

May 8th, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Exploring Attrition and Linguistic Shifts: The Impact of COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Discrimination on the East and Southeast Asian Diaspora

Sam Mutschler-Aldine
Portland State University

Amy Wan-Ling Lin
Portland State University

Natalie Robison
Portland State University

Milntra Raksachat
Western Oregon University

Carolyn Quam
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/studentsymposium>

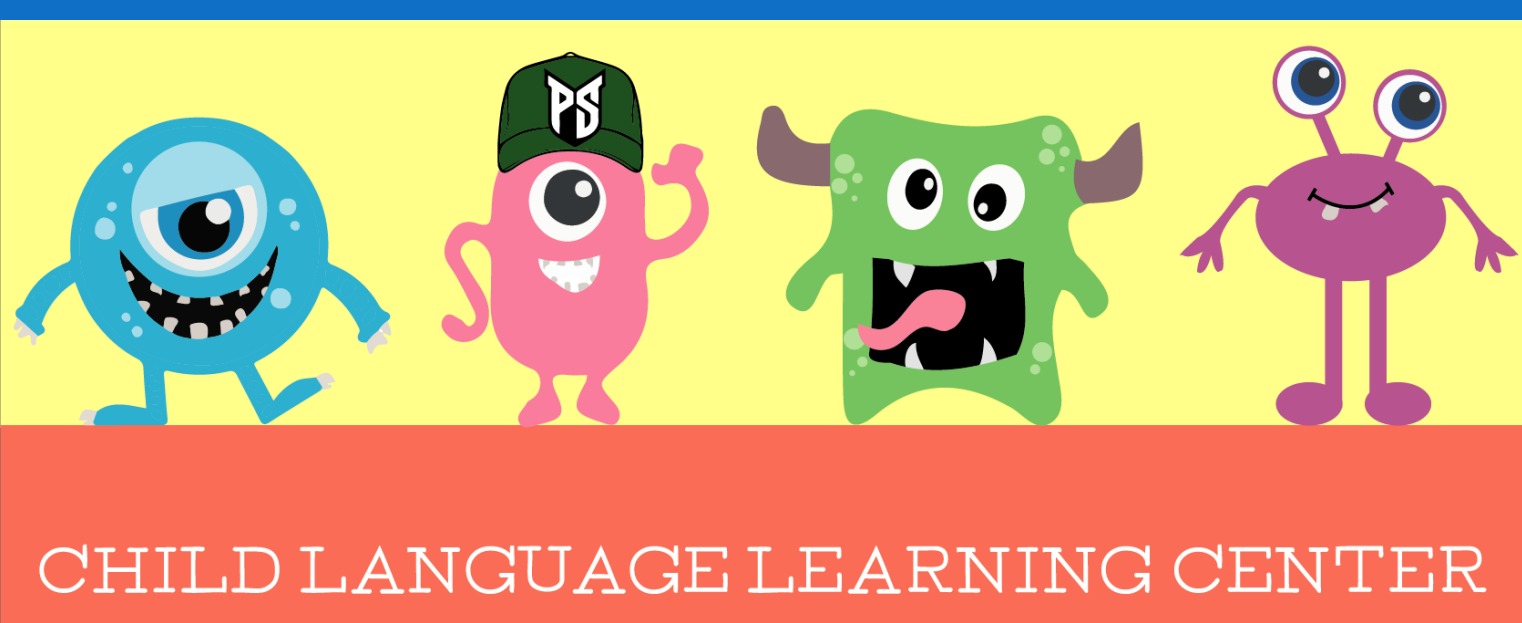


Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Mutschler-Aldine, Sam; Lin, Amy Wan-Ling; Robison, Natalie; Raksachat, Milntra; and Quam, Carolyn, "Exploring Attrition and Linguistic Shifts: The Impact of COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Discrimination on the East and Southeast Asian Diaspora" (2024). *Student Research Symposium*. 31. <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/studentsymposium/2024/posters/31>

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research Symposium by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.



Exploring Attrition and Linguistic Shifts: The Impact of COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Discrimination on East and Southeast Asian Diaspora

Amy Wan-Ling Lin, Sam Mutschler-Aldine, Carolyn Quam
Portland State University, Speech & Hearing Department, Portland, Oregon



Introduction

ATTRITION:

- Language attrition (when someone loses skills in a language) is particularly impactful when considering the **unique features of tonal and pitch-accent languages**, which are prevalent among **East Asian and Southeast Asian languages**.



Fig. 1: Tonal languages use **the pitch of a word** to distinguish its semantic meaning (flat, rising, dipping, falling,).

GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT:

- An alarming **increase in anti-Asian sentiment** and hate crimes (Smolinski, 2021)
- Hate crimes against individuals of Asian descent **rose by 76% in 2020 and 224% across 21 cities over the 3 years** since the onset of COVID-19 (Sonnenberg, 2022)
- The surge in xenophobia - **former President Donald Trump's statements of the coronavirus as the "China virus."** (Rahman, 2021)
- Subconscious belief that **Asian Americans are "perpetual foreigners"** (Yam, 2020)

REASONS FOR ATTRITION:

QUANTITATIVE



- Decline in ability to utilize lexical tone information (Quam & Creel, 2017)
- Pressure to assimilate leads to a trade-off of one's HL, particularly in the aspect of phonetic tones (Deng, 2023)
- Perceptions of language status and experiences of discrimination & bias as contributors to pressures (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009)

QUALITATIVE



- Importance of bilingualism, such as an advantage in the job market (Wu, 2005)
- Language as a bridge to cultural roots and homeland (Kang, 2013)
- Scarcity of bilingual programs and resources (Li and Renn, 2018)
- Factors such as language status, community advice, and parent beliefs shape outcomes of Heritage Language Maintenance (Loeung, 2023)

Fig. 2: Summary of findings from quantitative and qualitative studies about causes of language attrition

Hypotheses

- Escalating anti-Asian sentiment in the US since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic **could deter the use of Asian languages among heritage speakers.**
- Surge in anti-Asian sentiment could trigger a counteractive response, reinforcing the significance of community solidarity and strong cultural identity, which **could potentially lead to an increase in the use of Asian languages**

Methods



Fig. 3: This study used the free open-source Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) developed by Rampin & Rampin (Rampin & Rampin, 2021).

INITIAL DATA COLLECTION:

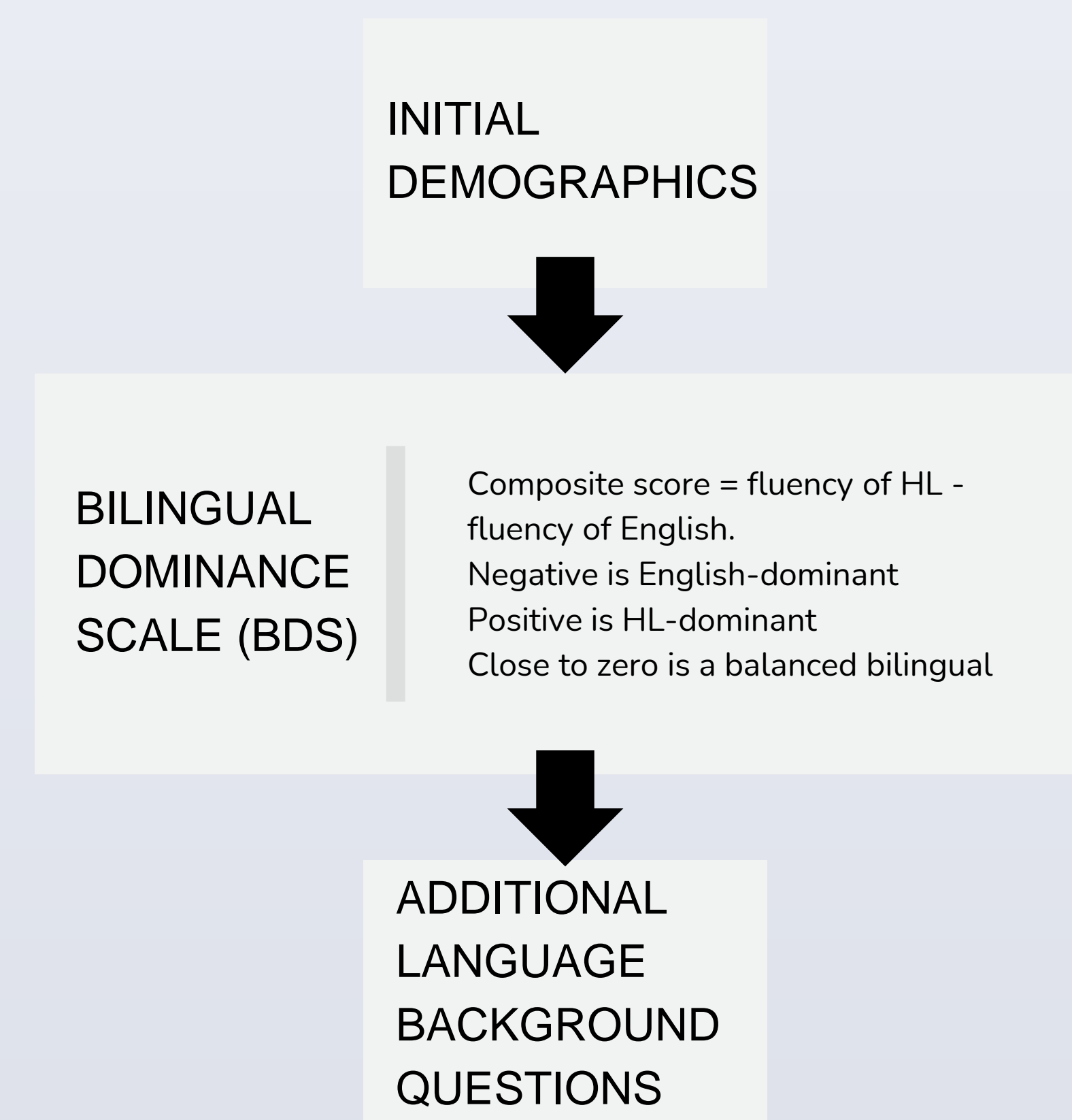


Fig. 4: Summary of methods used for recruitment into the study and to form demographic data for languages

CODING:

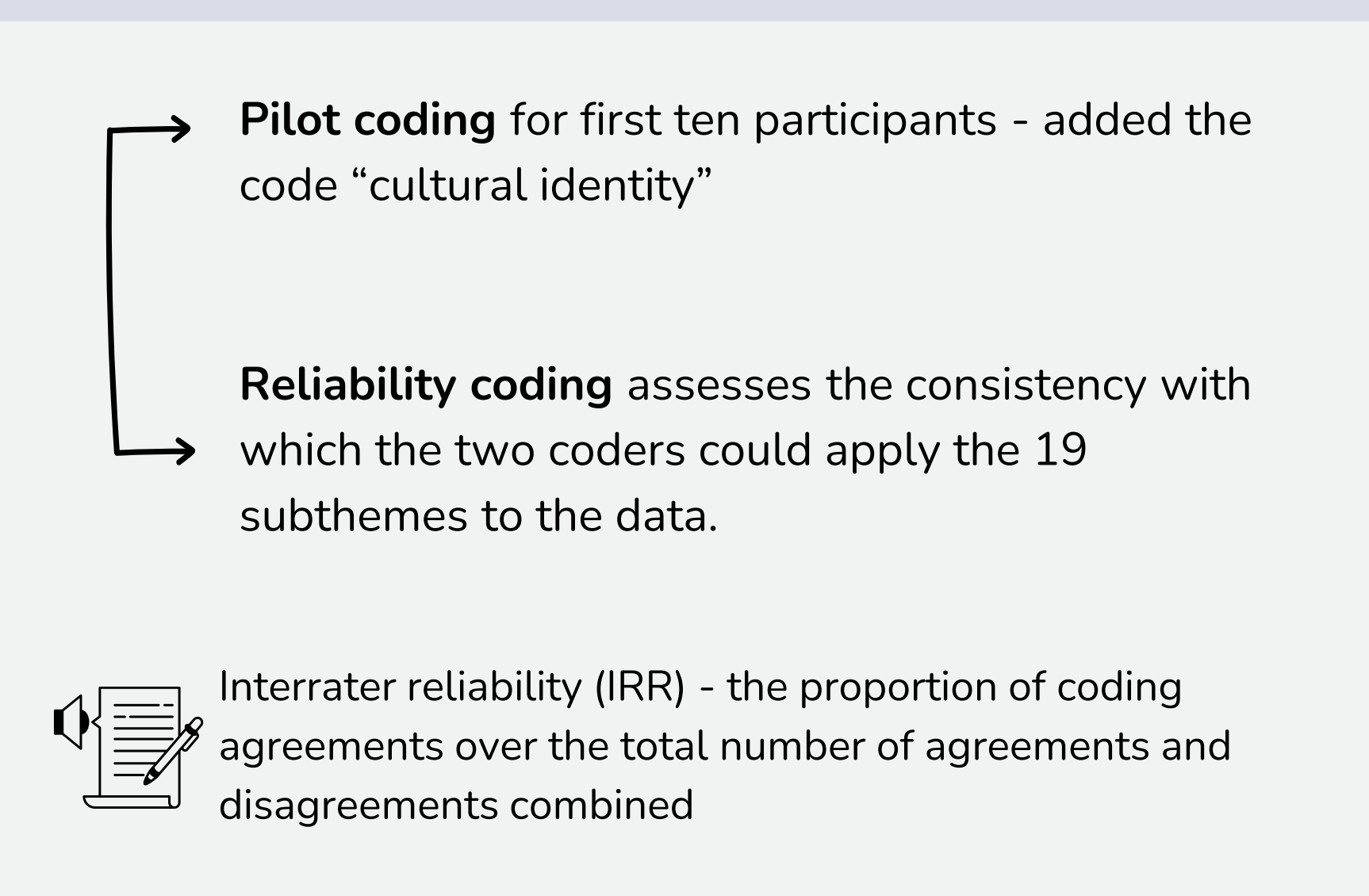
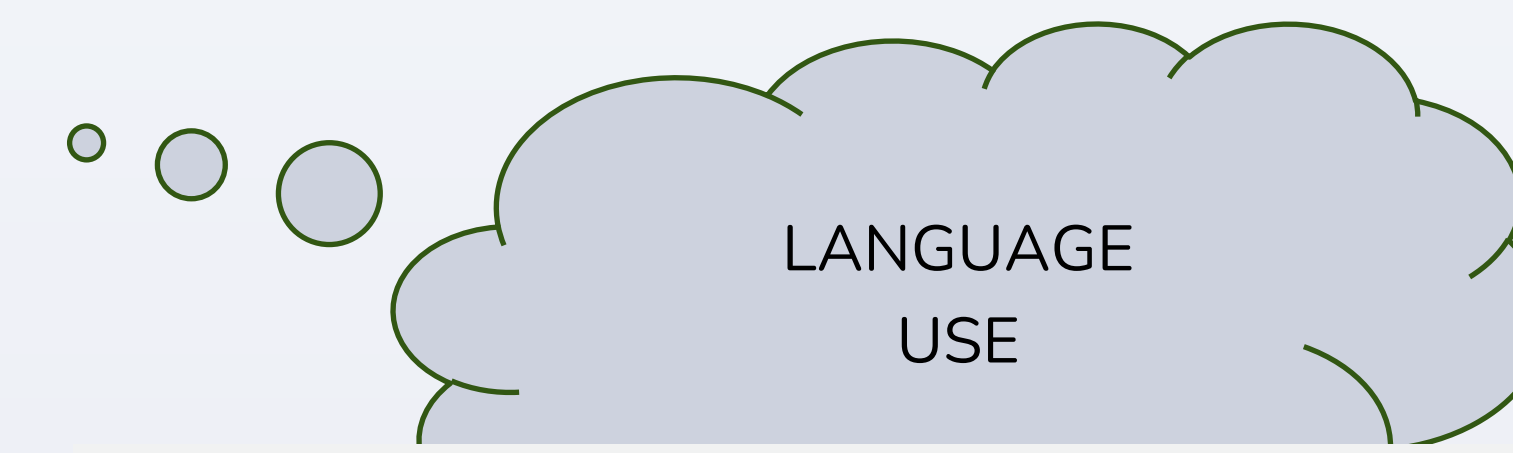


Fig. 5: Summary of coding methods used to chunk the recorded data into themes

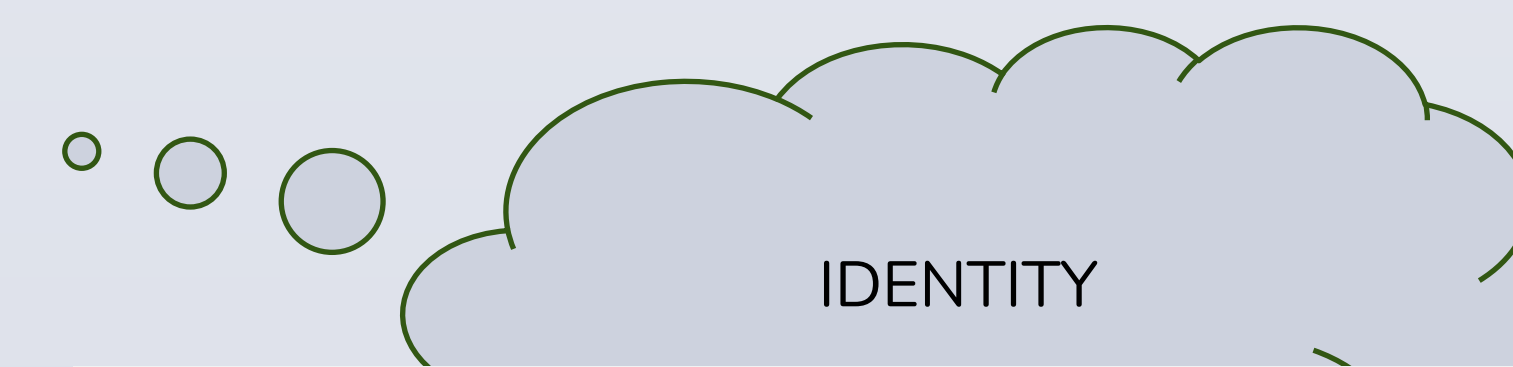
Results



- Increase in HL use since the pandemic (18)
- Decrease in HL use since the pandemic (5)
- No change in HL use since the pandemic (23)
- Change or no change in English use (14)
- Change or no change in use of other languages (5)
- Heritage language in context (5)



- Increase in positive feelings toward HL (1)
- No change in feelings toward HL (17)
- Increase in HL prioritization and/or maintenance (13)
- Decrease in HL prioritization and/or maintenance (3)
- No change in prioritization and/or maintenance of HL (14)



- Celebrating identity and/or appreciating culture (8)
- Minimizing and/or hiding identity (16)
- Increased desire to pass on HL to children (6)
- Decreased desire to pass on HL to children (1)
- No change: want to pass on HL to children (16)
- No change: don't want to pass on HL to children (1)
- No change, unspecified (3)
- Not planning on being a parent (2)



- Instances of microaggression, bias, and/or discrimination
 - Experienced themselves (8)
 - Experienced by family/friends (2)
 - Nothing reported (18)
- Instances of bullying, harassment, abuse, and hate crime
 - Experienced themselves (8)
 - Experienced by family/friends (2)
 - Reported in the news (9)
 - Nothing reported (6)
- Heightened anxiety (9)

Conclusions



- Many (but not all) participants indicated that **the pandemic increased their heritage language (HL) use** due to more frequent interactions with HL-speaking family members.
- Several participants reported **using their HL less in public** due to concerns about anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes.
- At the same time, many participants reported that the pandemic led to a **renewed motivation and prioritization of HL** due to recognizing the importance of communication and cultural ties.
- A majority of the participants expressed a **desire to preserve and pass on their HL** and culture to their future children.

LIMITATIONS:

- Small convenience sample
- Sample was mostly young adults (Mean age was 21.97)

Literature Citations

Deng, H. (2023). A Study on Language Attrition Factors Affecting Children's Reading of English Picture Books. *The Educational Review, USA*, 7(7), 1014-1018. <https://doi.org/10.26855/er.2023.07.031>

Kang, H. S. (2013). Korean-Immigrant Parents' Support of Their American-Born Children's Development and Maintenance of the Home Language. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41(6), 431-438. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-012-0566-1>

Li, H., & Renn, J. (2018). Nurturing Spanish-speaking English learners to be bilinguals in the rural Midwest: Challenges and possible solutions. *INTESOL Journal*, 15(1), Article 1.

Loeung, J. (2023, August 21). *Effects of Language Status, Community Advice, and Parent Beliefs on He*. by Jasmine Loeung. <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses/1406/>

Quam, C., & Creel, S. C. (2017a). Mandarin-English Bilinguals Process Lexical Tones in Newly Learned Words in Accordance with the Language Context. *PLOS ONE*, 12(1), e0169001. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0169001>

Rahman, K. (2021, March 17). *Trump Repeats "China Virus" Slur on TV on State Night As Atlanta Shootings*. Newsweek. <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-says-china-virus-slur-just-before-atlanta-shootings-1576756>

Rampin, R., & Rampin, V. (2021). Taguette: Open-source qualitative data analysis. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 6, 3522. <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.03522>

Smolinski, P. (2021, March 13). *Reports of Asian American hate crimes rose nearly 150% in major U.S. cities last year*—CBS News. CBS NEWS. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/asia-american-hate-crimes-rose-nearly-150-percent/>

Sonnenberg, R. (2022, May 20). *One Year Later: COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act a promising work in progress*. Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/05/20/one-year-later-covid-19-hate-crimes-act-promising-work-progress>

Wu, C.-H. (2005). Attitude and Behavior toward Bilingualism for Chinese Parents and Children. *Caseville Press*.

Yam, K. (2020, September 29). *Anti-Asian bias rose after media, officials used "China virus," report shows*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asia-anti-Asian-bias-rose-after-media-officials-used-china-virus-n1241364>

Zhang, D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (2009). Language attitudes and heritage language maintenance among Chinese immigrant families in the USA. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 22(2), 77-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310902935940>

Acknowledgments

I'm extremely grateful to Dr. Carolyn Quam for the opportunity to work as an undergraduate research assistant in the Child Language Learning Lab through the Build EXITO program and for her mentorship through this project. I would also like to thank Natalie Robison for helping run participants for the BET project and the QS.

Special thanks to my closest friends Kacie Lee and Leo Huang for their unwavering support and encouragement since I started this project. Most importantly, I would like to acknowledge my parents and brother, Roger Lin. Their belief in me and unceasing encouragement have kept my motivation high during this process.

Lastly, thank you to all the study participants who made this thesis possible.