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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of subtractive schooling, including language use in education, on the identity of a group of ethnic minority students in Central Highlands of Vietnam. Drawing on semistructured interview data, a deeper look is taken into the ways in which these students identify themselves with their languages, cultures, and social relations. Findings reveal that the subtractive power of the school language and the institutional milieu profoundly influenced their identity construction by creating the conditions for (a) the devaluation of their language and cultural identity as a consequence of the invasion of their sociocultural territory by the dominant language and culture and (b) the segregation and disunity that affected their identity construction through social relations. Although subtractive schooling apparently facilitated students' integration into the mainstream, its invisible power forced them not only to integrate but also to bear the full burden of constructing new identities to adjust to the school environment and the mainstream society.

In many polities across the world, there exists an unwritten law that recognizes only a single official language in education (Dooly, Vallejo, & Unamuno, 2009). This dominant language and its underlying culture inform every school practice, from its use as medium of instruction to other school activities (Giroux, 1983). Minority people in these polities may have no choice but to join this natural flow of the educational system. How minority students "swim" and "survive" in this subtractive environment (Valenzuela, 1999) has been a major concern of research. However, this research has dealt with the issues mainly by drawing on the views and perspectives of policy makers, educators, or teachers. Thus, the consequent understanding of subtractive schooling is partial at best because this is drawn from outside, by people other than minority students themselves. How minority students experience this environment is an issue that has not received much attention. In polities such as Vietnam, where the language of the majority dominates all aspects of social, economic, and political life, research on minority languages and their speakers has received little attention. Consequently, not much is known about how minority students struggle in adapting to mainstream schooling and the society.

This paper seeks an understanding of the life of eight ethnic minority students in a subtractive school environment in Vietnam. It is expected to contribute to our knowledge of minority students in Vietnam and to the literature on ethnic minority students participating in the mainstream society. We hope that our analysis and findings will assist educators and school administrators in creating a supportive education environment for minority students in the polity. As the politics of identity shapes the formation of students' ability to succeed in school (Baulch, Haughton, Haughton, & Truong, 2002), there is a need to put the practice into place to help them to construct a positive way of looking at themselves and dealing with difficulties in their schooling.

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Context

Ethnic minority people in Central Highlands of Vietnam

In the past, the majority of the local residents in Central Highlands were ethnic minority communities. Kinh (Viet), the dominant majority, mostly lived in the lowlands, deltas, and littorals. Since the government initiated resettlement projects in the 1990s, the number of Kinh settlers, including farm owners, merchants, and state officials from the north and other regions, has rapidly increased. Nevertheless, the Central Highlands region still has a high rate of ethnic minorities in Vietnam. According to the 2009 census statistics, ethnic minorities account for more than 25% of the population in Central Highlands. Amongst the ethnic minorities, Jarai, Sedang, Bahnar, Rhade, and Koho make up about 88% of the ethnic minority population (Central Population and Housing Census Steering Committee, 2011). Each of these ethnic groups has established a long settlement with distinct cultural characteristics.

There are considerable differences between the Kinh majority and the minorities in terms of socio-economic life. Due to the increased economic gap and social distance between the settlers and the indigenous people (Truong, 2011), the latter have been subjected to stereotypical views and preconceptions. For instance, they have been portrayed as backward, superstitious, and conservative (Jamieson, Le, & Rambo, 1998) and as attached to lower levels of development and civilization (Dang, 2006).

Languages and education policies in Vietnam

Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian are the two common language groups used by minority people in Central Highlands. Romanized scripts for several minority languages were produced at the beginning of the 20th century. Recently, written characters for more minority languages have been jointly produced by Vietnamese teachers, linguists, and members of ethnic minority groups for education purposes. Currently, 20 of the 54 ethnic groups have their own scripts (Bui, 2003). Vietnamese, the language of Kinh people, is the official and national language of Vietnam. Information related to all important domains, such as culture, education, science, economy, and politics, is communicated in Vietnamese. It is common for minority people to speak their own languages inside their communities and to communicate with others for wider social activities using Vietnamese.

Language and education of ethnic minority groups have been a major concern of the Vietnamese Government in drawing up strategies for the nation's development. In acknowledging the importance of education and the preservation of minority languages, the government has promulgated a number of policies that specifically relate to language and education of ethnic minorities. Bilingual programs for young minority students have been set up; these programs have taken different forms at different times. Up until now, 10 ethnic minority languages have been taught in primary schools. In Central Highlands, Bahnar, Rhade, Jarai, Sedang, and Mnong are the languages used in these programs (Bui, 2003; Ministry of Education and Training, 2011; Truong, 2009). Minority languages are usually taught in primary schools as a subject. Children learn their first language (L1) and Vietnamese simultaneously from Grade 1 until Grade 3 when it is assumed that they have acquired the required level of L2 academic proficiency (Archibald, 2003; Lavoie & Benson, 2011) to learn all subjects in Vietnamese. These programmes, however, are pilot projects and have not been expanded to all areas of the country due to ethnic diversity and a shortage of resources. Since 2000, a small number of L1-based research programmes have been carried out in which minority students' L1 has been used as the medium of instruction (Lavoie & Benson, 2011).

Literature

Subtractive schooling and ethnic minority students

Subtractive schooling has been a common topic of discussion. Valenzuela (1999) applies this term in her study on U.S.-Mexican youth viewing assimilation as a non-neutral process. This

type of schooling, as she explains, is a way of organizing the school system that involves adding a second language and culture, usually the dominant one, to minority students, or subtracting the cultural and linguistic resources brought to school by minority students (Haught, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). In this process of schooling, students learn the second language at the expense of their L1, which is gradually replaced by the L2 (Diaz, 1999). The subtractive process is described by Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) as "killing a language without killing the speakers" (p. 90).

In a subtractive context, minority students are put at a disadvantage because their L1 and cultural norms are not recognized. In early schooling, young minority students have to learn in a language that they have not yet mastered. Often, they are inaccurately defined as students who already know that language, not as students who are still learning it (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). They are assessed in the majority language with the same procedures as their majority peers. Results, not surprisingly, indicate lower levels of achievement for language minority students (Dooly et al., 2009). In the end, they may be labeled academically "disabled" or "retarded." Stebih (2003) commented that because of language and cultural differences, minority students' real strengths or capabilities remain underestimated. They are not viewed as potential bilinguals with talents in both home and school languages (Cummins, 2007). This may explain low academic achievement and high dropout rates of young indigenous students (Bear-Nicholas, 2009). In addition, in trying to adapt to the school environment, minority students are much less likely to use their L1 (Bear-Nicholas, 2009). They are also required to assimilate into the dominant language and culture (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1979). The subtractive process is associated with many potential developmental risks for them (Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000).

Subtractive education prevails in Vietnam, as in many other polities. Vietnamese, the official language and also the language of the majority, is the only language of instruction for students of all ethnicities. This has meant that the majority of young ethnic minority students have to start their schooling with limited proficiency or experience in Vietnamese (Nguyen & Baulch, 2007). Consequently, minority students face numerous difficulties as compared with their Kinh counterparts. Furthermore, as reported by Aikman and Pridmore (2001) and Truong (2011), multiethnic classes with a standardized curriculum for all have resulted in varied academic performance. At school, many minority students are represented as "slower" and less efficient in learning than Kinh students, with little consideration of language difficulties (UNICEF, UNESCO & MOET of Vietnam, 2008). Statistical data often show lower rates of enrolment in school, higher rates of dropout, and lower levels of achievement for minority students as compared with those for Kinh students (Dang, 2006; Truong, 2009). Under these circumstances, the percentage of minority students who finish general education to enter a college or university is relatively small.

In addition to educational disadvantage, minority students' own languages and sociocultural identities are implicated in the process of subtracting schooling. These language and identity issues are discussed next.

Identity, language, and subtractive schooling

Although identity can be viewed from various perspectives, in this paper we consider two general views. The first view attributes identity to an internal process by which an individual defines his or her sense of self while the other view refers to the individual's social roles and positions within the groups to which he or she belongs (Deaux, 2000; Sandin, 1994). Identity involves both personal and social dimensions (Baumeister, 1986; Liebkind, 1989). Personal qualities are found in distinctions between the self and others in the same groups, while the social aspects are derived from the individual's memberships in different social groups (Liebkind, 1989). The present paper endorses the understanding that "identity can be a sense

of one's self and not another, or sense of belonging to one group and not another" (Muldoon, 2010, p. 679). In other words, identity is understood as the way students identify themselves, what sorts of people they are, their sense of group membership, and how they relate to others in their living environment (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). In addition, identity is seen as an active, dynamic, and ongoing process (Cohen, 2008; Norton, 2008). This means that people constantly negotiate their identity and may never finish identity construction.

Language is a key element in identity formation and expression. Crable (2010) believes that "human creates identity using language" (p. 6). By learning and using language, individuals learn to represent themselves, to contact others, and to join different groups around them. Based on this view, we consider school language as a key factor that contributes to the process of identity construction for minority students.

Due to language and cultural differences, minority students have to construct new identities in the school environment (Martin & Stuart-Smith, 1998). Changes first take place in their language identity, as they use and adapt to a new language perspective. Changes in the valuation of languages in turn bring about changes in cultural values associated with languages. Finally, adopting a new language and cultural identity leads to changes in the social relationships that shape the formation of new social identities. Thus, minority students are affected by the school environment in expressing and defining their identity in terms of language, culture, and social relations.

In general, minority students prefer following the language norm set by school in defining their identity by means of language. In discussing the experience of minority children walking into school, Stebih (2003) depicted the process of gradual change in language attitude and identification expressed by her daughter, who experienced another language at school. The child tended to prefer the school language, even when she was at home, and rejected her L1 because her school friends did not understand it. Sandin (1994), in exploring children's perceptions of being bilingual and biliterate, discovered that the dominance of English at school had a strong influence on children's preference for English. They expressed more-positive feelings about English and negative feelings about Punjabi, their L1. Similarly, Gu and Patkin (2013) reported that some of the South Asian minority students participating in their research in Hong Kong attended mainstream school and became more aware of the pragmatic usefulness of Cantonese, the mainstream Hong Kong language. They believed that good Cantonese proficiency would enable them to communicate with "Chinese people" and avoid marginalization.

In addition to language, minority students experience changes in their sense of attachment to cultures associated with their languages and in their sense of membership in ethnic groups. An example of this is found in Cline and de Abreu's (2005) report on ethnic minority students in White-majority schools in the United Kingdom. The students felt embarrassed about speaking their L1 in front of their White peers and did not want to contact members from the same ethnic group (Cline & de Abreu, 2005). Gu (2015), in a study on Pakistani schoolgirls in Hong Kong, indicated that the mainstream culture the girls were exposed to in school and the society helped to construct the girls' future aspirations, which were not common in their Muslim culture. Likewise, in Wang's (2013) study on language, culture, and identity of Hui minority students in China, two participants were found to prefer their Chinese national identity. The author concludes that imposing the dominant ideology on minority students at school may undermine the minority culture and lead minority students to construct the identity of "others" (Wang, 2013).

Subtractive schooling appears to contribute to social exclusion of minority students. Miller (2000), in studying language use, identity, and social interaction of migrant students in Australia, points out that minority students cannot maintain their interpersonal relations with their English-speaking peers due to their limited English proficiency and are thus excluded from the mainstream school network, although the minority students may desire to connect to the majority. Experience of isolation in the mainstream school is also found in two Nepali students attending Hong Kong school

in Pérez-Milans and Soto's (2013) study. These students believed that some local majority students did not like minorities and so they found it difficult to communicate with them. On the other hand, in Rydland and Aukrust's (2008) study on Turkish minority students in a Norwegian classroom, some students were found to make efforts in negotiating their social status and belonging in peer play using Turkish, their L1. School environment, thus, brought them opportunities to develop social relations associated with the school language, especially with same-age peers.

In summary, minority students' identity related to language, culture, and social relationship is affected in a subtractive environment in which they have to suppress their home language and culture to adapt to the dominant language and culture. The present article examines the impact of subtractive schooling on the identity of minority students by exploring the ways in which they identify themselves with their languages, cultures, and social relations in their school life.

Methodology

This article is part of a larger study that examines bilingual identity of ethnic minority students in Central Highlands of Vietnam. The paper mainly draws on a qualitative approach and uses a case study strategy to generate rich data for a deeper understanding of the language life and identity of the research participants. A case study is descriptive, as it is concerned with detailed and in-depth exploration of a particular real-life phenomenon associated with different features of particular cases within given natural contextual conditions (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Case study is chosen because it best addresses the aim of the research, which is to understand identity for a group of minority students in a subtractive language environment.

The College

The study was conducted in Indochina College (a pseudonym), which is located in a province in Central Highlands where the first author has worked as a teacher. The institution facilitated access to the group of minority students who are otherwise hard to reach by researchers in the larger society. Some of the participants are former students of the first author.

Indochina is a community college that attracts minority students from the nearby areas including the provincial town as well as from more remote districts and other provinces in the region. Minority students accounted for about 47% of the student population in the college in 2013. This is one of the local colleges that has less rigorous entrance requirements and that gives priority to local minority students. Local Kinh students who have high levels of academic performance usually go to big cities to study in a better college or university.

Participants

The eight students are focal participants (see Table 1) of the larger project previously mentioned. They were either in the final year of their studies or had recently graduated from the Indochina College. The selection of this group of students ensured that the participants had experienced schooling from the primary to the college level. Of the eight students, only one reported to have learned her L1 as a subject in primary school.

Although the selection of the focal participants was planned to be based on the criteria related to the number of ethnic minority groups at the college—language, gender, and college studies major— recruiting participants for more in-depth information ultimately depended on their availability and willingness to participate in the research. This led to a compromise of the equal representation of gender and college major in the selection of interview participants.

Table 1. Information about the participants.

Name (Pseudonym)	Year of birth	Gender	Major	Ethnicity/home language (L1)	School language (L2)	Learning L1 as a subject in primary school
A-Anton	1989	Male	English	Rengao	Vietnamese	No
Y-Diopris	1989	Female	English	Rengao	Vietnamese	No
Y-Kap	1992	Female	English	Bahnar	Vietnamese	Yes
Y-Khau	1989	Female	Informatics	Bahnar	Vietnamese	No
A-Lim	1989	Male	English	Jarai	Vietnamese	No
Y-Nom	1990	Female	English	Jarai	Vietnamese	No
A-Than	1988	Male	English	Halang	Vietnamese	No
Y-Xuong	1992	Female	English	Jeh	Vietnamese	No

Researcher positionality

Lanza (2008) argued that "the researcher's identity is an integral aspect of the research process, including the selection of individuals, groups, and sites" (p. 78). The first author, who conducted the fieldwork, had multiple roles, which might have had some influence on the research process and data collection. First of all, she was a Vietnamese national and a native speaker of Vietnamese. Although this gave her an insider identity, she was also an outsider—or a cultural other—because she was not a member of any of the ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. Being a teacher to some of the participants, she had privileged access to them. In relation to data collection, while she presented herself as a researcher trained in Western academia (see Hamid, 2010), she was also a participant in the construction of the data because she selected the topics of interviews, encouraged participants to share their views, and probed issues she considered important for the research focus. Space does not permit elaborating on the implications of each of the roles. It will just be pointed out that there are advantages and disadvantages for each and that the authors were aware of all potential implications.

Data collection

Student interview was used as the main source of data in the original project. The interviews were carried out as informal conversations to ensure a relaxing atmosphere and to exploit more real-life stories from the students. As a broad range of questions was prepared for the interviews, there were three meetings with each student in order to cover all of the questions and elicit extra information from them. The interviews took place between December 2012 and May 2013 in "in-garden" cafés, which ensured the students' privacy and convenience. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours. The interval between the three interviews was from 1 to 3 weeks, depending on the students' availability. All conversations were carried out in Vietnamese and were tape-recorded. Selected extracts from interviews were translated into English in the process of writing this paper.

Interview questions of the first and second meetings focused on various topics such as language use, language attitude, ethnicity, and bilingualism. Data collected in the third round of interviews, which focused on issues of schooling, constitute the empirical basis of the current study. Questions in the third meeting were related to advantages and disadvantages of the students' study and communication in a language other than their L1; how the school language affected their language practices, self-perception, and social relations; and their preference for a school language in Vietnam.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis that is mainly based on the Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data went through three main phases of coding:

Open coding: Depending on the content of the interviews, different themes were identified and extracted from data records. These themes were labelled according to their content and the

information hidden in the content. Themes were then grouped according to their properties and dimensions.

Axial coding: Properties of these themes were determined in a link to larger categories related to the research focus. This phase ensured that coding themes contributed to an understanding of the phenomena.

Selective coding: In this phase, key categories were selected and refined at the dimensional level to integrate with the research. After separate analysis, data were compared, re-evaluated, and combined.

Findings

Language identification

Decrease in L1 use

Before the commencement of schooling, the L1 was dominant for the minority students because they had little contact with people speaking Vietnamese. In primary school, the students used L1 for communication outside the classroom, as most of their schoolmates were from their own ethnic groups. However, when the students went to secondary school, mixed-ethnicity surroundings in which Kinh were the majority did not encourage them to use languages other than Vietnamese. As a result, the students used their L1 considerably less in secondary school, high school, and college, where they only had contact with several friends who could speak their L1.

The students noted that the school language penetrated into their family and community, although very slowly. All of them admitted that they brought many Vietnamese words that they had learnt at school to their home and added to their informal communication. Consequently, they also used L1 to a lesser degree than in the past, even at home and in the local community. Y-Nom, in discussing influences of L2 on her L1, related that previously everyone in her family used their minority language most of the time. However, after she and her siblings had gone to school and brought Vietnamese home, her parents also had to code switch to adapt to their children's communication style.

Along the same line, Y-Xuong thought that because she had studied in Vietnamese and frequently used Vietnamese, her L1 use was "narrowed" and restricted: "The more I learn in Vietnamese, the more my Jeh is narrowed"

Similarly, Y-Diopris believed that her L1 use had not only been lessened but also had been "hybridized" with Vietnamese:

> Interviewer: Do you think that it [the school language] has an influence?
> Y-Diopris: Maybe its influence is that I use the home language less.
> Interviewer: That means over time, it lessened your home language?
> Y-Diopris: Well (.) my home language's gradually "faded," became hybridized.

By bringing Vietnamese home, the students had inadvertently contributed to families' bilingualism, wherein their parents had to adopt the children's newly achieved bilingualism, as in the case of Y-Nom. It appears that the more they used the school language, the less they used their L1 not only at school but also at home.

Code-mixing and communication style

The students recognized that together with bringing Vietnamese from school to their home, they inserted more Vietnamese words into their L1 speech. For example, Y-Diopris explained that when talking to one another, she used "half of Vietnamese, half of [L1]" which "sounds funny."

On the same issue, Y-Kap observed that learning in another language at school resulted in code-mixing in her language use: "It provides me a source of (.) vocabulary. As a different language, it (.) Well, sometimes I mix some Vietnamese words in speaking my home language."

The L1 and L2 were also occasionally mixed by some students when talking to friends from the same ethnic backgrounds in school. In general, they believed that the code-mixing was "normal" language behaviour because of the widespread use of Vietnamese in their living environment.

In addition, the school language influenced some students' communication style. Y-Nom and Y-Xuong believed that their language use was "hybridized." Similarly, A-Anton noted that he applied the communication style of Vietnamese in using his L1: "At home (.) I translate Vietnamese into (.) a more fluent and polite way of talking (.) use words that (.) sound good."

Hence, under the impact of the school language, the students experienced a decrease in L1 use, an increase in code-mixing and a change in their communication style. These changes were a corollary of school language policies that led to a sharp increase in their L2 use which gradually pushed the students closer to L2 in the process of identifying their sense of self associated with languages.

Identifying with L2

The students confirmed that they preferred using Vietnamese in school, which was both desirable and irreplaceable. They also believed that the more fluently they could use L2, the better they learned at school and more easily they joined the common climate in which Vietnamese was the norm. Of the many advantages of learning in the dominant language, Y-Kap emphasized her confidence in Vietnamese communication skill:

> When I have contacts and exchanges with them, I use the Vietnamese that I learnt in school. [Using it,] first I'm sure about the words [I use], not afraid of using them incorrectly. Then I [can] use it fluently, I can explain (.) or introduce to others (.) umm, about the things I'm selling, or something like that.

A-Anton, Y-Khau, and A-Lim's views were similar to Y-Kap's; these students also believed that the language they learnt in school helped them to develop a "standard" Vietnamese. Y-Khau affirmed that because she had learnt Vietnamese in school, she knew how to use it appropriately. Along the same line, A-Anton confided that he felt "proud" of the standard Vietnamese that he had acquired at school.

The students tended to connect their language confidence to the "standard" Vietnamese they had acquired from school. Being able to speak Vietnamese as educated people gave them a sense of achievement and self-respect for which they were also appreciated by others. The ability to speak standard Vietnamese may have been regarded by them as a sign of intelligence and a key to success (Shannon, 1995).

In short, in the process of negotiating and using their languages in school, the students felt closer to the school language, which then shaped their identity connected to the language. This tendency consequently led to certain changes in their perceptions of culture and ethnicity associated with languages, and with the ways in which they identified themselves in relation to different social groups.

Culture and social identification

Ethnic discrimination

In a mixed-ethnicity environment in which Kinh were the majority, the students were aware of ethnic differences, especially when they looked at their Kinh counterparts. They all admitted that, to some extent, they had to withstand negative attitudes toward their ethnicity. "Yes, I wasn't happy at all! Just wanted to take back their words to give away my anger," Y-Diopris said about her feeling when Kinh classmates called her "you ethnic!" a phrase commonly used in a derogatory sense. Also sharing unhappy memories of ethnic discrimination in school, Y-Khau related about Kinh classmates' attitudes towards minority students:

> At that time there's a friend who sat next to me. At first I thought she didn't want to sit close to me (smile).... Some friends, they said it out directly (.) I mean they didn't like [sitting close to minority students]. "You ethnic!" they said something like that.

Other students indicated that if they did not experience the discrimination themselves, they observed others being victimized and felt uncomfortable. "It hurt me"—Y-Kap said. Similarly, Y-Xuong confided: "I felt unpleasant (.) that I wasn't respected."

Ethnic discrimination appears to be common experience for minority students in mainstream school where they are put in a disadvantageous position amongst the majority. The students in this

study, unexceptionally, had experienced discrimination from their majority peers. This uncomfortable experience might have negatively influenced the students' self-esteem and identity construction related to their ethnicity.

Language and ethnic distance

Because of language disadvantages and ethnic discrimination, the students initially faced numerous difficulties in building up relations with their Kinh counterparts.

Talking about his first days at secondary school, A-Lim said that he was afraid of contacting Kinh friends and hesitated talking to them because of the ethnic distance. Y-Nom had the same feeling about contacting Kinh and friends from other ethnic groups: "First, if I contacted friends from the same ethnic group, it's ok. But if they're from different [ethnic groups], first I was (.) diffident."

In addition to issues of ethnicity, many students admitted that in early contact, they were hesitant in making friends with Kinh mates and joining them due to language problems. Some students reported that Kinh students often made fun of their Vietnamese, as Y-Khau noted: "Previously I was afraid of communicating with Kinh friends. Sometimes they mimicked (.) sort of (.) I didn't speak [Vietnamese] with a Kinh accent." Y-Xuong confirmed that she found herself in a similar situation, when she felt ashamed because her Vietnamese was not very good.

In the school environment where ethnic differences seemed to be clearer than in other domains, there was a certain distance between the students and their majority counterparts, especially in their initial contact when they had not known much about each other. Kinh majority students' negative attitudes towards the minority students' Vietnamese accent, proficiency, and ethnicity increased that distance. Language and ethnic distances posed difficulties for the students in joining school groups.

Identifying with L2 culture

In talking about the advantages of studying Vietnamese in school, Y-Kap asserted that through L2 she developed a good understanding of her Kinh friends' life and way of living. In explaining how she might be different if the school language were her L1, Y-Khau said that perhaps in that case, she would not be affected by Kinh culture and their way of living as much as in the present and her ethnic identity would be better preserved. Thus, Y-Khau recognized that she was profoundly influenced by the majority culture through the school language: "[If I studied in my L1,] my way of living would be different (.) That means I'd apply my language, my culture... The stuff of our ethnicity would be preserved (smile)."

Y-Khau was aware that in order to integrate into the school environment, she had to leave her L1 culture outside the school and adapt to the dominant culture. The students received the influence of the majority culture through their acquisition of the school language, contacting majority friends, and falling in line with the school culture. These changes in their language and culture identification significantly influenced their social relationships, especially within their peer groups.

Identifying with L2 groups

Despite the prevalence of language and ethnic discrimination at school, the students gradually moved closer to the majority group in order to fall in line with the school climate. They affirmed that they wanted to join their Kinh mates. A-Than, for example, related that he wanted to speak more Vietnamese and express himself as his Kinh friends expressed themselves: "They [Kinh friends] study better, they (smile), like, have better (.) communication skills, and they're better. I also wanted to be the same as them (.) to be liked more by my teachers."

Along the same line, Y-Xuong noted that if she studied in her L1 and the dominant language of the society was still Vietnamese, she would be "self-pitying" because it would be more difficult for her to integrate with Kinh people and the society:

Well, if I studied in Jeh (.) I couldn't integrate with them, then I would be sort of (.) self-pitying (.) … I couldn't integrate with them (.) suppose I wanted to share some funny stories with my friends (.) If I didn't know [Vietnamese], I couldn't tell them.

In their views, the knowledge of and communication skills in Vietnamese provided them with more chances to widen their L2 relations, as Y-Kap observed: "Thanks to it [the school language], I have more friends (.) I think, Vietnamese is the general language, so we must learn it to understand, or to (.) probably to widen my relations."

Similarly, A-Lim agreed that the school Vietnamese had provided him more opportunities to make friends and to widen his circle of acquaintances. He explained that by learning in Vietnamese at school, he acquired better vocabulary and knew how to use Vietnamese in different situations to win the appreciation of others.

"Widening relations," "having more friends," "joining," or "integrating into the wider community" were mentioned by many students in discussing the advantages of the school language. This indicates that they attached significance to their belonging to school and L2 groups. As the majority of their school peers were Kinh, the students appreciated the role of Vietnamese in the process of social integration. Learning in Vietnamese in school and improving their "standard" Vietnamese, the students' social relations with others had been more effectively broadened. This impact of the school language was not limited to peer relationships inside the school environment; it also expanded to other domains in the society.

L1 relations

On the other hand, going to school and acquiring Vietnamese caused negative changes in the students' relations associated with their L1. Y-Diopris, Y-Khau, Y-Nom, and A-Than observed that in their own communities, they sometimes felt hesitant to use Vietnamese because they were afraid that people, especially elderly ones, might appraise them negatively and think that they were "showing off." As Y-Khau related,

Yes, if I use Vietnamese to communicate with them [elderly people] improperly, for example, if I use some Vietnamese while talking to them, they won't like it. They'll think (.) that I'm educated and they aren't (.) so they can't talk to me.

In addition, it was revealed by some students that their relations with same-age peers in the community worsened due to going to school and using Vietnamese. An example of this comes from Y-Diopris's story about the attitudes of her village friends towards her Vietnamese use and her education:

Cos we often speak in the language [Vietnamese] (.) Because in my village, some friends didn't go to school, or haven't completed their schooling …. They hate us, don't want to make friends, say bad things about us. They said that we showed off.

It can be seen that speaking an out-group language to in-group people can be criticized by members of the group and especially by people who do not have the same level of education and language knowledge. The students were aware that many people in their community did not go to school or had limited contact with Vietnamese so they had a restricted view about language choice for communication.

Thus, going to school and using the school language apparently had mixed impact upon the students' social relations associated with their languages. On the one hand, they asserted that school and the school language generally played a significant role in improving and widening their L2 relations. On the other hand, some of them also believed that in applying what they had learnt at school, including the language, some of their L1 relations underwent changes for the worse.

Discussion and conclusions

This article has explored the language life of eight ethnic minority students who were exposed to the majority language in a subtractive school environment. The findings reveal that the subtractive power of the school language and school milieu significantly influenced the students' identity construction related to languages, cultures, and social relations. It is possible to indicate that for these minority students, a subtractive school environment in which the dominant language was the norm created conditions for devaluation and invasion of their language and cultural identity. These conditions also gave rise to segregation and disunity in constructing their identity through social relations. On the other hand, the dominant language provided them a means to their integration into the mainstream society.

Devaluation effects of subtractive schooling are seen in the decrease in the students' L1 use and ethnic discrimination that they experienced in school. Decrease in L1 use is a common corollary of school language policies that immerse minority students in an unfamiliar environment in which their L1 is not valued. As they completed primary school, they had less chance to contact same-ethnicity mates and use their L1. Communication partners were not the only reason for the decrease in their L1 use (Ritchie & Bhatia, 2005). In a mixed-ethnicity climate in which Kinh were the majority, the students realized that using a language that was different from the dominant one was socially and academically undesirable. Language devaluation also took place at home, where their L1 had been dominant before their contact with Vietnamese through schooling. A typical example was provided by Y-Nom, who spoke L1 only as a child at home but she and her siblings brought Vietnamese home from school, which influenced everyone's language behaviours. In addition, the negative attitudes of Kinh students towards the minority students that "hurt" their self-respect was a consequence of the ideology of majority ethnocentrism (Liebkind, 1989) that was partly grown and nourished in the subtractive school. As a result, the students often had uncomfortable feelings in identifying themselves with their culture and ethnicity.

As the students were obliged to accept the school norm of language and culture, it is possible to see subtractive schooling as a source of invasion, as illustrated by the dominant language and culture penetrating into their life. Invasion was shown first in changes in their language use—that is, code-mixing and communication style—and then in the ways they identified themselves with the L2. To an extent, in acquiring the school language, the students brought that language to their home, inserted it into L1 use and hybridized their L1. This phenomenon reflects influences of the more powerful language on minority languages. Invasion of the school language and culture also led to considerable changes in their self-identification associated with L2 and L2 culture. What seems to be implied in their belief of the "standard" Vietnamese in identifying with L2 is a manifestation of a monoglot ideology that emphasizes the singular, unified image of a standardized, denotationally defined "language" (Silverstein, 1996) that enhanced their self-social worth. Being "proud" and "confident" of their ability of speaking "better" and "standard" Vietnamese, the students projected a positive self-image associated with the school language. In addition to language, the students also showed their appreciation of the dominant culture through the process of adapting it. They recognized that the majority culture had penetrated into their life and changed their way of living. Invading the minority students' language and culture, the subtractive schooling was on its way to effecting their assimilation into the dominant language and culture (Gibson, 1993; Stebih, 2003; Wang, 2013).

Segregation and disunity are demonstrated by language and ethnic distances between the students and their majority counterparts and by the negative impact of applying the school language on their L1 relations. School language policies and its norms created distances between majority and minority students. In the mainstream, they were "hesitant," "diffident," "afraid," or "ashamed" due to language difficulties and ethnic discrimination. It is also possible to deduce from Y-Khau's story about being made the object of "fun" by her Kinh friends that the students were often teased or shunned by majority students, who then pushed them further away from their group. School, thus,

multiplied differences between majorities and minorities, emphasized the upper hand of majorities, and created favourable conditions for ethnic segregation. In addition, some students' problems in their L1 relations might reflect a consequence of discontinuities between home–community and school language and cultural practices that "went well beyond differences between socialization practices across these domains" (Kim & Duff, 2012, p. 93). Their worry of being disparaged for "showing off" was a sign of attentiveness to the reactions of people in their ethnic community against the language and other things that they brought from school (Pon, Goldstein, & Schecter, 2003).

Subtractive schooling and its language policies, however, constituted the means of integration that helped the students to fall in line with the common climate. This was indicated by the students in describing the importance of the school language in joining L2 groups. For students of all ethnicities, belonging to certain school groups and being accepted by their peers were very important (Byram, 1988; Stebih, 2003). Perhaps that is why all students wanted to join their majority mates and, thanks to school and the school language, they could have more friends and widen their L2 relations. They also cared about the ways of using L2 in communication so they could receive audibility and appreciation from others, as in the cases of A-Lim and A-Than. Thus, in applying the school language, they were exercising the symbolic power of L2 in order to be heard and respected (Gu, 2010; Miller, 2000). Similarly, the desire of "being the same" as the majority peers expressed by A-Than also indicates that when individuals want to be assigned to a group, they try to develop a positive self-image that will make their entry into the group easy (Liebkind, 1989). In addition, Y-Xuong's feeling of "self-pity"—in case she did not learn the dominant language and therefore would not be accepted into the wider society—emphasized the importance of L2 in building school and social relations and the necessity of integrating with the common climate.

The impact of subtractive schooling brought the minority students both challenges and benefits in shaping their self-image through language, culture, and social relations, with the challenges being more salient. The process of devaluating robbed the students of their opportunity to express themselves in L1 and denigrated their primary sense of self that was embedded in their L1 culture (Miller, 2003; Walter & Benson, 2012). The process of invasion contributed to the impurity of the students' L1 and negatively acted upon their L1 maintenance and culture preservation that resulted in greater language and cultural divisions between generations in their family and community (Luna, 2002). And by promoting segregation and disunity, the school decreased the students' chances of developing their sense of belonging to both L1 and L2 groups.

It is to be noted that subtractive schooling provided the students the benefits of acquiring the "standard" language and successfully integrating into the mainstream society. Nevertheless, these benefits could be questioned from two perspectives. First, if the students' integration is seen in a positive light, it has to be highlighted that the students achieved this on their own. Instead of playing a supportive role, school actually imposed the integration on the students. In school, they learnt what was and was not rewarded (Cummins, 1989) and what they needed to do to survive in this environment. This then became a significant motivation for the students to exercise their agency in making decisions related to their identity construction through language. In realizing that Vietnamese was the key that could help them assimilate into the mainstream society, they determined that improving the L2 was essential for them. When coming of age, they became more aware of the instrumental role of the school language in their social integration and success. The students believed that Vietnamese was the language of possibility and that they could access the mainstream community by speaking the "standard" language and developing a positive image of themselves in that language (Gao, 2012; Yoshizawa, 2010). The students may have internalized those beliefs from subtractive schooling as well as from the dominant discourses of the economic power of the dominant language (Walter & Benson, 2012).

Second, the students' learning of the L2 and their integration into the mainstream were neither voluntary nor cost free. As previously indicated, integration was not their free choice; national policies, school, and the social set-up made it obligatory for them to do what they did. The idea of agency as previously mentioned becomes complicated here. They did exercise their agency in

learning the dominant language and social norms but ultimately this self-initiated process was conditioned by society and school. Moreover, the students achieved integration at a cost. They had to sacrifice a central part of who they were that was connected to their L1 and L1 cultural values (Cummins, 2001). If the students' L1 and cultural values had been recognized and encouraged by school and the society, they would probably have had a different valuation of their L1 (Ramirez, 2008), creating a different route to integration into the mainstream.

It can be seen that subtractive school policies placed the full burden on minority students in adjusting to the conditions in school. It is time for schools to construct appropriate strategies to share this burden with the students more equitably (Miller, 2003). Public institutions are responsible for creating an additive attitude to both languages (Aikman & Pridmore, 2001) and an awareness that minority students' L1 can also be used effectively for greater participation in education and society, whereby minority students' language and cultural and social identity can be recognized (Walter & Benson, 2012).

Acknowledgments

Note

Transcription convention

(.) Untimed pause, more information to come

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