

廣東話和普通話，如何替孩子選擇？

作為一間以粵語（廣東話）教學的中文學校，我們經常聽到家長有這個疑問：是否應讓孩子學習普通話而放棄廣東話？以現今中國在國際性的地位，無可否認普通話的重要性。然而在讓孩子學習中文這個整體課題上，實在不能草率。中文有很多方言，其實在學習中文的過程中，要同時學懂兩種口語，並不困難。重點在於整體地學好中國語文，同時保持孩子對中文學習的興趣。

因此在選擇學校時，應當首先考慮孩子在那一個語言環境下，學得最得心應手。在這方面，家長常忽略以下兩個重點：

首先，須知語言學習，必須在日常生活中多加運用。因此，要考慮孩子在家中或親友間最常接觸的是那一種方言？家長自己本身，對普通話還是廣東話較為流暢？近年科學研究指出，從嬰兒至六歲期間，大腦會自動分析聽到的語言發音結構。因此牙牙學語，是幼兒的專長。若在這個階段已對某一種語言有接觸的話，對學習這個語言及處理這語言的發音有重點性的幫助。

此外，孩子多用「模仿」來學習。因此順理成章地，家長應選擇自己較流暢的語言來讓孩子學習。這樣不但增加孩子練習中文口語的機會；而且能在運用這口語的過程中，讓孩子得到一些滿足感，刺激起他們的興趣。若家長能用流暢的普通話跟孩子對話，那選擇用普通話學習就會很順利。但若家長本身，或其他親友亦不能流暢使用普通話時，孩子在學習中文過程中會遇到較多的障礙。弄得不好，孩子更會失去學習中文的興趣。

然而，選擇了一種口語，並不表示要放棄另一種口語。特別以普通話為例，自從漢語拼音在一九五零年代制定開始，學習漢語發音便有一套完善的系統。即使西方人，亦可憑藉這系統來學講普通話。對於已有中文基礎的學生，就更易如反掌了。有了良好的中文基礎，再尋找教授字正腔圓的普通話班，（如倫敦大學的SOAS開辦的普通話課程）就能把兩種口語都掌握好了。

Cantonese or Mandarin, what should I choose for my child?

As a Chinese School teaching in Cantonese, we often come across with this question from parents. While China is becoming a superpower country, there is no doubt that learning to speak Mandarin should be on the agenda. However, when we are looking at learning a language as a whole, the decision will require some careful planning. There are many different dialects in the Chinese language and it is not impossible to master two or more dialects. The key is to establish a good foundation for the language as a whole, including read, write and speak, and also keep the child's interest in learning it. Therefore, parents must first work out which dialect environment is most suited for their child. And to work that out, you should consider a couple of matters:

You can only succeed learning a language well by using it. Therefore the first consideration is whether your child is mostly exposed to Cantonese or Mandarin. Which dialect do parents speak to their child other than English? Amongst family, relatives and friends, which dialect do they use more often? Scientific research has shown that during the formative age of the brain, which is from new born to approximately six years of age, the human brain is constantly analysing the language it hears, especially it's phonic pattern. This became the foundation of a child learning to speak. So naturally, the more they hear a dialect, the easier it is for them to pick up.

We also know that children learn by imitating their parents. That means they will stand a good chance picking up the dialect their parents, grandparents or relatives use. And when a child can practice the dialect with close family members, this will provide them with some satisfaction, which in effect, encourages the child to progress instead of becoming bored of it. So the simple conclusion is that parents should choose the dialect they speak most fluently.

However, as we have mentioned above, learning more than one dialect is very achievable, especially for learning Mandarin. Since the "Ping yin" system established in the 1950s, it has allowed a vast amount of Chinese (whose mother tongue is a different Chinese dialect) to learn the official language. It has even made learning to speak Chinese achievable for people all around the world. So if a child is armed with a solid foundation of the language in read, write and speak, they can quite easily pick up Mandarin at a later age from a good Mandarin course (such as classes run by University of London SOAS).