

# Examining Biliteracy Practices among Immigrant Women in Taiwan

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## Abstract

*Although there is a considerable body of literature on L2 acquisition by Southeast Asian immigrant women, biliteracy has not received much attention in the fields of immigrant woman studies in Taiwan. This paper explored biliteracy practices among 25 Southeast Asian immigrant women in Taiwan. This study involved analysis of interview data supplemented by observation data and conducted over a period of three years. The analysis surprisingly shows that some immigrants associated more with morphemes and logographic types of L2 than L2 phonological sounds, so they can write Chinese characters but neither speak or read them. Challenging traditional notions of language and power, the data also prove that a powerful L2 plays a minimal role having little effect on the most dominant L2 acquisition in immigrant women in a multilingual society. This paper has argued that language preferences immigrant women make on L2 acquisition in a multilingual society can be understood by pursuing a particular first L2 rather than all other L2s. It theorizes that their developed tendency to maximize this certain L2 system can be more cognitively satisfactory than mastering other unfamiliar L2s.*

**Keywords:** *Biliteracy, Immigrant women, Second language learning, Sociolinguistics*

## Introduction

Studies documenting Southeast Asian immigrant women in Taiwan becoming biliterate do not exist. Few literature resources closely examining L2 literacy acquisition by immigrant women in Taiwan from the perspective of literacy viewed as multiple and social practices can be found (Gee, 1989, 1999, 2000; Street, 1984, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2003). Drawing on relevant literature, individual and group interviews, multiple-site participant and non-participant observations, this study reported herein was designed to shed lights on biliteracy practices among these immigrant women.

Research aimed at understanding how immigrant adults, particularly women, practice biliteracy is clearly needed. While there are benefits to large-scale quantitative studies about this line of research, it is crucial to undertake smaller-case studies with rigorous qualitative research methods to ascertain a more nuanced knowledge and understanding of immigrant women's experiences. This paper attempts to provide essential understandings of biliteracy practices among immigrant women in Taiwan, through systematic observational data along with interview data.

## Literature Review

Linking macro-level diasporic movements and macro-micro level transculturation to micro-level individual practices of biliteracy is the organizing logic of this literature review. The connections between macro-level diasporic trajectories, macro-micro level transculturation and micro-level individual practices of biliteracy weave their way throughout this literature review. This study draws from bodies of literature such as diaspora and biliteracy (Hornberger, 2003) in conceptualizing biliteracy among Southeast Asian immigrant women in Taiwan. Macro-level transnational diaspora and micro-level individual biliteracy practices are interdependently connected. This article draws references to diaspora as trans-

culturation (Ortiz, 1940/1995). This paper employs the conceptual frame, Hornberger's (2003) continua of biliteracy, and helps to see data in a manner that illuminates and fills literature gaps.

Diaspora is a good starting point in linking macro-level contexts to micro-level practices regarding biliterate occurrences of immigrant women. Diaspora is defined as the study of dispersed ethnic populations (Brazier, 2008). The term, diaspora, entails a sense of homelands and is frequently used to indicate immigrants not living in their home countries (Puwar & Raghuram, 2003). Indeed, Southeast Asia, as a whole, is not a fixed or rigid constituency, but is seen as a constantly changing diasporic community in itself.

Taiwan has long been considered a host society for transnational immigrants. Its population consists of several culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Few decedents of Southern-Min speaking immigrants and the majority of (indigenous) Pingpu Southern-Min speakers comprise about 73 % of the population. Late Mainlander immigrants from the 1945 to 1949 migration make up about 13 %. Few decedents of Hakka speaking immigrants and (indigenous) Pingpu Hakka speakers comprise about 12%. Slightly less than 2% are Austronesian-Formosan speakers, because the majority of their decedents were already converted to become Min and Hakka speakers during the periods of Ming-Zheng colonization and Qing (Han-Chinese) colonization. Southeast Asian immigrant women are a relatively new group representing slightly more than 2 % of Taiwan's total population (Ministry of Interior, 2010).

Diasporic trajectories from Southeast Asia to Taiwan, East Asia, are at macro-macro level transnational contexts. However, these macro-macro level movements affect all the other macro-micro, micro-macro and micro-micro level contexts of biliteracy practices in Taiwan. Biliterate instances occurring to immigrant women inevitably are related to space, time and trans-cultural movements. This connects to next review on diasporic trajectories as transcultural processes.

Closely related to transnational diasporic movements, transculturation is a term coined by Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz in 1947. It is seen as an opposite to assimilation, because assimilation might merely entail the process of absorption and adaption into a mainstream culture, language and literacy. By contrast, transculturation does not imply simply obtaining a dominant culture, language and literacy by immigrants. It articulates the various stages of the transitional courses of actions from one culture to the other. Loss and displacing a prior culture is seen as deculturation. Transculturation can describe the dynamic developments when newly received cultural phenomena gradually generates into neoculturation. It includes adaptation and mobility throughout different socio-economical statuses and multiple-ethnicity among immigrants (Ortiz, 1940/1995).

Relative to diaspora and transculturation, biliteracy of immigrants has generated a great deal of attention (Hornberger, 1989, 2003, 2004; Gerena, 2010). In her influential study, Hornberger (1989) discovered continua of biliteracy. Biliteracy is a compound and multifaceted configuration. Knowledge, reading strategies, and literacy skills can be transferred from one language and literacy to the other. The ending result for this mutually reinforced literacy development between L1 and L2 is often termed biliteracy. To be biliterate is more than just being bilingual. Biliteracy can be seen as a combination and a conjunction between bilingualism and literacy (Hornberger 1989, 2003). Instead of contrasting L1 and L2 literacy, biliteracy should be seen as a continuum and viewed as a dynamic wholeness (Hornberger, 2003). Biliteracy can be defined as literacy instances, whereby communications are delivered by biliterate actors in two or more language varieties and in or around written literacy (Hornberger, 1990, cited in Hornberger 2003).

This paper reported herein is by no means a standard biliteracy study, but specifically tailored to Southeast Asian immigrant women studied in Kaohsiung City, Taiwan. After reviewing relevant literature, the preceding section provides research design of this article.

## Methodology

### Context of the Research Sites

Kaohsiung, a harbor city in Southern Taiwan, is considered the second largest metropolitan area in this beautiful tropical island. More than ninety percent of Kaohsiung City's population speaks Taiwanese-Southern-Min language, linguistically close to Min of Mainland China's east coast. The city of Kaohsiung has long been considered a stronghold of traditional Taiwanese languages, cultures and values. Kaohsiung City provides a rich site for L2 research because residents are known for their close-knit Taiwanese families. Local communities where Southeast Asian immigrant women live re-



main relatively conservative as its core, despite the fact that Kaoshiung is today a modern and second cosmopolitan center in Taiwan.

## Participants

25 participants were selected on the basis of their accessibility to the researcher and their willingness to collaborate in the research. All participants have fairly similar diasporic backgrounds with other immigrant woman communities throughout Taiwan. 25 participants selected include Burmese, Cambodians, Filipinos, Indonesians, Malaysians, Thais and Vietnamese. Participants chosen represent seven different Southeast Asian countries in the range of potential Southeast Asian immigrant women in Kaohsiung City with ages ranging from early twenties to late sixties. The researcher digitally recorded and observed them over a period of three years (2007-2009). Participants were interviewed and observed in multiple sites including two official adult literacy education programs, one private adult literacy education classroom, one protestant church that provides shelter for immigrants, two workplaces, two households, and one immigrant woman service center.

## Research Methods

On the basis of the biliteracy study conducted in 2007-2009, the researcher aimed to answer this following research question in this contribution: what are the patterns of biliteracy practiced by Southeast Asian immigrant women in Taiwan. The research question provides an opportunity to demonstrate the utility of Hornberger's (1989, 2003, 2004), Gee's (1989, 1999, 2000) and Street's (1984, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2003) view of biliteracy for immigrant women in Taiwan. Field-notes gathered from participant and non-participant observations supply data set. Thus, data sources include digital-recorded interview transcripts from individual interviews and transcripts of group interviews. Included as data sources are field-notes from observing participants interacting with each other, dialogues with L2 literacy teachers, and spontaneous conversations in multiple sites. The patterns of biliteracy are examined by means of the research instrument - an interview protocol - consisted of a series of close and open-ended questions pertaining to the language and literacy background of participants as well as their current reported patterns of biliteracy. Only one interview for each of the 25 subjects does not constitute interview data set, so a number of follow-up individual interviews and follow-up group interviews are to ensure the methodological rigor. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, so the digital-recordings of the interviews yielded a significant amount of data.

Self-reported interview data of biliteracy can be inaccurate and unreliable. Thus, personal reports are supplemented by observations. Although the main informants of this study were restricted to a small sample size - 25 participants, the researcher has a fairly representative sample by combining both interview data and observation data. The researcher is careful to triangulate interview data with observation data.

Predefined categories that differentiate among concepts and characteristics of data are recommended by Cain and Labov's analytic strategies (Riessman, 2008) as data are broken down into smaller units to be classified during qualitative data analyses. That is to say, all data gathered from interviews and field-notes exist in two stages of analyses. The first stage is thematic analysis, adapted from Cain's thematic analysis techniques. The objective is to search for reappearances manifested in regular activities among propositions, assumptions, episodes, and events. The second stage is structure analysis. For this, Labov's structure analysis strategy and some Riessman's adaptations from Labov's are adopted to code data, looking for structures that hang narrative texts together (Riessman, 2008).

## Findings and Discussion

This section reports a real sense of relative weighing of research results, grouped according to five final patterns emerged. They are organized into five major patterns of biliteracy and are integrated in a dynamic relationship of continuum (see Hornberger's continua model of biliteracy in Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester, 2000). Findings of this article, with a primary focus on five occurrences in the practices of biliteracy, reached the following five patterns. Immigrants are "D.R.I.F.T." ing in the host country experiencing diasporic continuum of L1, reversal biliteracy, imbalanced biliteracy, first L2 effect and transcultural biliteracy. Interview responses concerning diasporic continuum of L1, reversal biliteracy, imbalanced biliteracy, first L2 effects, and transcultural biliteracy, indicate intriguing outcomes. Five major patterns in which biliteracy is being actively practiced among immigrant women in the predominantly Mandarin-Chinese and Southern-Min language environment are explored within the concepts of

literacy as continua, multiple and social practices. An acronym was constructed, “D.R.I.F.T.,” as referred to five salient patterns. D stands for diasporic continuum of L1, R stands for reversal biliteracy, I stands for imbalanced biliteracy, F stands for first L2 effect, and T stands for transcultural biliteracy. Without reading explicit explanations of the DRIFT mnemonic, these five descriptors might seem to have confusing titles. “D.R.I.F.T.” entails comparable, and to some extent, overlapping biliteracy activities with each other. Nevertheless, they also differ in their practices. It is crucial to give clear definitions in concrete terms on what is D.R.I.F.T. mnemonic.

### Diasporic Continuum of L1s

*Table 1: Chinese heritage language abilities claimed by respondents*

Infor- mant	Age 2009	Ethnicity of informants	Chinese heritage language of participant	Chinese heritage language ability claimed by respondents	Official status in Taiwan
A	31	Burmese	MC	Can speak, read, and write	OL
B	45	Burmese	MC	Can speak but neither read nor write	OL
C	25	Cambodian	N		
D	27	Cambodian	N		
E	30	Filipino	N		
F	32	Filipino	N		
G	31	Indonesian	H	Can speak but neither read nor write	NL
H	26	Indonesian	SM	Can understand but not speak, read or write	NL
I	27	Indonesian	N		
J	29	Indonesian	SM	Can understand but not speak, read or write	NL
K	25	Indonesian	N		
L	24	Indonesian	N		
M	26	Indonesian	N		
N	27	Malaysian	MC	Can speak but neither read nor write	OL
O	50	Thai	MC	Cannot perform any combinations of skills	OL
P	45	Thai	N		
Q	32	Thai	SM	Cannot perform any combinations of skills	NL
R	25	Vietnamese	N		
S	24	Vietnamese	MC	Can speak, read and write	OL
T	23	Vietnamese	N		
U	22	Vietnamese	N		
V	30	Vietnamese	C	Can speak but neither read nor write	FL
W	25	Vietnamese	C	Can speak but neither read nor write	FL
X	60	Vietnamese	C	Can speak but neither read nor write	FL
Y	30	Vietnamese	C	Can speak but neither read nor write	FL

No. of informants=25

C=Cantonese  
H=Hakka  
MC= Mandarin Chinese  
SM=Southern-Min

OL=Official Language  
NL=National Language or Domestic Language  
FL=Foreign Language  
N=no opinion/unclear/neutrality

(Note that C, H, and SM cannot accurately be written, because there is no standard existing orthography.)

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For lack of a better term, this is what the researcher might call diasporic continuum of L1s. Native languages and L1 literacy of immigrants are coincidentally official languages, formal literacy, national languages, or local vernacular dialects in host countries. Some immigrant women acquire one or two L1s from childhood through young adulthood in their home countries and continue utilizing these L1s after their migration to a host country. However, employments of the same L1s before and after migration do not guarantee the same L1 experiences. The differences lie, in part, in different language and literacy socialization experiences between home countries and host countries. The intensity required in adopting the same L1s might vary depending on whether L1 is a foreign language, a household language, or a national or official language in the host country.

Some participants' (47%) reports of speaking Mandarin-Chinese, Southern-Min and Hakka were characterized as diasporic continuum of L1. During formal and informal interviews informants with Chinese ancestry and native Chinese heritage speakers express explicitly and frequently their beliefs, meanings, and values of heritage languages—Mandarin-Chinese, Min, and Hakka. In her interview, an Indonesian woman signaled her affective stance and deep language loyalty toward her heritage language—Southern-Min, which is the medium of wide communication in her migrated City, in ways that were different than other immigrant women learning Southern-Min language as their L2. Interview informants stated that literacy rates in home countries had been low as they had to eke out for a living and may not have time and financial supports to study literacy at schools. Despite this, these informants asserted that the oral language of their home in Southeast Asia was their Chinese heritage languages. After migrating to Taiwan, participants asserted that the Chinese heritage languages were still felt to be oral languages of their home and local communities in Taiwan. Echoed interview data, the researcher (a native speaker of Chinese and Southern-Min) observed that these Chinese heritage language speakers spoke fluent Mandarin-Chinese and Southern-Min.

Accompanying aspects regarding diasporic continuum of L1s discussed above, it is striking that 47% of participants' heritage languages and mother-tongue literacy are L1s in Taiwan. However, one of the big challenges for immigrants is a change in their language and literacy landscape even if their native languages and mother-tongue literacy remain the same L1s for majority people in the host country. It is evident from data indicating that diasporic continuum of L1s results in changing not only the normative use of languages in formal language domains but also in inter-personal communications.

### **Reversal Bilingualism**

Reversal bilingualism is a term that the author has coined for lack of a better term. Mastery of L2 literacy becomes a foundation for facilitating acquisition of L1 literacy among immigrant women interviewed and observed. L2 independent literacy competency has first been attained followed by successive learning of L1 literacy at a later time. Some immigrant women did not receive adequate L1 literacy instruction, thus they did not achieve L1 mastery in their home countries.

As some informants (7%) of this study demonstrate, nonetheless, the sequence of literacy acquisition cannot always be assumed L1 first and L2 second. In marked contrast, some participants were highly literate in their L1 literacy. However, it was evident that some participants were not literate in their L1s. This contrast is not lost on young immigrant women who cannot read their L1s. In exploring reasons for the difference between L1 literate and L1 illiterate immigrant women from the same countries, evidence was presented revealing that socio-economical reasons ranging from growing up in war zones or coming from poor native families before migration are the main causes for non-mastery of L1 literacy. However, for some, formal L2 literacy instruction will continue in the host country until they become independently literate in L2 skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This paper has argued that success in L2 literacy motivates them in acquiring L1 literacy in a successive manner. In interviews and casual dialogues, both L1 illiterate and L1 literate immigrant women expressed the desire for

learning Mandarin-Chinese language and literacy. However, a L1 illiterate Cambodian informant's statement is an evidence of the role that mastery of Southern-Min language orally can have in discouraging her enthusiasm to learn Cambodian literacy and Chinese literacy. This pattern is understood by considering what the researcher terms first L2 effect which will be discussed later. Considering aspects concerning reversal biliteracy, the data, which revealed a pattern of L2-L1 reversal biliteracy, questions the common belief that literacy acquisition follows the sequential order of L1 literacy followed by more fluent L2 literacy acquisition.

### **Imbalanced Biliteracy**

There is what the researcher might call imbalanced biliteracy for lack of a better term. A high proportion (67%) of informants asserted that they can learn two L2s in the host country simultaneously, but they prefer one, or rely on one, over the other. Any imbalanced-biliterate reliance individuals might continue to read their L1 texts in the host country while learning to read L2 texts, but their L1 reading ability might be much better than their L2 ones even after living in the host country longer than living in their home countries.

The other pattern which speaks most directly to the present discussion of imbalanced biliteracy is transcultural biliteracy. In following examples, the pattern of imbalanced biliteracy parallels with the pattern of transcultural biliteracy. However, a clear definition of transcultural biliteracy will be given later. A Vietnamese woman interviewed emphasizes this point when she clarifies the ways in which she only uses a L2 monolingual dictionary instead of a bilingual dictionary. Likewise, an Indonesian woman reported that she loves to listen to Taiwanese-Southern-Min radio. However, the same Indonesian informant cannot read and write Chinese L2 characters in a beginning level. A Thai informant stated that she reads L1 religious scriptures without involving any L2 literacies in her faith practices. In rare cases a Vietnamese participant replied to interview questions that she may only watch L2 TV programs, even though L1 TV programs are accessible to her. Almost all participants agreed that they sang lullabies to their children in only L1s rather than L2s. In addition, it was evident that some only read L2 children's books to their children at bedtime. In comparison, others might read only L1 bedtime stories to their children. There were informants like a Cambodian woman in this study who despite great need to learn Chinese L2 literacy had least desire to do so.

Returning to discussions of imbalanced biliteracy, participants' responses to interview questions reflect different types of imbalanced biliteracy. The most striking finding from the data regarding imbalanced biliteracy is found in a Thai woman. The data speak to the fact that not only are the majority of participants more fluent in listening and speaking in a L2 than reading and writing it, whereas an increasing number of immigrant women in Taiwan reported are more associated with logographic writing in Chinese L2 literacy but they were with little or without Chinese L2 phonological awareness to speak and read it. A Thai immigrant exemplifies such pattern. What this study points out here is that this pattern exemplified by this Thai informant might have little common or contradict with Western studies that show interpersonal communication can be acquired faster than cognitively demanded writing skills for immigrants.

### **First L2 Effect**

First L2 effect is a term coined by the researcher for lack of a better term. Reported from data, first L2 usually becomes the most dominant L2 for an individual immigrant in a multilingual host society. It occurs when the interview responses speak to a tendency on the part of immigrant women to insist on utilizing a certain L2 instead of other L2s in a multilingual setting. 40 % of participants desired a particular L2 over other L2s. The most intriguing finding from the data, however, concerns the pattern of reported first L2 language and literacy use as correlated with initial language and literacy socialization in Taiwan for immigrant women. Challenging current notions of language and power, the differences in reported adopting different first L2s in Taiwan often reflect the fact that what is the first L2 language and literacy immigrants were first being exposed to in an almost isolated language and literacy socialization.

*Table 2: Responses of informants when asked what affects the way they acquired their most dominant L2 oral and written discourse in a multilingual setting*

Impact factors	# of responses from 25 informants	% of responses from 25 informants
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Host parents/husbands/family members: Exposure to a local vernacular L2 in a household language domain for 2-3 years upon their arrival in Taiwan	2	13%
Receiving formal L2 literacy education in an official program for 2-3 years soon after migrating to Taiwan	11	73%
Friends and neighbors from Taiwan and home countries		
Media:		
Newspapers, TV, radio		
No opinion/unclear/neutrality	12	48%

This paper looks at ways in which the role of household language domains and formal L2 literacy programs during initial language and literacy socialization has influenced the long-term development of biliteracy for participants. The analysis strongly indicates that first L2 is not merely diminishing possibilities for other L2 acquisitions, but that first L2 has become part of immigrant women's beliefs, language ideologies, linguistic cultures, and value systems.

It is interesting to note that some participants utilized Mandarin-Chinese as their first L2, but others revealed a marked preference for the adoption of Southern-Min as their first L2. While widely similar percentages of participants reported utilizing their certain first L2 most frequently than other L2s, a significant distinction emerges in the use of Taiwanese-Mandarin-Chinese L2 and Taiwanese-Southern-Min L2 (73% and 13%, respectively). Crucially, immigrant women (73%) who received formal L2 literacy instruction first and then acquired a local L2 in the home developed their formal L2 literacy in a manner superior to that of the local L2 language and literacy. By contrast, if they (13%) first acquired a local L2 language and literacy and knew it for several years (data reported 2-3 years) before receiving formal L2 literacy instruction, their local L2 language and literacy was superior to their formal L2 literacy.

In multilingual settings, the first L2 acquired by immigrants, either through formal L2 literacy instruction that are influenced by language policies or through socialization that takes place in home language domains, becomes more influential and significant than other second languages and other L2 literacies available. Therefore, immigrants recognized with first L2 effect have strong tendencies to maximize this particular L2 verbal language and L2 literacy over others, regardless of the actual demands of other, or alternative, language competencies. Most participants identified with first L2 effect heavily rely on their particular first L2s more frequently than other languages and literacy in the host society. They stated that they regularly engage in certain L2 literacy activities where languages, other than first L2s, become less desirable.

Considering first L2 effects, relevance theory can be partially used in explaining first L2 effect. When immigrant women were exposed to a first L2 in a multilingual society through their initial language and literacy socialization, they developed a tendency to maximize this particular first L2 rather than other L2s because pursuing it was cognitively more satisfactory than acquiring other unfamiliar L2s. Please refer to Sperber and Wilson (1987, 1995, and 2004) for in depth explanations of relevance theory, ensuring its clarity and how it applies to the case for immigrant women identified with first L2 effect.

Continuing discussions of first L2 effect, an accommodation norm, explicitly or implicitly, involves decisions regarding the language domain and whether speaking the more formal Mandarin-Chinese language is required or the less formal Southern-Min language in Taiwan. This study might suggest otherwise. The most surprising finding in data relates to language and power, and shows that prestigious L2s may have weak or no effect on first L2 acquisition by immigrant women in a multilingual setting. The findings suggest that first exposed L2 in an immigrant's initial language and literacy socialization has a long lasting effect on her overall L2 acquisitions. Reported from data, the main contributor of certain L2 fluency for an immigrant woman in Taiwan is initial exposure to a particular L2 for at least 2-3 years in a relatively isolated language and literacy socialization. However, language policy and planning, and linguistic cultures might have a weaker effect on informants' L2 acquisitions. In Taiwan, the

traditional families in Kaohsiung City are usually consistent keeper of Southern-Min language. Even so, data in this study showed that first L2 effect prevents the non-first L2 Southern-Min language from passing to their immigrant wives of these Kaohsiung men, when the formal Chinese L2 has become the most dominant first L2 in these immigrant women after receiving formal Chinese L2 literacy education outside their host family discourses.

### Transcultural Bilingualism

Transcultural bilingualism is a term that the researcher has coined for lack of better terms. Challenging notions of assimilations, the data indicate that learning to read and write in L2s is not merely a matter of enculturation for immigrant women. As much higher number (80%) of informants asserted that they acquired bilingualism while engaging in monolingual activities. They participate in L1 literacy activities during some situations while practicing L2 literacy activities in others. Certain L1 literacy instances are not replaceable by L2 literacy practices. There are times when individual immigrants cannot find an alternative language and literacy to substitute for the ones they favor in certain literacy instances taking place in the host country. They do not abandon all L1 literacy texts overnight during transculturation as deculturation may suggest. Neither do they accept all L2 literacy prints overnight in transculturation as enculturation might imply. In other words, their preferred L1s and L2s are not interchangeable when it comes to certain daily literacy activities. They engage in L1 literacy instances on some occasions while practicing L2 literacy activities at other times. Certain L1 literacy occurrences cannot be replaced by L2 literacy practices, and some L2 literacy activities cannot be replaced by L1 literacy activities either. In other words, bilingual activities and monoliterate events and episodes in both L1 literacy and L2 literacy are practiced by immigrants in a host country at the same time.

With regard to inexchangeability between certain L1 literacy practices and particular L2 literacy activities, a Thai immigrant woman reported that her L1 religious scripture reading to resolve homesickness cannot be substituted by reading L2 texts, even though a massive number of Chinese L2 Buddhism scriptures are accessible to her and she can fluently read Chinese L2 characters. Moreover, a Burmese informant's comments reveal that L1 heritage language bonding cannot be replaced by any L2s, although her L2s might be better than L1s after living in Taiwan for more than 30 years. Likewise, a Vietnamese informant's narratives exemplify a pattern that L2 bedtime story reading cannot be replaced by L1 bedtime story reading to her daughter. In addition, both a Vietnamese participant and her Vietnamese friend observed by the researcher showed that disciplining their children in speaking L2s cannot be replaced by disciplining children in speaking L1s.

Table 3: *Transcultural bilingual practices claimed by informants*

Infor- mant	Age 2009	Ethnicity of informants	1	2	3	4	5	6
A	31	Burmese	N	N	N	N	N	N
B	45	Burmese	N	N	N	N	N	N
C	25	Cambodian	N	N	N	N	N	N
D	27	Cambodian	N	N	N	N	N	N
E	30	Filipino	L1	N	N	N	N	N
F	32	Filipino	N	N	N	N	N	N
G	31	Indonesian	L1	L2SM	L1	N	N	N
H	26	Indonesian	N	N	N	L2C	N	N
I	27	Indonesian	L1	N	N	L2C	N	N
J	29	Indonesian	L1	N	N	L2C	N	N
K	25	Indonesian	L1	N	N	L2C	N	N
L	24	Indonesian	L1	N	N	L2C	N	N
M	26	Indonesian	L1	N	N	N	N	N
N	27	Malaysian	N	N	N	N	N	N

O	50	Thai	N	N	N	N	N	N
P	45	Thai	N	L1	N	N	L1	L1
Q	32	Thai	L1 & L2E	L1	N	L2E	N	N
R	25	Vietnamese	L1	N	N	L2C	N	L1
S	24	Vietnamese	L1	N	L1	L2C	N	N
T	23	Vietnamese	L1	N	N	L2C	N	N
U	22	Vietnamese	L1	N	N	L2C	N	N
V	30	Vietnamese	L1	N	L2C	L2C	N	N
W	25	Vietnamese	L1	N	L2C	L2C	N	N
X	60	Vietnamese	L1	N	N	L2C	N	N
Y	30	Vietnamese	N	N	N	N	N	N

No. of informants=25

1=singing lullabies to children

L1= native language and mother-tongue literacy

2=singing folklore lyrics

L2C=Chinese L2

3=discipline children

L2SM=Southern-Min L2

4= reading bedtime stories

L2E=English L2

5= reading religious scriptures

N=no opinion/unclear/neutrality

6= reading literature when feeling

homesick

Both examples of irreplaceable L1 literacy practices by L2s and examples of irreplaceable L2 literacy activities by L1s described and implied the use of a certain language and literacy to great effect, meeting different needs in multilingual settings. Data show that irreplaceable L1 literacy practices by L2s and irreplaceable L2 literacy activities by L1s co-exists comfortably among immigrant women. When asked about reading bedtime stories to their children, participants reported reading Chinese L2 or English L2 instead of any mother-tongue literacy. Equally important, in interviews and observations many immigrants who are mothers reported that they desired to develop a more close relationship with their children and the use of L1 lullaby singing is employed rather than the use of any L2 lullaby singing to facilitate that intimacy.

Interestingly too, in interviews and observations a number of informants reported and observed consciously cultivating the use of mother-tongue literacy to their children. Just because they demonstrate a deep language loyalty to their L1s and desire to pass on to their children does not mean that they do not focus on learning L2s. They do both transculturally. These immigrants' examples underscore the ways in which different languages function as multilayered communications in multilingual settings. Each language and literacy serves different economical and socio-cultural intensions.

Relative to transcultural biliteracy, mother-tongue language and literacy of immigrant women in Taiwan are under discrimination, subjected to overwhelming socio-economical pressures. Transculturation provides an alternative conceptual framework rather than merely an assimilation model to view immigrants. There was a strong assertion by all participants for the need to continue listening, speaking, reading and writing their L1s. They make a very deliberate choice to adopt their L1s and mother-tongue literacy over L2s on some occasions. Even though mother tongue languages of Southeast Asian immigrant women are not economically viable in Taiwan, there is evident that an interesting in preserving these minority languages does not preclude the learning of dominant Chinese L2 or acculturation into Taiwan. Quite contrary, it is precisely individuals who practice Southeast Asian languages also frequently engaged in L2 activities. Participants expressed an appreciation for both L1s and L2s. Thus, they seek to negotiate transcultural biliteracy as a meaningful way of life that keep their old literacy and culture with their new literacy and culture in harmony.

## Conclusion

After completing this study and reviewing the data, several contributions surface. Essentially this paper reconceptualizes the confluence of Taiwan's immigrant women and biliteracy in ways that help see biliteracy linking macro-level diasporic trajectories and transcultural processes to micro-level individual practices. Furthermore, this study has opened up Taiwan's largest minority group to a research within the fields of biliteracy and L2 learning. Because this is the first study to examine biliteracy among Southeast Asian immigrant women in Taiwan, it may provide language policy planners with local and global implications in a variety of multilingual settings. Knowledge of the daily interactions immigrants have with languages and literacies is required of multilingual-educational policy makers and bilingual or multilingual education practitioners in guiding and establishing policies. It is also anticipated that this study influences and helps sustain diversity, multilingualism and multi-cultures of civilization and wisdom in Taiwan.

This study emphasizes how crucial it is to categorize potential multiple biliteracy behaviors among immigrant women regarding descriptive adequacy. It must be recognized that there is an accumulating consensus in both interview data and observation data that biliteracy should be viewed as multiple and social practices. As Street (2003) stated, "It is therefore of utmost urgency that we do not limit our definition of literacy to include only that which we know or have been taught to value, for literacy is not one uniform technical skill, but rather it is something which varies in each different context and society in which it is embedded" (p. 5). Thus, this study confirms Street's (1984, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2003) and Gee's (1989, 1999, 2000) concepts of literacy. Given the findings of this study, the data are also consistent with Hornberger's (1989, 2000, 2003, 2004) continua of biliteracy. That is to say, although this study classifies five main findings in five distinct patterns, they are essentially intertwined with one another, particularly regarding imbalanced biliteracy, first L2 effect, and transcultural biliteracy.

Here this study has touched on five patterns of biliteracy practices by Southeast Asian immigrant women in Taiwan. Yet, taken as a whole, five of them are considerable grounds to increase our understanding of biliteracy. Drawing from literature and data in this study, biliteracy is seen as not only continuum, multiple and socially practiceable, but is also seen as being diasporic continuum, reversal, imbalanced, first L2 relevant, and transcultural.

The findings show that biliteracy is not merely a matter of continua, multiple and social practices. These results add to existing knowledge about biliteracy in immigrant women and explain in a way that links macro-level diasporic movements and transcultural processes to micro-level individual practices. Nevertheless, the specifics, and to what extent, biliteracy is practiced by immigrant women in Taiwan will vary depending on contexts and individuals. Many more in-depth inquiries, analyses and descriptions of biliteracy will be required in communities of immigrant women in Taiwan and other countries. Even so, this study provides additional understanding concerning biliteracy practices by immigrant women in Taiwan that could apply to L2 learning programs for immigrants in other countries.

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