

Article

A Critical Analysis on The Revival of Hakka Diversity

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Abstract: The Hakka language, which is spoken by over 80 million globally, exhibits prominent dialectal variation and cultural richness in modern society. Despite its widespread presence, Hakka in a latent sense faces endangerment due to urbanization and linguistic assimilation, particularly among the youth. This study conducted a small-scale survey to critically explore the relationship between the dialect and its cultural identity aiming to assess whether the revival of Hakka is viable. It proposes a multidimensional mixed approach from both macro and micro perspectives and advocates for the revitalization of Hakka dialects with 3 aspects through socio-economic integration, educational strategies. The aim is to advocate preservation of Hakka linguistic diversity and cultural identity by offering a nuanced view of the complex interplay between language, culture, and human rights.

Keywords: Hakka; dialect diversity; revival; translanguaging; pedagogy

1. Introduction

To quote a widely used Hakka saying, “Wherever there is sunshine, there are Chinese; wherever there are Chinese, there are Hakka”, Hakka is widely spoken in every corner of the world map, including East Asia, South-east Asia and in numerous diasporic Chinese communities dispersed throughout the West. This global diversity is likely reflected in the Chinese term for Hakka, ‘*kejia*’ (‘guest family’). Statistically, there are thought to be about 80 million people of Hakka heritage, as proficient speakers or as those who use Hakka less but who self-identify socio-culturally with Hakka communities. Contrary to common belief, language loss for cases like Hakka is rarely attributable solely to the numerical decline of the speaker population. Instead, the predominant factor which drives threats of language extinction is language shift. This occurs when speakers abandon their home or first language to choose a more dominant one for various reasons, typically associated with political or economic power (Crystal, 2000; Grenoble, 2011). However, within Hakka communities in China and world-wide among those of Hakka heritage, but also for tourists and the wider public, there is considerable interest in Hakka culture and Hakka language.

Thus the 46 Hakka traditional roundhouses in Fujian, noted as UNESCO World Heritage sites, are part of many tourist itineraries. Hakka cuisine has spread world-wide, even in English, demonstrating diversity in China, Canada, Singapore, and Peru (Anusasananan, 2012), as do Hakka martial arts (Hagood, 2015; Chao et al., 2016), besides cultural-historical accounts of Hakka communities in diasporas in Hong Kong (Constable, 2017), India (Pandey & Pawar, 2023) and Peru (Castro Otado, 2021). Therefore, it seems groundless to reckon that Hakka is in any imminent danger. However, the number of Hakka speakers is diminishing considerably for many reasons. Due to historical and topographical reasons, Hakka has developed numerous varieties in China. These, with differing linguistic systems, are mainly distributed throughout the regions in Gannan (Southern Jiangxi), Minxi (Western Fujian), East Guangdong, Central Guangdong, and North Guangdong. Sometimes with unique linguistic features, even within the same county or town there can be different Hakka varieties that vary in tones, phrases, sentence structure and idioms. However, employing a mutually intelligible written system among different dialects under the overarching umbrella of Chinese, Hakka is easily read and written by speakers of many varieties.



Hakka is considered as a dialect of Chinese but not a language (Ramsey, 1987; Norman, 1988). From a micro level, the population of many Hakka communities is down to a relatively smaller size, while the effect of language shift is greater. So there may be an interrupted succession in passing Hakka down to younger generations in contexts of rapid urbanization and massive migration to economically developing cities which have increased in past decades amid preferential policies towards coastal cities: The Reform and Opening Up, establishing Special Economic Zones and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. In such rapidly developing cities and their surrounding areas generally Putonghua (Mandarin) prevails, often with other widely spoken, well-established dialects such as Cantonese, shifting and squeezing the uses of Hakka.

Currently, according to the latest statistics from Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the People's Government of Guangdong Province (2023), there are over 80 million Hakka people worldwide, distributed in over 80 countries. Guangdong Province has the largest population, with about 20–22 million people identifying as Hakka; Gannan region, Jiangxi Province with about 10–12 million Hakka people, ranks second; Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region with 5–5.6 million Hakka people ranks third. Moreover, Hakka people are widely dispersed throughout Southeast Asia with a considerable population influx across the centuries (Liao, 2018). Nevertheless, in daily usage, Hakka is gradually becoming an informal dialect for various reasons. Yet it is admittedly problematic to try to determine linguistically who is linguistically or socio-culturally Hakka because the majority of Hakka people, especially the younger generation are multilingual, speaking both Cantonese and Mandarin without marked accents. Linguistically many people who no longer live in Hakka-based areas have abandoned speaking Hakka because of the realities of their life-changing situation. As a heritage challenge, the real problem with ascertaining Hakka-speaker figures might be traced to roots of Hakka obscurity. Many who may have Hakka ancestry or immediate family lineages simply do not trace back to their Hakka roots, or admit any, since to do so apparently does not seem to accrue social status, and as a feature of community self-awareness of some mainland Chinese have little or no idea about Hakka speech or cultures.

To classify endangered languages and attempt to quantify the scale of uses of languages which are under threat, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2003) has published an influential language vitality and endangerment scale, which together with the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman, 1991), the Extended Dialectal Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Lewis & Simon, 2010), and Krauss's framework (1992) for classifying languages in different situations, should yield the potential to get a valid picture for Hakka. However, there is insufficient research evidence to suggest that these measurements or

grades can be applied with robust validity to Hakka. Firstly, though Hakka is certainly currently spoken in China and diasporas with Hakka heritage communities around the world, researchers often estimate the total population who speak it in a general assessment, yet pay little attention to the scattered distribution of the population who speak a particular variety of Hakka in a specific region, let alone investigate its actual use and development inside and beyond their communities.

Secondly, though from a macro perspective the number of Hakka speakers is deemed far from reaching endangered status, Hakka itself is a broad dialect concept with many different local branches. In mainland China, Hakka can generally be divided into the Northern dialect (Lingbei Hakka phonetic system) and the Southern dialect (Lingnan Hakka phonetic system). There is a significant difference in Hakka in the northern region, which can be further divided into Ninglong dialect, Yugui dialect, Tonggu dialect, and Tingzhou dialect. The southern region is generally divided into eight major regions: Guangdong Taiwan region, Guangdong Central region, Chaozhou Zhangzhou region, and Guangdong North region. Taiwanese Hakka is generally regarded as its own dialect spoken in the Canton-Taiwan region (Li, et. al, 2012). Each of these branches had its own evolution process in every different place, which may offer the possibility that specific speakers reconsider their Hakka identity.

2. A Reevaluation of the Definition: A Language or a Dialect

Human language is arguably the single most remarkable characteristic that we have, the one that most truly sets our species apart (Trask, 1995). Beyond immediate communication needs, language also serves cognitive, emotional, socio-cultural, moral and aesthetic functions (Cortazzi & Jin, 2021). Alongside the socio-cultural and historical diversity features of significant variations of a language, the language in turn transmits and shapes many facets of human culture and identity. This leads to complex relations between proficiency in a language as a linguistic and cultural heritage and as a medium of socialization and a mediator of many daily interactions to comprise a key component of identity recognition. This is also the case with dialects, which are linguistically considered sub-categories or localized variants of a recognized language (Francis, 2016). The Cambridge Dictionary simply states. "*A dialect is a form of the language that is spoken in a particular part of the country or by a particular group of people*". Yet describing a dialect is often not simply a linguistic question, influenced by geographical and historical trends, but one that has social and political aspects of classification which affect recognition of dialect status (Chambers & Trudgill, 1980). This means that in considering Hakka dialect revival, sets of linguistic, social, cultural, and educational contexts are important.

Hakka is authoritatively acknowledged as a Han dialect in China because it is mainly spoken in certain provincial areas while Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken and official national language (Ramsey, 1987; Norman, 1988). As a Han Chinese subgroup (not an ethnic minority), Hakka dialect encompasses unique and rich traditional idioms and cultural features since historically from the 6th to 13th century Hakka migrated from China's central plain to mountainous Southern China areas. From the historical and cultural perspective, the emergence, development, and contemporary integration with the local communities all reflect that Hakka is spoken and disseminated for basic communicative purposes within the Chinese linguistic sphere.

You (2025) outlined two approaches to Chinese dialectology: first the comprehensive descriptive linguistic one which notes differences of phonetics, phonology, grammar and vocabulary to establish data-based categories related to geography; second, an approach, on which he concentrates, of general dialectological standards towards methods for classification using variants of Chinese to discover reasons and mechanism underlying historical change. Norman (1989) makes the linguistic argument that Hakka can be uniquely characterized into two tonally distinct groups of common words with sonorant initials (inpyng category and inshaang category). Other linguistic studies include that of Hashimoto's (1973) critical survey of Hakka, mainly focused on phonology and syntax, while Chappell and Lamarre (2005) conducted a detailed empirical analysis of the grammar and vocabulary of Hakka. In this case, from the phonetic, vocabulary and grammar perspective, Hakka indeed has its own structured system, evolving into a dialect with distinctive pronunciation and meaning that became widely disseminated. Exploring Hakka dialectology for linguistic historical-comparative features to consolidate methodology, Brenner (1999) focussed on linguistic features of four varieties in Wanna'an township (in Fujian).

As to Hakka literacy, it is debatable whether it has a formal written system. We can see that Hakka is written in many ancient books (e.g., Late Qing Dynasty literature). While in modern society, in Hakka-based areas there are many propaganda slogans, cultural and creative products and internet slang written in Hakka for various social, economic and entertainment motives. For instance, Hakka in Guangdong Province contains at least 7 major types, each with distinct linguistic features (Meizhou, Huizhou, Huiyang, Heyuan, Gannan, Tingzhou, Shaoguan) (Li, 1987). Most of them are simply written in transliterated Chinese characters, using homophones or semi-strokes in Mandarin to systematically form a readable combination. However, due to the complex variety of Hakka, there is still a considerable number of expressions which cannot be readily mediated through their Chinese-character equivalents.

Regarding identity and uses of Hakka, this leaves a complex and reflexive question about the 'self' and 'other':

we think of ourselves as we speak and interact culturally; in social mirrors, we identify ourselves in part as we think others see us and how they hear our speech as members of a community; these self-and-other perceptions of speech, community, culture, and identity are mediated in sociolinguistics by context, domain or topic, relation to an audience, and ideas about loyalty and belonging which can apply simultaneously—but in different ways—to both a language (Chinese) and dialect (Hakka) or local variant of Hakka.

Hence, a language or dialect is a kaleidoscope of complexities that requires diverse perspectives for feasible measuring. It is always difficult to draw a sharp conclusion to firmly identify Hakka as a language but consensus and convention usually prevail. The more linguistic evidence, cited above, clarifies Hakka as a dialect, subsuming multiple local variations, all within a one-language framework of the overall Chinese language. Some radical Hakka organizations or institutions (especially in Taiwan province of China) would tend to maintain that Hakka is a language in order to expand Hakka's discourse power in social, economic or political contexts.

Therefore, a careful and balanced reevaluation can be drawn that Hakka could be explored as a language when it plays a communicative role or a cultural identity symbol that is used by special Han subgroups worldwide. This is a micro perspective related to the macro level of Chinese. Nevertheless, this is not simple because Hakka is multiply-located within micro-level communities in a macro scale of Hakka world-wide distributed diasporas. This language-level perspective seems parallel to a substantial tradition of considering Cantonese as a language (not a dialect) in reputable language-learning publications, written by those who continue to self-identify as Chinese (e.g., Chao, 1947; Huang & Kok, 1970; Tong & James, 1994; Matthews & Yip, 1994). On the other hand, Hakka is a regional dialect using a macro perspective of the vastness of China's geography and the wider national viewpoint. This accords with the inclusive stance prevalent across the Chinese linguistic sphere which suggests that Hakka should be integrated into its broader macro framework as a dialect of the Chinese language.

3. A Critical Analysis of the Measurements of Endangered Languages

UNESCO (2003) has developed programs aimed at identifying, assessing, and safeguarding endangered languages. Since language communities are naturally heterogeneous and diverse, assessing the number of actual speakers of a language becomes a difficult task. UNESCO identified six factors with nine scales: (1) Intergenerational Language Transmission; (2) Absolute Number of Speakers; (3) Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population; (4) Trends in Existing Language Domains; (5) Response to New Domains and Media; and (6) Materials for

Language Education and Literacy to evaluate a language's vitality and state of endangerment with two factors to assess language attitudes (UNESCO, 2003).

The GIDS scale (Fishman, 1991) has contributed to the sustainable maintenance and preservation of a language for nearly two decades. It has become one of the best-known evaluation frameworks to categorize the level of endangerment. Lewis and Simons (2010) criticized the GIDS by asserting that it was not comprehensive enough and subsequently, the multi-dimensional extended GIDS (EGIDS) was developed which comprised 13 levels with clearer description and more elaborate labels on the scale representing a greater delicacy to interpret different statuses of languages (Filipović & Pütz, 2016). Krauss (1992) created a social broadening for a more precise terminology for categorizing degrees of language endangerment by considering safety, extinction, and endangerment, with five further refined subcategories (Brenzinger, 2007).

The above standards have established important reference points for the changing process of the status of Hakka. Apparently, Hakka use has gradually broken down over time due to its own evolution and other internal reasons. If these grades were applied to measure the constantly changing situation to which Hakka dialects have long been exposed in China, and elsewhere internationally, this might not be feasible or valid. More recently, Hakka dialects were withdrawn from school curricula and other formal occasions in mainland China, especially after the dynamic reform-and-opening-up policy since the 1980s in coastal regions in Southern China. Hakka migrant workers flooded into metropolitan areas along the Pearl River Delta region, but Hakka dialects became marginal as speakers were scattered over this relatively wide area. Some parents gave up using their own Hakka dialects to communicate with their children, replacing them with high prestige Mandarin and perceived potential benefits of English. In some areas, this phenomenon had the consequence that school-age children understand little of their own home dialects, let alone speak them actively.

To explore a specific case, Heyuan, in northeastern Guangdong Province, became a prefecture-level city in 1988. This is a traditional Hakka settlement with a profound socio-cultural and linguistic history along the Dongjiang River. Since ancient times Hakka has been in common use in most locations in this area. A unique Hakka dialect is evident in every town or even in many villages. Take Longchuan (the third largest county in Heyuan) as an example of demographic diminution which has affected Hakka use. According to the 2021 seventh population census of the county, the total permanent residents of the county are 595,471, which is a decrease of 14.40% (100,209) in ten years compared to 695,680 people in the 2010 population census. Among the 24 towns, 23 had a decrease in population during the past decade. Tiechang Town, Longmu Town, and Chetian Town, each experienced a decrease of 22,532 people, 16,768 people,

and 13,612 people respectively; such sharp population reduction directly implicates fewer Hakka speakers. Hakka people there cannot fail to be aware of this.

Since the degrees of endangerment are extremely diverse and often inconsistent (Grenoble & Whaley 1998), unfortunately no accurate or officially accepted number of Hakka speakers corresponds to the various standards which UNESCO, GIDS or EGIDS had provided. Yet, it remains reasonable to assume that no language with fewer than ten thousand speakers could be classified as 'safe' (Brenzinger 2007). Thus, it is hard to conclude that those dialects spoken by 13,612 (Chetian Town) or 16,768 (Longmu Town) people or the other 6 towns with less than 10,000 people are 'safe' or even 'stable'. More broadly, with the outward migration of speakers, the Hakka dialects in their towns are decidedly facing the threat of gradual disappearance. In this case, the proper measurement to determine whether Hakka language is endangered should not be evaluated solely from population numbers but needs to be considered in multiple ways. While much has been written about the status of endangered languages and reevaluation of language and dialect, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific case of Hakka. Despite its historical significance and widespread use across various regions in China and internationally, Hakka's development and its progressive change has not been adequately explored. The unique sociocultural and intergenerational factors that emerged during the transmission need to be studied. This research aims to make a modest contribution to address this gap by investigating the current state of Hakka among young people, specifically focusing on the attitudes, perceptions of the language shift, and the potential for revitalization. Through this investigation, new insights into the intersection of language, identity, and cultural preservation may be identified, delivering a more nuanced understanding of the likely prospects of Hakka.

Therefore, this study aims to answer the following two research questions:

- (1) What are the key factors influencing the use and transmission of Hakka among young speakers (age 18–30)?
- (2) How do young Hakka speakers' attitudes and perceptions shape their willingness to pass on the language to future generations?

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

To address these research questions, this study employed a quantitative survey design supplemented by a qualitative interview. A mixed-methods approach is widely recognized as effective in researching language maintenance and shift, as it enhances both the explanatory depth and validity of sociolinguistic inquiry (Dörnyei, 2007; Tagliamonte, 2006). A survey methodology is particularly

suiting for examining patterns of language use, ideological orientations, and intergenerational transmission intentions in minority language contexts (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2001).

4.2. Participants

Participants were 54 young adults aged 18–30 who self-identified as Hakka, self-claimed proficiency in Hakka or self-reported having a Hakka linguistic heritage. This age group is crucial for assessing language sustainability because young adults play significant roles as current users and potential transmitters of a language or dialect (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). A snowball sampling strategy was adopted through Wechat, targeting college students, young professionals, and their families from major Hakka-speaking regions in Guangdong. Participation was voluntary, informed, and with ethical consent.

4.3. Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 15 self-report items, using a five-point Likert scale. The items were designed across five dimensions:

Items 1–5: Language Use

This section measured the participants' self-reported frequency, context, and proficiency of daily Hakka use. The constructs of language use were operationalized based on established frameworks in language maintenance research, where habitual use and context-specific domains serve as indicators of vitality (Fishman, 1991; UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group, 2003). Items in this dimension assessed daily use, home-domain use, conversational comfort, and proficiency.

Items 6–10: Willingness to Use and Transmit Hakka

Attitudinal and motivational factors were measured following theories of language ideology and ethnolinguistic vitality (Bourhis et al., 1981; Spolsky, 2009). These items concern willingness to use Hakka socially, desire to improve proficiency, willingness to teach future children, and perceived importance of language promotion. These beliefs and intentions are crucial predictors of intergenerational transmission (King, 2000).

Items 11–15: Language and Identity

The identity dimension is intended to capture perceptions of the symbolic and affective meanings attached to Hakka. Prior research shows that identity may be seen as essential to such a speech community, especially in minoritized heritage languages (Edwards, 2009). These items measured linguistic pride, the perceived role of Hakka in cultural belonging, and the extent to which language contributes to collective values prevalent among the Hakka community.

4.4. Data Collection

The questionnaire was sent out via Wenjuanxing (a typical Chinese survey platform). This approach is advisable to reach scattered, hard-to-reach participants, but it

entails elements of self-selection and researcher reliance on respondent honesty and, in this case, their self-awareness and reflexivity regarding Hakka use (Bhopal & Deuchar, 2016; Dawaele, 2018). All the participants voluntarily took part in this survey and were well informed that their responses would be solely used for academic purposes and would be anonymized without sharing with any third party. The whole data collection lasted for one week. To enhance the depth of the survey and explore potential sociolinguistics factors, three semi-structured interview questions were developed to be a complement regarding Hakka use, identity, and language endangerment. Such integration of qualitative insights kept accordance with practices in sociolinguistic research on language shift and revitalization (Hornberger & King, 1996).

4.5. Data Analysis

All responses were checked, and questionnaires with a similarity index exceeding 70% had been excluded as invalid. Finally, a total of 54 valid questionnaires were ultimately collected through snowball sampling. Cronbach's alpha values of the three dimensions are 0.926, 0.904, 0.901, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (see Table 1). The overall questionnaire also showed high reliability ($\alpha = 0.954$), suggesting that the items consistently measured the intended constructs.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha for Each Sub-scale.

Sub-Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Language use	5	0.926
Willingness to Use and Transmit Hakka	5	0.904
Language and Identity	5	0.901
Overall Scale	15	0.954

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) is 0.892, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 756.337, p < 0.001$).

The results indicate that the questionnaire possesses acceptable psychometric accuracy according to the solid reliability and validity. The instrument is therefore suitable for ascertaining perceptions of the factors influencing Hakka language use, attitudes, and identity among young speakers. Pearson correlation analyses (see Table 2) were conducted to show associations among the three dimensions in a depth and width.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Matrix for Hakka Proficiency.

Variable	r Value with Proficiency Item 4	p-Value
Item 1	0.739 **	0.000
Item 2	0.723 **	0.000
Item 3	0.805 **	0.000
Item 5	0.730 **	0.000
Item 12	0.507 **	0.000

Note: ** indicates $p < 0.01$.

The Pearson correlation analysis (see Table 3) revealed a consistent pattern of significant and positive associations among Hakka proficiency and language use, sociolinguistic comfort, and emotional attachment. Hakka proficiency demonstrated strong positive correlations with daily use ($r = 0.739, p < 0.01$), early childhood acquisition ($r = 0.723, p < 0.01$), and use within the family domain ($r = 0.805, p < 0.01$). These coefficients suggest that individuals who acquired Hakka earlier and used it regularly tended to perceive themselves as more proficient speakers. This also indirectly points to a positive attitude toward the inter-generational transmission of Hakka.

Table 3. Pearson Correlations Among Key Variables.

Variable	r Value with Identity Item 11	p-Value
Item 5	0.529 **	0.000
Item 6	0.437 **	0.001
Item 7	0.744 **	0.000
Item 8	0.750 **	0.000
Item 9	0.760 **	0.000
Item 10	0.755 **	0.000
Item 12	0.740 **	0.000
Item 13	0.841 **	0.000
Item 14	0.711 **	0.000

Note: ** indicates $p < 0.01$.

The Pearson is aimed to find out the correlation between the cultural identity and Hakka (Item 11), exploring a set of variables reflecting their language use, willingness to engage with it, along with emotional factors. Results indicated that identity was significantly and positively correlated with all related variables, although there are two items, 5 and 6, that showed a moderate positive correlation. The most pronounced relationship is variables 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and item 14 ($r = 0.841, p < 0.01$), suggesting that identity is indeed closely intertwined with community belonging and shared ethnolinguistic affiliation. Therefore, it could be positively assumed that young Hakka speakers in this survey report stronger cultural identification with Hakka. The correlation pattern, to some extent, provides empirical support for the argument that identity-based factors would be the motive in the vitality and potential revitalization of Hakka among younger speakers. Overall, attitudes and perceptions are positive which shows willingness to pass this dialect to the next generation.

Additionally, based on participants' current residence, the finding reveals that those young Hakka speakers living in major first-tier cities (mostly in Guangzhou and Shenzhen) where Hakka communities are commonly concentrated have limited opportunities to use Hakka in their daily lives since Mandarin is prevalent. Their use of Hakka is largely confined to interactions with family members. However, they do exhibit a strong sense of iden-

tity with their Hakka heritage and they predict the likelihood of Hakka dialects is becoming extinct relatively low. The factors behind this apparent discrepancy (between limited opportunities for language use but optimism for its future) warrants further investigation. Furthermore, whether the depopulation of certain Hakka-speaking regions, especially those localized dialects, might be predicted to lead to local dialect loss resulting from the gradual disappearance or urban relocation of its speakers. This study therefore incorporated follow-up interviews in a further attempt to uncover at least part of the underlying dynamics behind this phenomenon.

The main supplementary interview was conducted with a college participant who had grown up in Hakka speaking area based on ethical principles. The respondent emphasized that Hakka is not only a means of communication but also a deep emotional and cultural connection to family and heritage but admitted that the revival issues may become necessary in small regions since the migration flow will not cease for economic reasons, particularly in rural areas. The continued use of Hakka among younger generations is linked to strong ethnic identity and family-driven language transmission, a trend of language loss is not far approaching.

5. Discussion

This study has firstly tried to explore the intricate relationship at micro level between Hakka dialect and identity. The response has been reflected in the shared experiences and perceptions of young speakers at the age of 18–30 mainly from Hakka-speaking regions. The findings confirm literature which suggests a strong connection between the use of Hakka and the construction of a Hakka cultural identity, especially for those who experience high frequency of Hakka in both families and communities. From these participants, we can confirm that Hakka is not merely a tool for communication but a key element of belonging which is deeply intertwined with Hakka cultural heritage. Language – and dialect – has been demonstrated again in this study as integral to one's sense of self and cultural attachment (Fishman, 1991; Byram, 2009). Secondly, this study also highlights a gradual but less noticed erosion of Hakka usage, particularly among younger generations and in mountainous rural areas. While the transmission of the overall dialects remains strong in major Hakka regions with large Hakka communities, smaller local dialects of Hakka are currently at risk due to migration, urbanization, and the dominance of Mandarin. There is a threat to Hakka dialects of sinking in a decreasing position due to demographic shifts and changing socio-economic dynamics. Furthermore, the results of the survey and interview reminds us here, the role of family traditions, cultural practices, and ethnic memory are arguably crucial in maintaining a sense of Hakka identity that cultural transmission extends beyond language itself. Cultural expression, such

as festivals, rituals, and shared customs mentioned in the interview may maintain and strengthen the sense of belonging that leads to salient identity awareness.

Thus, language preservation efforts should extend beyond merely encouraging language use towards significant socio-cultural engagement in community activities. Creating environments where Hakka is spoken and valued, particularly among younger generations is equally essential. The findings from this study indicate the importance of family-driven language transmission, community engagement, and, hopefully, educational initiatives aimed at fostering Hakka language skills and cultural awareness. Additionally, there is a need for policy interventions that support the teaching and usage of Hakka in formal and informal settings, particularly in regions where it is seldom spoken. In a multilingual perspective, this is not to dispute the national roles of Mandarin; furthermore, dialectal bilingualism, here envisaged through maintaining Hakka, has recognized cognitive, social and emotional advantages (Baker, 2001; Adamou, 2024).

6. Conclusions and Implications

6.1. The Hakka Dialectal Revitalization and Its Linguistic Strategies

Languages, and dialects like Hakka, are widely considered as social carriers of culture, the external representation of culture and mediator of culture in family and community relations, and hence with group identity. A prominent reason for preserving an endangered dialect and revitalizing its currency lies in these inextricable relationships between language, culture, and identity, but also with a wider consciousness of humanity in general and relationships with the natural world. Thus, some scholars compare language diversity to ecological diversity, arguing that linguistic and cultural diversity are as necessary for the existence of our planet as biodiversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999; Adamou, 2024). Once a language is threatened with extinction, the skills and traditions dealing with human-environment coexistence and with heritages of cultural wisdom, perhaps also with medicinal cures and indigenous healing, will also disappear amid the scarcity of language descendants. For example, The People of the Dreaming ('Aboriginal Peoples') in Australia originally spoke 250 different languages but over 150 are now lost; most others are endangered. The traditional intellectual skills used in harsh environments through the dreaming, stories and inherited survival practices are passed on through complexities of highly-nuanced grammars and elaborated lexicons (Dixon, 2019). Once their dialects disappear, precious skills are irrevocably gone and indigenous wisdom evaporates (Yunkaporta, 2019; Kimmerer, 2020). As a differently aligned point, with advancing civilization, language revival is increasingly recognized as a human rights issue. To use one's own language, in public or local communities, is held to be a

basic human right (Crystal, 2000; Austin & Sallabank, 2011; Adamou, 2024). Therefore, language revitalization is generally an effort to retain or regain language users' dignity, political autonomy, their homeland base, or their own sense of cultural and ethnolinguistic identity.

It is estimated that around 4,000 languages, or about half the world's total, are in danger of death; their speakers die out or simply stop using the disappearing languages and few members of the younger generations learn them (Crystal, 2000; Adamou, 2024). Though most linguists and language activists vigorously support work on documenting and revitalizing endangered languages (as shown with literature cited above on Hakka), there is some debate as to whether linguists should 'interfere' with the fate of these vulnerable tongues. Some linguists disagree about 'saving' or 'acting to maintain' doomed languages. Ladefoged (1992) argued that language death is a natural part of the process of cultural development, the extinction of a language has its own internal reason and they pass out of history. Thus, linguists could record and document an endangered language scientifically without interfering, simply observing extinction, if it happens. Mufwene & Vigouroux (2016) argue that the extinction of a language is evolution-driven by uncontrollable social aetiologies. In the obvious counter-argument, one might engage with endangered languages in the same way an environmentalist would engage in surveying and protecting an endangered species, thus restoring the linguistic socio-cultural ecology in which endangered languages can be transmitted naturally. Malik (2000), however argues that most languages die out because their speakers need to pursue a better life and therefore they assimilate to dominant languages associated with modernity. Thus, language death is seen, by some, as a healthy outcome of diversity (McWhorter, 2008). Yet, with an understanding of multilingualism (Baker, 2001), dialect speakers can 'modernize' by learning dominant languages and still be multilingual, including retaining proficiency in an endangered dialect.

Given the arguments above, when exploring whether and how Hakka dialects should be revived, it is necessary to consider the deep-seated relationships beyond the linguistic level. A language with falling speaker numbers might be in danger because the changing environment presses speakers towards language assimilation amid the relatively unequal hierarchical status of minority speakers. Despite the prosperous current economic development in Hakka-based regions in China, Hakka dialect diversity has increasingly declined for social and economic reasons. Therefore, it could be liberating to concentrate more on the wider range of advantages that Hakka dialectal revitalization will bring linguistic and socio-cultural benefits to Chinese society as well as to Hakka-speaking individuals. Languages are often seen as symbols of ethnic and national identity (Austin & Sallaba, 2011). For members living in the same clan or community, deep-rooted

traditional identity can be maintained and disseminated through ceremony, music, stories, social gatherings, and architecture, which can further provide a powerful motivation for younger people to learn their own linguistic traditions (Evans, 2009). Language and identity share an intertwined relationship which is bound to spiral into the relationships between dialects, cultures, and identity.

History also provides countless examples of people who strive to maintain language varieties for their social function and particular cultural values (Adamou, 2024). Once a language becomes extinct, the cultural heritage it embodies is also cut off, so the associated social identity and linguistic human rights are eroded. Thus Hakka speakers will ponder how, if a certain Hakka dialect of a specific region disappears, then who will inherit the customs and ways of thinking? If Hakka people in one region gradually migrate to metropolitan areas where almost every formal and public occasion is dominated by Mandarin or English, then if their descendants no longer speak Hakka, do they still recognize themselves as Hakka people? Will Hakka people in other parts of the world recognize them as Hakka people? To consider these thought-provoking questions is part of acknowledging the rationale of Hakka dialect revitalization.

To implement the revitalization work at the linguistic level cannot be isolated to an island, but such efforts need to be located in a novel model of social, economic, and pedagogical strategies.

6.2. Establish Multimodal Learning Communities

As the inheritance of Hakka dialects through families declines, and Mandarin becomes universal due to Mandarin promotion policy since 1986 (Wei, 2005), Hakka dialects need to be vigorously promoted through the joint efforts of the local communities. Digital technologies can be employed: human communication has always been multimodal with multiple textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual resources (Li, 2017). Therefore, establishing multimodal Hakka communities can boost the social prestige of Hakka dialects in a data-efficient way. The methods include taking action to:

- ✓ Establish a Digital Museum of Hakka Dialects, with world-wide links
- ✓ Establish a Hakka Literature Library in a Hakka-based town, later disseminating works digitally.
- ✓ Make Hakka-dialect animations and broadcast them through TV channels and via social media.
- ✓ Set up Official WeChat Accounts with versatile Hakka folk culture (e.g., The Hakka Mountain Songs)
- ✓ Establish a Hakka dialect landscape in public service areas, through bilingual labelling and signage

6.3. Translanguaging in Practice: To Establish Hakka-Based Curriculum in Primary Schools

Translanguaging (TL) is a planned and strategic educational practice using two different languages side by side, through which teachers craft learning activities, for both learner input and output, (Baker 2001). It regards both languages as simultaneously valid in classrooms. Languages are seen as practices and actions performed by individuals in reflexive, relational and dialogical ways (Mazzaferro, 2018). Using complex interactional processes of combinations of languages in classrooms, translanguaging has proven to be an effective pedagogical practice in contexts where the school language or the language-of-instruction is different from the home languages of the learners (Li, 2017). A successful example of translanguaging practices is 'Ako' in which New Zealand's strategy for Maori education develops *ako* as the reciprocal teaching and learning relationships where a teacher (English-speaking but a learner of the Maori language) learns from the Maori students, while teacher practice is informed, deliberate and reflective (Ministry of Education, 2018). Uses of both English and Maori emphasize language-identity and both cognitive and cultural learning through productive partnerships between students and educators (García & Li, 2014). Wang (2021) reckoned that *ako* meshes seamlessly with the epistemological foundation of translanguaging in social contexts, for example Maori appears frequently in newspapers, media and in campus life, emerging strongly through syllabus, teacher training and official documents which contribute tremendously to the concrete revival of the Maori language. On this account, translanguaging could be effective to reviving Hakka dialects.

In Hakka-heritage families and surrounding community environments, most pre-school-age children grow up with at least 2–3 languages but once they enter primary schools, they switch into monolingual practices and their mother dialects often phase out. Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) characterizes this as 'killing' a language without killing the speakers. The Maori 'language nest' in New Zealand, whereby grandparents use their fluent Maori with young children in kindergarten pedagogic contexts might inspire a Hakka-based curriculum in primary school to revive Hakka dialects. For a curriculum which includes Hakka, firstly, the aims of pedagogical translanguaging are to raise multilingual awareness so that the speakers can immerse themselves in a more Hakka-oriented environment. Secondly, the course design should not only focus on dialect learning but also stretch to increasing multilingual competence since Mandarin and English take dominant positions in most primary schools. Thirdly, the curriculum practices could use rich resources from the students' experienced linguistic repertoire, enhancing understanding of Hakka history and culture through learning, engaging teachers' recognized pedagogical purposes to develop cognitive, emotional, and socio-cultural abilities through languages.

The above strategies represent a small part of the full picture for revitalizing Hakka dialects, and there are still further measures that can be considered and implemented. For example, constructing creative combinations between digital media and dialect dissemination. Thus V-logs or WeChat moments can double the speed of dialect promotion to maintain dialectal social value. In summary, overall Hakka dialect vitality essentially requires an intensive combination of factors and all need to be imaginatively interwoven to raise metalinguistic awareness, embrace different pedagogical practices and later economic and social benefits. Understanding the intricacies of language, culture, community relations and identity, and how these apply to dialects like Hakka (which evidently are not only scattered in China but world-wide in Chinese diasporas) surely means that revitalization efforts are needed and of value, not just to those of Hakka heritages but to all peoples. By reclaiming disappearing languages and dialects, we reclaim ourselves by valorizing socio-cultural diversity of languages and their speakers within overall recognition of caring for all humanity.

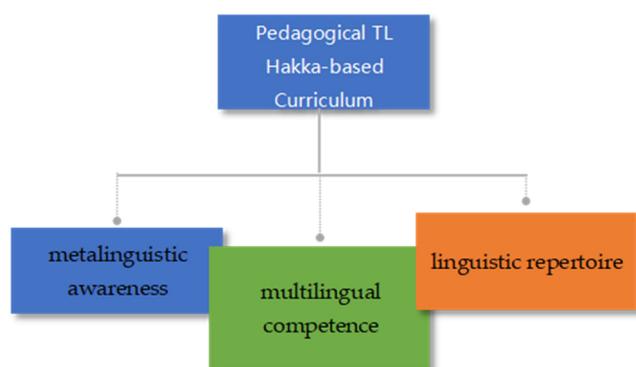


Figure 1. Pedagogical Framework of Hakka Curriculum.

7. Limitations and Further Research

The sample size of this study is relatively small. While the results offer valuable insights into young Hakka speakers' language use and identity, further study with larger sample sizes may expand upon these findings, providing a more robust understanding of the factors influencing language maintenance and transmission. The revival strategies proposed in this paper are mostly based on theoretical design which is somewhat idealistic. Unstable variables are likely in the actual implementation process, so that further verification is needed to determine their feasibility. The translanguaging practice is more of a blueprint which needs to be carefully planned in detailed steps. Due to historical reasons, Hakka people have been living in remote mountainous areas for a long consecutive time. How the typical topography had an impact on their local dialects and how have the dialects been affected, and how Hakka survives in diasporas are topics for further research. Overall, there is currently insufficient research related to Hakka. Interviews with all age groups could be

carried out to reveal new findings. Moreover, if the relationship between topography and Hakka dialects, and diasporic movements, can be visualized through digital data, this will help Hakka people world-wide gain a more profound understanding of the commonality of their own linguistic history, its evolution process, and the importance of Hakka revival.

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The study was conducted according to the AAAL (American Association for Applied Linguistics) Ethics Guideline and approved by the Institutional Review Board of City University of Macau (FHSS250032, 22 April 2025).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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No AI tools were utilized for this paper.

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