anglo-American city-dwellers.

Fowler notes that the idea 'pet' is a cultural category: it is "not a natural feature of certain animals but a property of the culture's system of attitudes towards animals" (1996: 27). The cultural attitude towards animals suggested by the narrator's experience with the pigeons is one that emphasizes their usefulness and practicality to humans at the expense of their emotional value: an animal can be a pet or a food item, depending on necessity.

This account of the Chinese American sisters' experience with the pigeons highlights the flexibility with which the category of "pet" can be converted to "food", and because it stems from the narrator's reflections on her use of the term "pigeon" for "squab", it becomes part of the term's associative meaning. Thus, in the narrator's mental map, the name "pigeon" conjures memories of both the "baby dove birds" and "nutritious treat". Moreover, the particular experiences that the term "pigeon" evokes are carefully emphasized as aspects of the narrator's Chinese American childhood and these experiences are situated within the immigrant Chinese environment. Consequently, the difference in naming becomes an indirect sign of the differences between Anglo-American and immigrant Chinese cultures. Names therefore serve as signifiers of cultural experiences that are filtered through the individual perspective of the narrator.

Saville-Troike comments that:

The development of semantic categories, and indeed of all the situated meaning in language, is dependent on the dictates of cultural experience . . . Vocabulary knowledge thus becomes a means, as well as an index, of enculturation.

(Saville-Troike 1982: 218)

Thus, in Bone (1993), Leila's learning of the new term "squab" for "pigeon" reflects both an increase in her understanding of American English and a more intimate experience of Anglo-American culture. As Saville-Troike points out, vocabulary knowledge can become both a means and an index of enculturation, and Leila's acquisition of the new term is perhaps an indication of her assimilation into English-speaking mainstream American culture; but in highlighting her awareness of the difference in naming, the text also emphasizes her ethnic background as a significant part of her identity.

The differences between what the ethnic culture and the Anglo-American culture regard as belonging to the semantic category of 'pet' is significant enough for it to be noted in other Chinese American narratives. The following example comes from Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club (1989):

Farther down the street was the Ping Yuen Fish Market.(1) The front window displayed a tank crowded with doomed fish and turtles struggling to gain a footing on the slimy green-tiled sides.(2) A hand-written sign informed tourists, "Within this store, is all for food, not for pet." (3)

(Tan 1989: 81)

The above excerpt comes from one of the female character's description of San Francisco's Chinatown, which is replete with examples of what an Anglo-American person, as an outsider to the ethnic community, would find unusual and exotic. The Ping Yuen Fish Market is a case in point because it deviates from an American

fishmonger by not only displaying live sea creatures in a manner similar to aquariums but also by including produce that would be fall under the category of 'pet' (non-food) in Anglo-American culture. One glaring example is turtle. Consequently, the store has to have a sign targeted at non-Chinese, that is, Western tourists, who have differing cultural notions of what constitutes a pet; by explicitly demarcating all the live animals in the store as food items, the sign brings into opposition the ethnic and Anglo-American notions of 'pet'. Its unconventional grammar not only suggests a second-language speaker's incomplete mastery of English, but also signals an ethnic cultural framework that upsets the Anglo-American semantic categories of 'food' and 'pet'.

A third example of the use of the word 'pet' comes from Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976). In the following passage, the narrator describes her conditioned response to animals:

I could feel a wooden door inside of me close.(1) I had learned on the farm that I could stop loving animals raised for slaughter.(2) And I could start loving them immediately when someone said, "This one is a pet," freeing me and opening the door.(3)

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 33)

The above description bears a striking resemblance to the attitude of the sisters described in Bone (1993): just as Leila and her sisters are able to cease their emotional attachment to the pigeons, Kingston's narrator reveals a similar facility when she states that she could voluntarily stop or start loving animals, depending on

whether they are designated as 'pet' or 'food'. From the above passage, it is apparent that the notion of 'pet' in the narrator's culture carries with it the idea of emotional investment, just as it does in Anglo-American culture. But the narratives also emphasize that the semantic category of 'pet' in the ethnic culture can convert easily into 'food' and it is this interchangeability that becomes a point of cultural difference.

The Chinese American narratives thus emphasize that semantic categories are closely related to cultural systems. They carefully situate words in their cultural contexts by conveying their meanings through descriptions of the Chinese American characters' experience of them in specific situations: the narrator's experience with the pigeons in Bone (1993) is specifically set in the context of her Chinese home culture, the fish market in The Joy Luck Club (1989) is highlighted in the context of Chinatown's divergence from Anglo-American mainstream culture, and Kingston's narrator in The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) describes her feelings as part of the response befitting a Chinese female warrior. Thus, in all three instances, comments and implications about word-usage and semantic categories are situated within the context of ethnic culture, and when the ethnic context is foregrounded in Chinese American narratives, there is an implicit contrast to Anglo-American usage of the terms. In this way, the narratives emphasize the interconnections between semantics and culture.

3.3 Semantics and Intercultural Communication

The above examples of the impact of culture on semantic categories demonstrate that words should never be taken for granted, especially in the context of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication occurs when cultural difference is focused upon in the narratives. But for this cultural difference to be taken seriously, the narratives need to alert the reader that some of the most common terms in the English language may not have quite the same meanings in the ethnic context. To do this, they interrogate the way these words are used and foreground their cultural contexts. These stylistic strategies simultaneously establish their cultural identity as minority texts, that is, as distinct from Anglo-American narratives, even though they are written in English.

The danger of misunderstanding is ever-present in intercultural communication, especially when one seeks to convey cultural significance in the language of another culture. Although most of the Chinese American authors discussed in this thesis are sophisticated users of English, the language difficulties described in their narratives suggest that even an American-born English-speaking Chinese has occasion to experience the insufficiency of the English language in conveying the cultural meaning carried by certain words in the ethnic culture. This insufficiency is created by the fact that a language associated with one culture does not carry exactly the same semantic load as a language associated with another culture.

Fowler's observation that the "meanings of words in a language are the community's store of established knowledge" (1996: 30) implies a direct link between the meanings of words and a group's mental model of the world. This mental model arises through the group's interaction with its physical environment and in the context of social relationships. Thus, the socio-cultural meaning of words in American English can be traced to its development in the context of the American cultural setting, and the same applies to the Chinese language. Language is therefore not a neutral medium of expression: it is learnt in a specific socio-cultural context and comes replete with the cultural associations of this context. A native-speaker is not just one who uses the language proficiently, but is also well-versed in the cultural norms of the language and the habitual *taken-for-granted* meanings.

Repeatedly, the Chinese American narratives depict how the switch from one language to another always involves a mental readjustment that reflects the differing cultural frameworks between the Anglo-American and Chinese American communities. In the short story "The Unforgetting" (1998) by Lan Samantha Chang, the cultural differences that contribute to the linguistic differences between English and Chinese are presented as a problem in translation:

Over and over, they reached for certain words that had no equivalents in English. Sansan could find no substitute for the word *yiwei*, which meant that a person "had once assumed, but incorrectly." And no matter how much he drilled himself, Ming could not instinctively convert the measure *wan* to "ten thousand," rather than "a thousand."

(Chang 1998: 146)

As immigrants to the United States from Beijing, China, Sansan and Ming know that they must acquire the language of their adopted country. However, they are repeatedly confronted by the lack of equivalent labels in English for a number of Mandarin concepts, such as the one encoded by the expression “yiwei”. The necessity of describing its meaning in the passage makes it clear that there is no equivalent linguistic label in English. That one language has an expression for such a concept, while another language has no equivalent term that captures all its aspects, suggests the importance of the concept to the culture that encodes it, and its relative unimportance in the culture that has no easily available term for it. The example of “wan” also underscores how ten thousand is such a significant unit of measure in Chinese culture that the Chinese language has a specific term for it, whereas in Anglo-American culture, “a thousand” is a more common unit of measure. The passage highlights the examples of the Mandarin terms “yiwei” and “wan” in order to emphasize their absence in American English and the problem of translating these terms from one language to another. The difficulty of language learning for the Chinese immigrants Sansan and Ming is portrayed in terms of adjusting to the different ways cultures choose to divide reality and encode those aspects that are important to them. Consequently, language learning is also a form of cultural adjustment and socialization into culture of the host country.

The lack of equivalent terms between languages and the difficulty of ensuring that the cultural significance of words from one language will be carried over to another language is part of the challenge facing those who engage in intercultural communication. However, these linguistic difficulties can also

contribute to intercultural communication when they create an awareness of the cultural identities of those who use language differently.

In the narratives, the interrogation of the cultural meaning of words becomes an important stylistic strategy for engaging in intercultural communication. Maxine Hong Kingston's "White tigers", from the collection The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), is one narrative that focuses explicitly on the cultural meaning of a common linguistic label - the noun "girl" – so as to highlight the cultural frameworks that makes it a Chinese American text. We shall examine how it repeatedly situates the word in cultural contexts so as to generate prototypical meanings that result in a 'translation' of the cultural connotations associated with the word in traditional Chinese culture into the English text. We shall also consider this stylistic strategy in relation to the theory of prototype semantics, which provides a useful perspective on the way the word definitions are related to cultural models of the world.

3.4 Prototype Semantics

The generation of prototypical meaning in Kingston's "White tigers" actually corresponds to one of the ways societies organize their semantic categories. Studies by Fillmore (1975), Sweetser (1987) and Lakoff (1987) demonstrate the influence of prototype semantics in our use of language. Essentially, prototype semantics views word-meaning "as determined by a central or prototypical application" (Sweetser

1987: 43).³ By relating real-world cases to a best instance of word-usage and by highlighting the underlying role of cultural models in theories of word definition, prototype semantics recognizes the crucial fact that words do not exist in a vacuum, but are grounded in the speaker's world.

3.4.1 Fillmore (1975)

In his analysis of the English noun “bachelor”, Fillmore (1975) argues that the traditional definition of “bachelor” as an unmarried adult man is inadequate because it cannot explain why some unmarried men, such as the pope, Tarzan, or a male partner in a long-term relationship, are not described as bachelors.

As an alternative, he proposes that when speakers use the word “bachelor”, they think in terms of a context with certain expectations about marriage and the marriageable age. Thus, the word “bachelor” ‘frames’ (Fillmore’s term) a simplified world of prototypical events: men marry at a certain age and marriages last for life. In such a world, a bachelor is a man who stays unmarried beyond the usual marriageable age, and becomes eminently marriageable. As Popes, Tarzans and

³ The psychological reality of prototypes was first demonstrated by Rosch (1973) in her study of colour categories in Dani, a New Guinea language that has only two basic colour terms: *mili* and *mola*. Rosch discovered that when Dani speakers were asked for the best examples of *mili* and *mola*, they chose the focal colours in the range of colours designated by the colour terms. She named these focal colours cognitive reference points or prototypes.

males in long-term unmarried couplings do not belong in such simplified worlds, they are not regarded as prototypical bachelors.

Thus, Fillmore demonstrates that conventional definitions are often related to cultural prototypes. By highlighting the role of conceptual models in language usage, Fillmore's frame semantics indicates one of the ways in which we can account for the prototypical meanings of words when used by different societies.

3.4.2 Sweetser (1987)

Sweetser's analysis of the English word "lie" (1987) similarly argues against traditional semantics that tends to rely on 'checklist feature definitions' as they do not allow for gradations within a category denoted by a word. As Sweetser notes, lexical categories can have 'better or worse members, or *partial* members' (1987: 43). Thus, the category denoted by the English word "lie" includes white lies, social lies, tall tales, fibs, and other better or worse examples of the prototypical lie. Moreover, although a lie is conventionally defined as a false statement, factual falsity is actually the least important definitional feature in relation to less prototypical examples of lies. Such an anomaly suggests that the dictionary definition of "lie" in terms of falsity is only valid in a simplified world.

Sweetser proposes that the prototypical and non-prototypical cases of the English word "lie" can only be fully understood in relation to a cultural model of

language and information. In this cultural model, language is assumed to be informational and helpful in the unmarked discourse mode. She describes the informational model of knowledge as a series of assumptions and rules:

A norm-establishing 'meta-maxim':

(0) People normally obey rules

General cooperative rule:

(1) **Rule:** Try to help, not harm.

(2) Knowledge is beneficial, helpful.

Combining belief (2) with rule (1) gives rise to:

(3) **Rule:** Give knowledge (inform others); do not misinform.

From the model of knowledge and information:

(4) Beliefs have adequate justification.

(5) Adequately justified beliefs are knowledge (= are true).

(6) Therefore, beliefs are true.

(6) allows rule (3) to be reinterpreted as:

(7) **Rule:** Say what you believe (since belief = knowledge); do not say what you do not believe (this = misinformation)

(Adapted from Sweetser 1987: 47)

According to this cultural model, speakers are assumed to be helpful, and will only communicate what they believe to be true. Consequently, hearers are normally ready to accept what is said to them; they only question the truth of a statement when they fear that reality does not correspond with their simplified discourse world, for instance when the source is naive, misinformed or wanting to deceive. Since justified belief is equated with truth in this cultural model, it is not the factual falsity of a white lie or a tall tale that makes them better or worse instances of the

prototypical lie, but how the speaker is perceived as adhering to the cultural model of language and information. While the prototypical lie is defined as completely undercutting all the informational exchange rules, deviations from the prototype can be accounted for in relation to the disruption or bending of informational exchange rules.

Sweetser demonstrates that cultural models of information and discourse explain why, in actual usage, the English word “lie” is much more complex than its straightforward definition as a false statement. She also briefly examines the presence of such models in the Malagasy and Lebanese communities and concludes that although these cultures differ quite significantly from that of the English speaking community, they have “similar understandings of lying and of the general power and morality dimensions of informational exchange” (Sweetser 1987: 62).

3.4.3 Lakoff (1987)

Lakoff elaborates on the function of prototypes in his theory of idealized cognitive models (1987). Idealized cognitive models structure mental space, which are “like possible worlds in that they can be taken as representing our understanding of hypothetical and fictional situations” (Lakoff 1987: 282). An example of an idealized cognitive model would be the simplified world described by Fillmore to account for the prototypical case of “bachelor”.

Lakoff (1987: 74 - 76) focuses his discussion of prototypes and idealized cognitive models on the semantic category defined by the noun “mother” and argues that a cluster of converging idealized cognitive models can give rise to prototype effects. The classical definition of “mother” is a woman who has given birth to a child. However, such a definition ignores other meanings associated with motherhood, which Lakoff describes in terms of models:

The genetic model: the female who contributes the genetic material is the
mother

The nurturance model: the female adult who nurtures and raises a child is
the mother

The marital model: the wife of the father is the mother

The genealogical model: the closest female ancestor is the mother

(Lakoff 1987: 74)

Lakoff demonstrates that the concept of mother involves all of these individual models, which converge to form a concept of mother that is psychologically more basic than each of the models taken individually. The point of convergence gives rise to the prototypical concept of “mother”.

What is particularly interesting is the way Lakoff relates the prototypical concept of “mother” to the existence of social stereotypes, which play an important role in defining cultural expectations. In his analysis of the category denoted by the linguistic label “housewife”, he observes that the housewife stereotype arises from a stereotypical view of nurturance, associated with the nurturance model of mother.

According to this view, housewives are mothers who are able to provide the best care for their children because they remain at home all the time. Thus, stereotypes are examples of prototype effects.

Lakoff characterizes social stereotypes in the following manner:

Social stereotypes are cases of metonymy - where a subcategory has a socially recognized status as standing for the category as a whole, usually for the purpose of making quick judgements about people.

(Lakoff 1987: 79)

Since stereotypes have a role in characterizing concepts and defining society's expectations, they affect the meaning value attached to particular linguistic labels. For example, consider the connotations attached to the noun phrase "the working mother". As Lakoff explains, the category denoted by "the working mother" is not simply a mother who happens to be working; instead one of the ways it is conventionally defined is in contrast to the stereotypical housewife-mother, with the result that the working mother is negatively viewed as one who cannot provide the best care for her children because she is not at home all the time. Thus, prototypes can be defined against other prototypes.

Apart from Lakoff's description of the stereotypical meanings attached to "the working mother" and "the housewife", alternative meanings may also associated with such expressions: "the working mother" can also carry the positive connotations of being an economic contributor or as one able to cope under difficult circumstances; "the housewife", on the other hand, may carry the negative overtones of being a non-wage earner and a dependent. Determining which meaning is more

pertinent depends primarily on the cultural values that are operating in the context in which the terms are used. The cultural meanings attached to the labels “the working mother” and “the housewife” are all generated through social stereotyping based on an economic model the female and they reveal the presence of prototype semantics in the social usage of language.

3.5 Prototype Semantics and Written Texts

The studies by Fillmore, Sweetser, and Lakoff focus on individual lexemes in an attempt to discover the cultural and social frameworks that explain their actual usage. They demonstrate that the meanings of these linguistic items are influenced by prototypes arising from particular cognitive models or simplified representations of situations in the social worlds of the language-user.

Intercultural narratives are framed by cultural contexts that differ significantly from those written by Anglo-American writers. If, as prototype semantics suggests, word meaning is characterised by prototypicality through the influence of underlying cultural models, then examining the way prototypical meanings are encoded, evoked, and exploited in Chinese American texts will not only reveal significant cultural meanings but also the cultural models that generate these meanings. In the rest of this chapter, I shall concentrate on the prototypical meanings evoked in the narrative of “White tigers”.

3.5.1 “White tigers” (1975, 1976)

“White tigers” is the second narrative from Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976). It is a semi-autobiographical text that recounts the author’s experiences as an American-born Chinese. An important theme is the influence of traditional Chinese values on Kingston’s perception of herself as a Chinese female child. The cultural context of the narrative is amplified through the incorporation of Chinese sayings and the retelling of a Chinese legend. We shall first examine the way the writer uses traditional Chinese sayings to evoke one of the prototypical meanings associated with the Chinese female child and then consider how this prototypical meaning is exploited in some unusual examples of language usage in the narrative and its significance in Kingston’s reworking of the legend of the woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan.

3.5.2 Transmitting Culture Through Language

The opening sentences of “White tigers” highlight the focus of our analysis: some of the cultural meanings associated with the lexemes “daughter” and “girl” in the text.

When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talking-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 19)

Here, Kingston refers to the popular Chinese pastime of storytelling, which not only entertains its listeners but communicates and promotes cultural values. The stories and legends of ancient China recounted by the Chinese in America thus play a crucial role in defining cultural expectations for Kingston. Taking note of Quinn and Holland's observation that cultural knowledge is 'learned from others, in large part from their talk' (1987: 22), our analysis begins by examining the Chinese sayings recorded in 'White tigers' as examples of language functioning as cultural instruction in the text.

3.5.3 Analysis of Chinese Sayings in the Text

Analysing the Chinese sayings in terms of illocutionary acts and perlocutionary effects associated with utterances (Austin 1962) reveals some of their pragmatic functions. The two Chinese sayings in the following passage are quoted by a corrupt man to justify his exploitation of females:

"Oh, come now. Everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to be rid of them. **'Girls are maggots in the rice.'** **'It is more**

profitable to raise geese than daughters.” He quoted me the sayings I hated.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 43. Emphasis mine)

The illocutionary force of the sayings is directed towards justification and agreement, and relies upon the assumption and acknowledgement of their status as pieces of cultural wisdom. However, their perlocutionary effect is to anger the narrator.

The next passage from “White tigers” contains three Chinese sayings:

When one of my parents or the emigrant villagers said, **“Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds,”** I would thrash on the floor and scream so hard I couldn’t talk. I couldn’t stop.

“What’s the matter with her?”

“I don’t know. Bad I guess. You know how girls are. **‘There’s no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls.’**”

“I would hit her if she were mine. But then there’s no use wasting all that discipline on a girl. **‘When you raise girls, you’re raising children for strangers.’**”

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 46. Emphasis mine)

The sayings quoted by the emigrant villagers and Kingston’s mother have several perlocutionary effects: Kingston is upset by them, which, as a child, she demonstrates by throwing a tantrum; however, their effect on the villagers is to evoke tacit consent and encourage other similar thoughts. Thus, in contrast to the sayings in the previous passage, the illocutionary force of the sayings in this passage succeeds when directed towards a specific audience - the emigrant villagers - since they refer the listeners to common knowledge as a basis for understanding behaviour and justifying action, or, in this case, the absence of action.

Common sayings assume a body of cultural knowledge shared by speakers. Thus, in above passage, the saying “There’s no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls” is preceded by the sentence “You know how girls are”, a phrase which not only emphasizes shared knowledge but also the *taken-for-granted* meaning expressed by the sayings. In the next two passages from “White tigers”, the sayings once again serve as reference points of common knowledge, which is then used to facilitate reasoning and understanding.

It was said, “**There is an outward tendency in females,**” which meant that I was getting straight A’s for the good of my future husband’s family, not my own.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 47. Emphasis mine)

They only say, “**When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls,**” because that is what one says about daughters. But I watched such words come out of my own mother’s and father’s mouths; I looked at their ink drawing of poor people snagging their neighbor’s flotage with long flood hooks and pushing the girl babies on down the river. And I had to get out of hating range.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 52. Emphasis mine)

The presence of the generic nouns, “females” and “girls”, as well as the existential “there”, help to raise these sayings to the status of gnomic utterances and collective wisdom. However, they convey not proven truths but certain negative cultural notions about female children. The visual representation of the second saying in a pen and ink horrifically concretizes the verbal imagery of rejection and makes an indelible impression on Kingston.

Although Kingston rebels against the negative value ascribed to females contained promoted by the Chinese sayings, the intensity of her response also suggests the powerful way in which “talk” can affect a person’s sense of self, and how language can become an instrument of socialization. Fowler comments that:

A child learns the values and preoccupations of its culture largely by learning the language: language is the chief instrument of socialization, which is the process by which a person is, willy-nilly, moulded into conformity with the established systems of beliefs of the society into which s/he happens to be born.”

(Fowler 1996: 30)

Fowler points out that language always exists in a social context and words are often culturally loaded. When a child learns the meanings of words in the language of his or her culture, he or she not only learns their dictionary meanings, but also the cultural values attached to them. Words are intrinsically connected to a system of cultural beliefs.

Lyons points out that the connotations of words arise through the “frequent use of a word or phrase in one range of contexts rather than another [that] tends to create a set of associations between the word or phrase and whatever is distinctive about its typical contexts of occurrence.” (1981: 150). By repeatedly situating the noun “girl”, and the related terms “female” and “daughter”, in the context of Chinese sayings, Kingston establishes the negative connotations of these terms in traditional Chinese culture. In the process, she achieves what Appel and Muysken describe as “semantic transfer” (1987:90), which occurs when the meaning of a word from one language is extended to a corresponding word in another language.

Thus, in “White tigers”, Kingston manages to translate the cultural meaning of “girl” in the ethnic language to English through prototype effects.

3.5.4 A Prototypical Meaning

Taken together, the Chinese sayings build up a picture of how daughters are regarded in traditional Chinese culture, thereby suggesting one cultural framework against which the words ‘girl’ and ‘daughter’ are prototypically defined. This cultural framework becomes obvious when the sayings are listed together:

1. Girls are maggots in the rice.
2. It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters.
3. There’s no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls.
4. Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds.
5. When you raise girls, you’re raising children for strangers.
6. There is an outward tendency in females.
7. When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls.

Repeatedly, the female child is described negatively: the words “girls”, “daughters” and “females” are associated with “maggots”, “no profit”, “cowbirds”, “strangers”, and “outward tendencies”. Even when we are unsure of the exact meaning of some of the sayings, the contexts surrounding them confirm the fact that they are not

meant to be regarded as compliments to daughters, as the analysis of their pragmatic functions in section 3.5.3 reveals. Instead, they generate prototype effects in the text by repeatedly emphasizing a negative view of daughters as worthless, bringing little or no benefit to their families. This view is closely linked to the notion of economic gain and practical value. Thus, a female child is stereotypically perceived in terms of her *lack* of worth or tangible contribution to her own family.

The traditional prejudices surrounding female children in traditional Chinese culture are well-documented (Hsu 1949, 1981; Lee 1960; Kristeva [1977] 1986; Tu 1985; Tsai 1986). According to feudal and Confucian customs, only sons continue the family name and inherit family property. A daughter, on the other hand, is expected to marry into another family, so that any contributions she makes will be to her husband's family and her sons will bear the father's surname. According to an economic model of value, raising daughters is a waste of limited resources since they contribute little to their families. In contrast, a son is highly valued and socially significant. The prototypical meaning of 'daughter' that Kingston generates in her text is based on this stereotypical view of the female child that arises from such a cultural framework.

3.5.5 Culture and Language Play

The prototypical definition of a Chinese female child as intrinsically worthless helps to explain the unusual choice of words in the last sentence of the following passage:

“Stop that crying!” my mother would yell. “I’m going to hit you if you don’t stop. Bad girl! Stop!” . . .

“I’m not a bad girl,” I would scream. “I’m not a bad girl.” **I might as well have said, “I’m not a girl.”**

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 46. Emphasis mine)

The adjective “bad” in the phrase “bad girl” is usually understood to mean naughty, but “bad” could also be used to describe a useless person. It is this second meaning of “bad” that the narrator refers to when she wryly concludes that to deny the label “bad girl” is tantamount to denying her identity as a female child. Within a cultural framework that regards a female child as intrinsically worthless, the adjective “bad” becomes redundant in collocation with the noun “girl”. Consequently, one can only deny that one is not a bad girl when one is not a girl, that is, a boy.

The word-play in the following passage is also possible because of cultural framework against which the noun “girl” is defined:

“Bad girl,” my mother yelled, and sometimes that made me gloat rather than cry. **Isn’t a bad girl almost a boy?**

(Kingston 1975, 1976:47. Emphasis mine)

Here, the narrator draws on another meaning of the adjective “bad”, such as the one used in the sentence: He was a **bad** actor. Correctly interpreting the reproof “bad girl” to mean her lack of the defining characteristics of the female child, she then turns it on its head by giving it a more favourable meaning: if “girl” is prototypically defined as worthless, the negation of this chief quality would elevate her status to that of the valued child, that is, a boy. Thus, by reordering semantics, the narrator reinterprets a reproof as a positive redefinition of her identity.

These two passages demonstrate that the nouns “girl” and “boy” in traditional Chinese culture are not simply antonyms according to sexual characteristics, but more importantly, they are perceived as oppositions because of the cultural attitudes towards males and females. In contrast to the prototypical definition of the female child as worthless, the male child is regarded favourably and of great value family. In a narrative that explores the meaning of identity as a Chinese American female, these cultural meanings assume great significance.

3.5.6 The Legend of “Fa Mu Lan”

In “White tigers”, the prototypical meaning of the noun “girl” in the framework of traditional Chinese culture forms an essential reference point for understanding Kingston’s retelling of the Fa Mu Lan legend in her narrative. The legend of the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan presents an alternative prototype, a daughter who achieves the status of the valued female child because she fulfils the

most important obligation of all Chinese children: filial duty. By retelling the legend in her own words, Kingston seeks to dismantle the negative cultural stereotyping attached to the female child. Thus, it is in her refusing to accede to the cultural expectation that she “would grow up a wife and a slave” (Kingston 1975, 1976: 20), that Kingston chooses an alternative definition of “girl”, articulated through the song of the warrior woman:

She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 20)

The woman warrior transcends the lowly status of the female by donning a man’s armour and fighting victoriously against the enemies of the state, her village and family. In doing so, she fulfils the Confucian obligations of duty to the emperor, her clan and her parents, that is traditionally a male domain. Fa Mu Lan thus represents the possibility of escaping the negative definition of “girl” and the impact of this legend sung to Kingston by her mother suggests once again the efficacy of language in transmitting values.

However, even though the legend of Fa Mu Lan represents a Chinese female who manages to escape the negative status accorded to a Chinese female, it continues to uphold the cultural roles expected of females. The fact that Fa Mu Lan can only achieve her battle victories disguised as a man underscores the traditional stereotyping of male and female. After her battles are won, she discards the soldier’s

garb and dons the costume expected of a young married female; it is an act that symbolizes the recontainment of the fierce energy of the warrior by the culturally prescribed behaviour of the female. Thus, while she manages to rise above the prototypical definition of women as unvalued daughters, she fulfils all the cultural duties expected of women by becoming a wife, bearing a son, and returning to her parents-in-law as a dutiful daughter in the end:

Wearing my black embroidered wedding coat, I knelt at my parents-in-law's feet, as I would have done as a bride. "Now my public duties are finished," I said. "I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons."

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 45)

The tale implies that Fa Mu Lan's legendary status is enhanced by her ability to accomplish what is expected of the Chinese female.

Kingston's retelling of the legend of Fa Mu Lan is rendered unusual by the use of first-person narration. This effectively allows her to narrate the legend as her own story, merging her identity with that of the warrior woman. The legend thus becomes a form of autobiography, not only enabling Kingston to incorporate elements from her own life into the story but also to express her own awareness of and implicit desire to match cultural norms and aspirations. This awareness is indicated through the pattern of modals in the narrative. For example, in a passage describing the heroine's choice between returning to her family or staying on the mountain to undergo training, there is a repeated use of the modal "can":

“What do you want to do?” the old man asked. “You **can** go back right now if you like. You **can** go pull sweet potatoes, or you **can** stay with us and learn how to fight barbarians and bandits.”

“You **can** avenge your village,” said the old woman. “You **can** recapture the harvests that the thieves have taken. You **can** be remembered by the Han people for your dutifulness.”

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 22-23. Emphasis mine)

Here, the modal “can” expresses possibility and permission: both sets of choices (to go back and work on the farm versus learning to fight and avenge the village) are open to the heroine. The second set of actions (learning to fight, to avenge the village, to recapture the harvest) traditionally belongs to the domain of the male Chinese hero; however, in the above passage, the old woman is offering the heroine the possibility of fulfilling the traditional Chinese obligations to her family, village and nation. Consequently, in the final sentence, the modal “can” emphasizes the possibility of being remembered by the nation as an example of dutifulness.

In later passages, the heroine’s duty is marked by deontic modals. For example, in the following passage, a double emphasis on obligation occurs when the modal “would” is followed by “have to”:

By looking into the water gourd I was able to follow the men **I would have to** execute.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 30. Emphasis mine)

Moreover, fulfilment of one’s duty can be enforced or self-motivated, as represented by the different modals in the following passage:

I saw the baron's messenger leave our house, and my father saying, "This time I **must** go and fight." I **would** hurry down the mountain and take his place.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 33. Emphasis mine)

"Must" conveys a high degree of obligation, and here, it is used in relation to an obligation that is unjustly enforced, as the heroine's father is too old to fight in wars. In contrast, the second modal "would" suggests a willingness and decision on the narrator's part to serve as her father's substitute, out of filial piety.

The final paragraph of Kingston's Fa Mu Lan story is also characterised by a repetition of the modal "would":

My mother and father and the entire clan **would** be living happily on the money I had sent them. My parents had bought their coffins. They **would** sacrifice a pig to the gods that I had returned. From the words on my back, and how they were fulfilled, the villagers **would** make a legend about my perfect filiality [sic].

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 45. Emphasis mine)

The past tense of these modals alert us to the dual time frames created by Kingston's retelling of the legend in first-person narration. Within the time frame of the legend, Fa Mu Lan manages to fulfil her obligations to her parents and her village; thus, the modals "would" are epistemic and predictive. However, where the narrator "I" is assumed to be Kingston, the passage is interpreted in the light of Kingston's own time and our awareness of her sense of failure as a Chinese daughter, causes us to retrospectively interpret the modals "would" as not only signifying the past time of legend, but also the remoteness of the possibility of these events. In comparison, the

present tense modal “will” would suggest a much firmer future possibility. These past tense modals belong to the category of “boulomaic modality” (Simpson 1993: 48): they convey a sense of desire on the narrator’s part, a wish that these events were true.

The pattern of deontic and boulomaic modality in Kingston’s retelling of the Fa Mu Lan legend indicates her desire to meet the cultural expectations embodied by the legendary heroine, who never relinquishes her female duties even as she manages to achieve significance in Chinese society. In fact, Kingston’s retelling of the legend emphasizes that Fa Mu Lan’s greatness lies in the fulfilment of her duties and her intense filial piety. Kingston only manages a vicarious achievement of the legend’s status in her storytelling; in her own life, she remains burdened by the negative cultural meanings associated with the label of “girl”. Thus, in the penultimate paragraph of the text, she falls back on the prototypical meaning of “girl” evoked through the Chinese sayings when she concludes: “But I am useless, one more girl who couldn’t be sold” (Kingston 1975, 1976: 52).

3.5.7 Semantics and Culture

Our analysis of “White tigers” reveals that our understanding of its central issues relies heavily on our grasp of a prototypical meaning denoted by the noun “girl” in the text. This prototypical meaning must be interpreted within the context

of traditional Chinese culture that is evoked through the translated Chinese sayings. Without it, the significance of Kingston's retelling of the legend of Fa Mu Lan would be lost. Her text encourages us to go beyond dictionary definitions of "girl" and locate its meaning within a cultural matrix, to interpret its significance through the model of traditional Chinese expectations evoked by the traditional sayings, which may or may not correspond to reality but certainly constitute a strong cultural influence.

This Chinese American narrative emphasizes that the cultural meanings of words form an essential aspect of their identity as intercultural narratives. Part of the successful communication of such meanings depends on how the writer provides access to the cultural framework. In 'White tigers', this cultural framework is built up through the cultural sayings and the retelling of the legend of Fa Mu Lan.

The theory of semantic prototypes, by drawing attention to the models underlying the meanings of words, reminds us that linguistic labels have cultural value. Although it represents only one approach to understanding the relationship between language and culture, it does encourage us to look beyond dictionary definitions of words to the socio-cultural contexts in which words are used.

The relationship between language in the narrative and language in its socio-cultural context will be expanded in the next chapter, which considers the sociolinguistic basis of the language patterns depicted in the Chinese American narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAKING TEXTS OUT OF EXPERIENCE

4.1 Language Variety in Chinese American Narratives

While the previous chapter examined how Chinese American narratives assert the presence of the ethnic cultural framework by interrogating the meaning of common English terms, in this chapter and the next, we shall turn our attention to the way the narratives establish the ethnic context through the representation of language variety. Just as cultural semantics allows the texts to introduce a non-English community's point of view, language variety makes explicit reference to the non-English-speaking speech community and permits its voice to be heard.

For the most part, standard English serves as the language of narration in Chinese American writing. But even a cursory reading of the narratives will reveal the presence of other languages that impinge upon the standard English of the texts and disrupt their monologic appearance. These other languages include varieties of the Chinese dialect or some form of interlanguage that characterizes an immigrant's efforts to master the language of the host country. Their presence is highlighted through narratorial descriptions and comments about the Chinese American sociolinguistic situation and through stylistic representations that physically marks

their presence on the surface of the texts. In this chapter, we shall concentrate on the former.

Languages other than standard English have their place in the sociolinguistic set-up of Chinese America, and Chinese American writers, as keen observers of their community and its experiences, draw upon this aspect of their reality in the representation of the world of Chinese America in their narratives. Although the narratives may differ greatly in style and plot, all of them describe, at some point, the difficulties of living with more than one language, of being forced to choose one language over others and the impact of those choice. In doing so, they also emphasize that the language difficulties of the minority person is not just a matter of linguistics but is intimately connected to social and cultural issues.

This chapter will examine the sociolinguistic portrait of Chinese America as delineated in the narratives by first considering how this portrait is grounded in sociolinguistic fact. Although we must be careful not to assume a simple equation between narrative depiction and sociolinguistic reality, it is reasonable to assume that Chinese American writers draw upon personal experience and knowledge of their community in representing the minority experience. Moreover, our appreciation of the narrative depictions of the ethnic speech community can only be deepened with the aid of sociolinguistic knowledge. Thus, we shall begin with a discussion of sociolinguistic research on language patterns of immigrant communities, particularly that of language shift. We shall also consider a study of the patterns of language shift among the Chinese in America and relate it to the way

the narratives characterize immigrant culture in terms of a transition between languages.

4.2 The Sociolinguistic Situation of Immigrant Groups

The sociolinguistic situation of Chinese Americans is a particular example of the linguistic pressures that surround the immigrant experience. Immigrants who speak a language or a variety of language that is different from that of the host country will inevitably encounter situations of language contact. Language contact is usually accompanied by language choices, and these choices often result in language shift.

4.2.1 Language Shift and Immigrant Groups in the United States

Language shift is defined as the process whereby a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one (Fasold 1984: 213). When the community shifts to a new language so completely that the old language (or languages) is no longer used, the result is language death. The opposite of language shift is language maintenance, whereby a community collectively chooses to continue using the language or languages it has traditionally used (ibid.).

In the case of an immigrant community, such as the Chinese in America, the surrender of the native language for the language of the host country, that is Chinese for English, would not mean the death of former, since it continues to serve as the language of Chinese people in China, Taiwan, and other parts of the world where the Chinese have settled and continue to use their native tongue. However, a shift from Chinese to English as their first language can be said to have occurred within the Chinese community in America. This is discussed in greater detail in section 4.2.2 of this chapter.

According to Fasold, one of the most frequently cited causes of language shift is migration (1984: 217). Other causes include the higher prestige of the language shifted to, a smaller population of the language being shifted from, the language used in school and other government institutions, industrialization, and other economic pressures (*ibid.*). While none of these factors guarantee language shift, they seem to favour them.

Immigrant communities in North America seem to fit the profile for language shift: they form minority language groups in a host country where English is not only the language of school, it is also regarded as the language of higher prestige since it is identified with the dominant group. Moreover, in line with America's 'melting pot' policy, which promotes the ideal that all cultural groups become part of a homogenous American culture, the ability to speak English is perceived as facilitating this aim. This policy has been enforced through government action and economic pressure. A good example is cited by researchers Campbell and

Kean (1997: 54): in 1915, the Detroit Board of Education launched a programme with the local industry to ensure that the city would become English-speaking in two years; this was in spite of the fact that three-quarters of the population were foreign-born, of foreign parentage and foreign-speaking. The programme policies included: making night school attendance for non-English-speaking workers a condition for employment, preferential treatment for workers trying to learn English- they would be promoted sooner and the last to be laid off - and incentive schemes, such as wage bonuses. Such practices exemplify the way language shift can be compelled through language policies that are based on unequal power relations.

In the following historical description by Campbell and Kean, we obtain a succinct overview of the way political and social concerns affect levels of linguistic tolerance in the United States and promote English as the language of prestige:

In the period immediately before the Immigration Acts of the 1920s¹, it was generally assumed that while linguistic diversity might continue at the local level, English would be maintained as the language of public culture. In the nineteenth century across the country a number of states, counties and local school districts allowed at least some educational provision in languages other than English, but this tended to die out as the campaign for immigration restriction developed in the early twentieth century. In its place came a much greater insistence that English was the necessary basis of a unified culture. This was regularly enforced by both private industry and city and state governments, in a way which reveals the close links between language and expected patterns of social and political behaviour.

(Campbell and Kean 1997: 54)

The reference to “unified culture” in the above quotation refers to the concept of assimilation, or the ‘melting pot’ ideal, which has been pivotal in determining the language planning policies in North America. With English established as the language of American culture, the move towards assimilation included English language competence as one of its necessary components. Minority languages, on the other hand, were perceived as hindrances to that great social enterprise.

Campbell and Kean provide us with a more detailed description of what assimilation in the United States meant:

. . . the concept of assimilation asserted that all ethnic groups could be incorporated in a new American national identity, with specific shared beliefs and values, and that this would take preference over any previously held system of traditions. Assimilation stressed denial of ethnic difference and the forgetting of cultural practices in favour of Americanisation which emphasised that one language should dominate as a guard against diverse groups falling outside the social concerns and ideological underpinning of American society.

(Campbell and Kean 1997: 44)

Thus, Americanization emphasized English as vital to successful assimilation: more than just a means of communication, it was both a symbol of shared American culture and a means of preserving that homogeneity. American assimilation forged a close link between language and national identity: to be ‘Americanized’ included being able to speak American English. The privileging of English as the language of American culture is demonstrated by the fact that interviews for American

¹ These were aimed at restricting the numbers of immigrants to North America.

citizenship are conducted in English, which means that English competency is a prerequisite for non-English-speaking immigrants who wish to become American citizens. Moreover, American assimilation did not simply promote English as the language of preference, it also discouraged the use of minority languages when it emphasized the denial of ethnic characteristics. Thus, it would appear that for immigrants who wish to become part of the American ideal of a “unified culture”, language shift is both inevitable and necessary.

However, the impetus towards language shift that accompanies assimilation is not peculiar to the United States. Holmes points out that language shift to English has been expected of migrants in predominantly monolingual countries, such as England, Australia and New Zealand (Holmes 1992: 56). In these countries, it is also true that the ability to speak good English is perceived as a sign of successful assimilation, and sadly, as Holmes reminds us, this is widely assumed to include abandoning the minority language (*ibid.*). Undoubtedly, the perceptions of the dominant culture often have a deep impact on the minority groups’ language patterns.

Consequently, we see that language ability deeply affects the immigrant’s adjustment in the host culture. Being able to speak or showing a willingness to acquire the language of the host country can facilitate the immigrant’s efforts at settling in. However, the inability to communicate in the host language seems to contribute to poor adaptation and assimilation. Firstly, it severely restricts the immigrant’s transactions with and access to the host culture, thus depriving him or

her of legal rights and social and economic opportunities. Secondly, as highlighted above, there is resistance on the part of the host community towards those who are different, and the lack of ability to communicate in the language of the host country is a potent symbol of this difference. As Holmes points out, “immigrants who look and sound ‘different’ are often regarded as threatening by majority group members” (1992: 56).

Saville-Troike (1982) describes three patterns of language use in a multi-ethnic speech community, which may also be applied to the United States, where the presence of many immigrant groups make it a multi-ethnic community. Immigrant communities form “subgroups” or “minority groups” and their language patterns may be any one of the following:

1. Subgroups in the community use only their minority ethnic language(s)
2. minority group members may be bilingual in their ethnic language(s) and the dominant language
3. minority group members may be monolingual in the dominant language

(adapted from Saville-Troike 1982: 85)

In the first pattern, no language shift occurs and the group not only maintains its ethnic language, it does not acquire the language of the host country. This would be feasible if the subgroup has higher status and power. However, most immigrant groups are not so advantageously positioned. Thus, in the immigrant situation,

pattern (1) seems only possible when the minority group is isolated, relatively self-sufficient, and has very few contacts with members of the host country.

In the first wave of Chinese immigrants to the United States between 1852 and 1882, when young male Chinese peasants from the Guangdong province arrived in America to work as labourers, harsh discriminatory laws encouraged legal and social segregation. These laws effectively confined the Chinese to Chinatown ghettos, and excluded them from participation in White Anglo-American culture (Wang 1994: 192). Such a situation did not encourage cultural or linguistic assimilation and consequently, there was a strong adherence to their ethnic dialects among the Chinese migrants. Moreover, in the Chinatowns, where the Chinese established their own social networks and maintained their cultural practices, English was not necessary. However, it is very rare that minority groups have absolutely no contact with members of the host culture. Thus, as early as 1875, a bilingual English-Chinese phrase book was distributed by Wong Sam and his assistants to equip the Chinese with useful English phrases that would help them deal with commercial, legal, work and social situations in the American West². Its publication underscored the fact that contacts with the dominant group required the use of the dominant language, and consequently, pattern (1) could only be sustained *within* the boundaries of immigrant community.

² The list of phrases extracted from the English-Chinese phrase book and reproduced in Chan et al. 1991: 94-110, presents a striking portrait of the difficulties and dangers of the Chinese immigrant experience in the late nineteenth century.

Perhaps, the more common scenarios of language shift are represented by patterns (2) and (3). According to Saville-Troike (1982: 85), in conditions (2) and (3), members of minority groups who have not completely relinquished their minority identity often speak a distinctive variety of the dominant language, which is perceived as 'having an accent'; these 'accents' are usually interpreted as simply arising from the influence of the ethnic language(s), and the features may indeed be attributed to substratum varieties or to the mother tongue, but they may be maintained and cultivated (consciously or unconsciously) as linguistic markers of ethnic identity. These linguistic markers become important tools that enable the minority group to resist complete absorption by the dominant culture and erasure of distinctive group identity. Using language to signal ethnic and cultural distinctiveness is an important sociolinguistic practice that is carried over into narrative writing, which may take the form of non-standard English language items and non-standard English grammar. These mark the minority group's *otherness* and the persistence of ethnic identity in the texts. In chapter six, we shall discuss stylistic attempts to preserve or create this 'accent' in the Chinese American narratives and consider the extent to which it is possible to identify the influence of Chinese dialects.

As highlighted above, patterns of language use are determined by the group that controls the society. Therefore, while immigrants and their children may acquire the language of the host country and become effective bi- or multi-linguals, if the dominant group emphasizes assimilation and regards the acquisition of the dominant

language as an important sign of assimilation, immigrants will tend to shift towards that language. Resistance towards cultural and linguistic assimilation often has negative consequences for immigrant communities, as the above-mentioned case of Detroit's language policies reveals.

Moreover, when competence in the language of the host country increases the immigrants' access to the dominant culture and enables them to gain a measure of success in that society, there is a greater incentive for a shift towards it. The link between English and success is certainly felt by Chinese in America, as Li points out:

Undeniably the pressure to speak 'proper' English as a prerequisite to success is felt by many Chinese-Americans, and for that matter by most immigrant groups.

(Li 1982: 113)

In the above passage, Li also notes that this feeling is not peculiar to Chinese immigrants, but is equally applicable to other immigrants groups in the United States. Thus, English is closely associated with success in America, and the pressure to assimilate with the dominant culture is so strong that the shift towards English is often accompanied by a shift away from the immigrant's native language(s). This pattern of language shift among the Chinese in America will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

4.2.2 Language Shift Among Chinese in the United States

An analysis of the sociolinguistic situation of Chinese Americans is found in Li(1982). This study examines the patterns of language shift among Chinese Americans and provides the factual data that would support descriptions of language use in the narratives.

Li's study draws its data from the 1% public-use sample of the 1970 census, carried out by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and focuses on the Chinese American sample of 4,046 persons (Li 1982: 112). In the 1970 census, each person was asked what language was usually spoken in the person's home when he or she was a child. For Chinese-Americans, the list of mother tongues includes, besides English, Mandarin (Chinese), Cantonese, Taisanese, Hakka, Shanghai dialect, Taiwanese, etc. (ibid.). The Chinese respondents are separated into three generations: the first generation consists of those born outside the United States, the "foreign-born"; the second generation consists of those born in the United States, the "native-born" with one or both parents "foreign-born"; and the third generation are the "native-born" with "native-born" parents (Li 1982: 113). According to Li's criteria, the "foreign-born" would refer to the first-generation of Chinese that had migrated from their native lands (including Taiwan and Hong Kong) to settle in the United States; they represent the first generation of Chinese Americans.

Li's analysis of the data reveals contrasting use of Chinese dialects as mother tongue languages between first (foreign-born) and second-generation Chinese-Americans. The statistics are presented in Table 1 below. Under "Language", the term "Other" reflects responses that specified which Chinese dialect was spoken, while the term "Chinese" does not.

From Table 1, we see that among the first-generation Chinese Americans, about 99% reported Chinese dialects as their mother tongue. For the remaining 1% who reported English as their childhood language, Li suggests that they were children of upper-class families who attended missionary-sponsored schools in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Li 1982: 113). In contrast, among second-generation Chinese Americans, almost 12% of the immigrants ceased using Chinese as the primary language in their families. As indicated in Table 1, the shift accelerates from the second to the third generation: almost half of the third generation of Chinese Americans were reared in English while 51% maintained various Chinese dialects. Thus, the "proportion of Chinese-Americans who adopt English as their mother tongue dramatically increases from the first to the third generation" (Li 1982: 113).

Language	Generation of immigration			Total
	First	Second	Third	
English	1.2	11.6	48.6	13.1
Chinese (unspecified dialects)	90.8	79.6	29.5	76.1
Other (specified Chinese dialects)	8.0	8.8	21.9	10.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	2,010	1,305	731	4,046

Table 1. Language used at home by generation of immigration (Li 1982: 114)

The statistics in Table 2 below, where the generation factor is controlled, show that as the generations progress, they gradually lose the ability to maintain their native language. Among second-generation Chinese Americans, the use of a Chinese dialect as the mother tongue was almost 100% for those 60 years and older. But among those under 20 years of age, 15.5% reported having English as their mother tongue. Table 2 also indicates that the shift towards English during the past 60 years is especially pronounced among third-generation Chinese Americans. Among the third-generation who are 60 years and older, only 25.5% reported English as their mother tongue; in comparison, the figure for those below the age of 20 years is 61.7%. Thus, there is a significant increase in the use of English as the native language among the third generation of Chinese Americans.

Li asserts that the “longer the immigrant group has lived in America, the greater is the loss of linguistic heritage” (1982: 114). Her analysis reveals language shift among the Chinese in the United States as a case of “intergenerational

switching” (Lieberson 1972, 1980). In intergenerational switching, the switch occurs between generations and a sizeable proportion of individuals in the group seldom completely give up the use of one language and substitute for another one within their own lifetime. Typically, one generation is bilingual, but only passes on one of the two languages to the next (Fasold 1984: 217).

Generation and age	English	Other	Total (N)
<i>Second generation</i>			
Under 20	15.5	84.5	100 (769)
20-39	8.9	81.1	100 (259)
40-59	4.7	95.3	100 (191)
60+	0.0	100.0	100 (86)
Subtotal	11.6	88.4	100 (1,305)
<i>Third generation</i>			
Under 20	61.7	38.3	100 (389)
20-39	36.7	63.3	100 (177)
40-59	32.2	67.8	100 (118)
60+	25.5	74.5	100 (47)
Subtotal	48.6	51.4	100 (731)

Table 2. Mother tongue by age and generation of migration (Li 1982: 115)

One of the major reasons for the increase in the number of Chinese Americans who grow up speaking English as their mother tongue could be because bilingual parents are only passing on one of the languages to their offspring. According to Fasold, this is one of the features of the final stages of language shift

(1984: 241). The corresponding decrease in the number of Chinese Americans who learn a Chinese dialect as their mother tongue could very well be the result of a form of language planning by immigrant parents:

They have to decide which language(s) they wish their children to speak. Since a vast majority of first-generation Chinese-American parents have Chinese as their mother tongue, the decision becomes even more difficult. The parents often face the dilemma of encouraging their children to speak English or teaching them only their mother tongue, with possibly serious educational and social consequences.

(Li 1982: 113)

As indicated in the above remarks by Li, the choice is not an easy one, especially for first-generation Chinese American parents, who only speak a Chinese dialect. However, as the statistics in Tables 1 and 2 seem to show, the maintenance of Chinese dialects as the mother tongue among Chinese Americans has declined to such an extent that “their children acquired virtually no knowledge of it” (Li 1982: 113). Although Li’s study does not investigate the reasons for this decline, it does suggest that the decline is partly the result of conscious decisions made by Chinese American parents to ensure that their children grow up learning and speaking English. In the Chinese American narratives, we find explicit descriptions of the language planning actions of Chinese American parents.

Another interesting fact revealed in Li’s analysis is that residence in a Chinatown strongly encourages language maintenance. Chinatown residence is broadly defined as central-city residence in the three states of California, New York,

and Hawaii, where nearly three-quarters of all Chinese Americans reside (Li 1982: 113). As shown in Table 3, the proportion of language shift among third-generation Chinese Americans is only 38% among Chinatown residents, but increases to 65% among non-Chinatown residents. Thus, there appears to a high correlation between ethnic residential segregation and resistance to language shift, especially among the third generation of Chinese Americans. Interestingly, the influence of Chinatown residence on ethnic language maintenance is reflected in the Chinese American narratives, as chapter six, section 6.4.2, demonstrates.

Residence and Generation	Under 20	20-39	40-59	60+	Total
<i>Second generation</i>					
Chinatowns	14.2	9.4	6.2	0.0	11.1
Outside	18.2	6.1	1.7	0.0	12.1
<i>Third generation</i>					
Chinatowns	49.1	28.8	25.3	21.9	37.8
Outside	77.8	50.0	45.2	27.3	64.8

Table 3. Percentage adopting English as mother tongue by age, residence, and generation of immigration. (Li 1982: 118)

Socioeconomic status, measured by level of education and family economic status, also affects language shift. As Table 4 indicates, the lowest socioeconomic group has the highest propensity for language shift. Among low-income Chinese American children, 72% in the third generation adopt English as their mother

tongue, compared to 21% in the second generation. However, language shift also seems to be high among Chinese Americans of high socio-economic status. In contrast, middle-class Chinese Americans seem to be the most resistant to language shift. Using the multiple logit model, a multivariate analytical technique, Li discovers that socioeconomic status as measured by educational attainment does not appear to have an independent effect on language shift among Chinese-Americans: formerly, it was assumed that families of higher socioeconomic status had a stronger tendency to preserve their native language and culture than other families; however because of the remoteness from their ethnic communities and their desire to see their children upwardly mobile, this is not always the case (Li 1982: 122-123). Thus, Li concludes that residential segregation is a stronger explanation for language shift than socioeconomic status (Li 1982: 123).

Family Economic <i>Status</i>	Second Generation		Third Generation	
	%	(N)	%	(N)
Low	20.8	(53)	72.0	(25)
Low-middle	16.8	(125)	60.0	(40)
High-middle	13.4	(112)	62.7	(59)
High	17.8	(180)	56.7	(150)
Total	16.8	(470)	59.9	(274)

Table 4. Percentage of school-age Chinese Americans adopting English as mother tongue according to family economic status and generation of migration (Li 1982: 117)

While some factors, such as Chinatown residence, may promote maintenance of Chinese dialects, Li's analysis suggests that the overall sociolinguistic portrait for Chinese Americans is that of a shift towards the language of the dominant society. As Li remarks:

Like previous immigrant groups from Europe, Chinese-Americans cannot count on language as a means to maximize their group distinctiveness in American society, although this tactic is possible in other societies . . . In the past Chinese-Americans may have done slightly better than European immigrants in language maintenance, but as the generations have progressed, they have gradually lost the ability to retain their native language. It appears that time is indeed a formidable factor.

(Li 1982: 114)

If maintenance of linguistic heritage is viewed as a measure of ethnic loyalty, then it would seem that Chinese Americans, in not retaining their native language as mother tongue, have also lost some of their ethnic distinctiveness. As Saville-Troike notes, among American Indians and many immigrants, the loss of language has led to a sense of deculturation (1982: 188).

However, ethnic and linguistic loyalty may assume different forms. Referring to ethnic minorities in the United States as "hyphenated" Americans, Saville-Troike observes that:

. . . many other 'hyphenated' Americans who speak only English after two or more generations of residence in this country [the United States] retain ethnic identity only through preservation of a little folklore, with

perhaps a few traditional foods or celebrations, and express few regrets about losing ancestral languages. Others who cannot speak the language of their grandparents or great-grandparents have still inherited their linguistic values, with language attitudes outlasting the language itself, while still others have fully ‘melted’.

(Saville-Troike 1982: 188)

Thus, losing the language of the ethnic community does not necessarily mean a lesser sense of one’s cultural identity, as cultural identity can be asserted through other means. However, since language is such an integral part of culture, there is often an unconscious equation between language and identity. Among the Chinese people, language is still regarded as a primary means of accessing the culture, so that a Chinese person who does not speak the ethnic language is frequently looked down upon and considered culturally deficient by other members of the speech community. The importance of the Chinese language is foregrounded in the narrative comment from Kingston’s China Men (1980),: “If you are an authentic Chinese, you know the language and the stories without being taught, born talking them” (1980: 257). Therefore, there is a strong belief in the intrinsic relationship between the Chinese language and cultural authenticity.

4.3 Literary Representation of Sociolinguistic Patterns

With the above insights from sociolinguistic research on the language patterns of immigrant communities, we shall now consider the significance of these patterns, as foregrounded in the Chinese American narratives. In particular, the declining use of native dialects among Chinese children born in America and the consequences of this language shift seems a constant theme in Chinese American narratives. By showing how these patterns are played out in the lives of the characters, the narratives ‘flesh out’ the cold statistics. They not only present a detailed picture of the sociolinguistic situation, they also reveal its close relationship to other, non-linguistic, facets of life.

4.3.1 A Caveat

We must, however, be careful not to confuse literary *representation* for factual data. Although we may find identical sociolinguistic patterns in the narratives and reality, the world of the narratives is ultimately a product of authorial invention and subject to the considerations of plot, characterization and theme.

On the other hand, while we must not mistake representation for actual data, we may find that the narrative descriptions are faithful to the findings of sociolinguistic studies of immigrant communities. In a study of literary

representation of German immigrant language, Fennell observes that there are a sufficient number of common features in the texts that hold up to a close comparison with “authentic” data from “real” linguistic studies (1994: 254). More significantly, she points out that the literary examples represent the author’s interpretation of how a language variety is used in context, and this is both important to sociolinguistic analysis and heavily dependent on prior knowledge of it (ibid.). Thus, the way Chinese American writers represent the sociolinguistic situation of their community throws into relief the meanings they attach to language variety and choice. To the extent that Chinese American writers draw on their own experiences as a member of the speech community in attempting to describe it, it would also be reasonable to assume that the literary representation of language variety in these narratives is grounded in reality. This, of course, does not erase the fact that the angle and emphasis of the descriptions are determined by narrative concerns.

The variety of language used, the context in which it occurs and who uses it with whom – these are deliberate choices that are written into the texts, and they become part of the narrative structure. Patterns of language use become important metaphors, as Meinhof suggests:

The way the characters speak, change, reject or retain their speech varieties throws into focus questions of belonging and not-belonging, of rootedness and alienation, of tradition and change.

(Meinhof 1996: 41)

In the above comment, Meinhof refers to the significance of the representation of dialect in Edgar Reits's *Heimat* films. His comment is equally applicable to Chinese-American narratives, where the representation of language patterns in Chinese-American narratives is an important means of signifying the immigrant's ethnicity and identity in the collision of cultures. As subsequent analyses will demonstrate, the sociolinguistic situation represented in the texts is a reflection of the complex negotiations performed by the immigrant in dealing with the host culture, involving questions of how far one should change in the direction of the host culture and how much of one's ethnic identity should be retained, and whether or to what degree it is possible to do both.

4.3.2 Depicting the Language Experience of First-Generation Chinese Americans

In describing the sociolinguistic situation of Chinese Americans, most of the narratives concentrate on "first-generation Chinese Americans" and "second-generation Chinese Americans" (we shall use these terms as defined in Li's study (1982)). This is, perhaps, because the conflict between languages in the clash between immigrant and host culture is most dramatic and the impact of language choices most poignant between these two generations. Thus, we shall examine

narrative descriptions of how these two groups respond to the linguistic pressures surrounding the immigrant experience.

First-generation Chinese Americans do not form a homogeneous group. As revealed by the various Chinese dialects that constitute the mother tongue of Chinese in America, they belong to different clan and dialect groups and come from different geographical regions, which not only includes the various districts in mainland China, but also Hong Kong and Taiwan. Their social and economic backgrounds may also differ widely: from very poor peasants, who sought work in the United States as labourers or “coolies”, to the educated elite, who arrived as foreign students or political refugees. The varied nature of this group of first-generation Chinese Americans is reflected in the narratives’ portrayal of the different types of characters and their social worlds. However, no matter how different their backgrounds, all of the protagonists, at one point or another, will reflect on the linguistic changes that result from their experiences as immigrants and minority group members.

The infiltration of the language and culture of the host country into the immigrant’s life is described in Gish Jen’s novel, Typical American (1991). As its title suggests, the novel depicts the gradual assimilation into American culture of the three main characters who represent first-generation immigrants from China: Ralph and his wife, Helen, and Theresa, his sister. All three come from educated and relatively wealthy backgrounds, but are cut off from their families in China when it comes under Communist rule. Ralph enters the United States as a foreign student,

while Theresa and Helen arrive later, escaping from war-torn China. Maintaining their native cultural and linguistic habits, the three of them form a Chinese household in their country of adoption. However, there is also a gradual absorption of American ways, most strikingly in terms of language and thought:

It had already been nine years since Ralph had touched foot in the United States.(1) Theresa had begun her internship; they had all studied up on the three branches of government, and so advanced from permanent residents to citizens(2) . . . They celebrated Christmas in addition to Chinese New Year's, and were regulars at Radio City Music Hall.(3) Ralph owned a Davy Crockett hat.(4) Helen knew most of the words to most of the songs in *The King and I*, and *South Pacific*.(5) It was true that she still inquired of people if they'd eaten yet, odd as it sounded; Ralph invented his grammar on the fly; even Theresa struggled to put her Chinese thoughts into English.(6) But now she had English thoughts too – that was true also.(7) They all did.(8) There were things they did not know how to say in Chinese.(9) The language of *outside the house* had seeped well inside – Cadillac, Pyrex, subway, Coney Island, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus.(10) Transistor radio.(11) Theresa and Helen and Ralph slipped from tongue to tongue like turtles taking to land, taking to sea; though one remained their more natural element, both had become essential.(12)

(Jen 1991: 123-124)

In the above passage, the legal process of obtaining American citizenship is closely associated with the process of American cultural penetration and changes in the characters' psychological and linguistic landscapes. As objects from their new environment become part of daily reality, the characters find themselves having to acquire a new language to name these objects, exemplified in the list in sentences 10

to 11³: “Cadillac, Pyrex, subway, Coney Island, Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Transistor radio.”. The passage also suggests that a language is intimately associated with its community’s culture, so that there is no easy transference of concepts from one culture into another language. For instance, Theresa struggles “to put her Chinese thoughts into English” (sentence 6) and not only did they have “English thoughts” (sentence 7), there were “things they did not know how to say in Chinese” (sentence 9). Therefore, English and Chinese are not only portrayed as language systems for communication purposes, but are identified with quite different environments, as implied in the metaphorical description of the characters slipping “from tongue to tongue like turtles taking to land, taking to sea” (sentence 12). Interestingly, the phrase “*outside the house*” (sentence 10) signifies the home as the bastion of ethnic culture and language; it represents the boundary between ethnic and host culture. But even the home is not immune to the influence of the dominant culture. Thus, towards the end of the same chapter, Theresa teases Ralph for becoming “one-hundred-percent Americanized” (Jen 1991: 128). As the narrative develops, the family’s increasing adoption of American culture is reflected in the characters’ increasing competence in the English language. It is no coincidence that the successful self-made American Chinese man, in the character of Grover Ding, is portrayed as speaking only in English. Narrative portrayal thus

³ Strictly speaking, 11 is not grammatically a sentence since it lacks a verb; it would be more accurately described as a phrase or sentence fragment. However, for the sake of descriptive convenience, we shall refer to it as “sentence”.

mirrors sociolinguistic description of how language is perceived as a major factor in successful assimilation.

A less cheerful depiction of immigrant encounter with host culture is found in Mei Ng's Eating Chinese Food Naked (1998). The following passage from the novel foregrounds the language difficulties of a non-English-speaking Chinese woman, Bell, newly arrived from China, and how these difficulties affect her adjustment in America:

Bell looked around for someone else to talk to.(1) Some of her neighbors were friendly.(2) If she could talk to her neighbours, maybe they could tell her something.(3) But she didn't know enough English yet.(4) English was a funny language, but she was learning it as fast as she could.(5)

Franklin had done the shopping the first few weeks, but one morning he sent Bell to the store.(6) She walked in the direction he had pointed her, but she didn't see any open markets where farmers sold live chickens that people bought and tucked into baskets or tied upside down to handle bars of their bicycles.(7) However, she did find a supermarket and in one aisle she found a can with a picture of a chicken on it and she thought, So that's how things work here in America.(8) When she opened it up for dinner, she tasted the brown stuff that was gravy and not chicken at all.(9) Over rice, it was tasty but not quite enough for two people who had worked all day.(10)

The next day, she found the butcher.(11) There, she pointed to the pork chops and held up two fingers.(12) At the bakery, she stood in line behind a woman who asked for a quarter pound of cookies.(13) Bell watched to see how many cookies that was.(14) She needed twice that much as a present for the shoemaker's wife, who had brought over a dish of spaghetti when Bell first arrived.(15) When it was her turn, Bell said, "Two quarter pound cookie." (16) The woman behind the counter had eyes that were blue, of all the crazy colors.(17) "Dearie, you want half a pound?" she asked.(18) Bell got a little annoyed.(19) "I want two quarter pound," she said.(20) Everyone in the store laughed and she didn't know why until she came home and asked her husband.(21)

(Ng 1998: 32-33)

Bell's lack of English language competence accentuates her lonely status as a foreigner by effectively isolating her, since she is unable to talk to her neighbours or read the labels on foodstuff or make simple requests. She becomes an object of comedy when she asks for "Two quarter pound cookie" (sentence 16) at the bakery, and does not even understand why. Bell's foreigner status is further emphasized through her incorrect use of the English singular noun for the plural in "cookie" (sentence 16), indicating either an incomplete mastery of agreement or pronunciation difficulties on Bell's part and her unfamiliarity with the Western system of weights and measures. The passage does not present Bell as a woman lacking in intelligence, but only as someone who finds herself in an alien environment, silenced because of language lack. Through its depiction of Bell's predicament, it emphasizes how an inadequate grasp of the language of the host country can incapacitate the immigrant and subject him or her to all sorts of misunderstandings.

The passage conveys a depressing sense of Bell's inarticulate state through the limited use of verbs related to speaking: although there are numerous verbs denoting perception ("know" (sentence 4), "thought" (sentence 11)) and action ("walked" (sentence 7), "found" (sentence 8), "opened" (sentence 9), "pointed" (sentence 12)), verbs denoting speech either occur together with modal words referring to hoped-for possibility ("If she **could talk** . . . they **could tell** her something." (sentence 3. Emphasis mine.)) or in the final paragraph describing the

scene at the bakery, where the verb “said” is finally used with Bell as the speaker (“Bell said” (sentence 16), “she said” (sentence 20)). Unfortunately, it is ironic that what Bell says in these instances only reveals her lack of knowledge of the English language, so that she becomes the object of a joke based on linguistic incomprehension. Thus, the passage conveys a strong sense of the way language incompetence renders the immigrant both inarticulate and vulnerable to ridicule from the dominant society.

Bell’s case exemplifies that of young Chinese women who marry Chinese American husbands and migrate to the United States with them, and then find themselves linguistically and culturally disabled. In the novel, Bell makes an effort to learn English, but her lessons at English school are curtailed by her husband, Franklin, who becomes irrationally jealous and fears that men in her class might pay her too much attention. Having a better grasp of English through his long-term residence in the United States, he decides to teach her himself. The following passage provides an example of one such lesson:

What is this?(1) This is a shirt.(2) What is this?(3) This is an iron.(4) What is this?(4) This is a hanger.(5) What is this?(6) This is a dollar.(7) What are we doing?(8) We are talking.(9) We are ironing.(10) We are working hard.(11) The baby is sleeping.(12) . . .

Where do you live?(13) I live in the United States.(14) I live in New York.(15) I was born in China.(16) My mother and father live in China.(17) China is far away.(18) A letter takes a long time to get there.(19) I live in the United States now.(20) My sister lives in Chicago.(21) It costs money to call her.(22) The baby is an American citizen.(23) The baby is crying.(24)

What time is it?(25) It is eight o'clock.(26) We eat breakfast at eight.(27) What time is it?(28) it is nine o'clock.(29) We iron shirts at nine.(30) It is ten o'clock.(31) We iron more shirts at ten.(32) It is eleven o'clock.(33) We starch shirts at eleven.(34) It is twelve o'clock.(35) We eat lunch at twelve.(36) We eat rice, chicken, bok choy.(37)

But look.(38) This here is American food.(39) This is bread.(40) American people eat a lot of bread.(41) They eat it cold with butter.(42) Or with cheese.(43) Or if you're really lucky, you can eat it with ham.(44) This is good food; here, taste it.(45) This is Campbell's soup, and this is a cheese sandwich.(46) The good thing about bread is that you can make it into toast.(47)

This is a car.(48) No, you don't have to learn how to drive.(49) This is a station wagon, a street, a stop sign.(50) This is a hand, a leg, mouth, ears, nose.(51) This is a marriage.(52) This is America.(53) This is American money.(54) This is the life you didn't bargain for; this is the life you left China for.(55) There are some words that are hard to say.(56) Like three.(57) Like thirty-three.(58) Free.(59) Firty-Free.(60) No, put your tongue here, like this, between your teeth.(61) Th. Th. Th. Thank you.(62) Can't you even say thank you?(63)

(Ng 1998: 33-34)

In contrast to the third-person perspective that characterizes much of the novel, the above passage is written in free direct speech⁴, that mimics the rhetoric of a language lesson. Comical in its repetitions and yet, somehow depressing in its content, the passage is an unmediated replay of the type of English lesson that Bell undergoes. Consisting mainly of wh-questions and declarative statements in

⁴ Free direct speech is a term used in stylistics to refer to direct speech that is "stripped of its reporting clause or its quotation marks" (Simpson 1993: 22). It is 'free' in the sense that the marks of narratorial control are removed and the reader is provided with unmediated access to the speech situation.

repetitive grammatical forms, it reads like an English primer. The aim of the wh-questions is not to elicit new information or opinions, but to provide rhetorical practice for the student. Each paragraph concentrates on a limited number of grammatical constructions, allowing the student to practise standard grammatical patterns with a variety of lexical terms from the same category. Topics of discussion are restricted to matters of fact, habitual actions and concrete reality, and these provide the reader with a glimpse of the monotony, loneliness and hardships faced by Chinese immigrants, particularly those in the laundry business, which was a typical occupation⁵.

Significantly absent are expressions of feeling or opinion until the last two paragraphs, where the value-laden adjective “good” is used to describe American food (sentences 45 and 47) and evaluative comments are made about the Bell’s life in the United States and language difficulties (sentences 56 and 63). From the instructional tone of these last two paragraphs, conveyed through the demonstrative “this”, the second-person pronoun “you”, and the evaluative comments, we gather that it is Franklin, the ‘teacher’, who speaks. Bell’s voice only surfaces in the mispronunciation of “thirty-three” (sentences 59 and 60). This unequal representation of speaking opportunities reflects the unequal power relations between those who can speak the language of the host country, and are therefore in a

⁵ Many Chinese in the United States operated laundries, since it was “one of the few occupations the host society allowed the Chinese to follow after the 1880s” (Chan 1991: 34). However, it is regarded as an “inferior” occupation, allowing the white customers to patronize the laundryman because his status is low and represents no economic threat (ibid.). Mei Ng’s novel portrays Ruby as highly sensitive to the social inferiority of her family’s laundry business and the stigma of “washing other people’s dirt” is depicted as an underlying cause for Franklin’s bad-temper.

better position to speak for themselves and control events, and those who cannot; it foregrounds the powerlessness of the non-English-speaking immigrant, who not only experiences all sorts of dislocations that resettlement brings, but is also silenced through language disability in an alien environment.

As revealed in the last paragraph of the above passage, particularly in the final sentence, Franklin, is not an encouraging teacher. A later passage in the novel emphasizes how his insensitivity discourages Bell from mastering English:

Bell studied hard, but sometimes she forgot how to say a word and had to ask her husband again. "You're too dumb to learn anything," he'd say. Bell tried to be a good sport. She laughed too. But inside her, something closed up. She stopped asking him to say words in English. Instead she looked at the words painted on the side of trucks and tried to see what was inside.

(Ng 1998: 35)

Her husband's ridicule causes Bell to rely on her own resources and, in spite of his lack of encouragement, she does achieve some measure of competence in the English language. However, in highlighting her predicament, the novel emphasizes the learning a second language as an exercise that requires tremendous emotional and psychological resources and one that would be better served by a supportive learning environment.

While Mei Ng describes the linguistic struggles of a young female Chinese immigrant to the United States from a third-person perspective, Lan Samantha Chang provides us with a first-person viewpoint in her novella, "Hunger" (1998).

Min is a young Chinese woman who first leaves China for Taiwan with her parents to escape from the war, and then comes alone to the United States, where she finds a job as a waitress at a Chinese restaurant in New York and takes English classes at the community college. In the following excerpt from “Hunger”, Min reveals why she failed to learn English:

Before I came to this country, I felt at home in the Chinese language, the way a fish feels at home in the sea. When I came to New York, I vowed to practice speaking English, but it was difficult, working in the restaurant. I did not talk to customers; I did not own a television. I took classes at a community college but made little progress with the humped and tangled grammar. Instead, I spent my spare time reading novels that I bought and traded with the other waitresses, books that had seduced me with their bright, familiar covers, lined up along the shelves in the Chinatown stores.

(Chang 1998: 19)

Like Bell, it is the lack of a supportive environment that contributes to Min’s difficulties in learning English. But the passage also suggests that part of the responsibility for failure lies with Min, since she herself is not motivated to practise “the humped and tangled grammar” of English and spends her free time reading Chinese novels. Min’s indulgence in Chinese novels is an example of the way the lonely immigrant, far from home and family, would seek solace in a familiar language.

In another passage later in the narrative, the narrator, Min, reiterates her difficulties in learning English:

I buried myself in Chinese novels and read the Chinese newspaper; my Chinese had formed a brick wall in my mind and only short sentences and stray phrases of English could slip through the cracks. I vowed to study my old books. I would sit for hours staring at the simple sentences on the page. *The butter is on the table. The cat is under the bed.* But none of the new words I learned seemed able to express my thoughts – I felt as if, in order to speak English, I would have to change the climate of my soul, the flavor of my tongue.

(Chang 1998: 46)

In this passage, Min's native language is described as "a brick wall" that forms a barrier against the new language. The image of a divider that separates the interior from the exterior, echoes Jen's description (1991: 123-124) of English being the language of "outside the house" and Mandarin as the language of the home for the characters Ralph, Helen, and Theresa. The above passage also suggests a close association between language and culture: Min's lack of motivation in learning English is related to the way it represents an alien environment that she is reluctant to inhabit. Just as Jen's novel, Typical American, depicts Chinese thought as inseparable from the Chinese language and English thought as joined to the English language, Chang's narrative expresses a similar theme through the voice of Min. Learning the language of the host country is thus represented as a dislocation on the deepest level that would "change the climate of my soul".

The above passage from the novella "Hunger" reminds us that while the narrative is written entirely in English, it is presented through the voice of a narrator who speaks mainly Mandarin. This is interesting from a stylistic point of view, since it sets up an incompatibility between the language of the narrative and the language

that the narrator tells us is the one that best expresses her thoughts and feelings. This incongruity is emphasized through the narrative's repeated foregrounding of the narrator's inadequacy in the English language. It raises issues related to representation and translation, so that, on one level, we may perceive the author as assuming the guise of a translator, who manages to represent the story of a Mandarin-speaking Chinese immigrant in English. The concept of the narrator as translator is an important aspect of these narratives and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

Ben Fong-Torres' autobiography, The Rice Room: Growing Up Chinese-American – from Number Two Son to Rock'N'Roll (1994), contains a similar description of the reluctance to learn English on the part of a first-generation Chinese American woman:

Over the years, the kids would encourage my mother to go back to evening school, but she resisted. English was far too complicated a language for her to learn. Besides, she had to take care of us and work in our restaurants, as well as do work at home for garment factories.

(Fong-Torres 1994: 59)

Just as Chang's narrator experiences difficulties with the "humped and tangled grammar" of English, Fong-Torres' mother finds English "too complicated a language for her to learn". She also indicates that the harsh realities of making ends meet and taking care of the family leave her little time for English language lessons.

Chang's representation of her narrator's linguistic situation and Fong-Torres' account of his mother's resistance to learning English suggest that it is possible for an immigrant to persist in using only the minority language, if he or she does not need to function outside the minority community and the community is relatively self-contained and self-sufficient. In the United States, the sizeable Chinese communities in the cities' Chinatowns make this possible. However, the problem occurs when the second-generation of Chinese Americans becomes English-speaking and gradually loses the ethnic language, thus creating a communication gap between the two generations. This is clearly depicted in the narrative passages discussed in section 4.3.4 in this chapter.

But Chang's narrative also reveals that it is the language proficiency of the second-generation of Chinese Americans that provides the first-generation with the impetus to acquire English. Thus, the narrator of "Hunger", Min, describes her language shift towards English:

I discovered, to my surprise, that by listening to and speaking with my daughters I had learned enough English to answer almost all of the customers' questions. As a matter of fact, whole days went by when I did not speak a word of Mandarin, and I might have never needed to if not for occasional phone calls from my mother's sister, phone calls that came less and less frequently with the years, and if Anna had not insisted now and then on using the language with me in order to practice. It was as if I were a member of a dying tribe, and those with whom I cared to communicate were growing fewer and fewer.

(Chang 1998: 97)

The passage describes Min's acquisition of English as the result of having to communicate with her daughters in the language. She achieves functional proficiency in the language that is enough to "answer **almost** all of the customers' question" (Emphasis mine). However, Mandarin remains the language with which she is most comfortable, even though the death of her husband, Tian, meant that Min had lost the only person in America with whom she regularly conversed in Mandarin. Thus, Min likens herself to "a member of a dying tribe". The metaphor poignantly captures the sense of language loss and death that comes with a decline in the membership of the ethnic speech community.

While narrative descriptions of the language behaviour of first-generation Chinese Americans may portray them as acquiring a level of competence in the English language, they consistently characterize them as the ones who maintain their ethnic language. Even in the short story "The Unforgetting" (1998), another narrative by Lan Samantha Chang, in which a Chinese American couple deliberately removes as many traces of their past as possible and adopts American modes of living, the Chinese language persists as the one that best expresses their thoughts and feelings. With respect to English, the wife, Sansan, tells her husband, Min, "So much is missing" (Chang 1998: 146). The narrative goes on to describe how English is limited to a restricted range of functions for her:

Her English world was limited to the clipped and casual rhythm of daily plans. "Put on your tie." "Did you turn on the rice?" "Be home by five o'clock."

(Chang 1998: 146)

Chang's narrative seems to suggest that for the two first-generation Chinese Americans, Sansan and Ming, English never becomes a language that expresses their innermost feelings, hopes and fears; it remains a foreign tongue. While the passage above indicates that the English serves them ably in routine communicative needs, it also implies how language can have a limiting effect, confining its less competent speakers to mundane and everyday topics of "daily plans". For Sansan and Ming, Mandarin persists as their language of intimacy and personal matters.

"The Unforgetting" (1998) depicts the couple's son as the one who experiences the loss of the ethnic language, and explicitly portrays this as the result of language planning on their part: they purposely stop communicating with him in Chinese and establish English as the dominant language to facilitate his adaptation to English-medium American schooling. In the next two sections, we shall examine in greater detail how the narratives depict language shift and loss among second-generation of Chinese Americans.

4.3.3 Depicting the Language Experience of Second-Generation Chinese Americans

The linguistic struggles of second-generation Chinese Americans is complicated by the fact that they not only have to learn English at school but must

also grapple with the varieties of Chinese that Chinese immigrants bring with them to the United States.

The linguistic map of China contains considerable variety. As described in Crystal's The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language (1987), there are eight main varieties of speech in China: Cantonese, Hakka, Xiang, Gan, Mandarin, Northern Min, Southern Min and Wu (Crystal 1987: 312). These are traditionally referred to as "dialects", based on the fact that there is a single method for writing in Chinese and a common cultural and literary history. However these "dialects" are quite dissimilar, particularly in pronunciation and vocabulary, so that they are often mutually unintelligible, and Crystal likens this to the dissimilarity between French and Italian (*ibid.*). The situation is further complicated by the fact that each regional dialect is multiplied into a number of variants distinctive to the particular district, city or village in which they are spoken. For example, Cantonese is the dialect of Guangdong province in southern China, but it becomes localized as the Saam Yap (Three District) variant that takes its name from the counties around Canton, or the Sei Yap (Four Districts) variant that is characteristic of speakers living in the poorer area to the west of the delta. The differences between the two variants are such that they may hinder communication:

When an educated man from the Three Districts claims he can't understand a word of what a Four Districts peasant is saying, he is being snobbish of course, but also expressing a genuine difficulty. How is he to know that *doi*, for example, is really *tsai*, the word for 'bloke' in urbane Cantonese, or that *hyat* is really *sik*, his word for 'to eat'?

(Pan 1990: 15)

Pan's examples demonstrate how widely the vocabulary of two variants of the same regional dialect, Cantonese, can differ. As Crystal points out, many of the variants of a particular regional dialect are so distinctive that each may be referred to as a language (1987: 312).

The first generation of Chinese Americans brought this language variety with them to the United States, and this is reflected by the number of Chinese dialects named as mother tongues by Chinese Americans in Li's study (1982), discussed in section 4.2.2. The ensuing confusion resulting from these dialectal differences for second-generation Chinese Americans is elaborated in the Chinese American narratives. In The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts (1975, 1976), the narrator describes her family's native dialect as being so localized that she has difficulty locating speakers of the same dialect in America:

I've stopped checking "bilingual" on job applications. I could not understand any of the dialects the interviewer at China Airlines tried on me, and he didn't understand me either. I'd like to go to New Society Village someday and find out exactly how far I can walk before people stop talking like me.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 104)

In emphasizing her inability to understand any of the other Chinese dialects, the narrator also underscores the lack of mutual intelligibility among speakers of the different dialects.

Similarly, in Gus Lee's novel, *Chinaboy: A Novel* (1991), the narrator, Kai Ting describes an episode of mutual incomprehension between himself and a hostess in a restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown because of dialectal differences:

I wanted a barbecued pork dumpling, a universally recognized dish. I was five. It was the Kuo Wah on Grant Avenue.

"*Muhr-deh, ching*," I said politely, my feet together, my head slightly inclined. Pork dumpling, please. I said it in Songhai, the language of the known world.

The hostess looked at me and said something that sounded like "*Neh ghong WAH!*" The first word rose with unlimited aspiration, the second fell precipitously without hope, the third seemed strangely complaining. She spoke in an angry volume that shrank my male unit and climbed tonal scales like a stream-driven xylophone. That was Cantonese.

I repeated myself. She repeated herself, louder.

She put her hands on her hips, like Mother, and I smiled. "Ay-yaa!" she said, shaking her head, beckoning to me. I followed her through a maze of tables, through a corridor and a door. The smells were heavenly when she stopped and spread her arms. I squinted and searched, my head six inches ahead of my body. I smelled and saw a basketful of *muhr-deh*. I pointed. Ahh, she said, smiling.

"*Char siu bao*," she said clearly, nodding.

I frown and shook my head. That was not char-see-you-bow, or whatever. Those were pork dumplings. "*Muhr-deh*," I said as clearly as I could, making the hostess laughed. She shouted at the cooks in the wild, exciting, undulating music of her dialect.

(Lee 1991: 59)

The above passage comically depicts how dialectal differences between members of the same ethnic group can complicate the ordinary speech act of ordering food in a restaurant. The first-person narration allows us to see the situation through the eyes of young Kai Ting and thus, vicariously experience his incomprehension and confusion in the face of a Chinese dialect that differs significantly from Songhai or

Shanghainese, his home language. The detailed description of Cantonese speech in the third paragraph characterizes it as abnormal in its pitch and force, as completely foreign and incomprehensible, and hence, threatening in the ears of non-Cantonese speaking Kai Ting. It is also significant that this episode is deliberately set in Chinatown, which suggests that even though the Chinese in America are viewed as constituting a single ethnic group, language differences prevent any easy assumption of homogeneity.

The linguistic situation for second-generation Chinese Americans is doubly confusing as they not only find themselves having to grapple with this assortment of languages in their ethnic community, they must simultaneously master the English language at school. Ben Fong-Torres records this linguistic confusion in his autobiography, The Rice Room: Growing Up Chinese-American – from Number Two Son to Rock’N’Roll (1994):

At home, we found ourselves facing a foreign language within the Chinese language. Our parents spoke the *tze-yup* dialect of Cantonese, the dialect of their native Hoi Ping region and three other districts west of the Canton River delta in China. (*Tze-yup* means “four districts.”) In Chinese school, the teachers spoke – and tried teaching us – *sam yup* – a dialect spoken by three (*sam*) districts north of the *tze-yup* districts. In the early fifties, Mandarin was nowhere near becoming China’s national language, but our teachers were wedging in some basic Mandarin phonetics – *baw-paw-maw-faw . . . der-ter-ler-mer . . .*

We hated all this gibberish. Here we were, kids groping with English, and we were also getting two or three distinct dialects of the Chinese tongue drummed into us.

(Fong-Torres 1994: 45)

Fong-Torres' account emphasizes that the differences between the three Chinese dialects – “sam-yup” or Saam Yap, “tze-yup” or Sei Yap, and Mandarin – are great enough to render them different languages, so that English is not the only foreign language they encounter; both the Saam Yap Cantonese and Mandarin feel like foreign languages too. His account also indicates that multilingualism was common in the Chinese American community, and that Chinese children born in America were expected to handle the linguistic diversity.

Linguistic confusion forms one of the main themes in Gus Lee's novel, Chinaboy (1991). In the novel, the narrator describes his family's hasty departure from the family home in Shanghai to escape capture by the Japanese and their wartime journey across Asia to the Pacific Ocean before arriving in San Francisco in 1944. The narrator, Kai Ting, a second-generation Chinese American, is the only one to be born in the United States. In the following excerpt, Kai Ting describes the linguistic diversity of his household:

Our home was linguistically disarrayed. We sounded like elevator talk in the Tower of Babel, with a smorgasbord of Chinese dialects on the ground floor, a solid base in Songhai, a strong layer of Mandarin, and a smattering of *sam yep* Cantonese veneered on the top. Ascending, we found Father's unique hybrid blend of Chinese, English, and German accents employed in his pronunciation of English. Then came Jennifer and Megan's high English aristocratic accents – the products of Tutor Luke's original instruction and the year of speaking Empire English in India. Of course, had we been at the fount of the tongue, in Great Britain, their speech would have represented the apex. But this was America, and Janie's rapid grasp of American dialogue placed her just beneath the perfect enunciation of Edna, who rested at the pinnacle. My gibberish of eclectic sounds was actually not part of

the structure and lay in the subbasement, in the antediluvian terrain of cave-dweller grunting.

(Lee 1991: 100)

In the passage above, he describes the multilingualism at home in terms of the coexistence of three different Chinese dialects – Shanghainese or Songhai, Mandarin and “*sam yep*” or Saam Yap Cantonese - and two regional variants of English – British and American. The British English was acquired by his sisters, Jennifer and Megan, in China, through their tutor’s instruction, and later perfected in British India, where the family spent a year before arriving in the United States; American English reflects the family’s resettlement in the United States, and it becomes the language of home when Kai Ting’s white American stepmother, Edna, absolutely forbids the children to speak Chinese.

The hierarchical ordering of the various dialects in the above passage reveals the level of social prestige attached to each, and it is not coincidental that the Chinese dialects are described as forming the base layer, thereby reflecting the secondary status of minority languages in the host country, which privileges the language of the dominant group. Thus, as the penultimate sentence states clearly, American English stands at the apex of the hierarchy. By distinguishing between British and American English, the passage not only reveals a sensitivity to the fact of different varieties within the English language, it also emphasizes the fact that the prestige and power of each variety is precisely related to the country in which it is spoken.

Sheltered by his mother from birth, Kai Ting acquires very little English. However, his acquisition of Shanghainese and Mandarin at home is severely curtailed at seven years old by the death of his mother. The novel comically portrays seven-year old Kai Ting's linguistic confusion in the following manner:

Our mother's absence had caught me between languages. My Songhai was pitiful, my Mandarin worse. My English was fractured. My Cantonese was non-existent.

(Lee 1991: 69)

Having mastered none of the Chinese dialects spoken at home, nor having an adequate grasp of English, Kai Ting finds himself without a proper language and has to contend with speaking a "gibberish of eclectic sounds" (Lee 1991: 100). The term "language vacuum" (Houbein 1983: 189 - 190) would appropriately describe Kai Ting's predicament of losing proficiency in the first language without mastering the second language so as to be able to express one's thoughts and needs beyond the mundane matters of material existence. In the novel, Kai Ting's linguistic confusion becomes symbolic of, as well as a contributing factor to, his social displacement. The narrative of Chinaboy is the story of the struggle of a young Chinese American to find his place in American society, as represented by his stepmother, the American street culture of his racially-mixed neighbourhood, and the Y.M.C.A. His adaptation to American culture is matched by a growing linguistic confidence in the use of American English and American slang.

While first generation Chinese Americans may perceive the mastery of English as indispensable to their children's success in America, the narratives portray them as being more contented with maintaining the ethnic language. Since their contact with the dominant American society is often restricted to the essential, and their world, as portrayed in "Hunger" (1998), Fifth Chinese Daughter ([1945] 1989), Chinaboy: A Novel (1991), Eating Chinese Food Naked (1998), and The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975,1976) is both inward-looking and focused on preserving the traditions and values of their countries of origin, the ethnic language is sufficient for most domains. However, compared to the first generation, second-generation Chinese Americans seem to feel the pressure to assimilate with the dominant American culture more intensely and identify competence in American English as a function of becoming more 'American'.

The narratives suggest that this stems from their increased exposure to American culture and society, especially with the commencement of American schooling. American schools, as institutions that promote the American way of life and as socialising forces, play a crucial role in making second-generation Chinese Americans aware of the host society's perceptions and expectations of them and the narratives portray them as places of enculturation, stimulating minority group members to adopt the norms of the dominant group, including its language and language behaviour. Thus, in Fifth Chinese Daughter ([1945] 1989), American school is described as a place that made Jade Snow Wong conscious of "“foreign”

American ways” (Wong [1945] 1989: 13) and her American public school teacher as the person who actively “discouraged them [her pupils] from speaking their accustomed language” (ibid.). Similarly, in Chang’s short story, “The Unforgetting” (1998), it is Charles’ fourth grade teacher, Mrs Carlsen, who advises his Chinese parents that they “not require him to speak Chinese” (Chang 1998: 136), as the home language is perceived as hindering his acquisition of English.

In Ben Fong-Torres’s autobiography, The Rice Room: Growing Up Chinese American – From Number Two Son to Rock ‘N’ Roll (1994), the close association between language and assimilation is also highlighted. The narrator describes his efforts to sound more ‘American’ when he attends a Texan school:

For my English elective, I chose speech and drama. Without having been told, I knew that I had what was known as a Chinese accent. Some sounds in English don’t exist in Cantonese, and vice versa. Chinese words stand on their own as pictograph symbols; there is no alphabet. Cantonese, then, can sound choppy. And so, too, would our English. I had trouble differentiating among various *ch* and *sh* sounds, and bridging words smoothly. In childhood, in Chinatown, it was neither good nor bad; it was just the way we were. In Texas, I decided to try and sound, as well as be, more “American.”

(Fong-Torres 1994: 75)

Fong-Torres’ account attributes his English pronunciation difficulties to the influence of Cantonese, his mother tongue. He is highly conscious of the fact that he spoke English with a “Chinese accent”, which was unremarkable and accepted in Chinatown. However, in the predominantly white Texan setting, where he is the only Chinese among 433 white students, this accent marked him out as a member of

an ethnic minority and he is motivated to remove it from his speech. The attempt to “sound, as well as be, more “American”” stems from a desire to identify with the dominant group, and it emphasizes the intimate link between language and group identity.

Ben Fong-Torres’ efforts at modifying his speech patterns in order to assimilate better with English-speaking America is part of a common sociolinguistic pattern observed among minority group members:

. . . individual speakers born into an ethnic group – or the entire group membership – can generally succeed in eliminating all ethnic markers in their speech if they desire to fully assimilate to the dominant group, or they can develop both marked and unmarked varieties and shift between them depending on the desired group identification in specific situations.

(Saville-Troike 1982: 86-87)

Saville-Troike’s comments emphasize the desire to assimilate as a motivating force in an ethnic group member’s conscious or unconscious alteration of his or her speech habits. While some speakers remove all ethnic markers from their speech, others develop two varieties – a marked one in which ethnic markers are present, and an unmarked one – and use them according to the groups with which they wish to identify in particular situations. In Fong-Torres’ account, the “choppy” rhythm of his English speech and the poor differentiation between the “*ch* and *sh* sounds” constitute the ethnic speech markers that identify him as a Chinese, and his efforts at removing these ethnic markers from his speech highlights his awareness of the

unacceptability of these signs of ethnic differences by the dominant group that favours assimilation in the creation of a common American culture.

Interestingly, Fong-Torres ascribes the unevenness of the rhythm of his English speech to the “choppy” Cantonese rhythm and relates this, in turn, to the Chinese pictographic symbols⁶ and its lack of an alphabet. While this explanation of language interference requires factual substantiation, what is significant is that Chinese speech is perceived as being less fluid and, by implication, less refined than English speech. In The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975,1975), the female narrator presents a similar viewpoint:

It is the way Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian. We make guttural peasant noises and have Ton Duc Thang names you can't remember.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 171-172)

The terms “chingchong” and “Ton Duc Thang” comes from American slang referring to Chinese speech, and their presence in the passage indicates an outsider's perspective in this description of the ethnic language. The terms are non-complimentary, purportedly mimicking the way Chinese speech sounds to American ears, but ultimately contributing to a negative and stereotypical view of the language of this ethnic group. Thus, the adjectives “ugly” and “not beautiful” are used by the

⁶ It would be linguistically more accurate to describe Chinese as a logographic writing system, derived from ideographic script with several pictograph elements. The Chinese characters refer to linguistic units, not directly to concepts and things, and they often represent parts of words, as well as whole words. Crystal (1987:198) provides a succinct and useful description of the Chinese writing system.

narrator to describe the sounds of the Chinese language unfavourably, and the noun phrase “guttural peasant noises” implies the low status of the ethnic language. It is possible that the narrator intends these negative descriptions of her own ethnic language to be read ironically, however, they also suggest how easy it is for Chinese Americans, in adopting the outsider’s perception of their ethnic language, to acquire a negative attitude, even a sense of aversion, towards their ethnic language and the speaking habits of their own community.

On the topic of differences in speech behaviour, Kingston emphasizes how Chinese female voices are “strong and bossy” (1975, 1976: 172) in sharp contrast to American female voices, and recounts how she and her sister, as second-generation Chinese Americans, “invented an American-feminine speaking personality” (ibid.). This example of language behaviour modification underscores this second-generation Chinese American narrator’s need to identify with the dominant American culture and reveals the negative by-product of assimilation as a sense of estrangement from one’s ethnic language and community. In Kingston’s work, the intimate relationship between language adaptation and cultural assimilation is repeatedly highlighted.

4.3.4 Language Choices

While the narratives discussed in section 4.3.2 portray second-generation Chinese Americans as actively engaged in changing their language habits so as to identify with the dominant society, many of them also depict first-generation Chinese American parents as making deliberate choices to ensure that their children acquire English, even to the extent of sacrificing the ethnic language. As noted in section 4.2.1, ethnic minority parents are often anxious for their children to achieve success in the United States and see the acquisition of English as vital to this goal.

In Typical American (1991), Gish Jen portrays two sets of Chinese American parents engaging in a form of language planning:

“I thought we agreed the children are going to be American,”
puzzled Helen.

Ralph furrowed his brow. When Callie had turned three they had decided that Mona and Callie would learn English first, and then Chinese. This was what Janis and Old Chao were planning on doing with Alexander; Janis didn't want him to have an accent. For Ralph and Helen, it was a more practical decision. Callie had seemed confused by *outside people* sometimes understanding her and sometimes not. Playing with other children in the park, she had several times started to cry, and once or twice to throw things; she had lost a doll this way, and a dragon.

(Jen 1991: 128)

Ralph, Helen, Janis and Old Chao are first-generation Chinese American parents, who decide that their children should learn American English first, before Chinese. In doing so, they become the prime motivators for a language shift towards English

as mother tongue language in their children's generation. Helen's comment at the beginning of the excerpt reveals that while the first-generation Chinese Americans remain highly conscious of their immigrant status, they want their children to "be American", and this includes speaking American English. The passage also indicates that Ralph and Helen's decision is a "practical" one, aimed at resolving their daughter's communication problems with the "*outside people*", a term they use to refer to Americans. The italicized phrase is probably a translation of the Chinese phrase for "outsider", since in Jen's narrative, italics is often used to represent Chinese discourse. It locates the point of view in this passage as belonging to Ralph and Helen, and characterizes them as immigrant Chinese who continue to perceive the host society as *the other*. However, in deciding that their children are to be American, they not only accede to the heavier demands of the host culture, but also expose their home culture to *outside* influences. In the above passage, Jen represents this cultural accommodation in terms of a change in the mother tongue.

Mei Ng's novel, Eating Chinese Food Naked (1998), similarly describes how Ruby's parents, Franklin and Bell, deliberately chose to teach their children English, instead of their native Chinese dialect:

Her parents whispered in Chinese and Ruby tried to make out what they were saying. She didn't know why they bothered to whisper since she couldn't understand the words. Her parents hadn't wanted her to end up like her cousin who grew up in Chinatown and didn't speak English. Her cousin sat in the back row at school and sucked on her pen. One day the pen burst and there was blue ink all over her mouth. She wouldn't answer the teacher and she wouldn't stick her tongue out. That was rude.

Franklin and Bell didn't want that to happen to their kids, so they taught them English, then called them stupid when they asked for English menus in Chinese restaurants, called them stupid when they couldn't talk to their uncles and aunties who lived in Chinatown, called them stupid American kids who didn't know where they came from.

(Ng 1998: 95-96)

The result of such deliberate language planning is unfortunate, since it takes the form of a communication gap between Ruby, a second-generation Chinese American, and her first-generation Chinese American parents. The passage presents Ruby's non-acquisition of her parents' ethnic language as a significant loss: she loses one of the most important means of communicating with them. Chinese becomes her parents' private language, and her inability to communicate in this language not only hampers her understanding of their immigrant past, but also distances her from members of her own ethnic community. The paradox, wryly expressed by the narrator in the above passage, is that her parents are the ones who sowed the seeds of her language loss by concentrating on English at home, even as they mock her for not knowing Chinese. From her parent's perspective, her language shift is both a sign of Americanization **and** alienation from the ethnic culture, as exemplified in her inability to read menus printed in Chinese or communicate with the Chinese-speaking Chinatown residents. In the passage, the connection between language and culture is emphasized, so that to lose one is to lose the other as well. Thus, the narrative not only portrays the distance between Ruby and her parents in terms of cultural and linguistic differences, it offers the loss of the ethnic language as a signifier of the loss of one's cultural origins..

Lan Samantha Chang's short story, "The Unforgetting" (1998), contains a poignant depiction of language loss. Earlier, in section 4.3.3, we referred to an episode in the narrative, in which Charles' fourth-grade teacher requests that his parents do not require him to speak Chinese at home. Charles' parents, Ming and Sansan, fearing that their son would be lost between English and Mandarin, follow Mrs Carlsen's advice rigorously. The following excerpt describes Charles' shift to English as his home language and the accompanying loss of his mother tongue:

"Daddy thinks we should speak English for a while," Sansan explained.

Ming watched his son's face. Recently, Charles had developed an expression of careful solitude. "I can read to you from your schoolbook," Ming said.

Charles shook his head.

"Do you understand why you need to learn English?" Ming asked.

Charles nodded. In the next few months, he gradually stopped speaking Chinese. Since they did not test him, Ming never knew how long it took for all of those words to be forgotten.

(Chang 1998:137)

Chang's description of Charles' language loss foregrounds the sense of increasing isolation felt by this Chinese American child in the white cultural setting of Iowa: already experiencing the loneliness of being culturally different at school, he now loses the link to his parents' culture with the loss of his home language. Consequently, the growing distance between Charles and his father is revealed through their awkward conversations in English and, more significantly, the lack of communication. Similar to Eating Chinese Food Naked (1998), Chang's narrative

underscores the estrangement between immigrant Chinese parents and their second-generation Chinese American children through their language differences.

Descriptions of the difficulties created by the language shift among second-generation Chinese Americans are not confined to fictional narratives. In his autobiography, Fong-Torres insists that language differences played a crucial role in accentuating the generation gap between him and his parents:

Over the years, I've talked with my parents many times, but we've never really communicated.

When we talk, it sounds like baby talk – at least my side of it. The parents say what they will in their native dialect of Cantonese. I pick up the gist of it, formulate a response, and am dumbstruck. I don't know half the words I need; I either never learned them, or I heard but forgot them . . .

What we have here is a language barrier as formidable, to my mind, as the Great Wall of China.

The barrier has stood tall, rugged, and insurmountable between my parents and all five of their children, and it has stood through countless moments when we needed to talk with each other, about the things parents and children usually discuss: jobs and careers; marriage and divorce; health and finances; history, the present, and the future.

(Fong-Torres 1994: 4-5)

In Fong-Torres' case, the shift towards English was largely the result of American schooling and his succumbing to the pressure to identify with the dominant American culture in his dread of "being different" (Fong-Torres 1994: 45). While he attains native-like fluency in English, his parents remain immersed in their native dialect, and his dwindling ability in the latter produces a communication barrier as great as "the Great Wall of China". This barrier makes it even more difficult to solve the problems that arise because of generational differences and the diverging

experiences of immigrants and their American-born children. As revealed by Fong-Torres, the lack of a common language results in an almost complete communication breakdown between him and his parents. Thus, in this narrative, language differences between first and second generation Chinese Americans are portrayed as significantly affecting other aspects of life.

While Fong-Torres writes about the language barrier from the perspective of a second-generation Chinese American, Lan Samantha Chang conveys the feelings of a first-generation Chinese American mother in her fictional narrative, "Hunger" (1998):

Somehow I had lost both of my daughters. If I had learned English, I wondered, would I have been able to follow them? I will never know. But my daughters turned into women and I was left behind, stumbling after their voices.

(Chang 1998: 101)

In the above passage, the mother, Min, reflects on the possibility that her lack of English contributed to the distance between her and her daughters. Throughout Chang's novella, the first-generation Chinese American parents, Min and Tian, are represented as Mandarin-speakers: Mandarin is the language with which they are most comfortable and best expresses their true selves. Their American-born daughters, Anna and Ruth, on the other hand, are characterised by their lack of fluency in the ethnic language as they acquire English at school and through the mass media. These language differences compound the lack of mutual understanding

between the parents and their children, and symbolise the rift between the two generations: the presence of two different languages at home is a function of two separate worlds in uneasy coexistence. Thus, like Fong-Torres' autobiography, Chang's novella emphasize the link between language differences and the failure of relationships.

4.3.5 Language Shift and Deculturation

Gus Lee's novel, Chinaboy: A Novel (1991), depicts seven-year old, American-born Kai Ting as being stranded between languages and cultures. In the following excerpt, Kai Ting reflects on his position upon his father's suggestion that they return to China:

Father, talking to me in our true tongue, talking about Mother. Oh, Mah-mee. I wanted him to keep talking, to never stop. Drunk on his words, intoxicated with the communication. He was talking about somehow returning to China. But I was having a hard time figuring out how to be black, how to be American. Now I had to learn to be Chinese? To go to China now, with our mother dead.

. . . I was not so sure that I would be so lucky on the streets of Shanghai, trying to get by as a cultural Chinese. I could hardly speak Songhai anymore. The idea of backtracking on the Chinese tongues made me ill.

(Lee 1991: 157-158)

The phrase "our true tongue" in the above passage refers to Shanghainese, the family's native dialect. However, Kai Ting's reference to it as such is ironical, in the

light of the penultimate sentence in the passage: with his weakening grasp of his native language, it is difficult to see how it can function as his “true tongue”. What the phrase acknowledges is the significance of the ethnic language as a sign of cultural authenticity. Thus, when Kai Ting foresees his failure at being a “cultural Chinese”, he relates it to his inability to speak Shanghainese. Kai Ting’s wondering question - “Now I had to learn to be Chinese?” –emphasizes his alienation from his ethnic culture, while the phrase “how to be American”⁷ in the preceding sentence underscores the more urgent need of adapting to American culture for this Chinese American.

In Amy Tan’s novel, The Joy Luck Club (1989), Lindo Jong, a first-generation Chinese American mother, laments that her American-born daughter is no longer culturally Chinese. The following excerpt from the novel presents Lindo’s thoughts in first-person narrative:

But now she wants to be Chinese, it is so fashionable. And I know it is too late. All those years I tried to teach her! She followed my Chinese ways only until she learned how to walk out the door by herself and go to school. So now the only Chinese words she can say are *sh-sh*, *houche*, *chr fan*, and *gwan deng shweijyau*. How can she talk to people in China with these words? Pee-pee, choo-choo train, eat, close light sleep. How can she think she can blend in? Only her skin and her hair are Chinese. Inside – she is all American-made.

⁷ Kai Ting’s first encounter with American culture occurs on the streets of the predominantly black, lower social class neighbourhood of the Panhandle in San Francisco. Consequently, for seven-year old Kai Ting, growing up as an American meant becoming “an accepted black male youth in the 1950s” (Lee 1991: 14), and this is reflected in the combined phrases “how to be black, how to be American”.

It's all my fault she is this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two don't mix?

(Tan 1989: 252)

The first sentence of the excerpt indicates that there was a time when Lindo's daughter, Waverly, did not want to be identified as a Chinese. However, ten years later, Waverly is keen to reclaim her ethnic identity. But the superficial nature of her present interest is captured by the deprecatory tone of the adjectival phrase "it is so fashionable". This description of Waverly's search for ethnic identity reflects a trend observed by social historian Lynn Pan: "Among migrants, as among new nations, there are few causes more fashionable than the quest for identity" (1990: 295). Although Waverly is American-born, speaks American English as her dominant language, embraces the American lifestyle and has become a successful lawyer in an American firm, the narrative portrays her repeatedly attempting to resolve her inner conflicts between a Chinese heritage and an American lifestyle.

The passage also indicates that ethnicity cannot be conveniently discarded and resumed, nor is it automatically inherited by the next generation. It defines ethnicity as an internal quality, rather than a matter of physical characteristics, and highlights the force of American assimilation through Lindo's description of her daughter as "all American-made". Moreover, Lindo's statement that her daughter followed her "Chinese ways only until she learned how to walk out the door by herself and go to school" marks the close link between the socialising force of schooling and the discarding of ethnic ways for American culture.

In the above passage, Waverly's loss of ethnic identity is conveyed through her lack of competence in the ethnic language. Culture and language are once again interlinked as Lindo describes Waverly's command of the Chinese language as arrested at the most elementary level and limited to only the most childish expressions, as emphasized through the English translations of the italicised Chinese terms :“Pee-pee, choo-choo train, eat, close light sleep”. In this way, it recalls Fong-Torres likening his command of his ethnic language to “baby talk” (1994: 4). Competence in the ethnic language thus becomes a measure of one's closeness to the ethnic culture; in the eyes of the first-generation Chinese American narrator, losing the ability communicate in Chinese is synonymous with the loss of “Chinese character”.

The narratives also describe the efforts of first-generation Chinese American parents to ensure that their children retain their ethnic consciousness and language. One primary method is to send them to Chinese school, where “teachers taught language, calligraphy, culture, and history and, not incidentally, manners.” (Fong-Torres 1994: 44). However, the level of success varies between individual characters: while Jade Snow Wong in Fifth Chinese Daughter ([1945] 1989) appears to retain a good measure of her ethnic consciousness through learning the Chinese language and culture, the narrator of The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975,1976) expresses a sense of estrangement from her ethnic community and culture despite having attended Chinese school. In the case of Ben

Fong-Torres, attending Chinese school was no guarantee that he would be able to resist American assimilation or the language shift towards English.

Where does language shift leave second-generation Chinese Americans? The narratives discussed in this chapter seem to suggest that the language shift to English, with the accompanying loss of the ethnic language, leaves second-generation Chinese Americans with a profound sense of cultural displacement, which is made worse by the fact that even though they no longer feel culturally Chinese, they remain Chinese in appearance and are viewed accordingly. As Elaine Kim points out, Asian American literature, including that many of the Chinese American narratives in this study, is written primarily by “American-born, American-educated Asians whose first language is English” (1994: 601), so perhaps, it is not surprising that language loss and cultural alienation are such constant themes in the narratives.

The narratives’ repeated foregrounding of the relationship between language shift and loss of ethnic identity also alludes to the fact that languages are fundamentally the products of their native speakers and often become markers of cultural identity, as in the case of Chinese. As the means of expressing and communicating the cultural values of individual speech communities, they acquire cultural import, and patterns of usage, as well as the meaning of specific linguistic items, become framed by cultural connotations that are only familiar to members of the particular speech community. In the following excerpt from The Joy Luck Club (1989), American-born Jing-mei Woo suggests that language difference is one of the

main reasons why first and second generation Chinese Americans constitute different cultural groups:

And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow up impatient when their mothers talk in fractured English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds “joy luck” is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation.

(Tan 1989: 31)

The rift between the first-generation Chinese American mothers and their second-generation daughters is described in terms of a language gap, with the mothers having to communicate with their daughters in “fractured English”, precisely because their daughters have lost or never acquired proficiency in the ethnic language. The loss of ethnic language among the second-generation of Chinese Americans means the absence of a common language for handing down cultural meanings, thereby severing the link to a cultural heritage and history that is traced back to the motherland, that is China. As the narrator Jing-mei observes, to the American-born daughters, the nouns “joy” and “luck” do not combine to form a word, and do not carry the same cultural associations that would be understood by the immigrant Chinese. Thus, this narrative emphasizes how the language shift to American English as a first language opens gaps in the community’s linguistic fabric, where cultural meaning falls through and is lost.

4.4 Literature Out Of Sociolinguistic Reality

It is important to realise that the literary descriptions of language use have their basis in sociolinguistic reality. This not only emphasizes the interconnections between the narratives and their socio-cultural context, it also compels a serious examination of such literary descriptions that is informed by sociolinguistic information. Sociolinguistics both illuminates the larger context in which the narratives are set and provides important concepts to help us understand the significance of language patterns in the narratives. It is an indispensable partner in the analysis of narrative descriptions of language use.

However, while sociolinguistic studies provide us with important observations about the language patterns of immigrant groups, the narratives offer a detailed working out of the factual data, showing us what it means to learn a new language in a foreign environment, how the lack of knowledge of the language of the host country can mean isolation and powerlessness for the immigrant, how difficult it is to balance the competing demands of the ethnic language(s) and that of the host country, and the impact of language choices on succeeding generations. The texts also emphasize the way language constitutes a powerful cultural marker and how the sociolinguistic situation becomes the site of cultural difference.

Sherry Simon describes immigrant culture as “a culture of transition between languages” (1987: 122), and in the Chinese American narratives, we find a persistent preoccupation with this fact and the literary working out of its consequences.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PORTRAIT OF LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE

5.1 Language Difference in Chinese American Narratives

In the previous chapter, we not only observed how narrative depictions of the Chinese American speech community concur with sociolinguistic findings, but also the ways in which they particularize situations of language contact and elaborate on the language choices faced by an immigrant community and the consequences of those choices. Even as the narratives describe the shift towards English among later generations of Chinese Americans, they simultaneously foreground the continued importance of Chinese dialects in the linguistic make-up of Chinese America by marking their presence textually. It is the use of these dialects that help define this speech community and their representation in the narratives reminds the reader that, in spite of its dominance in mainstream American society, English is only one of the codes in the Chinese American speech repertoire. Thus, the narratives portray a world in which language variety and language differences are always present.

In representing language variety, the texts not only recreate the multilingual environment of the immigrant community, they also disturb the monologic¹ appearance of the texts. Instead of a single voice, represented by the standard English of the narrator, they assert of presence of other voices, non-English ones that help to differentiate the narrative world, so that we see it as one inhabited by different cultural memories and experiences, beliefs and perspectives. By allowing these non-English voices to speak, they create a space for the reproduction of the values and emotions and the cultural contexts that are associated with these other languages, while simultaneously exposing the tensions and accommodations that are fundamental to a multicultural and multilingual setting. By permitting the interplay of different languages within the framework of the narrative, Chinese American writing is inherently heteroglossic²; as are all texts which seek to portray the language variety of a multicultural reality. The textual representation of this language variety allows its presence to be perceived even on the surface appearance of the texts, and this dramatic assertion of other languages makes the presence of the ethnic cultures more immediate. Both in the way it opposes standard English patterns and serves as a sign of another consciousness, language variety becomes a prime marker of difference in the intercultural narrative. Because of the way

¹ My concept of the term “monologic” is informed by Bakhtin’s use of the term to refer to single voice that gives the appearance of unity and closure. Bakhtin (1981, 1984) contrasts it against the notion of heteroglossia, which consists of a plurality of social and historical voices, speech types and languages.

² In this thesis, “heteroglossia” refers to the diversity of languages.

language is repeatedly made to stand for culture in these narratives, language differences always have cultural significance.

We shall begin by reviewing three studies on the representation of language variety in non-native English writing. Like Chinese American writers, non-native speakers of English who choose English as their medium of creative expression are faced with the challenge of *making* the English language authentically convey the many non-English aspects of their reality. The representation of languages other than English thus becomes an important means of meeting this challenge since these other codes are strongly associated with local cultures and serve as signifiers of these cultures. Consequently, non-native English texts are characterised by the presence of languages other than English in the speech repertoire of its characters. In the following sections, we shall discuss research by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), Kachru (1987), and Hoffmann (1988), before examining the Chinese American narratives in the light of these studies.

5.2 Stylistic Studies of Creative Writing by Non-Native Speakers

The upsurge in the publication of creative writing by non-native speakers of English has raised considerable interest in the field of literary criticism. What seems especially distinctive is the way these writers manage to convey a non-English

sensibility through the manipulation of English language structures and other stylistic devices.

5.2.1 Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989)

The central argument in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) concerns the theory and practice of literature in English from post-colonial countries. For them, the term “post-colonial” covers all cultures affected by the British imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. By this definition, “post-colonial literature” covers creative writing in English from the African countries, South and South-east Asia, the Caribbean countries, and countries on the Pacific rim, such as Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific Islands. Although they are not primarily concerned with the literature of the United States of America, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin feel that it should also be described as “post-colonial literature”, in view of the fact that American colonies were established as part of the British empire (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 2).

The theory of post-colonial literatures presented by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin is characterized in terms of opposition to linguistic and cultural imperialism. According to them, one powerful form of British imperialism was the institutionalisation of British English, together with the British literary canon, as the ‘privileging norm’ in the colonies (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 3), which resulted in the

marginalization of native languages and literary traditions. They argue that post-colonial literatures emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonisation and assert themselves by foregrounding the tensions between native experience and colonial power and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. Thus, they perceive post-colonial literatures as forms of writing that interrogate and subvert the “imperial cultural formations” (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 9). As part of this process, standard British English - the language of the imperial centre - is appropriated, transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties.³

Thus, in a chapter describing the stylistic strategies found in post-colonial literature (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 38-77), it is not surprising that the authors’ main emphasis is on the way the texts use language variance to assert their difference from the imperial centre. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

Whether written from monoglossic, diglossic, or polyglossic cultures, post-colonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of ‘English’ by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood. It does this by employing language variance, the ‘part’ of a wider cultural whole, which assists in the work of language seizure whilst being neither transmuted nor overwhelmed by its adopted vehicle.

(Ashcroft et al. 1989: 51)

³ For a strong critique of the linguistic imperialism associated with English, see Phillipson (1992).

By describing standard British English as an ‘adopted vehicle’, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin acknowledge the fact that for many post-colonial writers, English is not a native language. Nevertheless, they maintain that it is possible for these writers to use English in a way that successfully conveys native reality, even as it allows them to communicate with readers outside their native audience.⁴ In the process of asserting cultural distinctiveness, these writers manipulate the English language to subvert any easy assumptions of a single standard, both in terms of language and culture. Thus, they use language variance to register distance from British norms, and it is this aspect of post-colonial writing that forms the focus of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s study.

The following stylistic devices are highlighted by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin as means of introducing language variance in postcolonial writing: **(1)** the insertion of untranslated words from the native languages, which forces the reader to engage with the cultural context in which these terms have meaning (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 65); **(2)** glossing or the parenthetical translations of individual words, which signals authorial presence and cultural difference, but also “gives the translated word, and thus the ‘receptor’ culture, the higher status” (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 66);

⁴ Ironically, the use of English may also exclude members of their native community who do not speak the language.

(3) the use of syntactic fusion⁵ to demonstrate the influence of English and the writer's native language and subtly convey the rhythms of the vernacular⁶ voice, specifically exemplified in the development of neologisms; and (4) the representation of code switching between standard English and the vernacular or local forms through variable orthography and vernacular transcription. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, these strategies introduce language variance, and language variance signifies "a metaphoric entry for the [post-colonial] culture into the 'English' text" (1989: 51). They emphasize that cultural difference is not "inherent in the texts but is inserted by such strategies" (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 65).

The strategies described by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin are also evident in narratives by Chinese American writers. In many cases, a similar effect of asserting cultural difference through language variance may be perceived. However, the relationship between Chinese American writing and mainstream American culture is too complex to be described only in terms of an opposition between the marginalized and the centre, nor should it be solely perceived in terms of linguistic and cultural appropriation by the colonized, since the historical process that informs

⁵ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin also discuss the fusion of linguistic structures from two codes (English and Yoruba) in the work of the African writer Amos Tutuola in terms of an "interlanguage" (1989: 66-68). They use this term to argue that Tutuola's style represents a genuine and discrete linguistic system that characterizes the writer's appropriation of English, rather than rejected as mere linguistic aberration, as many African critics have done. However, their description of interlanguage in terms of appropriation is somewhat misleading since it minimizes the fact that the use of interlanguage is often involuntary on the speaker's part.

⁶ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) do not define the term "vernacular". However, examples of the vernacular in their book suggest that they use the term to refer to the most colloquial or informal variety of a language in a monolingual society. Holmes (1992: 80-81) informs us that the term can also refer to the unstandardized ethnic or tribal language, as opposed to the one adopted as the standard language, in the context of a multilingual society.

Chinese American writing is one of immigration, not colonization and the relationship between an immigrant community and the host country is often ambiguous. In section 5.3, we shall examine more closely the effect of some of the stylistic devices highlighted by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in the context of Chinese American narratives.

5.2.2 Kachru (1987)

Kachru (1987) also analyses creative writing from the category of “post-colonial literatures”, as defined by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989). However, he refers to them as “contact literatures”. The term “contact literature” is an extension of his notion of “contact language”, which is defined as a language that acquires some of the characteristics of the language with which it comes into contact (Kachru 1982:341).

In using the term “contact literature”, Kachru foregrounds the multilingual and multicultural contexts that form the background to such writing. Unlike Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, who emphasize the oppositional nature of post-colonial writing, Kachru concentrates on its duality. For him, the defining characteristic of such literature is the combination of at least two language systems and literary traditions. Specifically, he used the term “contact literatures” to refer to “literatures in English written by users of English as a second language to delineate

contexts which generally do not form part of what may be labelled as the traditions of English literatures” (Kachru 1987:127). Kachru identifies these traditions as Judeo-Christian traditions of literary and linguistic creativity (1987: 126). He adds that contact literatures contain “a range of discursal devices and cultural assumptions distinct from the ones associated with native varieties of English” (1987: 127). Consequently, they require “a new literary sensibility and extended cultural awareness from a reader who is outside of the speech community which identifies with the variety” (ibid.).

According to Kachru (1987: 131-134), the linguistic realization of a distinctive identity from the British cultural context and British English is achieved in contact literatures through the following processes:

1. The nativization of context, in which cultural presuppositions overload a text and demand serious cultural interpretation. Kachru suggests that one of the primary means of achieving this is by extending the cultural load of the English lexis.
2. The nativization of cohesion and cohesiveness, so that these concepts are redefined in each variety of non-native English within appropriate universe of discourse. This includes what Kachru describes as “lexical shift”, which involves direct lexical transfer, hybridization, collocational extension, and the use of local grammatical forms.
3. The nativization of rhetorical strategies, which involves close approximation to the devices a bilingual uses in his or her code(s), according to patterns of

interaction in the native culture, which are transferred to English. Kachru suggests that this can occur through the use of native similes and metaphors, the transfer of rhetorical devices, the translation or ‘transcreation’ (Kachru 1987: 133) of proverbs and idioms, and the use of culturally dependent speech styles.

In Kachru’s description of the processes by which cultural distinctiveness is achieved, the word “nativization” occurs frequently. This term foregrounds the transforming influence of local cultures on the English language. Thus, Kachru’s analysis of the language of contact literatures focuses on the ways the English language may be claimed by postcolonial countries for local expression and reworked so that it identifies and becomes identified with local realities.

Kachru’s study invaluablely foregrounds the possibility of using the resources of the English language to authentically convey the local voice; it asserts that English does not belong solely to its native speakers, but may be appropriated by those who learn it as a second or non-native language. In our analysis of the representation of language difference in Chinese American narratives, we shall see that some of the strategies named by Kachru are also employed by Chinese American writers as a means of making English a language of their own. However, in the case of Chinese American writers, the term “nativization” may be too strong a description for the way they use English in their texts. It suggests the systematic creation of a new variety of English with strong national interests, and there is a lack

of evidence of this in Chinese American writing. Instead, Chinese American writing appears as **both** American **and** Chinese, characterised by a sense of duality, both in terms of culture and language.

Kachru's study highlights the influence of other language codes in the post-colonial writer's use of English through the term "contact language". This term may also be applied to Chinese American writers' use of English, since they too inhabit a multilingual world and languages other than English serve as sources of language deviance in their writing. However, it is often difficult to identify which linguistic deviation in their writing is based on another language code and to ascertain whether the deviations are due to native influence, colloquial speech representation, or the writer's idiolect. The danger in Kachru's analysis is that it tends to relate all language deviations in postcolonial texts to the influence of the writers' first languages. It is possible that non-standard English elements may be due to the writer's idiolect, to stylistic innovation that is unrelated to the native codes, or even to another code that does not belong to the writer's ethnic culture, as the discussion in section 5.3.5 demonstrates. Thus, while some of the stylistic strategies Kachru describes seem clearly based upon the writers' native languages, it is not easy to determine that this is always the case.

It has also been observed that the non-standard features of second-language writing in English tend to be common to all non-native Englishes. In his analysis of West African English as a non-native variety of English, Bamiro points out that "many of the syntactic variations in WAE [West African English] are not unique to

this variety but have been found in other non-native varieties as well” (1995: 201). He regards these non-standard features as stable linguistic characteristics that are being acquired by the new Englishes as a whole (1995: 202). Consequently, some of the linguistic deviations in second-language creative writing may not be specific to any one culture.

Finally, focusing on linguistic deviations can emphasize the concept of difference unduly. As Kachru himself points out:

There are more similarities than differences between the diverse varieties of English; that is how an underlying Englishness is maintained in all these Englishes spoken around the globe.

(Kachru 1986: 131)

Thus, Kachru points out that in spite of their diversity, common features allow the varieties of English to remain recognizably English.

5.2.3 Hoffmann (1988)

Unlike the research of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) and Kachru (1987), which emphasize the way cultural distinctiveness is expressed through language, Hoffmann’s (1988) research focuses the problem of cross-cultural communication in second-language creative writing where the cultural and linguistic background of the audience differs from that of the writer. The fact that he uses the

term “intercultural writing” to describe such texts makes his research seem especially pertinent to this study. His study describes how the cross-cultural nature of such texts both motivates and allows for the types of language deviations pointed out by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) and Kachru (1987) and suggests that it is the writers’ awareness of the reader’s cultural difference that encourages distinctive stylistic strategies that, in turn, help to define such writing. The successful inscription of cultural difference through language deviance depends upon the cultural gap between the reader and the world of the narrative

Hoffmann uses the term “intercultural writing” to emphasize that it is written communication that occurs between participants from different cultures, involving different languages or varieties of a language. He highlights the following constraints faced by those who write interculturally (1988: 157):

1. There are fewer common and familiar patterns of action⁷ and types of text to rely on.
2. What is common to both cultures must be presupposed to some extent.
3. The text must fulfil the stylistic requirements of a literary context.
4. The text must be intelligible to a general audience, on which, however, information is lacking.

⁷ Hoffmann describes “patterns of action” as linguistic patterns developed within a society to meet the needs of individuals in specific social settings (1988: 156). He attributes the theory of linguistic action to Ehlich and Rehbein (1979).

Hoffmann warns that the various constraints may give rise to conflicting demands; for example, the demands of either 2 or 4 may mean that 3 cannot be fulfilled.

Hoffmann's data is drawn from a 1982 literary competition on the theme of "Living in Two Languages", organised for Turkish immigrant workers in Germany. The submissions, in the form of essays, reports of personal experience, stories or poems, are in German, the writers' second language. Based on his analysis of 340 texts, he suggests that the challenge of intercultural communication can be met on two levels: (1) the level of expression, by which he means the local surface forms; and (2) the level of linguistic patterns of actions, which relates to higher level text illocution and includes rhetorical patterns developed by and associated with particular groups of speakers and which will affect readers' expectations.

On the level of expression, Hoffmann (1988: 157-164) suggests four stylistic possibilities: transfer, mixture, integration and installation. Transfer involves the reproduction or 'imitation' in the second language of an expression belonging to the first language by means of the linguistic repertoire of the former, resulting in equivalence on the level of meaning. Hoffmann (1988: 159) gives the following example:

We'll now let Ahmet travel from MOTHERLAND to FATHERLAND.

Hoffman notes that in this example of transfer, the term "MOTHERLAND" is reproduced from the Turkish expressions "anayurt" or "anavatan" ("ana" = mother,

“yurt” and “vatan” = home or country of origin) and used ironically in opposition to the German word “Vaterland” (Fatherland).

The second possibility of a mixture of stylistic devices includes the insertion of isolated expressions from the first language into the second language. This could be because the expressions are not translatable, the writer does not know the appropriate expression in the second language, or the writer considers the first-language expression to be stylistically effective. In the following example from Hoffmann (1988: 160), untranslated Turkish words are used to represent the name of a student hostel:

A big sign. It says, in large letters ‘Atatürk Öğrenci Sitesi’.

Hoffmann points out that the following Turkish words are translatable: “öğrenci” means “students”, “site” refers to “closed town quarter”, and “si” is the third person possessive suffix. Thus the writer probably inserted the Turkish words for stylistic effect.

The third option of integration involves the reproduction of expressions from the first language in the second language, but the writer also takes precautions to ensure comprehension by marking the integrated expression graphically, paraphrasing or explaining the expression, and/or inserting it in a context which may help the reader grasp its meaning. The following example from Hoffmann (1988: 162) illustrates one simple way in which this can be achieved:

They also tell me that I to find some possibility and go as worker abroad. They always say: that one here in mine profession 'will not get shorter but also not get long'. That is: on it you die will not but can't live on it either.

Hoffmann explains that the integration of a Turkish idiom ("kütü layemut geçinmek", which literally means, "too short to live eternally") with a similar non-Turkish idiom (not enough to live on, but too much to die from) is achieved by using the "repair" formula: "that is". Consequently, despite the linguistic problems faced by the author, the reproduction of a non-Turkish idiom helps to make the idea behind the Turkish idiom comprehensible.

The last option of installation occurs when expressions from both the first and second languages are combined within a text, so that they remain comprehensible in the complete context, without translation. Hoffmann (1988: 163) illustrates installation with the following example:

My parents were already there. I went to them and kissed their hands.
'Hoş geldin, my son. How are you?' my mother said. 'Hoş bulduk. I am well.'

As Hoffmann explains, the Turkish expressions are placed precisely where the greetings are expected; moreover, they are followed by a ritual non-Turkish greeting formula to facilitate comprehension. He also notes that installation is particularly suitable for pattern positions that are relatively fixed (for example, the third position in 'request-grant-thank' pattern) and common to both cultures. Both integration and

installation demand a broadly-based competence in the second language on the part of the writer, since they require the construction of a suitable context that will ensure the reader's comprehension.

Hoffmann's description of the different types of linguistic patterns of action is less cogent, as he fails to provide a clear definition of what constitutes "linguistic patterns of action", apart from the statement that they "are socially developed for the realization of specific purposes" (Hoffmann 1988: 164). The examples in his study suggest that linguistic patterns of action in written texts mainly consist of rhetorical devices and narrative strategies, such as the traditional "once upon a time" beginning of the European fairytale. Hoffmann (1988: 164-172) distinguishes between the combination of different patterns of action in the second language from strategies involving patterns from both the first and second language. The former includes pattern-synthesis, pattern-implementation, and pattern-import, while the latter involves pattern-integration and the mixing of patterns. In order to recognize the occurrence of these patterns and distinguish between them, the researcher needs to have in-depth knowledge of the rhetorical and literary traditions found in the cultures of the first and second languages.

In pattern synthesis, different patterns from the second language are combined to form a new unity. Hoffmann (1988: 165-166) highlights an example of a narrative that begins with the pattern of the fairytale. This sets up the expectation that the unhappy situation will conclude happily with the aid of supernatural intervention. However, the narrative upsets this expectation when it develops into a

different type of story, one in which the protagonist is not removed from her unhappy situation but is freed from false illusions. Thus, according to Hoffmann, two linguistic patterns of action are synthesized.

Pattern-implementation is produced by changing to a linguistic pattern B within pattern A to achieve aims not attainable by the sole use of A. In his discussion, Hoffmann (1988: 166-167) emphasizes this as a strategy for inserting “supportive patterns” that are not directly related to the core of the text, but which help to explain particular aspects of culture that may not be familiar to the reader. He gives the example of a narrative that begins with an extended description of an aspect of Turkish culture before embarking on the actual narrative. The cultural description is not actually part of the story; its aim is to provide the non-Turkish reader with background information necessary for understanding the text. The disadvantage of such supportive patterns is that they can take up valuable story-time.

In pattern-import, the stylistic repertoire of a linguistic pattern A is partially realised in the framework of pattern B, and this could lead to a conflict of styles. As an example, Hoffmann (1988: 168-169) highlights the following narrative by a Turkish immigrant:

In the year 1960, a boy comes on to the world, in an Anatolian town. At the Black Sea, Sinop/Ayancik. When was 3 Years old, his mother deceased . . . The father married so many times until he had found the right mum to his children . . .

The narrative mixes the stylistic elements from bureaucratic institutions (“Sinop/Ayancik”, “deceased”) with elements from family communication (“mum”). The incompatibility of styles arises when these elements are not integrated but remain isolated in the text, thus impeding the pattern of literary narration. It should be noted that in the above narrative, the clumsy effect of pattern import is due to the limited linguistic resources of the author.

Strategies involving linguistic patterns of actions from the first and second language can take the form of pattern-integration and the mixing of patterns. In pattern-integration, a pattern from the first language is completely or partially realised in the second language. This depends on the degree of commonality between the two languages and the particular arrangements taken by the writer to render the integration understandable. Hoffmann refers to use of the fairytale pattern as a means of integration in the following example (1988: 170):

Back now to the girl Ayşe, who grew up in this village . . .
We’ll now let Ahmet travel from MOTHERLAND to FATHERLAND
and see what is going on in the village in the mean time, we will see what
Ayşe is doing . . . Let us now leave Ayşe alone with her worries and
watch the new life of Ahmet for a while . . .

The story of Ayşe who remains at home while her husband, Ahmet, works in West Germany is based upon the oriental fairytale type of text, in which the narrator addresses the reader directly and explicitly orientates the reader at transition points in the narrative. This differs from Western fairytales where the narrator is not so

evident. Nevertheless, the fairytale genre is common to both cultures and the reproduction of the stylistic elements of the Turkish fairytale in the second language text actually facilitates understanding.

In the mixing of patterns, a complete pattern A, realised in the first language, is inserted into framework of the second language and no precautions to ensure comprehension are taken. Hoffmann (1988: 171) is unable to find any examples of this in his corpus, so he offers a verse by Metin Oz, a Turkish songwriter, for illustration:

I work at Ford'ta.	(I work at Ford Company)
We fall asleep yurтта.	(We sleep in a hostel)
Hayatım mantar oldu,	(My life (or, my firm) has become mindless for me)
Bir kil var bu yoğurtta.	(There's a hair in this yoghurt)

The text contains mixtures of expression ("ta" 'as Turkish locative suffix) and the realisations of assertions in Turkish (final two lines); the alternation between the first and second language occurs throughout the song. Hoffmann explains that the song was written during a strike at Ford in Cologne and was addressed to Turkish and German colleagues, as well as the company management. The more aggressive passages are expressed in Turkish, and Hoffmann surmises that this was done to offer colleagues a certain protection against the management. Although Hoffmann's example illustrates a mixture of languages, he does not explain how this constitutes

a mixing of linguistic patterns of actions. His example could be more clearly analysed in terms of code mixing and code switching⁸.

Due to the difficulty of distinguishing some of the linguistic patterns of action and Hoffmann's lack of elaboration, we find his description of intercultural strategies on the level of expression more useful. Where instances of strategies on the level of linguistic patterns of action occur in the Chinese American narratives, they will be pointed out. Examples of language mixing, which Hoffmann describes as the mixing of patterns, are analysed in terms of code mixing in the next chapter of this thesis, where its function in narrative descriptions of intercultural discourse is discussed.

Hoffmann ends his discussion by describing three possible solutions to the problem of intercultural communication:

1. One solution is to adopt completely the perspective of the second language, with the long-term goal of forming a new type of literature. Such writing is characterised by the synthesis of patterns.
2. Another solution is to use the second language as an instrument of mediation, with the aim of broadening the perspective of the majority culture, of giving information and furthering understanding. It begins as a "literature of distress", seeking to overcome "speechlessness" (Hoffmann 1988: 172). While the second language remains dominant is such

⁸ Both code mixing and code switching refer to the use of two languages and are described in greater detail in chapter six, section 6.2.

literature, the culture of the second language is resisted as the writer seeks to reproduce individual experiences, characteristically through the stylistic devices of integration and installation. There is a sense of continual opposition to foreign norms.

3. A third solution is a new form of literature which is “*an authentic expression of minority cultures*” (Hoffmann 1988: 173). This type of literature speaks for itself and for those for whom it is written, since such texts “speak their own language (probably a specific variety of the second language)” (ibid.) and contain forms of knowledge and action that reflect exactly the situation between cultures. Although Hoffmann does not describe the intended readership of such texts, he seems to imply that the readers will also be familiar with the experience of being caught in the intercultural situation. He adds that this literature is still in the making.

Hoffmann seems to perceive these solutions in terms of three exclusive categories, with the third solution as the best. However, it is quite possible to see them as overlapping categories; for example, a literature of mediation may also be an authentic expression of minority culture. This can happen when a writer not only attempts to reach readers like himself or herself, who are similarly situated in the intercultural gap, but also readers from the second-language community. Such a writer may have both the aims of authentic self-expression and the broadening of the perspective of readers from the majority culture: the two aims are not incompatible.

Moreover, Hoffmann's ideal of an intercultural text that speaks its "own language" (Hoffmann 1988: 173) seems to wait upon the development of "a specific variety of the second language", which in turn downplays the sense of duality that is an intrinsic quality of intercultural writing. Even though the language of an intercultural text is constantly being adapted to convey the ethnic culture, it continues to register the presence of the community of speakers who use it as a native language. From this perspective, perhaps Kachru's concept of "contact language", discussed in section 5.2.2 above, captures the nature of language in intercultural writing more accurately.

5.3 Strategies for Representing Non-English Codes in Chinese American Narratives

The studies by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), Kachru (1987), and Hoffmann (1988) highlight the types of stylistic strategies that non-native speakers of English use to represent language variety, and consequently, cultural difference. An examination of Chinese American narratives suggests that they contain similar strategies and that representations of language variety in these texts also serve as salient markers of the minority culture: the non-standard language forms in otherwise standard English texts insist upon the existence of non-English sensibilities. In the following sections, we shall describe the various stylistic devices

found in Chinese American narrative writing and consider them in relation to those discussed in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), Kachru (1987), and Hoffmann (1988).

5.3.1 Non-English Terms

One of the commonest strategies used to introduce language variety in Chinese American narrative writing is the insertion of non-English terms. Drawn from the minority language, these terms disrupt the standard English of the texts and serve as important signs of the presence of minority culture in the texts. Frequently, they are visually highlighted through italicisation.

The setting of the following passage from Gus Lee's China Boy: A Novel (1991) is a Chinese banquet in San Francisco's Chinatown, to which Kai Ting's family is invited. Unfortunately Kai Ting's Caucasian stepmother, Edna, is regarded as an outsider by Victoria, one of prominent ladies in the Chinese community, who makes several attempts to embarrass her. The passage below partly describes one such attempt:

Victoria discreetly left a small plate of *duvu*, soy bean curd, at Edna's place setting.(1)

Chit duvu, in Songhai, means "eat soybean," or "to make a fool of someone without his or her discovering it."(2) Duvu, or tofu, is fine stuff.(3) Low in cholesterol, high in protein, environmentally sound in

production, and amenable to the rich spectrum of Chinese sauces.(4) But it lacks the historic class of duck, the traditional expense of lobster.(5) Cleverly seasoned and disguised, it tastes as good as the pricier platters.(6) But it is not expensive, and cooks who pad an expensive dish with *duvu* know that a deceptive expansion of volume, camouflage, has occurred.(7) Eat *duvu*, eat dirt without knowing that it is dirt, foreigner – this was the message.(8)

(Lee 1991: 169)

The italicisation of “*duvu*” { 豆腐 }⁹ in sentence 1 immediately differentiates the term from the standard English of the rest of sentence and foregrounds its non-English origins. The reader does not have to guess its meaning, since the explanatory noun phrase “soy bean curd” follows it immediately. Sentence 2 further reveals that “*duvu*” is an approximate sound translation of the term for soy bean curd in Songhai or Shanghainese, a northern Chinese dialect. It is also significant that the non-English expressions in this passage refer to a product that is specifically associated with Chinese culture. However, once the meaning of the term “*duvu*” has been explained, it is no longer italicised and appears as part of the language of the text. This suggests that the graphical marking of the term on its first appearance is aimed at highlighting its non-English character, which in turn alerts the reader to the cultural framework in which it will be used. As the rest of the passage reveals, the word “*duvu*” in the phrase “*chit duvu*” { 吃豆腐 } has specific meaning in a particular context within Chinese culture, and this meaning is only accessible to those with insider knowledge.

⁹ Throughout this thesis, Chinese ideographs are enclosed in curly brackets.

In sentence 3, another dialect term is used to refer to soy bean curd: the word “tofu”, which comes from the Japanese language. However, the Japanese derived it from Mandarin, which uses the term [doufu] to refer to soy bean curd. But, interestingly, unlike the Shanghainese term, the *foreignness* of the word “tofu” is not emphasized as it is not italicised on its first appearance. In fact, like the noun phrase “soy bean curd” in sentence 1, it seems to serve as an explanation or a more recognizable alternative that diminishes some of the strangeness of the Shanghainese version. This perhaps reflects the way the word “tofu” has entered the English lexicon and gained currency.

The insertion of a dialect term, together with an explanation of its meaning would be considered an example of the strategy of “glossing”, described in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989). Hoffmann (1988) refers to it as the stylistic strategy of “integration” on the level of expression, and his description highlights three important aspects of this strategy: (1) an expression from the first language is reproduced in the second language, (2) the writer ensures comprehension on the reader’s part by marking the integrated expression graphically (for example, through italicisation), and (3) inserting it in a context to help the reader grasp its meaning. In the above passage, all three aspects are evident, and the explanatory function completely takes over from sentence 2 onwards, as the narrator explains the insult contained in the phrase “*Chit duvu*”. The inclusion of this explanatory paragraph is an instance of pattern-implementation described by Hoffmann (1988: 166-168),

since a supportive pattern of providing cultural information is inserted into the pattern of narration of plot development.

While conceding that the strategy of glossing signals cultural difference, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin also interpret the inclusion of parenthetical translations to ensure comprehension as giving higher status to “the ‘receptor’ culture” (1989: 66). It is certainly true that the inclusion of explanations or translations shows sensitivity to readers who come from a different cultural background; however, the strategy can also have the opposite effect of emphasizing cultural ignorance. In the above passage, the insult presented to Edna turns upon cultural knowledge: the implications of being offered a dish of soy bean curd can only be understood by those who know exactly how soy bean curd is valued and used in Chinese culture. An outsider would mistakenly interpret the gesture as a sign of welcome and thus compound his or her humiliation by accepting the ‘gift’. As the narrator’s comment “Eat duvu, eat dirt without knowing it is dirt, foreigner” in sentence 8 makes clear, this is precisely the trap that Victoria sets for Edna. Thus, here, the noun “foreigner” not only emphasizes exclusion from the cultural community, it also connotes inferiority and cultural ignorance that can be taken advantaged of. While the inclusion of the explanatory comments ensures understanding of the cultural significance of the passage, it also creates a discourse situation in which the reader is placed in the same position as white, English-speaking Edna, as the foreigner, the uninformed, the outsider.

The different effect created by the absence of glossing or explanation is demonstrated in another passage towards end of novel. It occurs after Kai's triumphant fight with Big Willie:

"Tsou gou wan ba dan," I muttered wetly. I shook my aching head and smiled awkwardly with the wonder of it, my swollen mouth downturned when I thought of the fight. It was confusing, but wonderful. Liberation was sweet.

(Lee 1991: 391)

In the above passage, Kai's speech takes the form of the dialect phrase "*Tsou gou wan ba dan*". In contrast to his usual practice of glossing dialect terms, the author does not provide an explanation of the phrase here. Instead, the reader must deduce the meaning from the context. This strategy of inserting untranslated words from the native languages has been described by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989: 65) as a means of introducing language variance and forcing the reader to engage with the cultural context. According to Hoffmann's study, this would be an example of a mixture of stylistic devices since no translation is given, although the author has marked out the non-English terms through italicisation. From earlier descriptions in the novel, we may assume that the non-English terms in the above passage represent Shanghainese, which is Kai's native dialect. Although the statement is not explained, the reader deduces from the context that it is related to Kai's feelings about his victory over Big Willie, the neighbourhood bully. While it may be irritating to some readers that the non-English words are left untranslated, the

absence of translation seems to suggest that their exact meaning is not as important as the way they assert Kai's ethnic identity: it is significant that Kai's first words after the fight are in his native dialect, since it is precisely Kai's *chineseness* that singles him out and makes him the target of bullying. Thus, the cultural significance and the emotional force of Kai's victory is undiminished, in spite of the absence of translation.

In Fae Myenne Ng's Bone (1993), non-English terms are inserted into the English narrative to form a complex mosaic of language codes that characterize the linguistic behaviour of a Chinatown family. The following passage presents a dialogue between the narrator's mother and stepfather upon the former's return from a holiday in Hong Kong.

"*Ho lo?*"(1) Leon mumbled.(2) "A good trip, fun travel?"(3)
Mah nodded.(4) "*Ho ho.*"(5) Then she started on a long gossip ritual
about the relations.(6) "Blind Second Uncle's terrible fourth son
gambled away his father's business."(7)
"What kind of business?"(8) Leon was interested.(9)
"Who's Blind Second Uncle?"(10) I wanted to know.(11)
Mah answered, "Two cement trucks."(12)
"*Hor sick!*"(13) Leon moaned.(14) "Cement's good business."(15)
(Ng 1993:100)

The passage begins with a question that holidaymakers are ritually asked upon their return: "Did you have a good trip?" In the passage, this question takes the form of the Cantonese phrase "*Ho lo*" { 好路 } in sentence 1 and the English version is provided in sentence 3 as a continuation of Leon's speech. As in Gus Lee's China Boy, the dialect words are italicised and this differentiates them from the rest of the

text as another language code. Interestingly, the English version in sentence 3 retains an element of non-standardness through the unusual collocation “fun travel”. It is unclear whether sentence 3 represents Leon’s non-standard immigrant English or the author’s translation aimed at capturing colloquial dialect speech. However, it does manage to foreground the minority status of the speaker, and emphasize the non-English setting of the scene. In fact, it is through representations of their speech that the novel characterizes both Leon and Mah (which is the Cantonese term for “mother”) as immigrants in America, whose roots are in China and who never really become part of American society.

The reproduction of the Cantonese phrase “*ho lo*” /hou lo/ in sentence 1, with its accompanying translation, is another example of the stylistic strategy of integration, as described by Hoffmann (1988). Here, the reproduction of an expression from Cantonese into English is marked graphically through italicisation and inserted in a context that explains its meaning. The passage also contains an example of what Hoffmann (1988: 163) has described as “installation”: in sentence 5, another expression from Cantonese, “*Ho ho*” /hou hou/ { 好好 }, is reproduced in English without any accompanying explanation. However the preceding sentence “Mah nodded” provides sufficient context for the reader to grasp that the dialect phrase expresses a positive response to the questions in sentences 1 and 3. Moreover, it occupies the second position in the adjacency pair that routinely occurs in friendly enquiries about a recent trip or holiday. This complete context removes the need for any explicit explanation of the dialect phrase. Hoffmann (1988: 163)

cautions that this stylistic strategy requires the writer to construct the context so that the discourse pattern and the precise position of the expression within the pattern is easily recognized by the reader. In the above passage, we see that Ng manages this successfully with a discourse pattern that is found in both Chinese and English cultures.

In the ensuing conversation between Mah and Leon, there is no clear indication as to whether the dialogue is carried out in English or Cantonese, but the ethnicity of the two speakers has been sufficiently established through the dialect terms inserted at the beginning of the dialogue. In sentence 13, another Cantonese phrase is reproduced in English: the interjection “*Hor sick!*” /Ho-sik/ { 可惜 } may be roughly translated as “what a waste!” The phrase is left untranslated and it is the succeeding sentences 14 and 15 that provide the context which enables the reader to grasp its meaning. As another example of the strategy of installation, the insertion of this non-English interjection significantly disrupts the English rhythms of the text and re-emphasizes the Chinese background of the speakers. With most of the dialogue in the passage depicted in English, the dialect expressions contrast with the standard English of the text and signal the multilingual world of these Chinese immigrants.

In another passage from Bone (1998), we find another mixture of English and Cantonese terms. In this case, the mixing of codes in the narrator’s speech is explicitly pointed out.

I just said it.(1) “Ona.(2) Ona’s dead.(3) *Mo* Ona, no more Ona.(4) She jumped off the Nam Ping Yuen.(5) Ona *tui-low*.(6) The police told me.(7)”

I felt the shock fresh, hearing the news out of my own mouth, all mixed up in English, Chinese.(8)

(Ng 1998: 143)

Here, sentence 8 highlights the fact that the mixing of codes actually occurs in the narrator’s speech as she breaks the news of her sister’s suicide to her parents. The non-English terms are italicised to ensure that the reader does not miss them. In sentence 4, the Cantonese negative “*Mo*” /Mou/ { 冇 } may be translated as the English expression “no more”, and the parallel grammatical pattern of adjectival phrase + proper noun of both phrases reflects the equivalence in meaning, while simultaneously reinforcing the sense of shock and loss. The Cantonese phrase “*tui-low*” /tui lau/ { 跳楼 } in sentence 6 specifies the nature of her suicide, that is, jumping from a high building, and thus conveys approximately the same information as sentence 5, with the latter providing the additional detail of the location of Ona’s suicide. However, in this example of integration, the meaning of the dialect term occurs in the preceding sentence, and readers who do not understand Cantonese may not grasp this. Such readers will have to rely on the surrounding context, which indicates that the dialect terms refer to the topic of Ona’s suicide. In fact, the dialect terms actually do not convey more information than what is provided in English, which strongly indicates that they have been included for stylistic effect.

On one level, the dialect terms signal the non-English cultural sensibilities of both the speaker, who is the narrator, and her listeners, who are immigrant Chinese. The explicit reference to the mixing of codes in sentence 8 further foregrounds the speaker's bilingualism, and thus, her access to both Chinese and mainstream American cultures. However, on another level, within this episode in the narrative, the mixing of codes effectively mirrors the narrator's emotional upheaval and communicates her struggle to find the right words when breaking the bad news to her parents. Moreover, the double verbalization of the tragedy both magnifies it and demonstrates its deep impact upon the narrator's consciousness. Thus, the insertion of non-English terms in the narrative not only serves as a marker of ethnicity, it also contributes to the narrative impact.

5.3.2 Direct Translation

Another stylistic strategy that introduces language variety in Chinese American writing is the literal or direct translation of terms from Chinese. The terms are usually taken from colloquial expressions in the ethnic culture, and their literal translations, often without accompanying explanation, have the effect of novel expressions that have no ready reference in English. The unconventionality of these terms in the English-speaking cultural context redirects the reader to locate their meaning within the ethnic cultural context and it is precisely their contrast to

standard English that alerts the reader to the undercurrent of another language within the texts. Thus, these direct translations of dialect expressions signify the presence of the ethnic language and culture in the narratives.

This strategy of direct translation can be considered as an example of what Hoffmann (1988) describes as “transfer” in intercultural writing. According to him, “transfer” is defined as the reproduction or “imitation” in the second language of an expression belonging to the first language (Hoffmann 1988: 158). Kachru (1987: 132) also mentions the strategy “direct lexical transfer” in the nativization of cohesion and cohesiveness in the postcolonial text, and it appears to be similar to what we are describing as direct translation. He remarks that:

Such English lexical items have more than one interpretive context: they have a surface ‘meaning’ of the second language (English) and an underlying ‘meaning’ of the first (or dominant) language.
(Kachru 1987: 132)

Kachru’s comment emphasizes the way direct lexical transfer involves the resources of two codes for the representation and interpretation of such terms. Thus, the strategy both arises out of and expresses the multilingual and multicultural identity of these texts.

The use of the term “transfer” by Kachru (1987) and Hoffmann (1988) is borrowed from theories of second-language acquisition, where it refers to the interference of the first language on the learning of the second language. In using it,

the authors focus on the writers' first languages as the source of certain non-standard features in non-native English writing. In Chinese American narratives, direct translation of Chinese terms may be viewed as a transfer of lexical items from the writers' ethnic languages into English. It is a deliberate means of introducing language variance and often, stylistically effective.

The following passage from Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) contains a striking example of direct translation:

America has been full of machines and ghosts – Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five and Dime Ghosts. Once upon a time the world was so thick with ghosts, I could hardly breathe; I could hardly walk, limping my way around the White Ghosts and their cars.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 96-97)

In the above passage, and on a number of other occasions in The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), Kingston uses the word “ghosts” to refer to the American people. It occurs without supporting explanation and, following the standard grammatical pattern of English, is inserted in the noun position in the sentences above. However, the standard definition of “ghosts” in English makes the sentences unacceptable as the noun “ghosts” refers to entities that are non-living, non-human or supernatural. Here, Kingston violates collocational restrictions by unconventionally using it to refer to the living and human.

But the noun “ghost” is actually a direct translation of a common term { 鬼 } [gui] /gwai/ used to refer to non-Chinese people in the colloquial Chinese speech. Unlike English, in colloquial Chinese, the semantic scope of “ghosts” can include both the living and the non-living. When referring to the living, it serves to identify the referent as *the other*, or that which is non-self. Thus, when Chinese people refer to Americans (and people of other races) as “ghosts”, they differentiate between themselves and the Americans by labelling the latter as *the other*. The colloquial meaning of “ghosts” in Chinese culture may also be applied to other Chinese people, particularly in contexts where the speaker wishes to dissociate himself or herself from the person being referred to. In the above passage, Kingston uses a direct English translation of the Chinese term, but ignores the standard English restrictions on the scope of its reference and deliberately follows the pattern of colloquial Chinese usage.

The direct translation of the Chinese noun for “ghosts” { 鬼 } [gui] /gwai/ in Kingston’s narrative produces complex stylistic effects. The transference of its Chinese meaning into English structures creates an anomaly that directs the reader to consider the non-English space of the text. This non-standard use of the noun “ghosts” also acknowledges the influence of the ethnic language and its community of speakers. However, Kingston does not explicitly refer to them and it is the context and prior information in her narrative that points the reader to the Chinese influence in her use of the noun.

From the perspective of Kachru's study (1987), this example of direct translation may be interpreted as a device that "extends the cultural load of the English lexis" (Kachru 1987: 132). It appears to contribute to what Kachru has described as the "*contextual* nativization of texts, in which cultural presuppositions overload a text and demand a serious cultural interpretation" (Kachru 1987: 131). While the term "nativization" may be too strong, the non-standard use of the word "ghosts" in Kingston's narrative does allude to a frame of reference that is not ordinarily associated with standard English; it serves as a signifier of Chinese culture and its repeated appearance embeds the passage within a Chinese cultural and linguistic framework. Moreover, it inscribes the Chinese point of view into the text, such that an American person is regarded as *the other*.

Initially, the non-Chinese reader may not grasp this Chinese frame of reference and the unconventional use of "ghosts" could present interpretative difficulties. The list describing the various occupations in the first sentence of the above passage – "Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five and Dime Ghosts" – is a strong clue that Kingston is referring to actual people, and the noun "Ghosts" is easily replaced by common noun "men". But the unorthodox use of the English lexical noun "Ghosts" raises connotations of the strange and unnatural, which in turn forces the reader to reassess the conventional English definition of the noun "ghosts". Even more significantly, the repeated use of "ghosts" and "Ghosts" in Kingston's first-person narrative produces a sense of defamiliarization, which distances the narrator

from those she refers to as “ghosts”. As a result, it effectively conveys the quality of *otherness* that is central to the meaning of “ghost” in colloquial Chinese. Thus, while non-Chinese speakers may not perceive the influence of the ethnic language in Kingston’s use of the noun “ghost”, the direct translation or transfer is nevertheless stylistically effective in capturing cultural differences and the sense of disorientation that accompanies cultural adjustment.

In another passage from The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), we find another example of direct translation:

The women had only been taking a break from their gambling. They spread ringed fingers and mixed the ivory tiles for the next hemp-bird game.

(Kingston 1975,1976: 139)

The adjectival noun phrase “hemp-bird” is a direct translation of the two Chinese ideographs { 麻雀 }/ma-jeuk/ used in Cantonese to refer to the game of mah-jong¹⁰. In the above passage, the Chinese social environment is indicated through the setting of Chinatown and the clause “mixed the ivory tiles” provides a clue to the nature of the game being played by the Chinese women. But in choosing the unconventional noun

¹⁰ “Mah-jong” is itself an English transcription of one Chinese dialect pronunciation of game.

phrase “hemp-bird game” over the more familiar referring expression “mah-jong”, Kingston deliberately introduces a sense of defamiliarization into her text, making it less easy for the non-Chinese reader to identify the game being referred to. Even readers who understand Chinese must first retranslate “hemp-bird” back into Cantonese in order to identify its reference. Thus, direct translation can have quite complex effects in the narrative, even as it preserves the imprint of the Chinese language in the text.

Louis Chu is another Chinese American writer who employs direct translation as a stylistic strategy. The following passage from Eat A Bowl Of Tea ([1961] 1989) presents a dialogue in which Lee Gong confronts his daughter, Mei Oi, about rumours regarding her adultery.

“Today when I was having a cup of coffee at the Coffee Cup, I overheard three people talking about Wah Gay’s daughter-in-law.(1) *You* are Wang Wah Gay’s daughter-in-law, aren’t you?”(2) Lee Gong stared fiercely at his daughter.(3) “They said this Wang Wah Gay’s daughter-in-law knitted a *green hat* for her husband to wear!” he roared.(4)

“Where did you get such a story?” demanded Mei Oi, shaken by the accusation.(5)

“I just told you where I got it from.(6) Are you deaf? (7)”

“Propaganda,” said Mei Oi.(8) “Rumors. Just many-mouthed birds spreading rumors.(9)”

(Chu 1961, 1989: 130)

The passage contains two examples of direct translation: “a green hat” (sentence 4) and “many-mouthed birds” (sentence 9) are word-for-word translations of Cantonese colloquial expressions. In Cantonese, the ideographs for “green” and “hat” combine to form the expression {绿帽}/luk-mou/, which is used to refer to a husband who

has been cuckolded by his wife. The expression “many-mouthed” is a direct translation that preserves the word order of the Cantonese colloquial phrase { 多嘴 } /do-hau/ which is used to describe a talkative person. There is no explicit explanation of these phrases; it is the context and prior events in the narrative that enable the reader to grasp their meaning.

As in Kingston’s text, these direct translations are reproduced as part of standard American English sentences. Although the colloquial expression “*green hat*” in sentence 4 is italicised, this seems to indicate emphasis in Lee Gong’s speech in a way similar to the italicisation of the second-person pronoun “*You*” in sentence 2, rather than to signal the presence of a dialect term. What makes these direct translations striking is the way they convey familiar concepts through novel English expressions. The noun phrase “many-mouthed birds” is particularly unusual in its combination of English lexical items. Even as Chu literally translates the two Chinese ideographs { 多 } and { 嘴 } into “many” and “mouth” respectively, she also adds the suffix “-ed” to the translated expression. To understand the grammatical structure of “many-mouthed birds”, we can rephrase it as (ii) below:

- (i) many-mouthed birds
- (ii) birds with many mouths

The grammatical structure of (ii) consists of the head noun “birds”, followed by a modifying prepositional phrase “with many mouths”. A more conventional English

example of this structure is the noun phrase “*chairs with three legs*”, which may be rephrased as “*three-legged chairs*”. The fronting of the post-head modifier “with three legs” results in the deletion of the preposition “with”, the hyphenation of the noun phrase “three legs” and the addition of the suffix “-ed”. This standard English pattern of converting the post-head prepositional phrase into a pre-head adjectival phrase seems to have contributed to the formulation of “many-mouthed birds”, which makes the expression doubly unusual in English. Thus, “many-mouthed birds” is not simply an example of direct translation, it also employs the rules of English grammar in its reproduction of the Chinese pattern of adjectival phrase + noun head.

The visual imagery of the expressions conveys local flavour and characterises them as local idioms. They not only allude to the influence of the ethnic language, but also help to characterize the scene as occurring within the context of the Chinese speech community. In an English-language text, it is their presence that helps the reader remember that the dialogue between Lee Gong and his daughter does not take place in English, but Cantonese. Jeffery Chan’s introduction to the novel specifies that the variety of Cantonese being represented is the Sei Yap dialect (Chan 1995: 2).

In another passage from Eat A Bowl Of Tea ([1961] 1989), direct translation is again used to convey the colourful language used by Chinese male immigrants in New York’s Chinatown in the late 1940s. The following heated exchange occurs

when the barber, Ah Mow, jokingly suggests that Chong Loo may take the opportunity to court the affections of Mei Oi, who is Wah Gay's daughter-in-law.

"Go sell your ass, you stinky dead snake," Chong Loo tore into the barber furiously.(1) "Don't say anything like that!(2) If you want to make laughs, talk about something else, you trouble-maker.(3) You many-mouthed bird.(4) You want to get me into trouble?(5)"

"Nobody said you go after someone's daughter-in-law.(6) I merely said ...(7)"

"I don't want your ass.(8) Go sell it somewhere else, you sonovabitch!(9)" Chong Loo grabbed his brief case and stormed out of the barber shop.(10) The others laughed at his abrupt exit.(11)

"He has a bad temper," explained Ah Mow, "but he means no harm.(12) He's just many-mouthed.(13)"

(Chu 1961,1989: 112)

As in the previous passage, the noun phrase "many-mouthed birds" appears as a local idiom in various forms: in sentence 4, it occurs in the singular and is used as an insult directed at the barber; in sentence 13, only the adjectival phrase is used. However, its repeated appearance in the speech of the characters in Chu's novel suggests that it is a common expression in the Sei Yap dialect.

The phrase "make laughs" in sentence 3 also suggests an element of lexical transfer. The collocation does not belong to standard English, although it does seem similar in meaning and effect to the English colloquial expression "crack jokes". The non-standardness of the verb phrase "make laughs" alludes to the Chinese language, where the ideograph for "laughs" { 笑 } /siu/ occurs in the final position in the Cantonese verb phrase { 讲笑 }/gong-siu/, which is similar in meaning to the English verb phrase "to joke". Although it difficult to ascertain whether "make

laughs” is a concrete example of direct translation, its variance from standard English indicates the presence of non-English mind and speech styles, which therefore helps to embed the dialogue in a Chinese setting.

From the above examples, we see that the strategy of direct translation in Chinese American narratives installs elements of the ethnic language into the English-language text. The translations are always unconventional in relation to standard English. By introducing language variance into the text, they do not allow the reader to forget the presence of other language codes. When successfully applied, they help to establish the Chinese cultural framework that persists as a significant part of the Chinese immigrant’s world in America.

5.3.3 Culturally-Dependent Speech Styles

Another important stylistic strategy that introduces the notion of language variety in Chinese American narratives is the representation of culturally-dependent speech styles. Kachru (1987: 132-134) highlights this strategy as part of the nativization of rhetorical strategies, which reproduces the devices used in patterns of interaction in the native culture. The direct translation of idioms, discussed in section 5.3.2, can be regarded as contributing to the nativization of rhetorical strategies, as it conveys the texture of discourse within the ethnic speech community. It can thus be employed as a device for representing culturally-

dependent speech styles. Other stylistic means of reproducing such speech styles in Chinese American narratives will also be considered in this section.

Louis Chu's novel, Eat A Bowl Of Tea ([1961] 1989), contains vivid examples of culturally-dependent speech styles. For instance, in the final passage discussed in the preceding section, Chong Loo's anger is expressed through the swear words: "Go sell your ass", "stinky dead snake", and "sonovabitch". While the first and last are found in English, the expression "stinky dead snake" is somewhat unusual, and may be the direct translation of a Chinese term of abuse. But more importantly, the Chinatown setting of the scene and the fact that the characters are speaking the local dialect imply that all the words of abuse must be regarded as English equivalents of Chinese terms. While Chong Loo's swearing in this passage is clearly motivated by anger, other passages from the novel present swearing as a speech habit that characterizes even the friendlier conversations between male members of the Chinatown community.

In Chu's novel, the habit of swearing becomes a feature of the speech style of many of the older Chinatown males. The passage below illustrates a friendly exchange between men who are portrayed as early immigrants and long-time residents of San Francisco's Chinatown:

"Remember a year ago some Lao Tsuey ran down to South Carolina with Lao Ning's wife?(1) She's the niece of the president of the Bank of Kwai Chow," Chong Loo persisted.(2) "Have you heard the latest about . . . ?"(3)

"Wow your mother," said Ah Song, this time a little louder than before.(4)

Across from Ah Song, sitting on the couch, the proprietor, Wang Wah Gay, smiled his agreement.(5) “You many-mouthed bird, go sell your ass.”(6)

“Heh heh.(7) See you on the fifteenth,, Mr Wang.(8)”

(Chu 1961, 1989: 16)

In the above passage, expressions of swearing include “go sell your ass” in sentence 6 and “wow your mother” in sentence 4. The phrase “wow your mother” seems to be a sanitised version of a stronger term of abuse, with exclamation “wow” replacing “fuck”, which was probably considered too offensive in 1961 when the novel was first published.

As indicated in the above passage, both Ah Song’s and Wah Gay’s responses to Chong Loo consist entirely of swear terms. But Chong Loo does not seem offended; his departing words in sentences 7 and 8 indicate affability and acquiescence. Thus, while the replies by Ah Song and Wah Gay consist of rather strong swearing, their illocutionary force is a mild dismissal, that informs the addressee of the undesirability of his presence without causing offence. This exchange suggests that among the male speakers of Chinatown community, swearing can function as a kind of social cement that establishes the discourse participants as members of the same community. Throughout the novel, swearing only occurs in informal speech between family members or among friends, particularly Chinese male friends. Jeffery Chan describes the representation of swearing among the novels’ older male characters as an authentic product of the predominantly male society of Chinatown in the late 1940s (1995: 2). From this perspective, the novel faithfully records the language

patterns of the Chinatown bachelor society that was created by the Chinese Exclusion Act, enforced between 1882 – 1943, that severely restricted the entry of Chinese women into the United States. Chan further suggests that “the linguistic sensibility that lies behind these Sei Yap curses accurately reflects the combative nature of these bachelors who give no advantage in a land of trial, humiliation, and sacrifice” (ibid.). Thus, in the novel, swear words convey the roughness of the speech of Chinatown men, and simultaneously alludes to the toughness of their lives. It may thus be regarded as a speech style that reflects the hardships they faced as the pioneering group of Chinese immigrant men in America.¹¹

It is interesting to contrast this with the use of swear terms to characterise the informal English speech of America-born Chinese in Chinese American narratives published in the 1990s. For example, in Patricia Chao’s Monkey King: A Novel (1997), the informal speech of the narrator’s sister, a second-generation Chinese-American, contains numerous examples. In the excerpt below, she is responding to the narrator’s enquiries about their father:

“Oh, he’s nothing. He just yells a lot. He can’t do anything. I don’t give a **fuck** about him.”

(Chao 1997: 19. Emphasis mine)

¹¹ Studies of language and gender (Tannen 1994; Fishman 1983) suggest that while women appear to use more supportive and collaborative conversational strategies, men are more likely to adopt an adversarial style and use interactive strategies that allow them to seize and maintain control in conversations.

In Mei Ng's Eating Chinese Food Naked (1998), swear terms also punctuate the conversation between two second-generation Chinese American friends:

“How the **hell** are you? You visiting?” Helen said.

Ruby was tempted to say yes, that she was just visiting for the weekend. “I wish. I’m back home.” They were both quiet, then Ruby said, “My mom said you were working at Macy’s.”

“Hats and gloves. Another **fucking-shit** job.”

(Ng 1998: 111. Emphasis mine)

Like Eat A Bowl of Tea ([1961] 1989), the swear terms in the above passages only appear in informal conversations between friends or siblings of a similar age and, particularly in the excerpt from Ng’s novel, seem to serve as a type of verbal cement that signals the speakers’ common lingo. But here the similarities end: unlike Chu’s representation of swearing in the dialect speech of Chinatown bachelors, in these later narratives, the swear terms appear in the representation of English speech by American-born Chinese; moreover, they are not directed at the message recipient but used for emphasis and negative description. Their repeated appearance in representations of informal English speech between young Chinese Americans not only becomes a defining characteristic of their verbal exchanges, they also convey the impression of colloquial American speech. The smooth insertion of swear terms indicates the ease with which the American-born generation use English, sharply contrasting with the halting and restricted English of their immigrant parents. It may therefore be regarded both as a speech style that identifies these American-born

Chinese as assimilating more readily into American culture, and as one of the means that allows them to do this. Language is therefore an act of identity.

Another form of swearing is represented in Louis Chu's Eat A Bowl Of Tea ([1961] 1989), and the specific swear word used suggests that it occurs as part of a culturally-dependent speech style. In the following excerpt from the novel, it occurs in the speech of Eng Shee, who comes to visit a pregnant Mei Oi, and is highlighted through metalinguistic comments that are presented as Mei Oi's inner thoughts.

Little Georgie came running out from the kitchen.(1) He was crying.(2) "He took my cooky.(3) Ah Ming took my cooky, Mommy.(4) He took my cooky.(5)"

"You dead boy, what are you crying about?"(6) She grabbed little Georgie by the arm and shook him vigorously.(7) "You dead boy, you wouldn't cry like this if your mother dies."(8) She turned to Mei Oi.(9) "He is always like that.(10) For no reason at all, he's got his mouth wide open.(11) You two dead ones are no good either," she waved a menacing finger at Ah Ming and his sister, who stood mutely at a distance from their mother.(12)

"Children are like that," said Mei Oi.(13) "All children are like that."(14) She walked over and wiped the tears off little Georgie's face and went into the kitchen to get him another cooky.(15) She disapproved of the way Eng Shee had called her children: *Dead boy this and dead boy that*.(16) But there was nothing she could do.(17) In the villages one would expect children to be called *dead boy bitches and dead girl bitches* by their aroused parent.(18) But in America one would think that a parent, be it a father or mother, would feel more affectionate toward his offspring.(19) . . .

She began thinking of her own child in its fifth month of life.(20) Soon it would be born.(21) She would never call her offspring a *dead girl bitch* or a *dead boy bitch*.(22) She would shower upon it all the love she could.(23) She would cherish it.(24)

(Chu 1961,1989:166-169)

What strikes the reader almost immediately is the ferocity of Eng Shee's language when scolding her children. This effect is generated by the repeated application of the adjective "dead" in describing her children. Thus, she addresses Little Georgie twice as "You dead boy" (sentences 6 and 8) and the two older children as "You two dead ones" (sentence 12). In English, it is highly unusual to use the adjective "dead" in addressing another person, even when scolding him or her. Its insertion in the passage therefore signals the presence of another code. In fact, the adjective is a direct translation of the Chinese term { 死 } /sei/, which, in Chinese colloquial speech, is often used on the person who has knowingly or unknowingly caused offence and to express the displeasure of the speaker. The noun phrase "You dead boy" also matches the Cantonese phrase { 你死仔 } /nei sei jai/ word for word. Both the noun phrase and the adjective function as terms of general abuse in colloquial Chinese. Thus, even though the phrases "You dead boy" and "You two dead ones" may seem inappropriate and even offensive to English speakers, they contribute a non-English voice to the text and signal the Chinese cultural framework in which the scene is embedded.

However, if the reader fails to grasp this cultural framework, the subsequent paragraphs after Eng Shee's speech refer to it pointedly. Written from Mei Oi's point of view, they serve as commentary on the particular speech habit of using the adjective "dead" to refer to one's children. Sentence 18 specifically identifies Chinese village folk as the group of speakers who use it most often, and indirectly informs us of Eng Shee's rural (and by implication, uncultured) background. Even

more significant is the way the speech habit is perceived by Mei Oi as a marker that distinguishes between immigrants whose thought and speech habits remain unchanged from those in rural China and immigrants who identify themselves with America. Consequently, Mei Oi's receptiveness to American influence is portrayed in terms of a willingness to change her speech behaviour. Thus, while focusing on a culturally-dependent speech style as a means of characterisation, the passage also suggests the impact of the dominant culture of the host country, which can lead to changes in language patterns.

The representation of the culturally-dependent speech habit of using the adjective "dead" to upbraid the living is not confined to Louis Chu's novel. It occurs in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) as part of an angry outburst by the narrator's mother, when an American boy delivers medicine wrongly to their home. The narrator's mother regards the wrong delivery in terms of a curse, as the bringing of bad luck.

My mother muttered for an hour, and then her anger boiled over.(1) "That ghost!(2) That dead ghost!(3) How dare he come to the wrong house?(4)"
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 169)

Like Eng Shee in the Eat A Bowl Of Tea ([1961] 1989), the narrator's mother in the above passage uses the adjective "dead" as a forceful expletive. The phrase "dead ghost" in sentence 3¹² is a direct translation of the Chinese phrase { 死 鬼 } /sei

¹² While recognizing that (3) does not form a complete sentence, we refer to it as "sentence" for descriptive convenience.

gwai/, in which the ideograph for “ghost” { 鬼 } /gwai/ is used to refer to a non-Chinese person, as discussed in section 5.3.2. The insertion of “dead” as a pre-head modifier of the noun “ghost” in sentence 3 is semantically superfluous in English, since “ghost” already refers to the non-living. However, in Chinese, the combination of the two terms is permitted, since the semantic field covered by “ghost” in colloquial speech includes the living. The non-standard collocation English “dead ghost” may therefore be interpreted as the product of a different linguistic pattern that is permitted in the Chinese culture.

We find both the adjective “dead” and the noun phrase “dead ghost” in Jeffery Paul Chan’s narrative, “Sing Song Plain Song” (1976). Its appearance in the following passage from the narrative is quite unexpected.

My dead mother caught me posing with a tour group from Minneapolis. I was draped in a fox fur stole resting in the arms of a heavy-set domino champion mugging for the camera, drugged as I was by the soporific aroma of lilac sachet. My cheeks smeared with lipstick, I reached out for yet another warm embrace when Mah caught me by the hair and swung me to the sidewalk.

(Chan 1976: 28)

What makes the appearance of the adjective “dead” incongruous is that it is used to described a person who is depicted as very much alive. Since the paragraphs preceding this passage have followed the rules of grammatical standard English, a first reading of the noun phrase “My dead mother” in the first sentence would assume that it refers to the non-living. However, the action verb “caught” already suggests otherwise. The final sentence of the above passage confirms that, in the

time frame of the events being described, the narrator is actually referring to a living person, someone who is able to physically haul him away from the tourists. The use of the adjective “dead” thus seems bizarre according to the rules of standard English.

There are at least two ways of interpreting the use of the adjective “dead” in the above passage. The passage may be written in retrospect; the adjective “dead” thus signals the present time frame of the narration when the narrator’s mother has already passed away, while the events described occurred in the past. The lack of indicators, apart from the word “dead”, to signal this retrospective view may be perceived as part of Chan’s playful manipulation of time frames that characterizes the narrative. The other interpretation of the adjective “dead” is with reference to the Chinese cultural and linguistic framework, where the adjective “dead” is used to express the speaker’s displeasure. Thus, in the passage, it signals the narrator’s irritation at his mother’s interference. In fact, the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive and it is possible to read the passage with both in mind. However, it is important to note that the second interpretation is only possible within the framework of the Chinese code.

A later passage in Chan’s narrative emphasizes the presence of the Chinese code in the representation of direct speech by the narrator’s mother as she rebukes him and sends him home:

“Go home, you dead ghost, you nightmare, you know-nothing,” she intoned, sending me up the stairs.

(Chan 1976: 28)

Like Eng Shee in Eat A Bowl Of Tea ([1961] 1989), the speaker in the above passage uses the derogatory adjective “dead” to describe her own child, which interestingly reverses the narrator’s use of the adjective on his mother in the preceding excerpt. As in Kingston’s narrative, the adjective “dead” collocates with the noun “ghost” to form the non-standard swear phrase “dead ghost”, and it is the Chinese linguistic framework that lends validity to the expression. However, unlike Kingston’s narrative, the noun “ghost” in Chan’s narrative is used by a Chinese mother to describe her son, and therefore does not ostensibly refer to a non-Chinese. But in using it, the mother draws attention to her son’s lack of cultural identity and his infatuation with American ways, as the preceding excerpt from “Sing Song Plain Song” (1976) reveals. Like the other Chinese American excerpts discussed in this section, the representation of a culturally-dependent speech style in Chan’s narrative also introduces a non-English voice and sensibility into the predominantly English text.

In another passage from Eat A Bowl Of Tea ([1961] 1989), we find a different culturally-dependent speech style represented. The conversation between Lee Gong, the customer, and Wang Wing Sim, the restaurant manager, takes place in a Chinese restaurant. The two men have never met each other, and Lee Gong’s real motive for eating at the restaurant is to observe his prospective son-in-law, Ben Loy.

Lee Gong's hands still held the menu but he was not reading it.(1) "I want a little something to eat," he said.(2) Then, changing the subject, "What is your esteemed family name?"(3)

"My insignificant name is Wang.(4) Wang Wing Sim.(5) And your esteemed name?(6)"

"Insignificant Lee.(7) What is Ben Loy's esteemed family name?(8)"

"He's a Wang too."(9)

"Your beloved cousin."(10)

"Same village.(11) Same village.(12)" Wing Sim left for the kitchen to give Lee Gong's order.(12)

(Chu 1961, 1989: 29-30)

The dialogue between Lee Gong and Wing Sim is characterised by extreme politeness. The elaborateness of the language emphasizes the formality of the exchange. For example, in Lee Gong's first question in sentence 3, the adjective "esteemed" is used to describe his addressee's family name or surname. Likewise, Wing Sim uses the same descriptive adjective in sentence 6 when referring to his addressee's family name. In describing their own family names, both speakers use the adjective "insignificant" (sentences 4 and 7). Both of these adjectives belong to the register of formality and they signal the fact that the speakers are strangers who have only just met and are now engaged in the act of introduction.

The formal rhetoric, the turn-taking, and the content of the dialogue follow the traditional Chinese pattern of conversation that occurs on first meetings. In such meetings, introductions usually begin with inquiries about the other party's family name. Louie (1998: 7) points out that the traditional Chinese way of asking a stranger his name, { 貴姓 } [gui xing], literally means "precious/esteemed family name?" Moreover, in traditional Chinese culture, it is considered polite and

appropriately humble to lower one's own status and elevate the status of the other. In the above passage, this is expressed through the use of the adjectives "insignificant" and "esteemed" respectively. Even though Lee Gong is a customer and an older man - two factors which lend him greater authority in the encounter - he still refers to himself as the lesser person. Wing Sim reciprocates the courtesy, not only out of a need to please his customer, but also because of adherence to traditional Chinese custom. The result is an exchange of mutual courtesy and the giving of "face"¹³ (or respect), which is principle that controls all significant aspect of social life in the Chinese culture. Thus, in the above passage, the discourse between Lee Gong and Wing Sim is represented in a manner that reflects culturally-prescribed norms. Although the politeness of the above exchange is in stark contrast to the forceful swearing characterizing other speech situations, both constitute speech styles that contribute to the cultural identity of their speakers.

In Frank Chin's Gunga Din Highway (1994), where there is a veritable babel of speaking styles by Chinese American characters from different backgrounds and age-groups, a depiction of a conversation between a Chinese American mother and her son combines traditional formality with slang to create comic contrast:

"Go ahead, call him Pop, son," she says, touching my face. "You know, how he wants to be the first Chinese to play Charlie Chan. So how about calling him Pop, my Honorable Number Two Son?"

¹³ The term "face" means respect or reputation. While the concept of "face" is present in other cultures, it constitutes one of the key sociocultural principles in the management of everyday life for the Chinese adult. King (1994: 109) points out that it is one of the concepts in Chinese culture that continues to play a significant role in shaping the behaviour of the Chinese, even in spite of the modernization of social and economic life in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

Number One is piss. Number Two is shit,” I say, and she flushes red in the face.

(Chin 1994: 66)

The noun phrase “Honorable Number Two Son” makes reference to a more formal system of address in more traditional Chinese culture that signifies the greater importance of the male over the female, even when the former happens to be one’s son. Together with the adjective “Honorable”, the premodifier “Number Two”, instead of the more conventional ordinal numeral “second”, suggests the transfer of Chinese language structures. The whole noun phrase manages to convey a sense of ritual formality that is somewhat stereotypically associated with Chinese speech. The narrator’s use of the descriptive terms “Number One” and “Number Two” echoes this, but formality is sharply undercut by the pungent swear terms, “piss” and “shit”, in his two short declarative statements. The juxtaposition of formal rhetoric and swear terms creates a comic pastiche of narrative representations of Chinese American English, highlighting some of the stereotyping involved in its literary depiction. Thus, Chin’s representation of Chinese American speech styles contains ironic elements that subvert the cultural traits being referred to.

From another perspective, Chin’s representation offers a view of Chinese American English speech as the result of a mixture of influences: American popular culture, American speech, Chinese culture and Chinese speech. It is a view that blurs the boundaries between what is Chinese and what is American. If speech style is an indicator to the character’s cultural identity, then this alternation of cultural rhetoric

suggests the difficulties of establishing a stable identity by these characters who live between the two worlds of American and Chinese culture.

5.3.4 Non-English Grammatical Patterns

Another means of representing language variety in the narrative is through the insertion of grammatical patterns not found in standard English. These non-standard English patterns suggest the transfer of patterns from the ethnic language. Our earlier discussion on the direct translation of Chinese terms into English in section 5.3.2 did acknowledge the transfer of patterns from Chinese, but in this section we wish to focus on the transfer of grammatical patterns that does not necessarily involve direct translation.

Both Kachru (1987) and Hoffmann (1988) emphasize the influence of the writer's first language on his or her writing in the second language. Indeed, Kachru's formulation of the processes by which nativization occurs in the post-colonial text stresses the transfer of first-language grammatical patterns as a significant means of realizing local identity in the text. However, as the discussion in section 5.3.5 reveals, it is not a simple matter to determine deviant grammatical patterns in the English texts as the result of transference from the writer's first language. Moreover, perhaps because many Chinese American writers are American born and educated,

and English has become their home language¹⁴, interference from the ethnic language in terms of grammatical structure is not readily evident in their narratives. Nevertheless, we shall examine two passages from Maxine Hong Kingston's The Warrior Woman: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) which suggest the transfer of grammatical patterns from Chinese.

The following passage from The Warrior Woman: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) forms part of the narrator's musing about an aunt in China who committed suicide after giving birth to a child that was the product of an adulterous relationship.

If I wanted to learn what clothes my aunt wore, whether flashy or ordinary, I would have to begin, "Remember Father's drowned-in-the-well sister?"

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 6)

In the narrator's direct speech, we find the unusually long adjectival phrase "Father's drowned-in-the-well" preceding the noun "sister". In standard English, the pre-head modifier "drowned-in-the-well" would be more conventionally written as a post-head modifier, in the form of the relative clause "who drowned in the well". However, in Chinese, it is possible for nouns to be preceded by modifiers that are structured like clauses and the obligatory particle { 的 } [de] is inserted between the clause and the noun to signify its pre-modifying function. Thus, the Chinese version of the phrase can be written as:

¹⁴ See chapter 4, section 4.2.2, on language shift among Chinese Americans.

{ 淹死在井里的妹妹 }
 [yan si zai jing li de mei mei]
 drown at well particle for “in” particle for attribute (younger) sister

It is therefore possible to trace the non-standard grammatical pattern of “drowned-in-the-well sister” to Chinese grammar. In the context of the narrative, it preserves a sense of Chinese speech, which in turn, alludes to the Chinese cultural space from which the story of the narrator’s aunt arises.

Another example of an unusual grammatical pattern is found in the following excerpt from the second narrative in Kingston’s The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976). It appears when the narrator expresses her desire to become the female warrior, Fa Mu Lan, of Chinese folklore.

If I could not-eat, perhaps I could make myself a warrior like the
 swordswoman who drives me.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 48)

The negative formation “not-eat” is unusual in the light of the standard English of the rest of the above statement, particularly when the hyphen suggests that the phrase “not-eat” constitutes a single unit. While the meaning of the phrase can be understood from the narrative and linguistic context, the pattern of verb negation is not only unconventional in standard English, but the subordinate clause “If I could not-eat” would probably be written as “If I could stop eating”. However, a pattern

for subordinate clauses similar to the one in Kingston's text can be found in Chinese.

{	假	如	我	不	吃	}
[jia	ru	wo	bu	chi]
	If		I	not	eat	

As the above Chinese counterpart of the English subordinate clause demonstrates, the negative precedes the main verb “eat” and is part of the verb phrase, as suggested by Kingston’s use of a hyphen in the phrase “not-eat”. It is thus possible to argue that there is an element of transfer from Chinese in the unusual verb phrase “not-eat”. The presence of such unconventional English formations in her work allows Kingston to suggest the operation of other language codes besides English, and simultaneously introduce language difference in her narratives.

But while the presence of non-standard grammatical patterns introduces the notion of language variety in the texts and may even be validly ascribed to the influence of the ethnic language, it is often difficult to determine exactly when transfer occurs. In discussing the two examples from Kingston’s The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), we are able to relate the non-standard grammatical patterns to Chinese patterns; however, we remain cautious about relying on the notion of transfer in any deterministic sense. The following discussion will reveal why.

5.3.5 “Talk-story”

In The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), Kingston uses the non-standard lexical compound “talk-story”, which gains significance through repetition throughout her work. It occurs fourteen times in various grammatical forms and becomes characterised as a culturally important speech activity. In excerpts (i) to (xiv) below, its various forms are highlighted.

- (i) When we Chinese girls listened to the adults **talking-story**, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 19)
- (ii) Night after night my mother would **talk-story** until we fell asleep.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 19)
- (iii) At last I saw that I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother **talking-story**.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 19-20)
- (iv) Then they asked me to **talk-story** about what happened in the mountains of the white tigers.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 27)
- (v) “Here we’ll put on operas; we’ll sing together and **talk-story**.”
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 45)
- (vi) “When you were little, all you had to say was ‘I’m not a bad girl,’ and you could make yourself cry,” my mother says, **talking-story** about my childhood.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 46)
- (vii) And they would not simply ask but have to **talk-story** too.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 50)
- (viii) “That was a Photo Ghost,” said my mother when the students **talked-story**.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 65)

- (ix) She gave beggars rice and letter-writers coins so that they would **talk-story**.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 77)
- (x) Sometimes Moon Orchid seemed to listen too readily – as if her sister were only **talking-story**.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 131)
- (xi) “The difference between mad people and sane people,” Brave Orchid explained to the children, “is that sane people have variety when they **talk-story**. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over.”
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 159)
- (xii) I’ve watched a Chinese audience laugh, visit, **talk-story**, and holler during a piano recital, as if the musician could not hear them.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 172)
- (xiii) “No. No, there aren’t any flags like that. They’re just **talking-story**. You’re always believing **talk-story**.”
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 183)
- (xiv) Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also am a **story-talker**.
(Kingston 1975, 1976: 206)

The above excerpts from The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) indicate that “talk-story” functions as a verb, taking the form of a non-finite participle in (i), (iii), (vi), (x) and (xiii); a to-infinitival in (iv) and (vii); as a past-tense verb in (viii); and is qualified by modal operator in (ii), (v) and (ix). However, it is non-standard in English, both because it is an unusual compound of the verb “talk” and the noun “story”, and because the verb “talk” in English is normally atelic, so that it usually refers to an open-ended activity. In the compound “talk-story”, the noun “story” appears as the object of the verb “talk”, and thus diminishes the atelic sense of the verb. In contrast, the verb “tell” would more

suitable and replacing the various forms of “talk-story” in the above excerpts with the verb phrases “telling stories”, “tell stories” and “to tell stories” respectively would be quite unexceptional.

“Talk-story” can also function as a noun, as demonstrated in the final sentence in (xiii). In (xiv), the compound noun “story-talker” reverses the order of the verb compound, and the suffix “-er” is attached to the second part of the compound. The inclusion of the suffix “-er” to a verb is a standard English pattern to generate a noun signifying the doer of the action from the verb. However, in standard English, the compound noun “storyteller” would be more acceptable.

The unorthodox collocation “talk-story” introduces language variance in the English text, and serves as a sign of the presence of another language code. The Chinese cultural underpinnings of Kingston’s work make it seem likely that the non-standard “talk-story” is the result of transfer from the Chinese language. It is possible to draw parallels between “talk-story” and the Chinese expression for “storytelling” { 讲故事 }, in which the verb signifying verbal speech { 讲 } [jiang] is followed by the noun phrase for “story” { 故事 } [gu shi]. Moreover, the hyphen in “talk-story” appears to correspond to the use of the hyphen in examples of grammatical transfer in Kingston’s work, which were discussed in the previous section; it may thus be perceived as a visual signal for transfer.

It therefore comes as a surprise to discover that the compound “talk-story” is actually a common expression in Hawaiian English. If we were to assume that this non-standard expression in Kingston’s work is the result of transfer from the writer’s

ethnic language, that is, Chinese, we would completely miss this fact. In her glossary of typical Hawaiian expressions, linguist Elizabeth Carr describes “talk-story” as “fixed in popular speech – often, of course, as part of the conscious and nostalgic fun-language of young adults” (Carr 1972: 151). She adds that:

Talk story may reflect the influence of the Hawaiian language, where the single verb ‘*olelo*’ can mean ‘say, tell, talk, speak’.

(Carr 1972: 151-152)

This information indicates the Hawaiian language as the source of transfer. The fact that Kingston lived and worked in Hawaii from 1967 to 1977¹⁵ suggests that she would have been familiar with the common occurrence of “talk-story” in Hawaiian English, and this provides a basis for regarding “talk-story” in The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) as a transfer from Hawaiian English. However, Kingston makes no reference to Hawaiian English and within the context of her work, “talk-story” becomes associated with Chinese culture because Kingston uses it in predominantly Chinese frameworks, so that it appears as a Chinese social activity. As a result, the compound “talk-story” becomes *sinicized* through repeated association with Chinese cultural frameworks.

The case of “talk-story” foregrounds the fact that it is often difficult to determine the source of grammatical deviations in the text. While we might speculate that they are produced by grammatical patterns in the writer’s ethnic

¹⁵ In 1987, Kingston published a collection of essays about her experiences in Hawaii, entitled Hawai’i One Summer (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press).

language, and some cases clearly demonstrate this, we must not assume too quickly that that they represent cases of native language transfer, which would be quite misleading.

The ambiguity of “talk-story” as a dialect marker warns us not to assume too readily a simple correlation between literary representation and real life; it reminds us that in literary texts, depictions of dialect speech are subject to authorial manipulation and narrative concerns.

In his examination of the representations of the ‘Wessex dialect’ in the work of Thomas Hardy, Cooper warns against extrapolating dialect speech from the novels “as though it were an actual geographically defined dialect” (1994: 28). Instead, he emphasizes that:

Realist representations of dialect speech in literary writing do not work through exact correlation with an actual referent (an actual dialect outside the text), but are perceived as credible because they mobilise codes that are significant to the reader.

(Cooper 1994: 27)

Even as he plays down the correspondence between literary representation and actual dialect speech, Cooper draws attention to the fact that literary representation is meaningful to the reader because it brings into play those codes that are relevant within the context of the literary work. Thus, he discusses the significance of dialect speech in Hardy’s novels in terms of the way it functions as a sign of inclusion and exclusion: dialect use is seen a marker of the speaker’s lower social and educational

status, in contrast to standard speech. This is in turn based on the sociolinguistic definition of dialect as being outside the linguistic norm.

Similarly, on the depiction of dialect speech in fiction, Leech and Short assert unequivocally that “there is no question of absolute realism” (1981: 168). They highlight Page’s observation that the “principles of selection and concentration are generally at work to give fictional dialogue a quality quite different from that of real speech” (Page 1973: 16; requoted in Leech and Short 1981: 167). This is an important reminder that when writers choose to depict non-standard language, even where realism is important, narrative significance remains a primary concern. Thus, the selection and organization of non-standard language features is governed by narrative considerations.

Therefore, we perceive the significance of Kingston’s use of the term “talk-story” not in terms of the way it represents a transfer of a grammatical pattern from the ethnic language, but in terms of the way it functions as non-standard language in opposition to the standard English of the text, so as to underscore the theme of cultural difference in the narrative. Its linguistic deviance therefore serves as a sign of the minority culture’s difference from mainstream Anglo-American culture. Moreover, Kingston carefully contextualizes “talk-story” by repeatedly using the term in the context of the ethnic culture. Consequently, within her text, the non-standardness of “talk-story” helps to emphasize the speech act as culturally-motivated and culturally significant to the Chinese speech community. It is interesting to note that as a term in Hawaiian English, “talk-story” exemplifies the

contrast between Hawaiian English and standard English, and signals the influence of a non-English culture in the former; this sign of linguistic difference and its cultural import is carried over into The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976).

5.4 Interlanguage as Another Code

Besides the representation of Chinese dialects, the narratives also depict a form of non-standard English that appears to be the result of an incomplete mastery of the language. The representation of this form of non-standard English is not specifically discussed in the studies by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), Kachru (1987) and Hoffmann (1988), although it is implicated in their descriptions of language transfer in non-native English writing. However, its deliberate and not infrequent representation in Chinese American narratives suggests that it constitutes another code that contributes to language variety in the texts.

5.4.1 Sociolinguistic Descriptions

The term “interlanguage” was first coined by Selinker (1972) to refer to a version of the target language that constitutes part of the linguistic competence of the second-language learner. Appel and Muysken stress that:

Although the term seems to imply it, interlanguage is *not* a kind of language somewhere between the first and the second language with structural features from both, but rather an intermediate system characterized by features resulting from language-learning strategies.
(Appel and Muysken 1987: 83)

The above comments emphasize that “interlanguage” must not be considered a mixed bag of features from both the first and second languages; instead it should be viewed specifically as a learner variety of the target language with features that are the result of language-learning strategies.

According to Appel and Muysken (1987: 83-92), the features of interlanguage include: (i) interference or “negative transfer”, which refers to the influence of the first language on the learner’s acquisition of the second language; (ii) simplification, in which the learner postulates a simpler structure than the one found in the target language; and (iii) generalization, which can also be viewed as a specific example of simplification since it implies the narrowing of the range of possible structures. Of these three features, simplification appears to be the commonest, and not surprisingly, it frequently characterizes the textual representation of interlanguage in Chinese American narratives. Some of its features include the deletion of function words and morphemes, such as personal pronouns, articles, auxiliaries, prepositions and tense-indicating morphemes, and an over-reliance on content words from the target language (Appel and Muysken 1987: 91).

As Appel and Muysken point out, many learners do not achieve complete mastery of the second language; this is particularly true of older learners and those who remain isolated from the target-language community (Appel and Muysken 1987: 92). Instead, their language-learning stops at one of the intermediate stages, resulting in the *fossilization* of interlanguage structures and a more or less stable interlanguage.

Both the temporary and fossilized versions appear in the narratives, and provide strong clues about the character's immigrant status and degree of acculturation. Presented as yet another code in the speech repertoire of the Chinese American community, this interlanguage contributes to the language variety.

5.4.2 Representations of Interlanguage

In Chinese American narratives, interlanguage is usually depicted through non-standard English structures. However, unlike the non-standard forms discussed in the preceding section, which are inserted to convey the presence of a non-English code, interlanguage is usually represented in a context that reveals its status as a variety of learner-language. In the narratives, it not only marks the speaker as a second-language learner of English, it also provides important information about the speaker's immigrant status and the degree of adaptation to mainstream American society.

The following passage from Gish Jen's Typical American (1991) depicts a dialogue between Ralph and his American professor, Pinkus. At this point in the novel, Ralph's status is that of a foreign student from China and he has just asked Pinkus not to reveal his whereabouts because he thinks that the American immigration department will deport him for failing to renew his student visa. In the course of the conversation, Pinkus indicates his fears about his own position as a Jew, but in such an indirect manner that Ralph does not understand him immediately.

"I'm sorry."(1) Pinkus sounded tired.(2) "But one thing I need to explain to you.(3) Some men have to watch out for their reputation.(4) You understand me?(5)"

"No," said Ralph.(6)

"Even in their own countries, some men are not at home."(7)

"Not home?"(8)

"You read the newspaper?"(9)

"Chinese paper.(10) Once a while.(11)"

"Look.(12) Maybe I'm paranoid.(13) But the way things are going, pretty soon everyone's going to be a spy or a Commie or both.(14) Do you know what I'm talking about? (15)"

Ralph shook his head.(16)

"You should read the newspaper.(17) We all have to be a little careful.(18)"...

"People don't like you?"(19)

"It's a matter of religion."(20)

"People don't like you because of your religious?"(21)

"Where've you been, Antarctica?" said Pinkus.(22) "The Germans, for example.(23) The Germans don't like us.(24) 'Because of our religious.'(25)"

"Ah," said Ralph.(26) "I get.(27) You Jewish guy.(28)"

(Jen 1991: 28-29)

The above dialogue provides a revealing contrast between standard American English and the English of a second-language learner. Pinkus' competence in American English is demonstrated by his choice of the colloquial term "Commie" (sentence 13) for "Communists" and his manipulation of its structures for circumlocution. On the other hand, Ralph's incomplete mastery of the language is partially suggested by the brevity of his responses throughout the conversation, and more strikingly, their divergence from standard English grammar.

An examination of Ralph's speech in the above passage reveals it as a form of interlanguage. For example, his question in sentence 8 is an echo of the last few words of Pinkus' statement in sentence 9. However, there is a slight difference: the preposition "at" has been dropped. In sentence 11, the absence of the preposition "in" makes the phrase "once a while" non-standard. Other grammatical elements are missing in sentences 27 and 28: the pronoun "it" in the former and the verb "are" in the latter. According to Appel and Muysken's description above, the deletion of these function words may be regarded as instance of simplification, which is a common feature of interlanguage. The deletion of these function words do not obstruct meaning since the content words are preserved. However, it does reveal Ralph as a second-language speaker of English who has yet to master all the complexities of the language. Thus, the missing elements help to characterize Ralph's speech as a form of interlanguage.

Ralph's incomplete mastery of English is shown in another example of ungrammatical English that occurs in Ralph's question in sentence 21: instead of the

noun “religion” after the possessive pronoun “your”, the adjective “religious” is inserted, which goes against the rules for English noun phrases. The author emphasizes Ralph’s mistake by reproducing it in Pinkus’ reply in sentence 25 as a mocking echo of Ralph’s question, and it is part of the irony of Ralph’s slowness to understand that he does not realize his mistake. The inappropriate grammar contributes to the representation of interlanguage in Ralph’s speech, thus characterizing him as a learner of the language.

The representation of interlanguage in the context of this passage underscores Ralph’s status as a foreigner with a minimal understanding of the intricacies of American society and politics, as shown in his negative responses to Pinkus’ queries “You understand me?” (sentence 5) and “Do you know what I’m talking about?” (sentence 15). In the above passage, Ralph’s interlanguage is portrayed as another language code, which characterizes the speaker as an outsider to the English-speaking American community. In this depiction, language proficiency is intimately related to the degree of one’s assimilation in the adopted country.

In Amy Tan’s novel, The Joy Luck Club (1989), the English of first-generation Chinese Americans¹⁶ is represented as a form of interlanguage. This is vividly depicted in the speech of two first-generation Chinese American women, Auntie Lindo and the narrator’s mother, in the passage below:

“She bring home too many trophy,” lamented Auntie Lindo that Sunday.(1) “All day she play chess.(2) All day I have no time do nothing but dust off her winnings.(3)” She threw a scolding look at Waverly, who pretended not to see her.(4)

“You lucky you don’t have this problem,” said Auntie Lindo with a sigh to my mother.(5)

And my mother squared her shoulders and bragged: “Our problem is worser than yours.(6) If we ask Jing-mei wash dish, she hear nothing but music.(7) It’s like you can’t stop this natural talent.(8)”

(Tan 1989: 132-133)

The narrator is Jing-mei and the passage is written from her perspective, as indicated by the use of the word “Auntie” in referring to Lindo (sentences 1 and 5), and the repetition of the noun phrase “my mother” (sentences 5 and 6). There is nothing unconventional in the narrator’s English, except perhaps for the noun phrase “a scolding look”(sentence 4), which is uncommon but grammatically permissible. In contrast, the speech of the two Chinese mothers is heavily laced with non-standard features that are the product of ungrammatical English.

Lindo’s first statement at the beginning of the passage already deviates from grammatical English in its lack of subject-verb agreement. This is repeated in sentence 2, and it also occurs in Suyuan’s English in sentence 7. The lack of subject-verb agreement may be considered as another example of simplification and its repeated appearance in the English of these two first-generation Chinese Americans strongly suggests that it has become a fossilized interlanguage feature. Apart from this feature, we also find other examples of ungrammaticality: the deletion of “to” in

¹⁶ First-generation Chinese Americans are defined as Chinese immigrants born in mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, who subsequently settled in the United States. This definition is based on Li’s study on the language shift of Chinese Americans (1982), discussed in chapter 4, section 4.2.2.

the non-finite clause “do nothing” (sentence 3) and the subordinate clause “If we ask Jing-mei wash dish” (sentence 7); the absence of the verb “be” in the main clause “You lucky” (sentence 5); and the lack of the plural marker “-es” in the noun “dish” (sentence 7). These ungrammatical elements contribute the representation of Lindo’s and Suyuan’s English as a form of interlanguage that results from an incomplete mastery of the language.

A number of inappropriate English formations are also apparent. In Lindo’s speech, the clause “All day I have no time do nothing but dust off her winnings (sentence 3) contains a double negative, which in this case, does not make logical sense; instead the noun “nothing” should be replaced by “anything”. In Suyuan’s response, “Our problem is worser than yours” (sentence 6), the suffix “-er” in the comparative adjective “worser” is unnecessary and it appears to be the result of a generalization of the English rule of attaching the suffix “-er” to comparative forms. Both these examples of inappropriate English usage do not obstruct our understanding of the characters’ speech; however, they emphasize them as non-native speakers of English, particularly in contrast to the narrator’s use of English, which is completely confident and grammatical.

In the context of the narrative, the representation of interlanguage in the speech of the two women contributes greatly to their characterization as first-generation Chinese Americans. Through the ungrammatical English structures and the misappropriation of English expression, the text prevents the reader from forgetting the immigrant status of these two women and the circumstances that

compelled them to acquire English. In identifying them as non-native speakers of English through their incomplete mastery of the language, the text also hints at the other language code in their speech repertoire: their native language in which they are more familiar and proficient. It is interesting that in this passage, the speech act of boasting about the accomplishments of their American-born children is represented in an interlanguage variety of English. This suggests that the choice of language code is an important indicator of the nature of the topic being discussed. In chapter 7, we shall discuss this issue more fully.

These passages indicate that the representation of interlanguage in Chinese American narratives may occur quite extensively to characterize its speakers as second-language speakers of English, and serve as a sign of their status as immigrants. It is depicted as another language code in the speech repertoire of Chinese Americans, particularly those belonging to the first-generation.

However, the use of non-standard language to represent the ethnic voice is a strategy that contains inherent dangers. To be effective in literary discourse, non-standard language must be sufficiently marked to contrast with standard language. This results in a polarisation between standard and non-standard language, which can all too easily lead to stereotype and gross generalization. Blake points out that it is not easy to depict non-standard language without descending into caricature (1981:13). One area where deliberate stereotyping frequently occurs is in the depiction of ethnic characters in racist jokes.

Consequently, the depiction of non-standard features in the immigrant's interlanguage may result in it being stigmatized as deficient, and therefore, invalid. The following warning by Leech and Short applies to all literary representations of non-standard speech, whether in terms of dialect or interlanguage:

One of the factors to be reckoned with is the distancing and stigmatizing effect of using non-standard forms of language, including deviant spellings. The very fact of using such forms implies that the character deviates from the norm of the author's own standard language. Hence, non-standard speech is typically associated with objects of comedy or satire: characters whom we see from the outside only.

(Leech and Short 1981: 170)

Leech and Short point out that characters who speak a non-standard language are often viewed negatively, particularly in juxtaposition to the standard language of the rest of the text; they become objects of comedy or satire. Chinese American texts do not escape this effect, and part of the comic effects of the exchanges between Ralph and Pinkus in Typical American (1991) and Lindo and Jing-mei's mother in The Joy Luck Club (1989) arises from the non-standardness of the Chinese American character's English. More serious, however, is the distancing effect of non-standard speech, so that the reader is alienated from the Chinese American characters, which is the very opposite of what Chinese American writing intends.

In describing her representation of non-standard English in her novel, Amy Tan reveals that she used her mother's English as a model, and it is no coincidence that her mother is a first-generation Chinese American. She laments that:

Like others, I have described it to people as “broken” or “fractured” English. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than “broken,” as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness. I’ve heard other terms used, “limited English,” for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people’s perceptions of the limited English speaker.

(Tan 1996: 41-42)

Tan’s comments emphasize the way language proficiency is regularly and almost automatically perceived as a sign of the speaker’s mental abilities, and asserts that this should not be the case. Yet, her comments also underscore the fact that non-standard language has negative connotations, both in literature and real life.

The effects of satire are attenuated when the reader is allowed to identify or sympathize with the Chinese American characters. For example, both Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston portray the first-generation Chinese as resourceful and persevering in the face of hardship and disappointment. More importantly, the reader is allowed to understand the minds and emotions of the characters when they speak in first-person narration or through narratorial insight. Thus, in Tan’s The Joy Luck Club (1989), which alternates the narratives of American-born daughters and the immigrant mothers, the latter are allowed to present their point of view in first-person narration, which largely consists of standard English. It is only when the mothers’ speech is recounted from the daughters’ perspective that its interlanguage features are highlighted. This narrative strategy allows the reader to focus on the narratives of the first-generation Chinese Americans without the conflicting effects

of comedy and satire that non-standard language brings and to enter into their perspective. The non-standard features of the mothers' interlanguage as depicted in the daughters' narratives contrasts sharply with the standard English of the American-born and this serves as an effective stylistic strategy to emphasize the distance between the first and second generation of Chinese Americans through language differences. Moreover, the satirizing effects of non-standard language contribute to the narrative portrayal of the daughters' perception of their mothers as too traditional and culturally backward in relation to Anglo-American society to be taken seriously. Another example of the deliberate use of non-standard English can be found in Chang's "Hunger" (1998), where the first-person narration by Min, an immigrant Chinese who repeatedly emphasizes her poor command of the English language, is paradoxically presented in standard English. It is only in the context of interactions with other English speakers that the non-standard features of her English surfaces. Once again, non-standard language is used as a stylistic strategy to distinguish between different generations of Chinese Americans and between the Chinese immigrant and English-speaking American society. Its distancing effect is used here to emphasize the way Min would appear to outsiders as culturally and socially inferior because of language incompetence.

The use of standard English in the first-person narratives of first-generation Chinese Americans in "Hunger" (1998) and The Joy Luck Club (1989) suggest that Chinese American writers are highly conscious of the negative effects of non-standard English; they prefer to use standard language these first-person narratives,

so that the characters do not sound unnatural and alienate the reader. However, since the non-standard features of interlanguage are highly effective signifiers of cultural difference, Chinese American writers use it selectively and exploit it for important narrative effect.

5.5 Linguistic Signs of Difference

In this chapter, we considered some of the common strategies by which Chinese American writers represent language differences and thus, inscribe a sense of the Chinese culture in their texts. A recurrent feature in all the strategies discussed is the use of non-standard English, either in sense or structure or both. This is particularly effective since standard English predominates as the language of the Chinese American text: set against this context, non-standard English features appear striking and significant.

In the narratives, the use of non-standard English is closely associated with the immigrant Chinese community and its culture, and in helping to characterize the Chinese voice, it manages to foreground a Chinese consciousness that is essential to the identity of the Chinese American narrative. Moreover, its divergence from standard English is a textual sign of the cultural differences between the immigrant community and mainstream America. As a stylistic strategy, it not only alludes to the presence of the Chinese dialects in the texts, it also underscores the paucity of

the English language in expressing the sentiments and concepts that spring from a non-English-speaking culture, and hence, the necessity of translation and the rearrangement of English linguistic structures.

Language variance in the texts, with all its complex effects, not only portrays heteroglossia as an inescapable feature of the Chinese American speech situation, but also presents it as endemic to the Chinese American narrative. By textually disrupting the appearance of linguistic homogeneity, it offers the reader a sense of the several codes at play in the multilingual context of the minority speech community. In doing so, it introduces an intercultural discourse framework into the context of the narratives, whereby the distinct cultural character of Chinese America is enacted through language in the texts, and declares its separate identity from mainstream, English-dominated American texts.

CHAPTER SIX

LANGUAGE CHOICE IN THE NARRATIVE

6.1 Language Dynamics

The importance of heteroglossia as a defining feature of the Chinese American speech community is revealed in the way the narratives depict language variety through a range of stylistic strategies. Its representation not only establishes the availability of alternate language codes as part of the depicted reality of Chinese America, but also generates a dynamic picture of language interplay in the narratives, where the selection of one language over another, the visual insertion of a Chinese term instead of its English equivalent, and alternations between English, Chinese speech and interlanguage assume narrative significance. Heteroglossia comes to be associated with contesting languages, and the choice of one code over another is an act of identity, a signal that one set of cultural values and perspectives is preferred over another.

In the narratives, language choice is repeatedly highlighted as a significant aspect of verbal interactions between Chinese Americans and between Chinese Americans and non-Chinese. Since the use of Chinese, English or a form of interlanguage is related to group membership, cultural allegiances are enacted

through the language chosen in a particular communicative situation. Language choice not only contributes to the way the speaker wishes to be perceived, but also affects the way he or she is perceived. It is therefore an important factor in the power dynamics between dominant and subordinate groups and can be exploited to emphasize or bridge the gap between cultures.

6.2 Sociolinguistics and the Narrative

Sociolinguistics has long recognized the significance of language choice and its relationship to issues of power and control. Our understanding of the dynamics of language choice in the Chinese American narratives can only be sharpened through the insights that sociolinguistics has to offer.

This does not diminish the fact that the narratives are ultimately works of fiction, even if they contain particularly accurate observations of the Chinese American speech community (as chapter four has shown), and must not be confused with naturalistic data. However, the collaboration between real life and fiction in these narratives result in the depiction of discourse patterns that in many ways concur with sociolinguistic reality. As the narratives invoke, reproduce and exploit principles operating in the real world, sociolinguistics provides a useful vantage point from which to analyse such patterns and interpret their meaning in the context of the narrative.

In the following discussion, analysis of narrative depictions of communicative situations will be divided into two categories: (i) interactions between Chinese Americans and (ii) interactions between Chinese Americans and non-Chinese. Although the former involves members from the same cultural community, any easy presumption of homogeneity is dislodged by representations of linguistic and cultural divergences in such interactions. The latter may be classified as inter-ethnic interactions, where typically the language of the dominant group is chosen. Since an understanding of linguistic reality facilitates critical analysis of language choice in the narratives, examination of each category will be prefaced by a discussion of the relevant sociolinguistic research and concepts.

6.3 Sociolinguistic Descriptions of Language Choice

When a speaker has two or more codes at his disposal, the possibility of language choice arises. Thus, language choice is a feature that characterizes bilingual and multilingual interactions.

Fasold (1984: 180-181) describes three types of choices, with the warning that they are best viewed as points on a continuum from relatively large-scale to relatively small-scale choices, since it is often hard to separate them completely. The first is the choice between using one language instead of another in a given instance, which is sometimes called “code switching”; the second concerns the inclusion of

words, phrases or larger units from one language while the speaker is basically using another language, which Fasold calls “code-mixing”; and finally, there is variation within the same language. When code mixing involves only words, it may be termed “borrowing” (Fasold 1984: 180).

The Oxford Companion to the English Language (1996) describes four major points in an utterance at which alternation between codes can occur:

- (1) *Tag-switching*, in which tags and certain set phrases in one language are inserted into an utterance comprising of another language
- (2) *Intra-sentential switching*, in which the switches occur within a clause or sentence boundary
- (3) *Intersentential switching*, in which switches occur at a clause or sentence boundary
- (4) *Intra-word switching*, in which a change occurs within a word boundary

In the Chinese American narratives, examples of the first three types of code change may be found, and they will be pointed out in the analyses. However, no examples of intra-word switching were evident.

A more complex issue is the question of what triggers the choice of one language over another? According to Fasold (1984: 202), one or more of four factors tend to be mentioned in sociolinguistic studies of language choice: topic, participants, situation and location or setting. Although he does warn that the terms have a broad range of meanings and that different studies may define them differently, the list serves as a useful guide when considering the functions of

language choice. The possibility that language choice is the result of more than one of these factors also needs to be taken into account.

Appel and Muysken point out that one reason why code-switching and code mixing occur is because the speaker has not fully mastered one of the language or lacks facility in one language on a certain subject (1987: 118). They describe code switching in such circumstances as serving a referential function (*ibid.*). This function call for a switch between codes or it could be limited to borrowing. Holmes points out that people “may also borrow words from another language to express a concept or describe an object for which there is no obvious word available in the language they are using. Borrowing of this kind generally involves single words - mainly nouns - and it is motivated by lexical need” (Holmes 1992: 50).

Under category of referential function, Appel and Muysken also include switching between codes according to topic (1987: 118-119). In some cases, this happens not because the speaker is unable to discuss the topic in one of the languages but because he or she may feel that certain subjects are more appropriately discussed in one language, and so change codes accordingly. At times, the switching may involve only specific words from one of the languages because they are “semantically more appropriate for a given concept” (Appel and Muysken 1987: 118). Holmes makes a similar point when she comments that “[for] many bilinguals certain kinds of referential content are more appropriately or more easily expressed in one language than another” (1992: 44).

Language choice is often influenced by the relations between speech participants. According to the theory of accommodation in linguistic behaviour developed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977)¹, when people interact in a speech situation, they either reduce or increase the number of dissimilarities between them by adjusting their speech behaviour. The first, in which the speaker chooses a language or language variety that seems to suit the needs of the person being spoken to, is described as convergence. The latter, in which the speaker purposely makes his or her speech as different as possible from that of the hearer's, is called divergence. This can happen when the speaker wishes to assert his or her own identity and dissociate himself or herself from the hearer's group. When a speaker makes no effort to accommodate his or her speech for the benefit of the hearer, this is described as non-convergence.

Fasold points out that convergence and divergence takes many forms:

Speakers can adjust their linguistic behaviour in reaction to the person they are talking to by changing to a different language (or not), using words or larger units from another language (or not), selecting among within-language variants in one direction or another; and using strategies such as short-passage translation, modifying rate of speech, and maximizing or minimizing their accent.

(Fasold 1984: 189)

¹ Appel and Muysken (1987: 28) point out that the theory of accommodation in speech behaviour is based upon social psychological research on similarity-attraction, which claims that a person can make himself or herself more attractive to another person by decreasing the number of dissimilarities between them.

Thus when speaker wishes to accommodate the hearer and practise convergence, he or she not only chooses the language that the hearer is familiar with, but may also translate portions of the discourse and slow down the rate of speech. On the other hand, when a speaker does not wish to accommodate the hearer, he or she would deliberately speak the language of his or her own group at a normal rate of speech without regard for the comprehension of the hearer from another sociocultural group.

Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) further apply their theory to the linguistic behaviour of dominant and subordinate groups in a society. They predict that when the groups do not perceive any possibility of social change, the dominant group will speak their own language without making any linguistic adjustments (nonconvergence), while the subordinate group will seek acceptance by the dominant group through linguistic convergence. As highlighted in chapter four (sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) this pattern is evident among ethnic minority immigrant groups in the United States, which are not only expected to acquire English, but are also to learn the language of the dominant group, which is perceived as a means to social improvement and acceptance. In such a situation, if a member of the dominant group were to give up his or her prestige language and use the language of the subordinate group when speaking to them, he or she may appear to be mocking the subordinate group and thus cause offence. However, where social change seems possible, and the dominant group is in favour of the change, then there is the possibility of downward convergence, in which the dominant-group member shows

sympathy through convergence with subordinate-group's lower-prestige language. The subordinate group may even demand this convergence from the dominant group in the process of social change. Finally, when the dominant group is not favourably disposed towards social change, Giles, Bourhis and Taylor hypothesize that the dominant group would practise divergence, using linguistic differences to distance itself from the subordinate group.

Herman (1968) draws attention to another important aspect of language choice: the overlapping psychological situations faced by the bilingual speaker simultaneously. The three psychological situations highlighted by Herman are: (i) personal needs; (ii) the immediate situation, comprising of people actually present at the time of interaction; and (iii) the background situation, which involves "groups in the wider social milieu that are not directly involved in the immediate situation but may yet influence the behaviour" (Herman 1968: 494-495). In a given instance, the speaker may feel pulled in different directions when a personal desire to speak the language with which he or she is most comfortable conflicts with what the immediate and/or background groups expect.

Since the three situations overlap, the speaker will respond to the situation with most salience or prominence at a particular time. Based on empirical data on language choice in Israel, Herman (1968) concludes that personal needs gain salience when the setting is private, the situation provokes emotional instability and touches on central layers of personality; on the other hand, the immediate situation becomes salient when task oriented behaviour is demanded, the person is not

concerned about group identifications, and there are well-established patterns of behaviour characterizing the relationship between the speaker and the hearer; and finally, the background situation is most prominent when the activity occurs in public setting, the behaviour in the situation may be interpreted as providing cues to group identification and the person involved wishes to identify with a particular group or dissociate from it. While it is not easy to predict which situation will gain salience in a particular instance, Herman's central concept of the potential conflict between choosing a language that is most comfortable for the speaker and one that identifies with a particular sociocultural group highlights an important aspect of the language behaviour of bilinguals.

In attempting to predict language choice on the basis of social organization, Fishman (1964, 1965, 1968) conceived of the notion of domain and proposed that there were certain domains in which one language or language variety was more likely to be appropriate than another. Fishman defines "domain" as:

... a social-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a speech community."

(Fishman 1971: 587)

Thus, a domain consists of a cluster of factors such as location, topic and participants. "Domains" may also be described as "typical interactions [that] have been identified as relevant in describing patterns of code choice in many speech

communities . . . A domain involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings” (Holmes 1992: 24). Although the relevant domains can differ from one community to another, some typical domains include: family, friendship, religion, education, employment. According to Fishman’s theory, language choice would depend on the domain in which a speaker finds himself or herself.

Domain analysis has been related to diglossia, which Fishman (1967) describes as the distribution of more than one language or language variety to serve different communicational tasks in a society². Typically, in more formal and public domains, such as education or employment, the prestige language or High variety will be chosen; in a less formal or more personal domain, for example, the domain of family, the language of lower prestige, the Low variety, would be used. By taking into account the four factors of topic, participants, situation and location, domain analysis seeks to present the pattern of language choices that characterizes a community.

More concerned with how a person uses language choices to reveal his or her cultural values, Blom and Gumperz (1972) studied language choice in the Norwegian village of Hemnesberget, whose residents alternate between *Ranamal*, the local variety, and *Bokmal*, a standard Norwegian variety. They discovered that two types of switching occurred, which they term “situational switching” and “metaphorical switching”. As its name indicates, situational switching refers to language choice according to situation. For example, when the situation is formal

² Fishman’s definition of diglossia modifies Ferguson’s original concept (1959), which is limited to two related language varieties. See Fasold 1984: 34-43 for a detailed discussion.

and remote from local and personal concerns, residents of Hemnesberget will converse in Bokmal; however, when the situation is specifically related to Hemnesberget community, rather than the Norwegian scene as a whole, the Ranamal variety will predominate. In contrast, metaphorical switching employs linguistic choice as a 'metaphor' for the relationship being enacted, regardless of the situation. So for example, when a resident of Hemnesberget approaches an official who is also a friend, they will extend greetings and exchange news about the family using Ranamal, but then switch to Bokmal when conducting official business. In this situation, the switching reflects the change from a private and personal relationship to a public and official one between the two speakers.

Holmes emphasizes that metaphorical switching is motivated by the symbolic or social meanings of the two codes:

Each of the codes represents a set of social meanings, and the speaker draws on the associations of each, just as people use metaphors to represent complex meanings.

(Holmes 1992: 49)

Thus, when a speaker uses standard language or the language of the wider community, he or she invokes the values and status of that community; on the other hand, switching to the local language signals the presence of local values and concerns. Language can therefore serve as a means to, as well as, a marker of cultural orientation.

Holmes also describes metaphorical switching both as a “rich resource” and “a distinctive conversational style used among bilinguals and multilinguals” (1992: 50). Unfortunately, practitioners of metaphorical switching themselves seem to view it with reservation; Fasold points out that sociolinguistic research on language attitudes has discovered that “switching of the metaphorical type seems to be almost universally deplored by bilinguals as ‘language mixture’” (1984: 206)

Gumperz warns that we should not expect to be able to assign a single interpretation to each switch because “what is generated are preferred or possible interpretations, not clear and uncontested meanings” (1977:30). It is not possible to assign a specific meaning to every instance of code switching or code mixing. Sankoff (1980) makes a similar point when she discusses a speaker who used both Tok Pisin and Buang in New Guinea within a single context: the use of both languages was an important means of keeping in touch with all segments of his audience, but exactly what was said in one language or another did not seem as important.

6.4 Chinese-American Interactions in the Narratives

As revealed in chapter five, the codes that constitute the speech repertoire of Chinese American community is depicted in the narratives as consisting of English, Chinese and a type of learner’s English, that is best described as an interlanguage.

Interlanguage as an adaptive strategy for the immigrant must also be regarded as a separate code, since, in the narratives, it is often depicted as the only variety of English that first-generation Chinese Americans manage to acquire. Thus, representations of this code often signals the identity of the speaker as a first-generation Chinese American, particularly in contrast to the grammatical English used by later generations of Chinese Americans.

6.4.1 Language Choice of First-Generation Chinese Americans

The following excerpt from Gish Jen's Typical American (1991) depicts a meeting between first-generation Chinese Americans. The scene takes place in the home of Old Chao and Janis, who have invited Ralph, Helen and Theresa over for dinner, with the aim of introducing Theresa, Ralph's unmarried older sister, to Grover Ding.

"So long since we've seen each other," said Ralph.

"Too long, too long. Come in! Ah yes! And this, if I'm not mistaken, is your Older Sister."

"How did you know?"

"When I was looking for you," explained Theresa. "Remember? We met then. He was very helpful." She nodded and smiled.

"That's right, you should thank me," joked Old Chao. "If it weren't for me and your Older Sister, you'd probably have landed up a beggar."

"Ah," said Ralph.

"Well, maybe not a beggar," put in Helen, comfortingly.

"That's right! How could you land up a beggar? Don't listen to him!"
Janis gestured with unusual vivacity. *"He thinks this is China! As if there are beggars here!"*

...

"Let me introduce –" Now Janis, in the living room, was speaking English.

(Jen 1991: 91-92)

Although the characters' conversation is represented in English, italicisation is used to indicate Chinese speech. Moreover, the recurrent use of the term "Older Sister" by Old Chao to refer to Theresa when talking to Ralph suggests the representation of the Chinese language, as "Older Sister" is a direct translation of the Chinese address term, specifying the order of birth and the sex of siblings.

Although the setting is America, not China, the novel emphasizes the privileging of ethnicity through language when it depicts the characters choosing to speak their ethnic language. The Chinese language is used not only to signal a shared ethnicity, but also the shared experience of being Chinese immigrants. Thus, the ethnic language marks the speakers as sharing a common cultural background, and encourages the reader to view them as one social group, even though tension exists between Old Chao and Ralph.

The significance of language choice is emphasized when Janis, the hostess, switches to English to introduce Grover Ding. This example of code switching, where one language is used instead of another in a given instance, marks a topic change in the her conversation and inserts an element of formality to her discourse, precisely because English is not the language of private and informal domains but

related to the wider community and hence, associated with public and formal usage. In the text, Janis' change of codes not only marks the appearance of a new character, it also affects the reader's perception of him as different and somehow important since the language of the dominant society is used in relation to him. Moreover, the language switch characterizes Grover as a non-Chinese speaker, thus strongly suggesting his separateness from the group, which, in fact, is the case.

While Grover Ding is also a Chinese American, he is portrayed as different from the others, both in terms of outlook and ambition. This difference is underscored by the fact that he speaks English, rather than Chinese, and it is specifically referred to later in the narrative:

Only Grover said nothing. Here everyone was, speaking English out of consideration for him, and he was too occupied to listen.

(Jen 1991: 94)

The excerpt also reveals the group's switch to English as an act of accommodation towards the non-Chinese speaker, who is however too preoccupied with his own concerns to participate in the conversation. His unresponsiveness is an act of nonconvergence, which reveals the character's sense of self-importance and self-absorption.

The social significance of language choice is constantly exploited in the narratives. Because the setting of the narratives is America, the use of English or Chinese by the characters is always related to issues of power and prestige. By

characterizing Grover as an English speaker, Jen's novel associates him with the language of the dominant group. In this way, it not only suggests his ease and familiarity with American culture, but also portrays him as a man of power and control, which is how Ralph and Helen come to see him. The novel confirms this perspective of Grover when it first shows how Grover tricks Old Chao into letting him take his car for a joy ride, and later, when it describes how Ralph is disastrously duped into becoming his business partner and scapegoat. In this association between language and power, the other Chinese American characters' incomplete mastery of English acts a sign of their less confident progress in American society.

A similar relationship between language and power is invoked in Chang's novella, "Hunger" (1998). The excerpt below depicts the narrator's first encounter with Tian, her future husband, in a Chinese restaurant in Manhattan where she works as a waitress:

"One person," he said, in confident English. At that time, in 1967, many new Chinese had come to live on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Most of them turned up at the restaurant, sooner or later. But not many spoke English with such ease. He wore a brown felt hat, and his overcoat seemed cut to fit his shoulders; most of the other men seemed content to wear whatever would make do.

"Come with me," I replied, in Mandarin. I did not want him to hear my voice in broken English words.

(Chang 1998: 12)

In an American context where both participants are Chinese, there is a choice of using English or Chinese. Choosing the latter tends to signal ethnic group solidarity, but Tian chooses English, the language of the dominant society, which carries with

it the connotations of prestige and power. Tian's confident use of English is thus represented through the eyes of the narrator as evidence of his facility with English and one of the signs of his success and confidence in English-speaking American society. The narrative later reveals that he is not as fluent nor as confident as he appears in this first encounter.

Embarrassed by her poor command of English, the narrator chooses to reply in Mandarin. In this case, her use of Mandarin is not an act of divergence, but a result of embarrassment over her own language incompetence. However, her language choice also functions as a narrative sign of her identity as a recent immigrant who has not acquired the language of the host country, nor adjusted fully with the host culture.

When Tian returns to the restaurant to look for his hat, his choice of code changes.

“You might have something of mine,” he said, in Mandarin this time.

“I don't think so.”

“Would you please take a look?”

(Chang 1998: 13-14)

In the above passage, Tian's use of Mandarin can be interpreted as an act of convergence, based on his earlier experience of the narrator's preference for Mandarin rather than English. He is also seeking her help and is therefore showing sensitivity to the needs of the person he is addressing in order to secure her

cooperation. Language choice, in this case, can be regarded as determined by the situation and the participants. But, more importantly, the narrative highlights Tian's choice of Mandarin to signal a change in the relationship between him and the narrator, from one that is strictly functional to a more personal one, as from this point on, the narrative concentrates on the new life they build together.

Mandarin becomes associated with the private domain in "Hunger" (1998): it is the language of home and the one used to discuss personal matters between the narrator and Tian. Thus, when English words appear in their predominantly Mandarin conversations, they acquire significance. In the following excerpt, Tian breaks the news to the narrator that he did not obtain the promotion that would have secured his teaching career in the music school:

"I was 'passed over.'" Carefully, he sounded out the English words.
"What does that mean?" I asked as gently as I could.
"It means I didn't get the job."

(Chang 1998: 33)

In the above text, the insertion of the English phrase "passed over" in an otherwise Mandarin speech is both an example of tag-switching and intra-sentential switching, according to The Oxford Companion To The English Language (1996), or more simply, in Fasold's terminology, "code-mixing". It is highlighted by the accompanying narratorial comment "Carefully, he sounded out the English words." This narratorial comment not only refers to the act of pronunciation, it also implies the unaccustomed use of these English lexical items, which in turn suggests the

unexpectedness and the undesirability of the information. Why does Tian code-mix in this instance? It is not for the benefit of the narrator who requires a Mandarin translation of the phrase. Yet the choice of English at this important moment calls up all that is connected with the language within the world of the narrative: English as the language of the world outside the home, of Tian's employers, the language associated with power, and in this case, the language of exclusion. The quotation marks around the English phrase "passed over" reinforces the impression that it is a phrase Tian has heard, perhaps from the ones who informed him of the school's decision, and is now repeating. Therefore, Tian's use of it can be interpreted as a reference to the English-speaking establishment who have decided to keep him out, which in turn underscores his minority position and powerlessness. From this perspective, this instance of code-mixing may be described as metaphorical switching, as it draws upon the social implications of the code. Through language dynamics, the text manages to convey the uneasy relations between an immigrant and the dominant society.

6.4.2 Language Choice of American-born Chinese Americans

Without exception, the narratives emphasize English as the language choice among American-born Chinese. This falls in with the pattern of language shift towards English among second and later generations of Chinese Americans

highlighted in sociolinguistic research and mirrored in the narratives (see chapter five).

Ng's novel, *Bone* (1993), makes a further distinction between second-generation Chinese Americans who live in Chinatown and maintain to some extent their ethnic language, and those distanced from their ethnic community and language. This distinction is portrayed in terms of a disparity in sociocultural knowledge that is revealed through speech behaviour. The following passage depicts an episode between Dale, a Chinese American who lives in the suburbs and speaks only English, and the narrator, Mason and Zeke, all of whom reside in Chinatown and are bilingual in both English and Chinese.

Just before the Redwood City exit, Mason warned me that if his Aunt Lily wasn't home a half hour was the max he'd stay. He said he couldn't stand talking any longer to Dale. "The guy sounds so white."

It wasn't Dale's fault, but I didn't say anything. Dale grew up on the peninsula and went to an all-white school, so how else was he supposed to talk? I've met a lot of kids like him: fourth-, fifth-, even sixth-generation kids who had no Chinese. To me, they just sound like English was their only language, nothing wrong with that.

Zeke tooted on the long driveway and Dale came out of the range-style house to meet us.

Mason pulled up alongside the Mercedes and got out. He nodded hello and handed Dale the keys.

Dale tossed them in the air. "Thanks, I really appreciate this." He tossed them up again. "What do I owe you?"

"Forget about it."

"No. Really, I'd like to pay you for your time."

Mason had that look on his face, that fuck-this-guy look. I knew that look; it was not good. Money was out of the question. What was this? If money was a question, Dale should've taken it to a shop. Why'd he ask Mason?

But Dale had no clue. He had no idea what was what. He didn't even know that Mason was doing him a family favor.

(Ng 1993: 43-44)

Although all the characters in the above excerpt are American-born and speak English fluently, the differences between them are highlighted through language. When the narrative portrays Mason saying, "The guy sounds so white", it foregrounds language behaviour as a marker of group membership and a signifier of the differences among second-generation Chinese Americans.

The interaction between Dale and Mason in the above passage reveals that their differences do not reside in accent but in the sociocultural presuppositions that direct their speech behaviour, which is part of the what sociolinguists describe as "communicative competence". Saville-Troike explains that:

Communicative competence involves not only knowing the language code, but also what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. It deals with the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have to enable them to use and interpret linguistic forms.

(Saville-Troike 1982: 22)

Communicative competence consists of the knowledge that one acquires in learning to use a code within a particular speech community and exercising such competence therefore identifies the speaker as a member of a particular sociocultural group. In the above passage, when Dale insists on discussing payment, it is interpreted as a sign of rudeness by the rest, because he should have understood Mason's response

“Forget about it” as a reference to family obligations, which dictate that doing a favour for one’s relative is more important than monetary payment. The linguistic impasse underscores the divergent frameworks that each speaker brings to the conversation: while Mason applies a Chinese cultural framework of family obligations, Dale relies on a different framework which measures time in terms of money. The latter’s application of a commercial principle in what the others perceive as a family matter leads to a communication breakdown that reinforces Mason’s negative view of Dale. In this case, the situation is made worse because Dale is a Chinese American, and is therefore expected to have the same cultural knowledge and carry out the appropriate speech acts. But as the narrator’s comments in the second paragraph of the above passage reveals, Dale grew up among white Americans and learnt his English from them, acquiring the sociocultural framework of that speech community in the process. The text therefore emphasizes Dale’s cultural difference in terms of a lack of communicative competence that would have helped him to frame the right response in this verbal exchange between speakers who are ostensibly from the same ethnic group.

Such differences among second-generation Chinese Americans is also implied in Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club (1989) and Patricia Chao’s Monkey King: A Novel (1997). In the former, the character, Waverly Jong, who is described by her mother as only Chinese in appearance while “Inside – she is all American-made”, is no longer proficient in her ethnic language; the text suggests that her success as a lawyer in an American firm is in direct proportion to her alienation from her ethnic

roots, as represented by her mother. On the other hand, Jing-mei Woo, another second-generation Chinese American, appears closer to her ethnic roots when she is described as accompanying her mother on frequent trips to Chinatown, and as experiencing a sense of identification with her relatives in China. Not surprisingly, the text also emphasizes her ability to communicate with her parents in Chinese. In Monkey King: A Novel (1997), the narrator emphasizes the differences between herself and Grace, another American-born Chinese, in terms of the way the latter had grown up in Chinatown, speaks fluent Mandarin, as well as English, while she herself could not speak Mandarin and only went to Chinatown once a month as a child. Consequently, while Grace moves fluidly in Chinese society, the narrator feels disengaged from it.

Thus, in the narratives, American-born Chinese Americans are characterized as competent speakers of American English, already adept at interacting with the English-speaking wider American community or they quickly learn to be. In some narratives, such as Patricia Chao's Monkey King: A Novel (1997) and Mei Ng's Eating Chinese Food Naked (1998), the closeness of their speech to the American model is conveyed through the inclusion of swear terms from American slang, as discussed in chapter five, section 5.3.3. However, as the above passage from Bone (1993) illustrates, there are differences in the language behaviour of these Chinese Americans, which stem from the individual's awareness of the ethnic sociocultural rules and his or her ability to translate those rules into the context of English speech. This is in turn related to degree of contact the speaker has with his or her own

Chinese speech community and becomes a narrative marker of the speaker's sense of cultural identification.

6.4.3 Interactions Between First and Later Generations

Interactions between first and later generations of Chinese Americans are shaped by differences in language that signal generational and cultural differences. In such interactions, there is a choice between English, Chinese or an interlanguage of English. Since in many narratives, the American-born generation are depicted as being only able to communicate in English, their immigrant parents are characterised as speaking to them in a version of fossilized learner's English. The choice of code is thus determined by the American-born generation's language competence.

In the sequel to Typical American (1991), the American-born daughters of Ralph and Helen have become teenagers, with the benefit of an American education. The following excerpt from Mona In The Promised Land (1996) depicts a conversation between Helen and her daughter about Alfred, their restaurant cook, who intends to sue them for racial discrimination, which was ironically inspired by a discussion on the topic with Mona and her friends.

“Mom,” Mona says. “You were never going to promote Alfred. Because he was black.”

"First of all, we hired Alfred when no one would give him a job. He should thank us instead of sue us! And how do you think he got to be cook if we didn't promote him? As for new promotion, since when do we owe someone promotion? We don't owe him anything."

"But Alfred could only go so far, when it came to —"

"Second of all," continues Helen, "parents are racist, parents are not racist, even parents are Communist, a daughter has no business talk like that. You talk like that is like slap your own mother in the face!"

"I didn't mean to slap you in the face, Ma. We were just having a discussion about racism, which happens to be an important social problem, and in that context —"

"Context! Social problem! What kind of talk is that?"

Mona closes up the dishwasher. "It's a free country, I can talk however I want. It's my right."

"Free country! Right! In this house, no such thing!"

More social analysis: "That's exactly the problem! Everywhere else is America, but in this house it's China!"

"That's right! No America here! In this house, children listen to parents!"

(Jen 1996: 250)

In the above exchange, Helen has no choice but to speak to her daughter, Mona, in English, since the latter is practically an English monolingual. The text portrays Mona's ease with the language as a sign of her integration into the wider American community and her assimilation of its values is most evident in her comment: "It's a free country, I can talk however I want. It's my right." The cultural and generational differences are portrayed in terms of the way Helen holds onto a different set of values, which is expressed in the form of an interaction rule that dictate that Chinese children should not contradict or argue with their parents.

Although Helen is able to express herself quite forcefully on a number of issues in English, it becomes noticeable that her language differs grammatically from her daughter's. Unlike Mona's fluency with a variety of sentence structure and

tense, the text represents Helen's English as restricted to relatively simple clauses and the use of simple present and past tense. In the sentence "... parents are racist, parents are not racist, even parents are Communist, a daughter has no business talk like that", the clauses run from one to another, with a lack of proper conjunction and punctuation. This series of clauses effectively conveys the intensity of her emotions but it also displays the narrow range of grammatical structures within her grasp. The absence of subordination and incorrect form of the verb "slap" in the statement "You talk like that is like slap your own mother in the face!" are other striking examples of Helen's non-standard English. Helen's speech, in the form of a learner's English or interlanguage, therefore identifies her immigrant background and places her on the margins of the dominant American society. The text suggests that Helen considers the home as the bastion of ethnic culture and values through her vehement declaration: "No America here!" Mona, on the other hand, is characterised as adopting the speech behaviour of Anglo-American society within the family domain, for which she is soundly rebuked. Thus, although the narrative portrays Helen as speaking English, it underscores the differences in her variety of English through non-standard linguistic forms and interactions rules that stem from a Chinese cultural framework. The verbal exchange between mother and daughter thus becomes the site of conflicting cultural codes.

Interactions between an American-born daughter and her immigrant mother are central moments in the narrative of Bone (1993). The choice of codes involves

both Chinese and English. In the following excerpt, the narrator is Leila, the daughter, who breaks the news of her marriage to her mother at her mother's shop.

As soon as the woman and her child walked out the door, I went up to Mah and started out in Chinese, "I want to tell you something."

Mah looked up, wide-eyed, expectant.

I switched to English, "Time was right, so Mason and I just went to City Hall. We got married there."

Mah's expression didn't change.

"In New York," I said.

No answer.

"You know I never liked banquets, all that noise and trouble. And such a waste of so much money."

She still didn't say anything. Suddenly I realized how quiet it was, and that we were completely alone in the store. I heard the hum of the lights.

"Mah?" I said. "Say something."

She didn't even look at me, she just walked away. She went to the back of the store and ripped open a box. I followed and watched her bend the flaps back and pull out armfuls of baby clothes. . . .

"Nina was my witness." My voice was whispery, strange.

Mah grunted, a humph sound that came out like a curse. My translation was: Disgust, anger. There's power behind her sounds. Over the years I've listened and rendered her Chinese grunts into English words.

She threw the empty box on the floor and gave it a quick kick.

"Just like that.

Did it and didn't tell.

Mother Who Raised You.

Years of work, years of worry.

Didn't! Even! Tell!"

WHAT could I say? Using Chinese was my undoing. She had a world of words that were beyond me. . . .

Now I said in English, "It was no big deal."

"It is!"

Mah was using her sewing-factory voice, and I remember her impatience whenever I tried to talk to her while she was sewing on a deadline.

She rapped a hanger on the counter. "Marriage is for a lifetime, and it should be celebrated! Why sneak around, why act like a thief in the dark?"

I wanted to say: I didn't marry in shame. I didn't marry like you. Your marriages are not my fault. Don't blame me.

Just then the bells jingled and I looked up and saw two sewing ladies come through the door. I recognized the round hair, the hawk eyes.

"What?" I was too upset to stop. "What?" I demanded again. "You don't like Mason, is that it?"

"Mason," Mah spoke his name soft, "I love."

For love, she used a Chinese word: to embrace, to hug.

I stepped round the boxes, opened my arms and hugged Mah.

(Ng 1993: 21-23)

This excerpt is necessarily long to illustrate the complex effects of alternating between different codes and its psychological and emotional undercurrents. When the narrator begins the conversation in Chinese, it suggests the personal nature of the news that she is about disclose, since the ethnic language is associated with the domain of family and topics of a personal nature. It is also an act of convergence, accommodating to the fact that her mother's dominant language is Chinese. However, in her very next statement, the narrator switches to English, and this switch is explicitly highlighted by the narratorial comment "I switched to English", which suggests that the switch is significant.

The significance of the change in codes in the above narrative episode can be analysed in terms of Herman's (1968) theory of the overlapping psychological situations faced by the speaker simultaneously and the potential conflict between choosing the language with which the speaker feels most comfortable and the language that the immediate or background group expects. In this case, the immediate group is represented by the narrator's mother, who would expect a matter

as personal as marriage to be discussed in the language of the family domain, that is Chinese. However, in choosing to get married without first informing her mother who would have insisted on the traditional Chinese banquet, the narrator has doubly violated cultural norms and her mother's expectations. Consequently, her choice of English, as the language of Anglo-American culture, may be read as a metaphor for this breach in cultural practice. Ironically, it is the narrator's awareness of her mother's displeasure that makes her revert to this non-native language, as her lack of confidence in speaking Chinese is revealed in later narratorial comments: "Using Chinese was my undoing. She had a world of words that were beyond me." The narrator's switch to English, when interpreted as motivated by her personal need to use the language she feels most comfortable with, may therefore be regarded as an attempt to start from a position of strength. Thus, the use of Herman's (1968) theory to analyse the narrator's code switching foregrounds the psychological and emotional turmoil she experiences on this occasion, which is an early indication in the story of her close yet difficult relationship with her mother that is elaborated upon in the rest of the narrative.

From the perspective of language choice as a marker of group membership, the narrator's code switching may also be read in terms of the way each code is identified with a particular group. English as the language of the host country, invokes associations with English-speaking American culture, such that its use in the above episode becomes a sign of divergence from the ethnic culture, thereby widening the gap between mother and daughter. The communication breakdown is

confirmed when the mother does not respond, which is emphasized twice in the passage, and then makes a sound that the narrator interprets as “Disgust, anger”. Significantly, the text portrays the narrator’s sensitivity to her mother’s unspoken feelings in terms of an act of translation: “Over the years I’ve listened and rendered her Chinese grunts into English words”. It is a remark that highlights the narrator’s membership in two cultural and linguistic communities and her role as a mediator in the novel. The above passage further emphasizes her function as a translator in the penultimate sentence: “For love, she used a Chinese word: to embrace, to hug”.

It is interesting to note that the text represents the reconciliation between mother and daughter in the presence of the ethnic language: the narrator points out that her mother uses a Chinese word to express her love for her son-in-law, which somehow dissipates the earlier tension and brings them together. While it may be that the narrator’s mother lacks the linguistic competence to find the right word in English, the choice of code is highlighted in a way that suggests the distinct meanings that the word carries in the ethnic language. It underscores the personal significance of the ethnic language for the narrator: since it invokes associations with the ethnic group, its use, especially in relation to the personal nature of the topic, symbolically suggests the mother’s inclusion and acceptance of her son-in-law.

Another episode in the novel Bone (1993) provides a example of the casual code switching that characterizes the bilingual community of Chinatown Chinese Americans. In the following excerpt, the narrator, her mother, Mason and Leon are

having dinner at a Chinese restaurant and the narrator is eager to learn more about her natural father from her stepfather, Leon.

When Mah handed him his second bowl, I refilled his tea and asked him, "What did he look like? My father. You saw him, didn't you?"

Leon put an oyster in his mouth. "Dark," he said.

"Dark? Like how?" I asked.

"Like a coolie," Mason said.

Leon said in English, "Hey, you know that word?"

"Sure." Mason shrugged.

Leon grinned. "From the sun, like a dried plum."

"I thought he was some big developer," I said. "A man inside, behind a desk, you know?"

Mah muttered something as she cracked open a lobster claw.

"That's people talking," Leon said in Chinese.

I thought about it. "So, what'd you talk about?"

"Not much. I mentioned the situation here."

Whenever Leon used Chinese, he sounded more serious. So I waited for him to say more. "Well? What exactly did you say?"

"I told him about your Mah and me." Leon looked over at Mah, who was busy with a piece of crab.

"Well? What did he say?" I couldn't stand it; Leon was so slow sometimes it killed me. I wanted more. I gave my chopsticks three hard taps on the tabletop. Mah looked up, scowling.

"Easy." Mason put his hand on my leg. I sat back. He peeled a shrimp and put it on my plate, and I popped the whole thing into my mouth.

"What about me? Did he ask about me?"

"Sure," Leon said. "I told him that you'd finished school, stuff like that." He looked at Mah.

She gave him some fish. "Good piece," she said.

I wasn't satisfied. "How'd it end?"

"End?" He put the morsel in his mouth. "What else? Shook hands, said goodbye, long life, and good luck."

(Ng 1993: 191-193)

In the above passage, the highlighting of the use of different languages at various points in the conversation makes it clear that code switching occurs. The lack of

other visual markers (such as the use of italics in Typical American (1991) to indicate Mandarin speech) makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly where the use of Chinese ends and English begins. But this contributes a sense of fluidity to the conversation, where the use of two codes is effortless and accepted. When the use of a specific code is foregrounded, it draws attention.

In this excerpt, the representation of switching between English and Chinese seems to have a different emphasis from that in the previous excerpt from Bone (1993). Here, the text presents us with another situation from the family domain - a family dinner – in which all the participants know one another well. If we examine the instances of code switching, it would appear that they serve to indicate a change in the tone and central focus of conversation. Thus, when the text highlights Leon's choice of English to comment on Mason's use of the word "coolie", it suggests the switch as an indication of a shift from the private and personal subject of the narrator's father to a more general topic. The second time language choice is highlighted in the passage, it occurs in the narratorial comment "Whenever Leon used Chinese, he sounded more serious"; this comment clearly relates language choice to the tone of the conversation and the importance of the topic under discussion. In this way, the text indicates changes in mood and the significance of the information through the change of codes. At the same time, it manages to convey how casually and commonly code switching occurs in the conversations of bilingual Chinese Americans.

In another Chinese American novel, Chinaboy: A Novel (1991), the text highlights the switch to the ethnic code as a means of signalling a move into the private domain. The following excerpt from the novel depicts a rare occasion when the narrator's father shares some of his thoughts with him.

"Your mother missed home." He coughed a little, squaring his shoulders to the window, filling his small dark pipe with Edgeworth, a prize in wartime China. . . . He lit the pipe, his own shadow playing on the walls, and **he slipped into Songhai**.

"In a way, the war goes on. The Reds might still be kicked out, and we could return to Kiangsu, where everyone but you was born. The Nationalists, my old army, are not a lot better than the Reds, but they won't kill *us*. I don't want to go back. I am American. But it might be better for you."

Better for me. Father, talking to me in our true tongue, talking about Mother. Oh, Mah-mee. I wanted him to keep talking, to never stop. Drunk on his words, intoxicated with the communication. He was talking about somehow returning to China. But I was having a hard time figuring out how to be black, how to be American. Now I had to learn to be Chinese? To go to China now, with our mother dead.

. . . I was not so sure that I would be so lucky on the streets of Shanghai, trying to get by as a cultural Chinese. I could hardly speak Songhai anymore. The idea of backtracking on the Chinese tongues made me ill.

(Lee 1991: 157-158. Emphasis mine)

Significantly, the text represents the narrator's father as choosing to share his inner thoughts in the ethnic tongue, Songhai or Shanghainese. The switch from English to Shanghainese signals the personal nature of the subject, as well as the fact that it concerns matters in China, which the narrator's father still acknowledges as home, even though he is now an American citizen. The significance of the language choice is intensified by the narrator's comments in the third paragraph of the excerpt: "Father, talking to me in our true tongue, talking about Mother. Oh, Mah-mee. I

wanted him to keep talking, to never stop. Drunk on his words, intoxicated with the communication". When the ethnic language is described as "our true tongue", it is not only imbued with prestige but also becomes a marker of identity. Thus, the text emphasizes that for the narrator, the ethnic language symbolises a deeper, and somehow more authentic, communication between father and son. It is also foregrounded as the language he spoke with his mother and therefore, most immediate in evoking memories of her. By highlighting the choice of code, the text raises all these associations in relation to the narrator. Ironically, it also portrays the narrator awareness that he "could hardly speak Songhai anymore". Nevertheless, it remains significant to him because of its cultural and emotional reverberations. Thus, on this occasion, the text highlights code switching in conjunction with the Chinese past of the narrator's parents, the Chinese cultural world, and the narrator's hunger for it even as he feels its loss. The ethnic language is therefore portrayed as intimately tied to his sense of cultural identity.

The connection between language and culture is also implicated in the following account of altercation between an American-born narrator, Jing-mei Woo, and her immigrant mother, Suyuan Woo, in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club (1989):

"You want me to be someone that I'm not!" I sobbed. "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!"

"Only two kinds of daughters," she shouted in Chinese. "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!"

"Then I wish I wasn't your daughter. I wish you weren't my mother," I shouted.

(Tan 1989: 136)

The quarrel begins when Suyuan insists that Jing-mei continues her piano practice, even when Jing-mei is convinced that she has no musical talent whatsoever. In the narrative, unless indicated otherwise, the characters' main language of communication is English. One instance when code switching occurs is found in the above excerpt. It is a moment of intense emotion, and the mother's reversion to Chinese is presented as a reflection of her powerful personal feelings at this point. It may also be interpreted in terms of linguistic divergence, since choosing to switch to a different language emphasizes the differences between the two speakers. Thirdly, it may be viewed as an example of metaphorical switching, that invokes associations with Chinese cultural traditions in the mother's description of an obedient daughter. When the text highlights the immigrant mother as reverting to her native tongue, it emphasizes that the setting of the scene is a Chinese household, in which the Chinese cultural framework remains an important influence, however much Jing-mei wishes to break free from its control. Thus, language divergence at this point not only serves as a narrative marker for personal differences, the use of the ethnic language is also an assertion of cultural authority. This verbal exchange with its clash of codes becomes the site of the contest for authority and control between the American-born daughter and her immigrant mother.

Later in the novel, when Jing-mei travels to China with her father to meet her step-sisters and inform them of their mother's death, she requests that her father

explains in Chinese the reasons why her mother abandoned her two baby daughters while fleeing the Japanese invasion of Kweilin.

“So why did she abandon those babies on the road?” I need to know, because now I feel abandoned too.

“Long time I wondered this myself,” says my father. “But I then read that letter from her daughters in Shanghai now, and I talk to Auntie Lindo, all the others. And then I knew. No shame in what she done. None.”

“What happened?”

“Your mother running away – ” begins my father.

“No, tell me in Chinese,” I interrupt. “Really, I can understand.”

He begins to talk, still standing at the window, looking into the night.

(Tan 1989: 282)

Significantly, the telling of her mother’s story takes place in China and in Chinese: both place and code emphasize the Chinese context and culture. When the text portrays Jing-mei as specifically requesting that her father narrates the tale “in Chinese”, it is a gesture that represents her new-found sympathy for her parents cultural roots and her desire to understand them better, which is somehow related to letting them speak in their native language. The foregrounding of a code switch at this crucial point in the narrative underscores the importance of this account of her mother’s past and simultaneously conveys the character’s acceptance of her Chinese heritage. In addition, the appeal to the ethnic language encourages a perception of it as the language of the heart, of true feeling, and cultural authenticity. Jing-mei’s choice of code thus serves as a narrative sign of her cultural identification.

Sociolinguistics describes the importance of code switching in terms of accommodation. The novella, "Hunger" (1998), not only depicts an instance of accommodation on the part of American-born generation towards the immigrant parent, it also emphasizes that the change of codes does not guarantee successful communication. In the following passage, narrated from the viewpoint of the mother, the American-born daughter, Anna, attempts to learn about her parents' past, and she chooses to use Chinese over English on this occasion.

She spoke in simple Chinese words, dull and halting. "You and Baba never talk about yourselves."

Her choice of language was a sign: she wanted to hear the truth about us. For some reason, this desire of hers left me uneasy. It is true that many Chinese people don't like to ask each other direct questions, but my uneasiness did not spring from the question only. Her interest also frightened me, reminded me that children formed their own opinions.

"I didn't think you wanted to know," I said. I began to strip the tough outer fibers off a stick of celery, and I kept my eyes on the paring knife.

"I do want to know."

"What do you want to know about?"

She asked carefully, "You and Baba – why are you together?"

"What do you mean?"

"You and Baba – why did you marry?"

"It was *yuanfen*," I told her.

"What is that?"

I did not know how agitated I was until I felt the paring knife go too far and press lightly, in warning, against my thumb. I set down the knife. "*Yuanfen* is your fate."

I thought of my mother's words. "That apportionment of love which is destined for you in this world." But I could not explain this to Anna. She would not have understood the Chinese words. She was too proud to ask me to repeat myself. I did not know enough English to tell her what I wanted to say. I knew simple phrases. I knew how to say, "Put the rice on the table," or "Are you cold? Do you want more to eat?" But I had no words to say what lay in my heart.

Now a furrow darkened between Anna's heavy brows as she struggled to find the words for the real questions, questions that would unleash some crucial secret she believed I understood. I held my breath.

"Why did you and Baba leave China?"

"Your father and I came over separately," I said. "We met each other and married here."

There was a pause while she comprehended this.

"But *why* did you leave? And Baba?"

"I left because of the war. My parents decided to move. Taiwan was safer."

"But Baba?"

I thought about what to tell her. "Your father came over alone."

"Why?"

"He wanted to be a violinist."

From the practice room, we could hear a fairly smooth rendition of the concerto's third movement. Ruth learned the notes and fingering very quickly when she set her mind to it. I concentrated on this music, the quick, bright notes that fell and cascaded like water droplets.

"But why?" Anna cried. I looked up. She scowled; her eyes were full of tears. "Why is music so important?"

How many times had I asked myself this question? "I don't know," I said. "It's his desire. It's – it's part of his bargain with himself."

Anna stared at her hands.

I had just seen a television show where the mother called her grown daughter "Honey" and comforted her in her arms. I stood up and walked round the table to where Anna sat. I put my arm round her rigid shoulders.

I asked her, "Are you cold? Do you want anything to eat?"

"Leave me alone!"

(Chang 1998: 64-65)

The narrator's comment "Her choice of language was a sign: she wanted to hear the truth about us" recognizes the significance of Anna's choice of Chinese over English. Ordinarily, the communication between mother and daughter occurs in English, the language of the host country. But as the passage reveals, such communication is limited to commonplace statements since the narrator admits that she "did not know enough English" to convey her inner thoughts and emotions. In

taking the initiative to speak to her mother in Chinese, the American-born daughter attempts to go past the barrier of language in order to learn the truth about her parents' past. However, this act of accommodation is sabotaged by Anna's own limited competence in Chinese, so that the narrator is still only able to communicate the barest answers to her questions. The difficult conversation underscores the tragedy of failing relationships within this Chinese American household. Throughout the narrative, language differences serve as a potent sign of communication breakdown and the distance between characters.

In the passage, apart from the narratorial comments that inform us that the conversation occurs in Chinese, the only other visual indicator is the insertion of the dialect term "*yuanfen*" { 缘分 }. Its italicisation marks it out from the rest of the English text. On the level of the reader's reading experience, its insertion is encountered in a way similar to code-mixing, as an instance of borrowing from the ethnic language because the English term does not adequately express its meaning. Although the narrator translates "*yuanfen*" as "fate", her subsequent comments "I could not explain this to Anna. She would not have understood the Chinese words" repeatedly emphasizes that the English translation falls far short of its true significance and that she lacks the language competence to define it fully for her daughter, just as Anna does not have sufficient competence in the ethnic language to understand the Chinese words. By representing it as a transcription of a dialect term, "*yuanfen*" is conspicuously associated with the ethnic cultural framework, which the narrator feels her American-born daughter would not understand. Thus, while the

narratorial comments convey the significance of “*yuanfen*” to the reader, they also assert the presence of a communication gap that is based on both linguistic and cultural competence.

Towards the end of the excerpt, the narrator appears to revert to English in an attempt to comfort Anna. Although the text does not indicate that she is speaking English, her use of English is suggested by the fact that her questions “Are you cold? Do you want anything to eat?” are precisely those that she earlier indicates as part of her limited English repertoire. However, the triteness of the questions only underscore the inadequacies of her English competence and the way language limitations prevent real communication. The failure of this act of accommodation on the mother’s part is signalled by Anna’s vehement response “Leave me alone!”

In the short-story, “Pangs of Love”, language is also used to underscore the complex relationship between an immigrant mother and her American-born son. The first-person narrative is told from the son’s point of view, and in the excerpt below, the dialogue between the mother and son occurs in Chinese.

“This is a fancy car,” my mother says in Chinese as we stop-and-go up Third Avenue. “It must’ve cost you a bundle. Tell me, *how much cents*,” she says conspiratorially. I look at her and say nothing.

“Isn’t this nice of Bagel,” my mother says a few minutes later. My youngest brother, the landowner in Bridgehampton, has always been called “Bagel” in the family. His real name is Billy, and God help him who drops “Bagel” in front of Bagel’s friends. My mother’s the lone exception. When she says Bagel, he knows his friends simply think that’s her immigrant tongue mangling “Billy”. “Out of you four brothers and sisters,” she adds, “only Bagel asks me to visit.”

“What are you saying? How can I invite you over when I live with you?”

"That's right. You're a good son."

"I didn't say I was a good son, but didn't I bring you out to California?"

"*Ah-mahn-da* invited me."

"I told *Amanda* to invite you while she was talking to you on the phone."

"That's right, that's right. You're a good son," she says. "Good son who doesn't know how to talk to his own mother. His American girl speaks better Chinese."

"*Forget it*," I say, waving her off.

"That's right. Always '*fo-gellit, fo-gellit*.' *Ah-mahn-da* never uses such words."

(Louie 1993: 273-274)

It is easy to forget that the conversation between narrator and his mother is carried out in Chinese, since there are few explicit markers to remind the reader, apart from the narratorial comment "my mother says in Chinese" at the beginning of the excerpt. However, other parts of the short story make it quite clear that the narrator's mother barely speaks or understands English and that it is her children who must accommodate by speaking the ethnic language, no matter how limited their language competence is. Thus, in the above depiction of their dialogue, normal print represents Chinese, while italicisation signals the presence of English. This indication of the presence of English in the predominantly Chinese dialogue implies the occurrence of code mixing.

The first instance of inter-sentential code mixing occurs at the beginning of the excerpt, when the narrator's mother switches from Chinese to English in the final clause of her speech: " "It must've cost you a bundle. Tell me, *how much cents*," she says conspiratorially." Significantly, when the mother speaks English, it is not the standard variety; instead, it is conspicuously non-standard in its use of the

terms “much” and “cents” instead of the more conventional terms “much” and “money” respectively. While these deviations convey the informal tone of the conversation, they also characterise her English as belonging to the interlanguage variety, which deviates from the standard rules of the language. The purpose of her change of codes is suggested by the narratorial comment “she says conspiratorially”: it is participant-directed, specifically aimed at her American-born, English-speaking son. However, the code change occurs not because he does not understand Chinese, but because it permits a playful variation in the tone of the conversation. The switch from Chinese to English is depicted as the mother’s exaggerated means of signalling a sense of solidarity with her son. The non-serious tone of her question is perceived by her son, who does not respond to it.

Another interesting example of the influence of Chinese on the mother’s variety of English is found in her pronunciation of the name of the narrator’s ex-girlfriend: “*Ah-mahn-da*”. Firstly, the hyphens separate the three syllables in “Amanda” and imply that she stresses each syllable equally. Secondly, the additional “*h*”s on the first two syllables also allow the first syllable to resemble the vocative “Ah”, which is commonly attached to names in Chinese convention (Louie 1998: 140). These variations on the name emphasizes the mother’s Chinese accent in her English, which is reinforced by the representation of her pronunciation of “forget it” as “*fo-gellit*”. Moreover, the narrator’s observation that her use of the word “Bagel” to address his brother is interpreted as a mispronunciation by “her immigrant tongue” indicates that her speech is regarded as characteristic of a non-

native speaker of English; it is ironic that when her English pronunciation is correct, it is perceived as wrong.

When the narrator's mother repeats her Chinese accented version of the phrase "forget it", it may be regarded as an example of code mixing where English is used for reported speech. It is also an example of tag-switching, as "Forget it" is a set English phrase that is inserted in the mother's Chinese utterance. It is not a phrase that belongs in her speech and its alienness is emphasized through her use of a different language. On the other hand, when the narrator uses the phrase, the text emphasizes his switch from the ethnic language to English through italicisation. This change of code represents an act of divergence that signals his wish to end the discussion about him and his girlfriend. By using the language that his mother does not quite understand, he disrupts the communication channel and effects a closure, which his mother recognizes and comments upon. As her remark, "*Ah-mahn-da* never uses such words" makes clear, she disapproves of her son's use of the English phrase.

From our analysis of the Chinese American narratives, we see that code switching is represented as a characteristic feature of conversations among Chinese Americans. The depiction of different codes allows the interplay of the different associations and significances that are associated with Chinese and English; it can effectively signal the presence of opposing worldviews and cultural frameworks. It is also a subtle indicator of changes in the tone of a conversation and the relationship dynamics between the speakers. Even in the final example of the humorous

exchange between the narrator and his mother, we see that language choice is related to issues of power and control. In the majority of cases, the narratives depict code switching as occurring in moments of conflict, where the issue of authority is at stake. Thus, language choice is not neutral, it is an appeal to the values and cultural codes of the community that speaks the language; it is an act that carries emotional and psychological significance. Therefore, the representation of language choice and code switching is full of narrative implications.

6.5 Sociolinguistic Perspectives On Inter-Ethnic Interaction

While the preceding sections discussed narrative representations of verbal interactions among Chinese Americans, we now wish to consider depictions of interactions between Chinese Americans and non-Chinese, which may be categorised as inter-ethnic interactions. The term “inter-ethnic” emphasizes that the discourse participants came from different cultural backgrounds and that both linguistic and cultural backgrounds play significant roles in defining their interactions. It is such interactions that form the traditional data for intercultural communication studies.

Sociolinguistic reveals that when speakers of different cultures and different languages come into contact, they can either persist in using their individual languages or they can adapt their verbal behaviour so that some form of

communication occurs. The extent of adaptation is determined by the speakers' knowledge of each other's language, or the degree to which they are bilingual. Where the speakers are not fully bilingual nor of equal status, the speaker of lower status is often expected to make greater adjustments. As highlighted in chapter four, in the context of immigration, speakers of other languages are usually expected to acquire the language of the host country, which is regarded as the language of prestige.

However, learning the language of the host country does not solve all the immigrant's difficulties when interacting with members of the host country. Indeed, as the narratives demonstrate, even speakers from the same cultural community encounter communication difficulties. But in interactions between immigrants and members of the host country, communication difficulties are aggravated by the fact that the immigrant is a non-native speaker of the host language. Appel and Muysken (1987: 143-150) highlight the following causes of conflict in verbal encounters between native and non-native speakers of a prestige language: (1) the limited formal second-language proficiency of the non-native speaker, (2) the non-native speaker's lack of the skill in distinguishing and appropriately using the different stylistic variants and registers of the second language, (3) the different cultural presuppositions of the native and non-native speakers, and (4) the use different sets of interaction rules, with the non-native speaker transferring rules from the first language. In section 6.7, we shall discuss how the different cultural presuppositions and interaction rules held by speakers from different cultures form particularly rich

sources of conflict in Chinese American narrative depictions of inter-ethnic interactions.

Another feature of inter-ethnic interactions is that the speaker in the more powerful position may choose to adjust his or her speech towards the other in the form of “foreigner talk”. Foreigner talk is an adaptive strategy, and Appel and Muysken emphasize that foreigner talk is “the type of language used when to [sic] speaking *to* foreigners, not the language *of* foreigners” (1987: 139)³. According to Holmes, its features include high frequency vocabulary, fewer contractions, the use of nouns rather than pronouns so that referents are clear, short sentences with simple grammar, the use of tag questions, and repetition (1992: 249).

Foreigner talk can be a sign of accommodation. But, while the person practising foreigner talk may be sincere in his or her efforts to facilitate communication with a speaker of another language, the effort may be interpreted negatively by the recipient as an act of condescension, particularly when blatantly ungrammatical forms are used. In such situations, it can only exacerbate cross-cultural misunderstanding.

³ Interestingly, Appel and Muysken (1987: 139) also point out that the colonial tradition has turned out a stereotyped version of foreigner talk that is depicted in literature as characteristic of foreigners, rather than the speech directed at them by Europeans.

6.6 Narrative Representations of Inter-Ethnic Interactions

In Chinese American narratives, depictions of interactions between Chinese Americans and white, English-speaking Americans are always significant: it is at such points that comparisons between the minority and host culture are made, and contact between the two carries much potential for conflict. In the depiction of such interactions, ethnic difference is always a factor and language behaviour is a primary means of illustrating and imposing this difference.

The following episode from the novella, "Hunger" (1998), describes an interethnic encounter that takes place after Tian's violin recital at the music school where he teaches. Written from Min's point of view, it emphasizes the minority speaker's sense of powerlessness in the inter-ethnic situation.

Tian spoke to the people who crowded us. Sometimes he made an introduction: "Min, this is Jennings. He and I share a practice locker." I nodded and smiled. "He did fine job! He very good!" they assured me, so I nodded and smiled again. Sometimes I turned to Tian for a translation, but he seemed to be having problems with his English; he stumbled over certain words and leaned toward the others as if he couldn't hear what they were saying.

He wouldn't move from my side, and he clutched his violin case in his hand.

(Chang 1998: 20-21)

Significantly, in the above account, language serves as the central signifier of the differences between the two Chinese protagonists and the rest of Tian's English-

speaking American colleagues. Min's limited proficiency in English is foregrounded when the text describes her looking to Tian "for a translation" or resorting to the non-verbal responses of nodding and smiling when Tian's colleagues speak to her. But the variety of English they use may be described as "foreigner talk", which is based on their perception of her limited English proficiency. Their statements "He did fine job! He very good!" consist of essential content words which convey their meaning most directly. The use of foreigner talk is therefore aimed at minimizing misunderstanding and gives consideration to the difficulties of the non-English-speaking immigrant. However, in the context of the narrative, this act of accommodation is also a sign of the speakers' more powerful position as members of the dominant society, with a facility in the prestige language that allows them to control the conversation and choose a suitable level of communication. The language difficulties of Min and Tian, on the other hand, are related to their position as immigrants, as cultural others who speak a different language that has no place in the host country; they are expected to learn and function in English, the language of all social intercourse in mainstream Anglo-American society. Language ability is therefore intrinsically related to power and status.

The passage's depiction of Min's lack of participation in this inter-ethnic encounter is in tandem with earlier descriptions of her inability to master English and her lack of contact with members of the host country, thus reinforcing the impression of her as an immigrant who has great difficulty adjusting to Anglo-

American society. The narrative significance of this passage stems from the way it reveals Tian's difficulties with the language through this interethnic encounter, which contrasts sharply with the narrator's earlier impression of him as a proficient speaker of English. The revelation of Tian's language difficulties at this point in the narrative has deep implications: it not only highlights the narrator's lack of knowledge about her husband, but also her mistaken impressions of him. Since English is always identified with success in the host country, the narrator's first impression of Tian as a competent speaker of the language made her regard him as a resourceful immigrant Chinese who had adapted well in American society. But this inter-ethnic interaction reveals his lack of facility in the dominant language, stripping away the earlier impression of a successful and confident man. His language difficulty in English-speaking American society is an ominous sign of his lack of understanding about that society and his later failure: he loses his position in the music school and ends up as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant. Thus, even as the above account foregrounds Tian and Min as the only Chinese in a white, English-speaking environment and highlights their limited formal second-language proficiency, it simultaneously conveys crucial information about the characters and their relationship with each other and with the dominant society.

Jen's Typical American (1991) contains a lighter account of an inter-ethnic encounter. In the excerpt below, Ralph, the foreign student from China,

communicates in his limited English with the secretary, Cammy, at the Foreign Student Affairs office.

"Name?" he repeated, or rather "nem," which he knew to be wrong. He turned red, thinking of his trouble with long a's, th's, l's, consonants at the ends of words. Was it beneath a scholar to hate the alphabet? Anyway, he did.

"Naaame," she said, writing it down. She'd seen this before, foreign students who could read and write and speak a little, but who just couldn't get the conversation. N-A-M-E.

"Name Y. F. Chang." (His surname as he pronounced it then sounded like the beginning of *angst*; it would be years before he was used to hearing Chang rhyme with *twang*.)

"Eng-lish-name," said Cammy. E-N-G-L-I-S-H-N-A-M-E.

"I Chin-ese," he said, and was about to explain that Y. F. were his initials when she laughed.

"Eng-lish-name," she said again.

"What are you laughing?"

Later he realized this to be a very daring thing to ask, that he never would have asked a Chinese girl why she was laughing. But then, a Chinese girl would never have been laughing, not like that. Not a nice Chinese girl, anyway. What a country he was in!

"I'm laughing at you." Her voice rang playful yet deeper than he would have expected. She smelled of perfume. He could not begin to guess her age. "At *you*!"

"Me?" With mock offense, he drew his chin back.

"You," she said again. "Me?" "You." "Me?" They were joking! In English! *Shuo de chu* – he spoke, and the words came out! *Ting de dong* – he listened and understood!

"English name," she said again, finally. She showed him her typewriter, the form she had to fill out.

"No English name." How to say initials? He was sorry to disappoint her. Then he brightened. "You give me."

"I-give-you-a-name?"

"Sure. You give." There was something about speaking English that carried him away.

"I'll-hang-onto-this-form-overnight," she tried to tell him. "That-way-you-find-a-name-you-like-better-you-can-tell-me-tomorrow."

Too much, he didn't get it. Anyway, he waited, staring – exercising the outsider's privilege, to be rude.

(Jen 1991: 9-10)

The exchange between Ralph and Cammy is an example of an interaction between a native and a non-native speaker of English that shows both sides accommodating to each other: Ralph, the non-native speaker, makes great effort to carry out the conversation in the language of the native speaker, while Cammy, the native speaker, adjusts her speech to facilitate his comprehension. Her linguistic accommodation is suggested through the use of hyphens in representations of her speech to visually suggest a speaking style that is slower and more regular than normal. The second paragraph of the excerpt indicates that it is Cammy's past experience with other foreign students that makes her a more patient and understanding participant.

Although the text depicts the conversation as taking place in English, we are made aware of its inter-ethnic character by narrative comments that convey both Ralph's and Cammy's personal points of view. Ralph's perceptions, in particular, are strongly shaped by his cultural background, and they repeatedly highlight the differences between American and Chinese ways of communicating. Thus, while the text begins by emphasizing Ralph's pronunciation difficulties, it goes on to reveal the more serious differences in sociolinguistic knowledge and cultural rules between the two participants. For example, when Ralph asks Cammy, in his learner's English, why she is laughing, the text highlights the fact that this would be

considered a cultural taboo in his ethnic culture. When Ralph says “I Chine-ese” in response to Cammy’s enquiry about his English name, he engages in intercultural communication by emphasizing his cultural identity.

But the passage also reveals Ralph’s ability to adapt cross-culturally as he and Cammy turn the occasion into a shared joke, despite his limitations in English. Ralph’s delight at his successful communication in English is presented as free indirect thought⁴, identified by the use of the exclamatory statements and Chinese terms in the following sentences: “They were joking! In English! *Shuo de chu* – he spoke, and the words came out! *Ting de dong* – he listened and understood!” In this representation of his thoughts, the insertion of italicized dialect terms, which are a transliteration of the Mandarin dialect, foreground the presence of the Chinese language in this inter-ethnic encounter. It suggests that while the ethnic language is not evident in the spoken conversation, it is ever-present in the non-English interlocutor’s mental framework – the native language that operates in conjunction with and sometimes in opposition to the new language he is acquiring.

The passage focuses on the difference between Chinese and American names in highlighting cultural divergence in this inter-ethnic interaction; it forms the topic of the communicative exchange between Ralph and Cammy. While Jen’s novel humorously portrays the bureaucratic requirement of an English name as a

⁴ Free indirect thought is a way of representing the character’s thoughts as he or she would think them. However, features of indirection, such as the altered pronouns and the backshifted verbs in the above example, reveal the presence of narratorial control. See Leech and Short (1981: 337-341) for a concise description of the various modes of thought presentation.

common problem confronting the Chinese students, it also implicitly refers to the power of the host country that insists upon an English name in its forms. The process by which Ralph acquires an English name suggests naming as a way of indicating a character's conformity to the culture of the host country, and this is a device used in other Chinese American narratives as well. For example, in Louis Chu's Eat A Bowl of Tea ([1961] 1989), most of the Chinese immigrants have Chinese names, particularly the elderly men of Chinatown; although Ben Loy was born in China, his American name signals his Americanization after serving with the United States army in the war and an openness to American values. In Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club (1989), all the first generation Chinese American mothers have Chinese names, while three of the American-born daughters are given English names; daughter Jing-mei's Chinese name is a sign of her acceptance of her ethnic culture and the end of the novel shows her identifying with her Chinese relatives in China. In Typical American (1991), the only character to be identified by his Chinese surname, Old Chow, is portrayed as most closely in touch with his native roots. When Ralph impulsively asks Cammy to give him an English name, the text significantly characterises this as the result of foreign language influence: "There was something about speaking English that carried him away". The implication is that the use of another language also brings into play a new set of behavioural rules and a different cultural framework.

The use of one code over another always carries social meanings. As we return to David Wong Louie's "Pangs of Love" (1993), we see that the narrator's mother's use of her ethnic dialect in the public domain is interpreted negatively by the narrator's American girlfriend. In the following passage, the conversation involving the narrator, his mother and his girlfriend, Deborah, occurs on the drive to his brother's house.

Her last time out, she says, she drove with Bagel and his friend "*Ah-Jay-mee*" in the latter's two-seater, with Bagel folded into the rear storage area, best suited for umbrellas and tennis rackets. Then she wistfully adds that Bagel's former apartment mate Dennis had a car that had an entire backseat, but that luxury is "washed up" since he moved out.

After a while Deborah taps me on the shoulder. "What's she saying? She's talking about me, right? I heard her say my name."

"She said Dennis."

"*Dennis-ah cah bik*," my mother tells Deborah, spreading her hand to show size.

"Tell her this is a 'bik' pain in the you-know-what," Deborah says in a huff. "Tell her I'm tired of your secrecy, of being-gossiped about in front of my face."

I say, "Slow down, okay? We're discussing my brother."

"What's Mah-ti saying?" my mother asks.

"She's saying her parents have a big car. She wants to take you on a drive someday."

My mother turns to Deborah and says, "*Goot!*"

(Louie 1993: 275-276)

The conversation between the narrator and his mother occurs in their native language, their characteristic mode of communication. However, the use of the ethnic language becomes an issue in the presence of a non-Chinese speaker. The text highlights Deborah's uneasiness at not being able to understand their conversation

when she first asks the narrator to tell her what his mother is saying, and then describes their speaking in the ethnic language as an act of secrecy. Deborah's groundless accusations suggests the intense mistrust of the person who cannot participate in a conversation because of language differences, particularly when he or she is from the dominant community and expects those from the minority community to accommodate him or her. Thus, the narrator's mother's use of the Chinese dialect is regarded by Deborah as deliberate divergence, even though her limitations in English are evident. Deborah herself does not show any attempt to adjust towards the language needs of the narrator's mother and only speaks to the narrator. This lack of cooperation is one of the ways the text emphasizes the coolness between the two women.

However, the narrator's mother does make some attempt at communicating with her son's English-speaking girlfriend and her attempts are represented as a type of a learner's English which includes an accent that deviates strikingly from the norm, as the two examples in the passage demonstrate: "*Dennis-ah cah bik*", meaning "Dennis' car is big", and "*Goot*" for "Good". The use of the particle "*ah*" in conjunction with the name "*Dennis*" is typical of Chinese speech; it also occurs in the mother's pronunciation of the name "Jamie": "*Ah-Jay-mee*". It is a recurrent feature that characterizes the mother's Chinese-accented English, which was discussed earlier in section 6.4.3 in relation to another excerpt from "Pangs of Love" (1993). The non-standardness of her English pronunciation is picked on by Deborah

when she mimics the former in her statement: “Tell her this is a ‘bik’ pain in the you-know-what”.

The narrator is in the unenviable position of translating and mediating between the two women. His role as a translator is highlighted when first Deborah and then his mother ask him what the other is saying. On the second occasion, he takes advantage of his mother’s limited English language proficiency and his girlfriend’s ignorance of Chinese to frame a “translation” that is untruthful but guaranteed to maintain his mother’s goodwill. His ability to maintain separate conversations with each party simultaneously is indicative of his facility in the two different cultures and two languages, although the text does portray his English competence as surpassing his Chinese. The passage therefore depicts an interethnic encounter in which language differences underscore the act of intercultural communication with a narrator serving as a mediator of cultural and linguistic differences.

In another account of inter-ethnic interaction, communication difficulties are compounded when there is no reliable translator-mediator. The following passage comes from Chang’s “Hunger” (1998), and it portrays the two Chinese-speaking protagonists, Tian and Min, awkwardly attempting to take leave of Tian’s English-speaking colleagues after the musical recital:

Tian looked at me. “We need to leave,” he said in Chinese. “You look tired.” He turned to the other musicians. “We’re going,” he said. “I’ve

got to get Min home in time to sleep. She is not –” he paused and struggled with his English “- she’s not one of us crazy musician types.”

“Don’t leave so soon! Come and have a beer,” said John.

Tian shook his head. “No, we should really be getting home.”

We waited through a moment of silence. Then the redheaded woman said, “Come on, Tian. Don’t be a *party-pooper*.” Her green-shadowed eyes widened as she spoke.

John said, his voice still cheerful, “Liddy is right.”

“No,” Tian repeated. “Min is tired.”

“I – okay,” I said. It had begun to seem that we would lose face if we didn’t go.

Tian turned to me. “I know you,” he said, in Chinese. “You’re tired.”

“No secret codes allowed! What did you say to her, Tian?” Lydia demanded. Her face loomed close: the pale bright eyes, the freckles faintly glowing under a coat of powder, the slash of lipstick, orange in the light.

We all stood for a minute, and then I said, “It *is* okay.” My voice cracked against the words. They fixed their eyes on me.

“Come on,” said Tian. He took my arm and pulled me around the corner, to the coatrack.

“I’m not that tired; I could have gone out with them.” I relaxed as I slipped into the familiar Mandarin language, thought forming easily again. “Why did you want to leave so much?”

Tian put his arm around me. “We don’t need them,” he said. “Aside from John, they’re not my friends. I want to go home.”

(Chang 1998: 21-22)

Narrated from Min’s point of view, the episode reveals her acute awareness of the social tension that results from Tian’s insistence that they leave, and her helplessness that stems from an inability to articulate her thoughts in English. There is no translator or mediator to smoothen out the tension; Tian’s own mastery of English is shown here to be inadequate, as the first paragraph describes him struggling with the language.

The passage shows both Tian and Min code-switching between Mandarin and English: they use the former when talking to one another and the latter when addressing the Americans. It is a case of code-switching according to addressee. What is significantly highlighted is that their use of Mandarin is not viewed positively by the English speakers. Just as Deborah in "Pangs of Love" accuses the narrator's mother of secrecy when she uses Chinese, the use of Mandarin in this inter-ethnic encounter is described as the use of a "secret code" by Lydia, who similarly demands a translation. The communication impasse is worsened by the fact that Tian does not translate as Lydia requests, perhaps because he is unable to. Thus, the switch to the ethnic language is perceived as divergence and non-cooperation. Nevertheless, Tian's English-speaking colleagues do initially attempt to obtain Tian's cooperation through persuasion, and Min herself endeavours to seal the breach in communication by signalling her compliance in her limited English. It is Tian who remains inflexible, and the conversation thus peters into silence.

This episode reveals that the choice of code always carries social meaning, whether the speakers intend it to or not. Thus, when Tian and Min speak Mandarin between themselves, it is interpreted both as a sign of exclusivity by the non-Mandarin speakers and as part of the Chinese couple's unwillingness to participate fully in the activities of the group, to be counted as part of them. As the final paragraph of the passage reveals, these are Tian's sentiments precisely. Tian's unwillingness to identify with his English-speaking colleagues is presented in terms

of a desire to leave their company as soon as possible, but the social gulf between the two Chinese and their American acquaintances is most emphatically portrayed in the choice of codes, the language difficulties, and the silences.

In section 6.6, it was noted that some of the main sources of problems in inter-ethnic communication are the different cultural presuppositions and interaction rules held by speakers from different cultures. The following excerpt from The Joy Luck Club (1989) underscores these differences and exploits the comic potential of an inter-ethnic interaction by describing the cultural blunders unconsciously committed by the narrator's white, English-speaking American boyfriend, Rich. The narrator comments retrospectively on the first time Rich meets her parents, an occasion of great significance in any culture, and describes how he upsets them at a family dinner.

But the worst was when Rich criticized my mother's cooking, and he didn't even know what he had done. As is the Chinese cook's custom, my mother always made disparaging remarks about her own cooking. That night she chose to direct it towards her famous steamed pork and preserved vegetable dish, which she always served with special pride.

"Ai! This dish not salty enough, no flavor," she complained, after tasting a small bite. "It's too bad to eat."

This was our family's cue to eat some and proclaim it the best she had ever made. But before we could do so, Rich said, "You know, all it needs is a little soy sauce." And he proceeded to pour a riverful of the salty black stuff on the platter, right before my mother's horrified eyes.

(Tan 1989: 173)

The passage makes clear that Rich acted not with the intention of causing offence but out of ignorance for the cultural rules of behaviour and speech during a Chinese dinner with a Chinese family. The subordinate clause “As is the Chinese cook’s custom” foregrounds the mother’s criticism of her own cooking as a typical speech act for a Chinese cook, and the family’s response of praise and appreciation is the expected answer. The text therefore provides the cultural information that to disparage oneself or one’s actions is in line with the Chinese perception of modesty and humility, while it is only good manners for the other party to respond with further approbation. Rich, however, is unconscious of the subtle dynamics of this particular cultural speech act, and wrongly takes the mother’s criticism at face value. His verbal response, which may sound placating from a Western point of view, is a major insult in the Chinese framework, since it agrees with the mother’s criticism of her own cooking, when he should deny it. Pouring soy sauce onto the dish is to add insult to injury as the description of the narrator’s mother’s “horrificed eyes” emphasizes. The above incident thus illustrates how speakers from different cultures have different cultural presuppositions and interaction rules and, more significantly, how these are carried over to interactions in the non-native language. The passage emphasizes that even though the narrator’s mother is speaking English, the presuppositions underlying her words are based upon a Chinese cultural framework.

That the narrator’s mother is a non-native speaker of English is revealed in the deviations from standard English in her speech: the lack of the copula in “This

dish not salty enough, no flavor” and the inappropriate use of the adjective “bad”, which connotes rottenness or spoilage, in “It’s too bad to eat”. However, her choice of English in this situation may be considered an act of accommodation towards her non-Chinese speaking Caucasian guest. But as the only non-Chinese and a prospective son-in-law under scrutiny, as he himself is aware, Rich is also expected to be conscious of the cultural sensitivities of his hosts. Unfortunately, he seems quite ignorant of his hosts’ cultural expectations and applies his native-speaker rules for interaction. This is even more apparent in the later description of him taking leave of his Chinese hosts, the narrator’s parents:

I was still shuddering, remembering how Rich had firmly shaken both my parents’ hands with that same easy familiarity he used with nervous new clients. “Linda, Tim,” he said, “we’ll see you again soon, I’m sure.” My parents’ names were Lindo and Tin Jong, and nobody, except a few older family friends, ever calls them by their first names.

(Tan 1989: 174)

Rich’s inattention to the sensitivities of his hosts is revealed when he wrongly substitutes the names of the narrator’s parents, “Lindo” and “Tin”, for “Linda” and “Tim”, the latter are more familiar to American ears. Another mistake occurs when he addresses them by their first names, which, as the narrator emphasizes, is not acceptable in Chinese culture that respects seniority and signifies this respect through the use of formal address terms. The text also presents Rich’s use of first names when addressing the narrator’s parents as an accepted social practice within

his cultural framework; it is intended to signal a sense of closeness and familiarity that is intended to put the other party at ease. It is therefore a verbal act, together with the handshake, that attempts to establish good relations with the narrator's parents. Unfortunately, it misfires because it does not take into account a different cultural framework that would interpret the act negatively.

In both of the above passages, it is the narrator who makes us aware of Rich's cultural gaffes. The narrator, Waverly Jong, is a second-generation Chinese American, and her successful career as a tax attorney in a big American firm suggests a high degree of assimilation into mainstream American culture. The first-person narrative uses her perspective as a member of both Chinese and American cultures to provide an internal view of this inter-ethnic encounter: she provides the reader with the necessary cultural information to understand the underlying reasons for communication failure in the encounter. Serving as the source of such information, the narrator therefore plays a crucial role in emphasizing the inter-ethnic nature of the above episodes.

As the above examples from the narratives reveal, inter-ethnic encounters provide great potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication. In these encounters, language differences become the most visible symbol of, as well as a contributor to, cultural conflict. However, language difference can also become a focal point for other sorts of inter-personal conflicts, as another episode from The Joy Luck Club (1989) demonstrates. In the following first-person account,

the narrator is Lena, whose dissatisfaction with her marriage, to an Anglo-American, becomes more clearly revealed in her mother's presence. The misunderstanding between husband and wife and between husband and mother-in-law is represented in terms of difference in language code:

“Who’s ready for dessert?” he asks, reaching into the freezer.
“I’m full,” I say.
“Lena cannot eat ice cream,” says my mother.
“So it seems. She’s always on a diet.”
“No, she never eat it. She doesn’t like.”
And now Harold smiles and looks at me puzzled, expecting me to translate what my mother has said.
“It’s true,” I say evenly. “I’ve hated ice cream almost all my life.”
Harold looks at me, as if I, too, were speaking Chinese and he could not understand.
“I guess I assume you were just trying to lose weight . . . Oh well.”
“She become so thin now you cannot see her,” says my mother. “She like a ghost, disappear.”
“That’s right! Christ, that’s great,” exclaims Harold, laughing, relieved into thinking my mother is graciously trying to rescue him.
(Tan 1989: 156-157)

In the above passage, the characters are not using different codes: English is the medium of communication, with the narrator’s mother speaking a variety of interlanguage that is characteristic of first-generation Chinese Americans in Tan’s novel. In contrast to her daughter’s and son-in-law’s fluency in English, her imperfect mastery of the language is revealed through the incomplete clauses and lack of agreement in her English sentences. Nevertheless, the referential meaning of her statements is quite clear and the passage reveals that

Harold's incomprehension is grounded in a lack of understanding about his wife. But when the text describes Harold looking to his wife for a 'translation' of his mother-in-law's remarks, it also deliberately casts the episode in the light of an inter-ethnic encounter, highlighting the cultural and linguistic differences between the characters. The lack of understanding between the characters becomes represented in terms of linguistic divergence. This is emphasized further by the narrator's remark: "Harold looks at me, as if I, too, were speaking Chinese and he could not understand". Language difference becomes a metaphor for communication difficulties that are based on inter-personal conflict, rather than cultural ones.

It is easy to frame the above episode in terms of an inter-ethnic encounter, since the male character is an English-speaking American Caucasian, while the two females are Chinese Americans. However, the real source of conflict in this encounter is not cultural but one based on a lack of understanding between the narrator and her husband. However, the presence of the immigrant Chinese mother allows the Chinese background of the female characters to be accentuated, which in turn, highlights the inter-ethnic dimension of the marriage. In such a context, interpersonal conflicts assume a cross-cultural appearance and communication difficulties are projected as language differences. The text, therefore, cleverly uses an interethnic

interaction, with all its implications of language and culture differences, to expose the uneasy relationship between characters.

6.7 Language as an Act of Identity

In chapter two, section 2.1.2, we discussed Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's concept of language as an act of identity. By describing language in this manner, they highlight the way language serves as a powerful means of projecting social identity. The projection can be unconscious or deliberate. Whichever the case, language use always tells something about the speaker and this has been repeatedly demonstrated in the narrative depictions of language choice and language use in interactions among Chinese Americans and between Chinese Americans and Anglo-Americans.

To complete our study of the narrative significance of language choice, we turn now to instances in the narratives where language as a deliberate act of identity is explicitly highlighted. Such instances reveal language being used as a means of asserting the ethnic identity and insisting upon the speaker's difference from white mainstream America. The narratives therefore portray language as an act of identity in terms of the way it calls up, refers to and enacts cultural distinctions; it is as an act

of differentiation and an engagement in intercultural communication that relies of linguistic markers and their cultural associations.

The following excerpt from “Chang” (1993) is narrated from the point of view of an American-born daughter, the product of a marriage between a Chinese man and a German woman, both immigrants to America:

By the time I was born my father had lived almost thirty years in America, but to hear him speak you would not have believed this. About his failure to master English there always seemed to me something willful. Except for her accent – as thick as but so different from his – my mother had no such trouble.

(Nunez 1993: 370)

The narrator’s description of her father emphasizes the significant role of language in her perception of him. When the narrator comments on her father’s lack of English competence despite having lived “almost thirty years in America” before her birth, and contrasts it against her German mother’s mastery of English, she suggests that her father’s lack is a deliberate act on his part, a hint of his non-conformity to the expectations and norms of his adopted country. The narrative also suggest his lack of English as way of isolating himself from other non-Chinese (including his wife and children), for it describes how he comes alive, both in speech and personality, only in the company of other Chinese. The father’s language choices is therefore characterized as deliberate acts that signal non-accommodation and separateness from Anglo-American culture.

Language is also a primary means whereby others come to perceive him, including his daughter, as the following excerpt reveals:

He intrigued my friends, who angered me by regarding him as if he were a figure in a glass case. Doesn't he ever come out of the kitchen? Doesn't he ever talk? I was angry with him, too, for what he seemed to me to be doing: *willing* himself into stereotype: inscrutable, self-effacing, funny little chinaman.

And why couldn't he learn to speak English?

(Nunez 1993: 383)

The final sentence of the text underscores the cultural import ascribed to learning English in the context of Anglo-American culture. The daughter's view of her father as conforming to the stereotype of the "inscrutable, self-effacing, funny little chinaman" is preceded and followed by questions about his language behaviour: "Doesn't he ever talk?" and "And why couldn't he learn to speak English?" respectively. This intensifies the relationship between language and identity, and emphasizes the ease with which language behaviour is used to confirm stereotypes, for it is the father's lack of ability in English that causes others to perceive him in terms of the cultural stereotype. Language thus serves as an act of identity, but this time as a means that others use to define the speaker's identity.

The narrative's repeated foregrounding of the father's lack of English as a cause of his social and cultural isolation is also a telling reminder of the relationship between language and power and of the lack of accommodation on the part of the

dominant society towards language minority groups, which expects the ethnic person to adjust his or her language patterns rather than the other way round. It emphasizes the way language behaviour can enforce the lines separating cultural groups by describing the daughter's own lack of effort to understand her father: as an American-born, preoccupied with mainstream American culture, she is distanced from her immigrant Chinese father, both in terms of language and culture, and she laments how she did not make the effort to understand him.

Another passage from "Chang" gives us an example of the father's English competence:

In school, or in the playground, or perhaps watching television, I hear something about the Chinese – something odd, improbable. I will ask my father. He will know whether it is true, say, that Chinese eat with sticks.

He shrugs. He pretends not to understand. Or he scowls and says, "Chinese just like everybody else."

("He thought you were making fun of him. He always thought everyone was making fun of him. He had a chip on his shoulder. The way he acted, you'd've thought he was coloured!")

Actually, he said "evvybody."

Is it true the Chinese write backwards?

Chinese just like evvybody else.

Is it true they eat dog?

Chinese just like evvybody else.

Are they really all Communists?

Chinese just like evvybody else.

What is Chinese water torture? What is footbinding? What is a mandarin?

Chinese just like evvybody else.

He was not like everybody else.

(Nunez 1993: 371)

Significantly, in the above passage, language difference is highlighted in the context of cultural distinctions, and the tokens for both linguistic and cultural difference connote stereotypical and negative images of the culture with which they are identified. The narrator picks on the father's non-standard pronunciation of "everybody" and amplifies its difference from standard English by using it repeatedly in the statement "Chinese just like evvybody else". The statement becomes a repeated refrain that is intended as an assertion of sameness, but ironically, its linguistic deviation throws into relief the cultural differences. Non-standard language thus becomes a potent linguistic marker of cultural divergence.

In the novel Bone (1993), we find a similar use of linguistic difference to emphasize cultural distinctions, but without the negative overtones; it is represented as an unselfconscious embrace of linguistic deviance to underscore the narrator's assured sense of cultural validity:

There's an old blue sign at the bottom of our steps: #2-4-6 *UPDAIRE*. You can't miss it and it was the first thing Mason saw. He pointed at the sign with his chin. The he threw his head back and laughed.

"D-A-I-R-E?" He looked at me and laughed again.

I shrugged. So? I thought. It was my address; it was home, where I lived.

(Ng 1993: 183)

The narrator, Leila, recounts the misspelling of "DAIRE" for "THERE" in the sign that informs visitors of her family's residence; she adds that the misspelling is never corrected and is in fact, reproduced ever time the sign is repainted. When Mason,

her boyfriend, laughs at the mistake, Leila is not bothered; instead she asserts that “It was my address; it was home, where I lived.” These statements reflect her acceptance of not only the misspelling, but also the specific character of her Chinatown home, and by implication, her ethnic culture and community. In the Chinese American context, the notion of home always carries the implication of the ethnic culture and is perceived in terms of its relationship to the host country. In this way, linguistic deviance is made to serve as a signifier of the ethnic culture. But instead of a diminished sense of self, the narrator’s attitude is one of assurance in response to the ethnic community’s linguistic and cultural difference from the dominant society.

6.8 Asserting Cultural Identity

The narrative depictions of the way linguistic practices serve as acts of identity underscore the relationship between language and cultural identity. The Chinese American narratives exploit the fact that language and cultural differences are intrinsic to the Chinese American world, and use these differences to explore their impact on the characters, their relationships with each other, and their sense of reality.

In the dynamic interplay of languages and cultures, the narratives do not present the characters as mere puppets in the stream of events, for they emphasize that in the midst of heteroglossia, language choices exist, and these choices are highly suggestive of the intentions and inclinations of the speakers, and of the way language can be used to convey, shape, disrupt or fulfil cultural expectations in their interactions.

As a primary marker of cultural distinctions, language is essential to intercultural communication. It allows the speaker to insist upon his or her cultural identity and to differentiate between cultures. This is particularly evident in narrative depictions of the interactions between Chinese Americans and non-Chinese. But in representing the linguistic and cultural diversity facing the immigrant in American society, the texts also assert their identity as Chinese American literature, as culturally distinctive from texts which represent a monolingual and monocultural reality, as well as other ethnic texts that do not represent non-Chinese American reality. In this way, it offers itself as a site of intercultural communication, based upon an awareness that many of its readers will be English-competent but non-Chinese American. This important issue forms the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTERCULTURAL TRANSLATIONS

7.1 Intercultural Texts

The concept of intercultural communication brings into focus the key features of the narratives discussed in this thesis. In defining culture as difference and in highlighting how language is always implicated in the practice of culture, both as a means of expression and as its primary signifier, the concept of intercultural communication captures the essence of the dynamic relationship between language and culture in the Chinese American narratives. The narratives' emphasis on the intimate connection between meaning and cultural contexts, their careful elaboration of sociolinguistic patterns and the consequences of language choices, and their deliberate stylistic exploitation of language variety are not only aspects of literary style, but also significant communicative acts dictated by a desire to express and establish a cultural identity that is distinct from mainstream, monolingual, Anglo-American culture and literature.

Reading the Chinese American narratives therefore involves an encounter with language as an act of identity, since these texts not only set out to 'tell a story' but to assert a certain cultural identity. Motivated by a desire to narrate the Chinese

American story in English, these texts are efforts at cultural definition in the language of the dominant culture. By being published in English, they make available not only a set of values and symbols by which the immigrant Chinese community comes to be associated, but also allow an English-speaking readership to become acquainted with the interplay of languages and the types of linguistic acts that characterize the Chinese American voice.

The concept of intercultural communication also situates the Chinese American narrative within the context of the reading experience: it foregrounds a discourse situation in which the reader is repeatedly compelled to recognize and acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of the text. The narrative is not only a text marked by intercultural intentions but also a site where intercultural communication may occur. It constructs an implied reader¹ who is often assumed to be a cultural other, for it is this reader who would benefit most from the cultural explanations and translations present in the narrative. Of course, the success of the text as intercultural communication is partially dependent on the extent the actual reader would cooperate and recognize the text as culturally distinctive. This does not discount the fact that the narratives may also address Chinese American readers, as when the narrator of The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975,1976) asks: "Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty,

¹ The implied reader is a hypothetical construct to differentiate between an actual reader of the text and it is the reader the text assumes and addresses. The concept was introduced by Booth (1961).

insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese?"(Kingston 1975,1976: 5-6)

However, the non-Chinese American reader is always part of the intended audience, for it is this reader's assumed cultural ignorance that motivates the textual strategies that explicate cultural differences, provide cultural background and identify cultural contexts. Paradoxically, these strategies also help to establish the presence of such an implied reader.

Nevertheless, the lack of cultural knowledge among their real readers is always a strong possibility, for when Chinese Americans authors use English as the language of their texts, they write not only for those in their situation but also for an English-dominated Anglo-American audience and an English-speaking international audience, both of which may have little understanding of the Chinese American experience. Therefore, a good number of their real readers would be culturally different and unfamiliar with Chinese American ways, and this is something the authors bear in mind.

7.2 The Narrator as Intermediary

The intercultural narrative therefore sets up a discourse situation in which the reader is assumed to be culturally different. In this situation, the narrator is made to play the crucial role of being an intermediary between the text and the reader. Characterised as standing at the confluence of languages and cultures in contact, the

narrator is not only an observer and recorder of ethnic culture, but acts as a commentator and translator of language and ethnic differences. This is particularly obvious in first-person narratives, where the American-born Chinese narrator describes the experience of coping with two languages and two cultures as an intrinsic part of his or her reality. This narrator may be more proficient in one language than the other, and often prefers the dominant culture over the ethnic culture. Nevertheless, he or she is privileged (or burdened) with an intimate experience of both ethnic and Anglo-American cultures and it is this narrator's perceptions of the points of cultural and linguistic difference that guide the reader into an understanding of Chinese American reality.

The narrator's bicultural and bilingual position is revealed when he or she draws upon the resources of two codes. This occurs in the following excerpt from Bone (1993):

I've never seen him. When I say "never seen," I'm thinking of the Chinese term, "seen his face." I've seen his picture and read his letters. I know him by the name he used in letters, "your father, Fu Lyman."
(Ng 1993: 187)

Although the English sentence "I've never seen him" seems innocently matter-of-fact and transparent in meaning, the narrator's explicit reference to the Chinese language in the second sentence immediately foregrounds the framework of the Chinese language that both informs and extends its meaning. This simultaneously highlights the semantic gaps between languages and the necessity of translation. By referring to the ethnic code, the narrator prevents the reader from falling into a

secure position of assuming that he or she shares the same cultural and linguistic codes of the text and establishes the ethnic culture as part of the Chinese American reality. This assertion of linguistic difference is thus an act of intercultural communication, because the text makes it clear to the reader that it is a Chinese American identity and perspective that shapes the narrative and organizes its meaning.

Even as two codes are brought into play within a single narrative moment, the narrator serves as an intermediary and translator in this intercultural instance. Translation occurs in the text when she explains that her use of the term “never seen” is based upon its equivalent in Chinese and elaborates on its nuances. This instance of translation acquires narrative importance for it emphasizes the father’s desertion of his wife and daughter in terms of physical absence and allows the reader to perceive the narrator’s feelings of abandonment, which are not diminished by his letters or photographs. By drawing on the resources of two codes, the text not only foregrounds the Chinese American bilingual background, it also suggests that for the Chinese American character, the ethnic code is a carrier of deep emotional significance. The act of translation reveals how much can be lost between languages, but for the mediating presence of the narrator.

In the following passage from Gunga Din Highway (1994), the narrator recounts how he had to memorize the ballad of “Muklan”² during Chinese school,

² The ballad of “Muklan” or “Fa Mu Lan” is a traditional Chinese poem that describes how one woman disguised herself as a male soldier to take her father’s place in the army. The traditional ballad that Chin refers to in Gunga Din Highway (1994) is inventively retold in Kingston’s The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) and chapter three, section 3.5.6, of this thesis, discusses Kingston’s version in detail.

as dictated by his teacher, nicknamed “Emperor Wong”. The ethnic code is represented as a transcription of dialect speech:

Ah yeah modie yee. Muklan mo jerng hing. Word by word, sound by sound, with the precision of military drill, the Emperor Wong marched the “Ballad of Muklan” in and marched it out of our mouths with his brass-studded wooden ruler. *Father has no grown sons. Muklan has no older brothers.* He beat the poem into our memory. I recited it with the class in pairs, trading lines, and solo for a year before I knew what it meant.

Yurn wooley see ngawn mah. Choong chee tai yeah jing. Leave me to buy a horse and saddle to ride in Father’s place. He asked why we laughed when we recited the “Ballad of Muklan,” and said, “Life is war. Everyone is born a soldier. Romantic love, pure love, is an alliance of fighters, back to back, fighting off the universe. Thus, after twelve years of war fighting back to back with her ally, Muklan goes home.”

(Chin 1994: 71-72)

Heteroglossia is present in this passage not only in terms of two languages, but also in terms of the contrasting codes of traditional speech and modern speech, poetry and prose, reporting and reminiscence, teacher and student speech styles. Significantly the line dividing the teacher and his students corresponds to the linguistic and cultural boundaries separating the immigrant Chinese from their more Westernized American-born generations. The second paragraph makes it clear that the emotional and cultural significance of the ballad is felt intensely by the teacher, but the American-born Chinese students only “laughed” when they had to recite it.

The interplay between the ethnic language and the dominant language is emphasized through the alternation between transcriptions of dialect speech and standard English text. The transcriptions are not intended as exact linguistic representations of the dialect tongue, for the reader is not provided with a phonetic

chart, as in a pronunciation dictionary, which would state the tones and sounds of the dialect speech accurately. Instead, their main aim is to provide the non-Chinese reader with a sense of the linguistic divergence between Chinese and standard English, and an experience of the incomprehensibility of a foreign tongue, which exactly mirrors the narrator's own experience in Chinese class, as he states in the final sentence of the first paragraph. The transcription of dialect speech in this English narrative therefore allows this episode to function as intercultural discourse, emphasizing the ethnic context of the scene being described, and the ballad of "Muklan" as a Chinese cultural text.

However, it is not just Chinese culture, but Chinese American identity that is established when the narrator states his difficulty in understanding the traditional poem that he was forced to memorize. Language differences therefore underscore a gap in cultural understanding that is revealed in the students' lack of appreciation for the ballad ("He asked why we laughed when we recited the "Ballad of Muklan," . . ."). This cultural gap brings into focus the cultural disaffection, together with language loss, that affects later-generations of American-born Chinese, as described in chapters two and four of this thesis. All but one of the narrators of the novel Gunga Din Highway (1994) are American-born Chinese, so it is not surprising that cultural disorientation forms one of its main themes.

Yet, ironically, it is an American-born narrator who provides the English translation of the dialect renditions of the ballad in this first-person narrative. This may be attributed to stylistic necessity, but as the narrator explains portions of the poem, we come to see his eventual understanding of its meaning as an indication of

the impact of the ethnic culture upon the American-born generations. Although alienated from traditional Chinese culture, the narrator is nevertheless affected by it; and as a member of his ethnic community, he is able to serve as a translator of a cultural text and as an intermediary between the reader and his ethnic culture. Thus, he provides the translation that allows the reader to make sense of the dialect transcriptions of the ballad; without this mediating action, the ballad and the Chinese context would remain a mystery to the non-Chinese reader.

In the following excerpt from Typical American (1991), an omniscient narrator speaks from the perspective of Ralph, a Chinese student in America, who realises that he has to solve the problem of his expired student visa:

Xiang banfa. An essential Chinese idea – he had to *think of a way*. In a world full of obstacles, a person needed to know how to go around. What *banfa* did he have, though? All he could think of was how many stories he knew about people smarter than he was. The advisor in *Three Kingdoms*, for instance, who, needing arrows, floated barges of hay down an enemy-held river. It's night; the enemy shoots and shoots; downstream at dawn, he plucks from the hay arrows to last weeks. Now there was a Chinese man!

(Jen 1991: 27)

As in Gunga Din Highway (1994), a transcription of the ethnic language signals the presence of both the ethnic language and the ethnic cultural framework. The phrase “xiang banfa” is a transcription of the Mandarin phrase { 想办法 }, where the first ideograph represents “think” and the latter two represent “solution”. In the passage, its equivalent meaning in English - “to think of a way” - is italicized to correspond with the italicized Mandarin phrase and to signal its status as a translation of the

Chinese phrase. Both the italics and the paragraph-initial position of the Mandarin phrase are stylistic devices to draw attention to the Chinese cultural context that informs Ralph's use of his ethnic language. They foreground the fact that the passage is written from his point of view, which perceives "xiang banfa" as a uniquely Chinese act. The Chinese cultural context is reinforced through the recounting of a story about a Chinese advisor. The foregrounding of the Chinese language and cultural context is significant, for both reveal Ralph as an ethnic Chinese, newly arrived in the United States, whose mental framework is as yet little affected by Anglo-American culture.

Once again, it is the narrator who provides the translation and the explanation, thereby allowing the non-Chinese reader access to the ethnic framework. At the same time, the emphasis on the Chinese linguistic code and cultural narrative allows this narrative description to be cast as intercultural discourse, in which the presence of the ethnic context differentiates it from monolingual and monocentric English texts and underscores the fact that this is a narrative about the Chinese American experience.

Highlighting the relationship between translation and intercultural communication, Pym makes the following point:

How might one define the points where one culture stops and another begins? The borders are no easier to draw than those between languages or communities. . . . Instead of looking for differentiated or distilled cultural essences, it could be fruitful to look at translations themselves in order to see what they have to say about cultural frontiers. It is enough to define the limits of a culture as *the points where transferred texts have had to be (intralingually or interlingually) translated*. That is, if a

text can be adequately transferred without translation, there is cultural continuity. And if a text has been translated, it represents distance between at least two cultures.

(Pym 1992: 25-26)

Pym stresses that the need for translation, whether intralingual or interlingual, signals cultural boundaries, for the translation of a text always involves an interpretation of its meaning and a careful selection of terms from the language of the target culture in order to produce an equivalent text. Cultural continuity that includes sharing a common linguistic code, and all that this entails in terms of shared sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge, would remove the need for linguistic and cultural translations. Translation therefore constitutes a powerful signifier of cultural difference.

The repeated acts of translation in the Chinese American narratives not only foreground the linguistic differences between the languages of the ethnic and Anglo-American communities, they also highlight the lack of cultural continuity between them. Where the ethnic text ends and its English equivalent begins may be regarded as a textual sign of the cultural boundaries that make translation necessary. These translations signify the anticipated cultural differences between the reader and the text, because their very presence posits a reader who does not share the linguistic and cultural codes of the ethnic community. Thus, translation is made to *enact* and *inscribe* cultural difference. It imposes a context of cultural difference, even when the concepts themselves are not culture-specific. Translation thus serves as a device

to register a sense of identity, to stamp the imprint of the ethnic culture upon the English text. In doing so, it emphasizes the act of intercultural communication.

7.3 “You just translate”

The narratives not only practise translation, they also often depict Chinese American characters in the act of translation. Previous chapters, particularly chapters five and six, have discussed the presence of translation in the Chinese American narratives, but here we wish to examine its significance in relation to the narrator and in the context of intercultural communication.

The recurrent depictions of translation suggest that it is both intrinsic to and definitive of Chinese American reality: to be Chinese American is to grapple with the discontinuities of minority existence in the English-dominated Anglo-American world, and to engage in the translation of linguistic and cultural meaning from one cultural domain to the other. Thus, the narrator’s role as an intermediary between the text and the reader is often paralleled by a similar role within the narratives, as he or she serves as a translator and interpreter between the ethnic group and the larger American society.

The form of translation undertaken by Chinese American characters belongs to the category described by Wadensjö as “natural translation” (1998: 36-37). Unlike professional translation, it occurs in everyday circumstances and without the benefit of special training; natural translators assume the role out of

necessity and sometimes reluctantly. Prototypical examples of natural translation include immigrant children interpreting for their parents in contacts with the dominant society, such as at the doctor's office or at an employment agency. In the narratives, the act of translation is never impersonal; it is always depicted as having emotional and psychological reverberations for the character.

In the following excerpt from Bone (1993), the narrator recalls her resentment at having to translate for her parents:

Growing up, I wasn't as generous.(1) I hated standing in the lines: social security, disability, immigration.(2) What I hated most was the talking for Mah and Leon, the whole translation number.(3) Every English word counted and I was responsible.(4) I went through a real resentment stage.(5) Every English word was like a curse.(6) I'm over that now.(7) I think.(8)

(Ng 1993: 17)

The narrator forcefully expresses her dislike at having to serve as translator for her parents, using the emotive verb "hated" (sentence 3) and describing the English language with the negative noun "curse" (sentence 6); she also states in no uncertain terms that she "went through a real resentment stage" (sentence 5). Her statement "Every English word counted and I was responsible" (sentence 4) highlights the weight of responsibility that accompanies the exercise of translation, and emphasizes that translation is never simply a matter of linguistics for the minority person, but also a matter of representation, of speaking accurately for another person, and often in situations of unequal power, in which the minority person feels powerless and vulnerable. It is therefore a heavy burden for a young child, when he

or she is made to bear the expectations of both the ethnic and the dominant communities. In such a context, translation becomes an exercise fraught with uncertainties and anxieties, and being bilingual seems more a burden than an advantage.

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976)

contains an extended description of the discomfort of a Chinese American child forced into the role of translator:

“Aha!” she yelled.(1) “You!(2) The biggest.(3)” She was pointing at me.(4) “You go to the drugstore.(5)”

“What do you want me to buy, Mother?” I said.(6)

“Buy nothing.(7) Don’t bring one cent.(8) Go and make them stop the curse.(9)”

“I don’t want to go.(10) I don’t know how to do that.(11) There are no such things as curses.(12) They’ll think I’m crazy.(13)”

“If you don’t go, I’m holding you responsible for bringing a plague on this family.(14)”

“What am I supposed to do when I get there?” I said, sullen and trapped.(15) “Do I say, ‘Your delivery boy made a wrong delivery’?(16)”

“They know he made a wrong delivery.(17) I want you to make them rectify their crime.(18)”

I felt sick already.(19) She’d make me swing stinky censers around the counter, at the druggist, at the customers.(20) Throw dog blood on the druggist.(21) I couldn’t stand her plans.(22)

“You get reparation candy,” she said.(23) “You say, ‘You have tainted my house with sick medicine and must remove the curse with sweetness.’(24) He’ll understand.(25)”

“He didn’t do it on purpose.(26) And no, he won’t, Mother.(27) They don’t understand stuff like that.(28) I won’t be able to say it right.(29) He’ll call us beggars.(30)”

“You just translate.(31)” She searched me to make sure I wasn’t hiding any money.(32) I was sneaky and bad enough to buy the candy and come back pretending it was a free gift.(33)

“Mymothersezttagimmesomecandy,” I said to the druggist.(34) Be cute and small.(35) No one hurts the cute and small.(36)

“What?(37) Speak up.(38) Speak English,” he said, big in his white druggist coat.(39)

"Tatatagimme somecandy.(40)"
 The druggist leaned way over the counter and frowned.(41) "Some free candy," I said.(42) "Sample candy.(43)"
 "We don't give sample candy, young lady," he said.(44)
 "My mother said you have to give us candy.(45) She said that is the way the Chinese do it.(46)"
 "What?(47)"
 "That is the way the Chinese do it.(48)"
 "Do what?(49)"
 "Do things.(50)" I felt the weight and immensity of things impossible to explain to the druggist.(51)
 "Can I give you some money?" he asked.(52)
 "No, we want candy.(53)"
 He reached into a jar and gave me a handful of lollipops.(54) He gave us candy all year round, year after year, every time we went into the drugstore.(55) When different druggists or clerks waited on us, they also gave us candy.(56) They had talked us over.(57) They gave us Halloween candy in December, Christmas candy around Valentine's day, candy hearts at Easter, and Easter eggs at Halloween.(58) "See?" said our mother.(59) "They understand.(60) You kids just aren't very brave.(61)" But I knew that they did not understand.(62) They thought we were beggars without a home who lived in back of the laundry.(63) They felt sorry for us.(64) I did not eat their candy.(65) I did not go inside the drugstore or walk past it unless my parents forced me to.(66)

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 168-171)

The translation difficulties experienced by the narrator here is not simply the result of linguistic differences but are related to cultural intranslatability, for they are rooted in the deep gulf that separates the ethnic culture from the Anglo-American one. Thus, the narrator is not only required to translate across languages, she must also engage in cultural translation, for it is the cultural context that makes sense of the words her mother requires her to translate: "You say, 'You have tainted my house with sick medicine and must remove the curse with sweetness'"(sentence 24). Outside the context of traditional Chinese superstition, such words would be incomprehensible, nonsensical.

But the child translator lacks the ability to perform this complex act; she can only feel “the weight and immensity of things impossible to explain to the druggist” (sentence 51). Her sole recourse is to reframe her mother’s request in a form that would be accessible to the American druggist; thus, instead of “reparation candy” (sentence 23), she asks for “sample candy” (sentence 43), and, in the face of Anglo-American incomprehension, falls back on a general statement that is both a cliché and a retreat into a stereotypical view of the impenetrability of the ethnic culture: “That is the way the Chinese do it” (sentence 48).

While the narrator manages to bring about an outcome that matches her mother’s expectations, she recognizes that she has failed in terms of real cultural translation; in opposition to her mother’s triumphant assertion that the American druggist now understood Chinese custom, the narrator’s statements in sentences 62 and 63 underscore the fact that this latest encounter has only reinforced the dominant culture’s stereotypical views of the minority community. Thus, while her mother and the druggist, as members of divergent cultural groups, presume to understand each other, the narrator is acutely conscious that their presumption is based upon mistaken assumptions and mutual incomprehensibility encouraged by language differences.

The Chinese American identity of the narrator is never more apparent than in her intense awareness of the cultural boundary separating the ethnic community from Anglo-American society. Her ability to perceive both cultural perspectives is simultaneously a privilege and a burden, for she is caught between cultures: unable to wholeheartedly embrace the traditional culture of her mother, neither is she part

of Anglo-American society, as the passage above makes clear. This is a classical example of the American-born generation's dilemma, and it is exposed in the act of translation.

In the short story "Pangs of Love" (1993), the male narrator describes a common language difficulty experienced by many American-born Chinese:

I know what I want to say in English. My mind's stuffed full with the words. I pull one sentence at a time from the elegant little speech I've devised over the months for just this occasion, and try to piece together a word-for-word translation into Chinese. Yielding nonsense. I abandon this approach and opt for the shorter path, the one of reduction, simplicity, lowest common denominator.

(Louie 1993: 283)

In the narrative, English is revealed as the dominant code in the narrator's speech repertoire. While this is an asset in the context of American assimilation, it is a liability in the context of his relationship with his mother, for his proficiency in English is accompanied by a loss of competence in his ethnic dialect. This language loss hampers his communication with his mother, a first-generation Chinese American with limited English-language competence. The two generations of Chinese Americans are thus separated by a linguistic gulf that prevents each from understanding the other. Consequently, in the above passage, the narrator's attempt to communicate the reality of his failed relationship with a girl his mother likes is reduced to the "lowest common denominator" of simple statements and bald facts.

The passage expresses a central truth: that word-for-word translation does not guarantee equivalence in meaning, for both form and context contribute to the

meaning of a text. Thus, the narrator realises that a message which sounds convincing in English must be repackaged and recontextualised to carry the same nuances and signification from one cultural sphere to another. Unfortunately, his linguistic abilities do not allow him to translate the elegance of his “little speech” in English into the ethnic language.

In Bone (1993), the narrator describes her difficulty in translating between English and Chinese as a result of the way each language seems identified with different spheres of experience and different aspects of her personality:

This was not the first time I'd done something and not told. I have a whole different vocabulary of feeling in English than in Chinese, and not everything can be translated.

(Ng 1993: 18)

The passage suggests that, for this Chinese American, having two languages encourages two separate ways of living, feeling and seeing, and that language also works to keep them apart, for “not everything can be translated”. The narrator’s inability to translate her feelings from English to Chinese and vice versa, suggests that language and experience are intimately connected, and, for the bilingual person, certain experiences or feelings are more appropriate and more authentic in one language than the other.

Therefore, the injunction to “just translate” is not as easy to obey as it seems. There is never a simple one-to-one correspondence between language and culture. The texts suggest that, for these Chinese American narratives, the ethnic language

and English operate in different spheres of existence, and translating from one language to another always seems to involve a shift in mental and emotional frameworks. Their translation difficulties underscore the fact that languages are always embedded in cultural contexts, and that translation is both a linguistic and cultural exercise. Bassnett's candid remark exactly sums up their predicament:

“Try as I may, I cannot take language out of culture or culture out of language.”

(Bassnett 1998: 81)

7.4 Misleading Translations

While the narrator of The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) focuses on the agony of having to translate for her non-English-speaking mother, a second-generation Chinese American daughter in The Joy Luck Club (1989) describes how she took advantage of her position as an interpreter:

I often lied when I had to translate for her, the endless forms, instructions, notices from school, telephone calls. “*Shemma yisz?*” – What meaning? – she asked me when a man at a grocery store yelled at her for opening up jars to smell the insides. I was so embarrassed I told her that Chinese people were not allowed to shop there. When the school sent a notice home about a polio vaccination, I told her the time and place, and added that all students were now required to use metal lunch boxes, since they had discovered old paper bags can carry polio germs.

(Tan 1989: 99)

The passage draws attention to the fact that translation occurs because one of the parties involved in the discourse situation is unable to understand the language of the other. Taking advantage of her mother's inability to comprehend English, the narrator, Lena St. Clair, deliberately manipulates and rewords messages from the dominant society. Her translations are therefore marked by a deliberate tinkering of the text, which could be distorting but innocuous, such as when she translates the grocer's displeasure over her mother's actions into a more general text on discrimination: "Chinese people were not allowed to shop there"; or more deliberately self-serving, as when she adds the non-existent requirement for a metal lunch box to the school's notice about polio vaccination. The passage foregrounds the fact that the roles of translator and interpreter can be exploited and that the translator is not always a disinterested party in the discourse situation.

Textual manipulation always occurs in translation, although hopefully not to the extent performed by Lena St. Clair. Bassnett describes translation as textual production and reminds us that:

. . . textual production is all about shaping language into patterns that will have maximum impact upon the reader. Any process of shaping anything involves the skills of the person who does the shaping, in other words, it involves textual manipulation. And that person is a product of his or her time, culture, gender, society, which means that a translation is always embedded in a context.

(Bassnett 1998: 84)

Bassnett's observations emphasize that translation, as textual production, involves choices over word-meaning, sentence patterns, faithfulness to the original in terms

of form or sense, and degrees of faithfulness. These choices are related to the purpose of the translation and the audience for whom it is intended. But, even more significant is the fact that these choices are made by a translator who is shaped by “his or her time, culture, gender, society”. Consequently, the notion of faithfulness to the original must be qualified by these considerations.

The Chinese American narratives play with the notion of reliability in translation. The deliberate distortions of the English texts by Lena in The Joy Luck Club (1989) are perhaps too flagrant a disregard for the norm of faithfulness in translation. Her use of the verb “lied” recognizes that she breaks one of the social norms of communication. However, her mistranslations effectively highlight the way texts can be distorted as they move from one culture and language to another, and that this distortion puts at risk the hope of real communication between the ethnic minority group and the dominant society. Even worse, it puts in place false representations of each cultural group and each party comes away with inaccurate ideas of each other’s cultural identity.

In another episode from The Joy Luck Club (1989), the textual distortion accompanying translation is exploited for comic effects. The narrator, Lindo Jong, relates An-mei Hsu’s translation of the sayings on the strips of paper that they insert into the fortune cookies at the factory:

I didn’t understand what she meant. So she picked up one of the strips of paper and read it aloud, first in English: “Do not fight and air your dirty laundry in public. To the victor go the spoils.” Then she translated in Chinese: “You shouldn’t fight and do your laundry at the same time. If you win, your clothes will get dirty.”

I still did not know what she meant. So she picked up another one and read in English: "Money is the root of all evil. Look around you and dig deep." And then in Chinese: "Money is a bad influence. You become restless and rob graves."

"What is this nonsense?" I asked her, putting the strips of paper in my pocket, thinking I should study these classical American sayings.

"They are fortunes," she explained. "American people think Chinese people write these sayings."

"But we never say such things!" I said. "These things don't make sense. These are not fortunes, they are bad instructions."

"No, Miss," she said, laughing, "it is our bad fortune to be here making these and somebody else's bad fortune to pay to get them."

(Tan 1989: 261-262)

The humour of the passage works on several levels: the most obvious one is An Mei-hsu's mistranslation of the sayings; another level stems from the strange logic of what appears to be gnomic utterances; yet another level draws on the irony that the sayings inserted in the fortune cookies are presented and even accepted as part of Chinese wisdom, as suggested by An Mei-hsu's observation that "American people think Chinese people write these sayings"; a fourth level resides in the multiple paradox of having Chinese workers insert American imitations of Chinese sayings into fortune cookies, which they themselves are ignorant of; and fifthly, there is the irony of the fortune cookie which comes with every Chinese restaurant meal and takeaway and thus, serves as a palpable marker of Chinese culture, but is, in reality, an American invention³.

The text therefore exploits the distortion that mistranslation brings for comic effect. Mistranslation occurs as An Mei-hsu translates the fortune cookie sayings

³ Pan (1990: 334-335) relates an interesting attempt by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service to reach the immigrant Chinese by inserting messages in fortune cookies. The plan failed because it was based on the mistaken perception of the fortune cookie as a Chinese cultural product.

from English into Chinese, but it also occurs in the sayings themselves, as misrepresentations of the Chinese culture for an American public. This crossing and recrossing of cultural and linguistic misreadings only reinforces each culture's mistaken view of the other. With both the translator and narrator hampered by a lack of knowledge of the dominant culture and language, there is no outside intervention to correct their false impressions.

7.5 Intercultural Awareness

In The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976), the narrator does not presume upon the ideal of exact equivalence in translation. In fact, she underscores her difficulties as a translator:

I've been looking up "Ho Chi Kuei," which is what the immigrants call us – Ho Chi Ghosts. "Well, Ho Chi Kuei," they say, "what silliness have you been up to now?" "That's a Ho Chi Kuei for you," they say, no matter what we've done. It was more complicated (and therefore worse) than "dog," which they say affectionately, mostly to boys. They use "pig" and "stink pig" for girls, and only in an angry voice. The river-pirate great-uncle called even my middle brother Ho Chi Kuei, and he seemed to like him best. The maggot third great-uncle even shouted "Ho Chi Kuei!" at the boy. I don't know any Chinese I can ask without getting myself scolded or teased, so I've been looking in books. So far I have the following translations for *ho* and/or *chi*: "centipede," "grub," "bastard carp," "non-eater," "dustpan-and-broom" (But that's a synonym for "wife"). Or perhaps I've romanized the spelling wrong and it is *Hao* Chi Kuei, which could mean they are calling us "Good Foundation Ghosts." The immigrants could be saying that we were born on Gold Mountain and have advantages. Sometimes they scorn us for having it so easy, and

sometimes they're delighted.

(Kingston 1975, 1976: 204-205)

The narrator's search for the correct English translation of the Chinese phrase "Ho Chi Kuei" throws up the multiple ways that the terms may be interpreted and highlights how the selection of one term over another can generate completely opposite meanings. The translation space is therefore characterized as one of possible rather than definite meaning, for the narrator does not presume to act as a cultural or linguistic authority. This is in opposition to the traditional notion of the translator who guarantees a faithful representation of the source text. The narrator's deliberations emphasize that translation always involves choices and textual manipulation.

Bassnett reminds us that:

The original text never reappears in the new language, rather what appears is something different that has a relationship of some kind with that original. But all sorts of things happen during translation. It may be that some words and phrases are untranslatable because they do not exist outside the source language. Or the form may be untranslatable. Or aspects of the original may be unacceptable in the target system and so are omitted . . . It is possible to censor a text by omission, or by alteration, without readers even becoming aware of what has happened.

(Bassnett 1998: 78-79)

Bassnett's comments highlight the possible changes that a text undergoes in translation, and serves as a warning against regarding any translation as infallible. In fact, exact faithfulness to the original is a practical impossibility.

Paradoxically, by highlighting the difficulties of translation, Kingston's narrator creates an awareness of the cultural context in which the original text is embedded. By locating the Chinese phrase in its cultural context, she invites the reader to participate in the process of interpretation: meaning is not given, but possibilities are offered. Moreover, linguistic deficiency does not prevent her from serving as a cultural intermediary, for while she may not be able to locate the specific translation of "Ho Chi Kuei", she is able to draw on her personal experience as a member of the ethnic community and her store of cultural knowledge and offer these as clues to its meaning.

In The Joy Luck Club (1989), we find a similar recognition of the difficulty of translation. The following excerpt begins with a dialogue between Rose Hsu Jordan and her mother about the former's separation from her husband:

"I don't think we should talk about Ted now, not here."(1)

"Why can you talk about this with a psyche-atric and not with mother?"(2)

"Psychiatrist."(3)

"Psyche-atricks," she corrected herself.(4)

"A mother is best.(5) A mother knows what is inside you," she said above the singing voices.(6) "A psyche-atricks will only make you *hulihudu*, make you see *heimongmong*."(7)

Back home, I thought about what she said.(8) And it was true.(9) Lately I had been feeling *hulihudu*.(10) And everything around me seemed to be *heimongmong*.(11) These were words I had never thought about in English terms.(12) I suppose the closest in meaning would be "confused" and "dark fog."(13)

But really, the words mean much more than that.(14) Maybe they can't be easily translated because they refer to a sensation that only Chinese people have, as if you were falling headfirst through Old Mr. Chou's door, then trying to find your way back.(15) But you're so scared you

can't open your eyes, so you get on your hands and knees and grope in the dark, listening for voices to tell you which way to go.(16)
(Tan 1989: 184)

Translation is motivated by the presence of Chinese phrases, "*hulihudu*" and "*heimongmong*" in the mother's speech. Highlighted through italicisation, the terms foreground the Chinese cultural framework that shapes the mother's perspective, whose speech, with its code mixing and mispronunciations, identifies her as a first-generation Chinese American.

The separate spheres of experience that is associated with different languages is also highlighted when the narrator muses that the two Chinese phrases "were words I had never thought about in English terms" (sentence 12). This statement simultaneously emphasizes the cultural context in which the phrases are embedded and explains why the narrator has difficulty translating them.

The narrator foregrounds the problem of translation three times: "I suppose the closest in meaning would be . . ." (sentence 13); "But really, the words mean much more than that" (sentence 14); and " Maybe they can't be easily translated . . ." (sentence 15). Each time, her comments are heavily marked by uncertainty, expressed through the epistemic modal verb "suppose" (sentence 13), the auxiliary "would" (sentence 13) and the adverbs "really" (sentence 14) and "Maybe" (sentence 15). By underscoring the narrator's difficulties in her attempt to provide the most accurate translation of the terms, these epistemic expressions also remind the reader that exact equivalence in meaning is a goal, at best, and that every

translation is filtered through the perceptions and experiences of the translator. However, what the narrator/translator does offer are meaningful approximations.

Therefore, the translator is never more honest than when he or she registers the difficulties of translation. Rose's solution, like the narrator of The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1975, 1976) is to offer her own experience as a means of allowing the reader some insight into the meaning of the terms. Old Mr Chou, as the bogey man of her nightmares, has already been introduced to the reader in the early part of the narrative. Consequently, when she refers to him at this point, she draws on the reader's familiarity with him as "the guardian of a door that opened into dreams" (Tan 1989: 181-182), and her earlier descriptions of how her dreams of him always involve confusion and fear. Her experience of this bogey man becomes a reference point for her explanation of the meaning of the two Chinese phrases, "*hulihudu*" and "*heimongmong*", expanding her earlier inadequate translations: "confused" and "dark fog" (sentence 13).

By situating their translations in specific contexts, both of the above narrators open up spaces in which the reader can participate in the interpretation process: meaning is not rendered static, instead, it is contextualized, examined and expanded. Moreover, as the narrators emphasize the emotional significance of the original texts and the relationship between meaning and experience, the reader comes to see that texts and their translations are not suspended in lifeless voids, that they are deeply connected to the circumstances in which they are produced, and that accessing their meaning is an imaginative and reflexive process. In the Chinese

American texts, translation is not a closure but a deliberation over meaningful possibilities.

When we view the Chinese American texts as intercultural narratives, we see that translation does not just occur on the level of individual words and phrases, but that the whole text may be represented as a form of translation, as a careful re-expression of the minority culture in the dominant language, and an attempt to translate the meanings engendered by one cultural framework to another textual space. It is in this act of translating culture that the narratives engage in conspicuous intercultural communication.

The narratives therefore draw the reader into a cross-cultural encounter, which is no less immediate and meaningful than face to face encounters. Pride comments on the different forms of cross-cultural encounters:

Obviously a good deal hinges on what is understood by the word “encounters” itself – encounters which are specifically “cross-cultural” and which have something to do with “communication and miscommunication”. They may of course take the form of face-to-face confrontations with other individuals; or they may be something altogether different. Thus common usage alone tells us that encounters, no less than culture itself, may be all in the mind: “I thought I understood these people, until I encountered their architecture/pop music/fashions/ . . . etc.”; “I first encountered the Russians in the pages of *War and Peace*”; and so on. Both types of encounter may be experienced at the time as new perceptions, new insights, or new interpretations, amounting perhaps to significant increments of awareness or knowledge . . .

(Pride 1985: 8)

While Pride notes that cross-cultural communication often takes the form of “face-to-face confrontations with other individuals”, he emphasizes another type of cross-cultural meeting that takes place when a person encounters another culture through its music, fashion, or literature. These cultural products are the texts on which the culture inscribes itself and through which it presents itself to others. In this form of cross-cultural meeting, the encounter occurs in the mind of the reader, viewer or listener, but it can just as effectively result in an appreciation of a different culture and an increase in understanding.

The act of translation becomes a form of cross-cultural exchange, for in rendering the meaning of words in one language into another, it signals the presence of another culture and orientates the reader towards a different cultural point of view. Unlike face-to-face intercultural exchange, where physical differences are visible reminders of cultural differences, the narratives rely on language to assert cultural distinctions, and translation serve as a useful means of highlighting cultural boundaries.

The disclosure of translation difficulties, that stem primarily from linguistic deficiencies, and the possibility of distortion may raise doubts concerning the reliability of the narrator/translator. On the other hand, the very act of disclosure pre-empts any false impressions of the narrator as a cultural and linguistic authority. Such disclosures emphasize that the narratives represent personal accounts of the Chinese American experience and serve as important reminders of the narrator’s own identity as a Chinese American, for whom language loss and cultural

compromise are aspects of the tensions between mainstream and minority culture, between Western modes of living and the traditions of the immigrant generation.

Translation therefore underscores the difficulty of reproducing a particular cultural perspective and identity in a text of another language. This difficulty confronts the Chinese American writers as they attempt to portray aspects of their ethnicity in English. In their narratives, the description of communication difficulties between members of different groups becomes a mirror of the difficulties encountered by the narrators as they attempt to translate some aspect of the ethnic language or ethnic culture across to the reader.

In the representation of Chinese American identity, the narratives capitalize on the differences between languages, both in depictions of discourse situations within the narratives and on the level of discourse between the text and the reader, to signify cultural distinctions. Language becomes intimately identified with culture, as the narratives exploit the relationship between word-meaning and cultural context, between ethnic identity and sociolinguistic practices, between stylistics and the representation culture. Language therefore always carries cultural significance in the world of the narratives, and it serves as a primary means of expressing and marking cultural difference.

Using language to express difference does not have to be divisive; in representing cultural differences, language can also express and clarify cultural differences and thus the need for cultural sensitivity. The narratives, in as much as they succeed in conveying the Chinese American cultural identity, are examples of successful intercultural encounters, for they not only assert the presence of cultural

differences but in expressing them, draw them out of the shadow of ignorance and misconception, bring them to a place where they can be examined and understood. Such intercultural discourse uncovers lines of differences in order to broaden knowledge and acceptance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

This thesis began with the fact that globalization has not erased the human tendency towards differentiation. Culture is still essentially defined in terms of difference and cultivated as such.

The Chinese American narratives in this study partake of both the reality of globalization and the need for cultural distinction, for they draw upon the development of English as an international lingua franca to reach a wider audience and simultaneously assert their uniqueness as Chinese American texts through the language. As revealed in this thesis, the theme of cultural difference and the attempt to present the Chinese American identity predominate in these narratives.

Consequently, in this thesis, the Chinese American texts are described as intercultural narratives. Written from the perspective of the ethnic minority, they seek to express the uniqueness of the Chinese American experience, which differs substantially from mainstream Anglo-American experience. A major part of the Chinese American experience consists of an interplay of languages and the juxtaposition of the ethnic culture against the English-dominated, white American culture.

As expressions of minority identity, the narratives foreground language as a primary marker of cultural identity. In these texts, language and culture are

intrinsically connected: language both expresses and signifies culture. Not only is language used to describe and comment on culture, it is also commented upon in terms of its relationship to the cultural community and in terms of the way it functions as an act of identity. Not surprisingly, situations of language use are repeatedly highlighted to establish the cultural identities of characters and their relationship with each other. Moreover, language is exploited stylistically to lend a palpable presence to the ethnic languages that are essential aspects of the Chinese American reality.

The relationship between language and culture in these narratives is first examined on the level of words and their cultural associations in chapter three. This chapter reveals that the cultural meanings of words are engendered through associations with particular cultural contexts. By reproducing the cultural meaning of the noun “girl” through prototype semantics, the narrative of “White tigers” not only reveals the traditional Chinese preconceptions attached to the noun, it also emphasizes how words are attached to specific cultural frameworks, which affect their use and interpretation. The notion of cultural semantics therefore underscores the close relationship between language and culture in these narratives.

To understand the relationship between language and culture in the Chinese American narratives, it was necessary to draw upon the resources of both stylistics and sociolinguistics. Stylistics alone would trace the interesting use of language in the narratives, highlighting the linguistic deviations that are used to express the ethnic perspective and characterise the speech styles of certain characters. However, it is sociolinguistics that reveals the close relationship between narrative depiction

and sociolinguistic reality, and provides important concepts for analysing the description and depiction of language patterns in the narratives. The combination of stylistics and sociolinguistics therefore yielded a much richer analysis.

Consequently, in chapter four, the sociolinguistic pressures surrounding immigrant groups and research on the Chinese American speech community were discussed, as these provide a basis from which to analyse the narrative depictions of the language experience of Chinese Americans. It is the sociolinguistic fact of language shift that alerts us to the way language behaviour is used to differentiate between different generations of Chinese Americans in the narratives. Sociolinguistics also revealed that the narrative depictions are rooted in reality. But the narratives go beyond the data when they particularize situations of language contact, elaborating on how language choices are aspects of cultural compromise and closely related to cultural identity.

Chapter five discussed the stylistic strategies for representing non-English codes in the Chinese American narratives. This focus on stylistics is nevertheless framed by a sociolinguistic awareness of the multilingual situation of the Chinese American speech community revealed in chapter four. Thus, when the narratives introduce language variance, we recognize that this manipulation of language is not solely for literary effect, but is an effective means of registering the presence of the ethnic languages in the Chinese American speech repertoire. We come to see that this heteroglossia not only disturbs the monologic appearance of the English narratives, it also characterizes the immigrant reality as one in which English often competes with the ethnic languages. This linguistic opposition then becomes a

telling sign of the conflict between immigrant Chinese culture and white Anglo-American culture.

The intimate relationship between language and culture is underscored through narrative depictions of discourse situations in which the language practices of members of different cultural groups become focal points of cultural difference. Chapter six focused on these discourse situations, which tend to form central episodes in the narratives. Drawing on the combined resource of sociolinguistics and stylistics, it examined the ways the discourse strategies of code mixing and code switching are used to illuminate cultural differences between characters and their response to members of other cultures, as well as the way in which language choice becomes an act of identity.

The Chinese American narratives exploit the fact that language and cultural differences are intrinsic to the Chinese American world, and rely on language to make the cultural identity of Chinese America perceptible. As they assert their distinctiveness, they engage in intercultural communication, and chapter seven returns to this issue by examining the role of the narrator. The narrator not only serves as a translator in situations within the texts, he or she also mediates between the reader and the world of the text, 'translating' Chinese American reality for the reader. In this 'translation', language is repeatedly used to express and represent cultural difference.

Viewing the narratives in terms of intercultural discourse allows us perceive them as cultural products, written by Chinese American who are intensely aware of their minority status and the need to assert their unique identity against the

homogenizing tendencies of mainstream English-speaking Anglo-American culture. However they do not document culture, instead they set out to represent culture, with the aid of the imagination, in the form of a story. In this type of intercultural discourse, the expression of cultural difference invariably draws upon the cultural significance of language.

This study therefore reveals that, in these narratives, there is an intense awareness of the cultural significance of language and a strong preoccupation with the relationship between language and cultural identity. It also demonstrates that in narratives of this type, a combination of stylistics and sociolinguistics provides the necessary tools for analysing them. Thus, in approaching texts as intercultural discourse, an awareness of sociolinguistic principles is essential for understanding the role of language in asserting cultural distinctions, particularly because such written discourse draws heavily upon the cultural significance of language for narrative import.

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