

Is there a language choice in Macao public primary schools?

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Introduction

Macao has a very peculiar education system based on a longstanding coexistence of church, government and community run schools (Adamson & Li, 2005) that were influenced by the local community, but also the Portuguese presence. Currently, the decentralized education system (Tang, 2000) comprises 77 schools (DSEJ, 2017), 10 of which are public Luso-Chinese schools whose main purpose is to preserve the heritage of the Portuguese language, along with the main local language, Cantonese, while not neglecting the learning of Mandarin. Five of those institutions are primary schools. Portuguese is the means of instruction of two local schools, one being government-run and the other private.

Methods

The target population of this study are the Luso-Portuguese and the Portuguese-medium primary schools, that work with the two historically main languages.

The data was collected from a total of 148 fourth and sixth-graders aged between 9-12 years of four institutions, in the years of 2011 and 2017. Based on closed-ended questions, the poster describes the target population and attempts to shed light onto language practices in the school domain, more specifically in the interaction with school stakeholders.

For the purpose of analysis, variables such as gender, school grade and the main reasons for attending school were considered as independent variables, while children's attitudes to both their mother tongue and the official language(s) were treated as dependent variables.

For the characterisation of the data, we used descriptive statistics, presenting the most relevant information in the form of tables, statistics or graphs, depending on the nature and scale of measurement of the variables under study. The study of possible association between variables was made using bivariate descriptive statistics, namely the association coefficient Phi or the Cramer's V. Where relevant, statistical inference techniques were used to verify the statistical significance of the results obtained. In particular, the chi-square test of independence (that indicates whether the difference in the data is significant) and Fisher's exact test were used, whenever the conditions of applicability of the former were not verified. A level of significance of 5% was considered. This is to say that the latter test is applied when one of the cells, on a 2x2 table, has less expected counts than the expected counts on the counterpart cell. On a table bigger than 2x2, when there is more than 20% of cells with expected count less than 5, we look at the likelihood ratio. When the level of significance is lower than .05, we look either into the Phi-coefficient (on a 2x2 table) or the Cramer's V (on a bigger table), in order to identify the strength of the statistical significance of the relationship between the variables under study. In the following crosstabulations, the missing values and non-answers account for the difference in the totals.

Conclusions

- The findings show the presence of seven Chinese language varieties, namely, the varieties of Yangjiang, Kejia, Shanghai, Hunan, Fujian, Hakka, that are outnumbered by the Cantonese speakers;
- One third of the native speakers of Cantonese and Mandarin attend the Portuguese-medium schools;
- Thai and Tagalo are two further Asian languages that also set presence in this context;
- Portuguese is the major but not the only European language present in this community: English, French, Spanish, Italian;
- Other worldwide countries represented in the sample population are: Angola, Brazil, Canada, Cape Verde, Colombia, India, France, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mongolia, Mozambique, Reunion and Spain;
- Portuguese-medium schools are more likely to develop a comparatively positive language attitude in general towards both their mother tongue and the second language whereas students from Cantonese-medium schools are more protective of their mother tongue (which is Cantonese) in detriment of a general positive language attitude, be it towards Mandarin or any other language;
- The likelihood of finding parents more skilled and with a higher level of education is higher in the Portuguese-medium schools, whether private or not.
- Cantonese native children are more prone to dislike the second language, mainly Mandarin and in the public school system.

Bibliography

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Results

Fig.1 Family origin - Asia

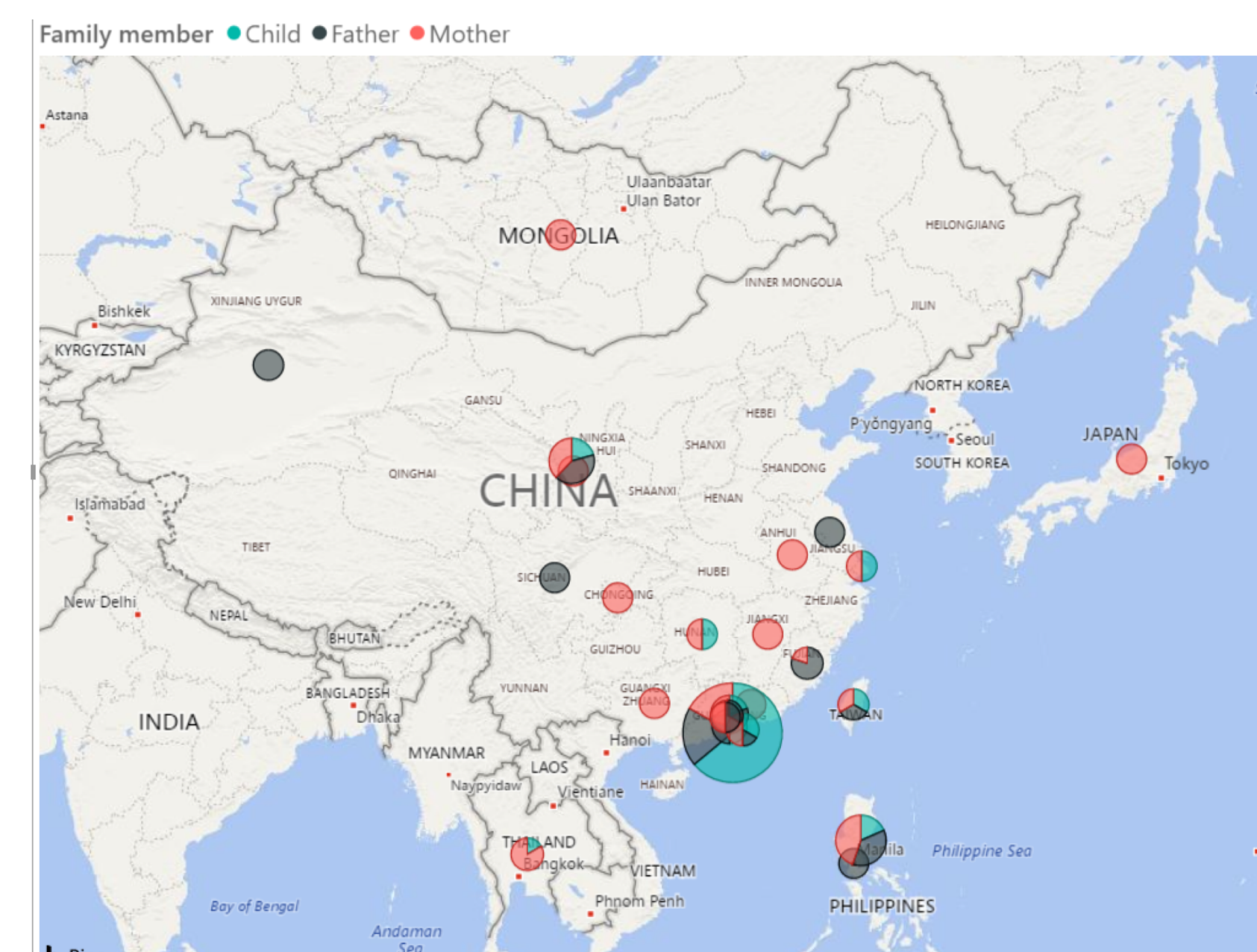


Fig. 2 Family origin - worldwide



Fig. 3 Family members by place

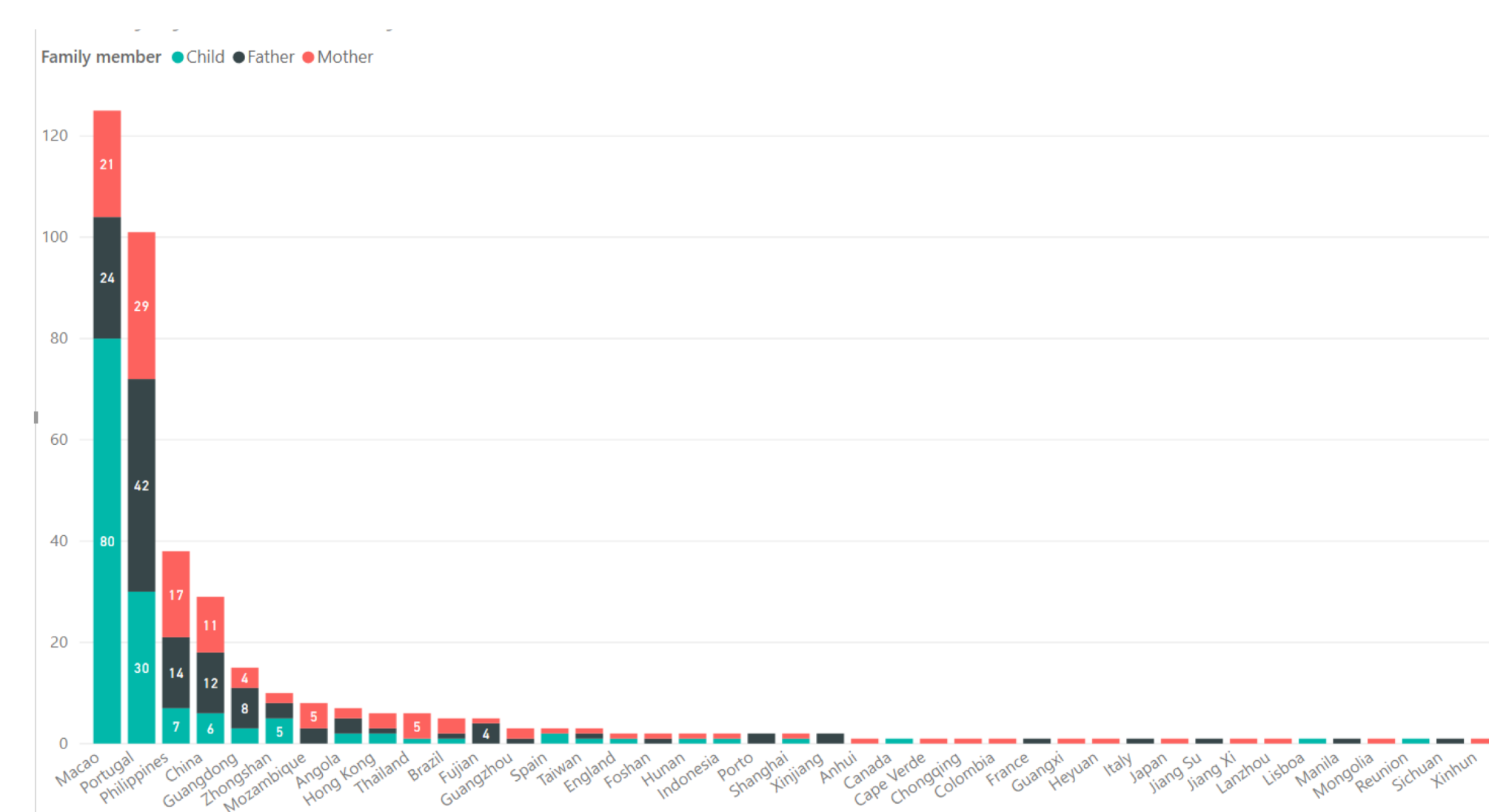


Fig. 4 Public school system as dependent variable

Independent variable	Significance	df	
Mother tongue	0.000	12	■
Attitude towards L2	0.000	1	■
Attitude towards L1	1.000	1	□
Positive language attitude	0.000	2	■
Father's educational background	0.000	3	■
Mother's educational background	0.000	3	■
Father's professional skills	0.000	4	■
Mother's professional skills	0.000	4	■
■ Statistically significant		□ Statistically insignificant	

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