Issues in Chinese Heritage Language Education and Research at the Postsecondary Level

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This chapter provides an overview of some of the most important current issues and challenges for research and educational practice in the teaching, learning, and assessment of Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) at the postsecondary level. We review existing research and identify areas in which further theoretical and practical attention is needed with regard to political, social-psychological, linguistic, and curricular dimensions of CHL. The shift in recent research to ecologically valid qualitative investigations of the lived experiences of CHL and other language learners, in terms of their shifting (or multiple, hybrid) identities, trajectories, and literacies, is highlighted. Salient practical concerns are also discussed, such as identifying heritage and non-heritage students’ diverse needs and planning curriculum accordingly; accommodating different student populations in single-track versus dual-track programs; developing effective and engaging instructional resources and assessment procedures and instruments; and providing advocacy for the legitimacy of CHL learners while at the same time attending to non-CHL students’ needs equally well. Finally, we argue that understanding CHL students’ heterogeneity and their potential will help us to better serve linguistically diverse learners in language courses and maximize the social, academic, economic, and cultural benefits of HL maintenance and development in Canada, the United States, and other diaspora contexts.¹

The cultural and linguistic diversity of modern society and of our educational institutions is rapidly increasing. Faced with the pressures and promises of globalization and global citizenship, educational communities and society at large are becoming more aware of, and responsive to, the diverse linguistic backgrounds, needs, aspirations, and potential of their student population, whether they are international, immigrant, domestic-born, or Aboriginal (Native) students. Heritage language (HL) teaching, previously the domain of non-credit community weekend schools or bilingual classes in elementary schools primarily, is now beginning to gain attention in such credit programs as “Spanish for Spanish,” “Russian for Russians,” and “Chinese for Chinese”

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in university foreign language (FL) departments, a clear manifestation of institutional responses to these demographic changes (Duff, 2002, 2005, in press-a; Kagan, Akishina & Robin, 2003; McGinnis, 1996; Valdés, 1997). However, accommodating students with a very different profile from more traditional, essentially monocultural, English-L1 backgrounds raises a number of practical, conceptual or theoretical, and academic issues and thus opportunities for careful reflection and further research. This chapter identifies critical issues and challenges in Chinese as a HL and suggests a set of research priorities and questions—political, sociological, psychological, linguistic, and curricular—for further exploration.²

## Making the case for HL education: Demographic, social-psychological, and academic factors

Canadian 2001 census data, the most recent available, lists Chinese (several dialects combined) as Canada’s third most common mother tongue, the most widely spoken after the official languages of English and French (Statistics Canada, 2004). Almost 872,400 people reported Chinese as their mother tongue, up 136,400 or 18.5% from 1996 (2004). In the US, Chinese (including both Mandarin and Cantonese) is, for the first time, the second most common FL spoken by those living on U.S. soil, following Spanish. Today an estimated 2 million Americans regularly speak Chinese at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).³

Drawing from research and practice in linguistics, psychology, and language education, HL education research has emerged as both a valid and distinct field within applied linguistics (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Brinton & Kagan, in press; Campbell & Peyton, 1998; Hinton, 1999; Kono & McGinnis, 2001). Considerable recent research has focused on issues associated with the teaching and learning of HL learners, especially with Hispanic learners of Spanish, in school and university language courses (e.g., Brinton & Kagan, in press; Valdés, 2005; Hornberger, 2005; Wiley & Valdés, 2000), while other languages (e.g., Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean) are just catching up.

Existing research argues convincingly that developing HL speakers’ linguistic and cultural knowledge to advanced levels is valuable not only for the students themselves and their families and communities, but also for individuals’ sense of personal identity and connectedness to their past and to their extended families, and for society more broadly (Fishman, 1991; Hornberger, 2003a, 2005). A strong foundation in one’s HL is associated with enhanced language and literacy achievement in English or the dominant societal language, and other languages such as French in French immersion contexts with minority-language students (e.g., from Italian backgrounds in which Italian has been actively maintained; Swain & Lapkin, 1991). Research on HL learners has shown that minority-language students who maintain their own culture, literacy, and ethnic identity, in addition to enjoying pride in their heritage and close relations within their family and community social networks, will benefit from greater social mobility and personal empowerment, and will more likely succeed in mainstream school and society (e.g., Cho & Krashen, 1998; Cummins, 1993, 2004; Krashen, Tse, & McQuillen, 1998; Kondo-Brown, 2002, 2003; Write & Taylor, 1995). Their countries also benefit from nurturing highly competent bilingual and multilingual citizens who can pursue careers requiring these skills; for example, in national defence, international business, diplomacy, social work, medicine, and academia, both at

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² Some of the observations made in this chapter are based on the first author’s 11 years of Chinese teaching and administration experience at university programs in the US and Canada, each with a substantial population of HL students.

³ To call Chinese and Spanish “foreign” languages when they play such an integral role in the lives of so many Canadians and Americans is, of course, a persistent misnomer, especially in the United States.
home and abroad. Preserving or cultivating the language/literacy skills and cultural knowledge or “capital” of HL learners while they become fully proficient in English through additive bilingualism or multilingualism is therefore an important educational priority in an increasingly global marketplace and diversified society (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Cummins, 2004; Krashen, 1998; Tavares, 2000).

**Chinese as a HL at the postsecondary level: Contexts, constraints, and challenges**

At many universities and colleges, HL learners are becoming an increasingly important constituency in the Chinese language classrooms (Lu & Li, this volume; McGinnis, 2005). Whereas there has been a relatively long history of debate and research about the advantages of K–12 bilingual, immersion, and HL education for children in Canada and the United States, almost no attention has been paid to issues in the postsecondary education sector where the number of HL learners in some fields, such as Chinese, is expanding exponentially in some cases. Considering the size, vitality, and growth of this learner population (He, this volume; Wang, 2005), research on teaching Chinese as a HL (CHL) in higher education has not yet received due attention. The linguistic histories, profiles, and needs of CHL students, their diverse language learning and socialization processes and outcomes, and the benefits and challenges of fully developing their HL proficiency, must be examined more closely using a variety of methods (as exemplified in this volume), across the quantitative and qualitative spectrum (He, 2006; Li, 2005).

Furthermore, existing research on other heritage languages (K–16) does not address issues particular to Chinese. Chinese teaching and learning are beset with some intriguing, complicating factors, apart from the sheer numbers of students. Unlike many other languages associated historically with a somewhat more homogeneous population, geographical area, or nation-state, and with a shared standard variety (e.g., Korean or Japanese; Sohn, 2004), Chinese itself is far from monolithic. It is spoken and written differently in Mainland China, Taiwan, Singapore and elsewhere, and these differences have historical, political, cultural, and social undertones and ramifications for both HL and non-HL education.

Yet, despite the desire among many Chinese students to reconnect with their HL language(s) in colleges and universities in North America and around the world, Chinese courses are still designed primarily for learners in FL courses—with no significant prior familiarity with, or connection to, the language and culture. For example, only 7 out of 19 Canadian universities or colleges included in a national postsecondary Chinese program database indicate that they offer Chinese HL courses on an annual basis, and then typically just one or two, mostly Mandarin courses designed for Cantonese speakers (Canadian Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (TCSL) National Database, 2006). HL students are treated either the same as non-HL students and then placed in classes they are overqualified for (and consequently often bored with), or simply dismissed as “native speakers” who do not need any instruction, or are viewed derisively by administrators, teachers, and classmates as people seeking inflated grades, “an easy A.”

Therefore, issues commonly grappled with by administrators and instructors include defining or categorizing HL learners, understanding their identities and motivations for learning, designing curriculum to meet their special needs as compared with non-HL students (who have their own pressing needs), developing effective and appropriate placement or assessment instruments and procedures, developing or adapting suitable and challenging teaching materials, and matching instructional approaches with different learner types. In what follows, we explore these issues in turn.
Who is a legitimate HL learner? The constitution of legitimacy in HL programs

Deciding who can be included under the “HL learner” label raises a number of issues related to the reification of identity and ethnicity, inclusion and exclusion, access and denial. As Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997) write, citing cultural theorist Hall (1988),

Members of minority groups are not simple inheritors of fixed identities, ethnicities, cultures, and languages but are instead engaged in a continual collective and individual process of making, remaking, and negotiating these elements, thereby constantly constructing dynamic new ethnicities. (p. 547)

On the basis of their research in multilingual urban Britain and its implications for heritage and dominant-language learning (Standard English in their case), Leung et al. suggest that we consider the dimensions of language expertise (actual linguistic or communicative competence in students' repertoire of languages, including the HL[s]), language affiliation (degree of personal or emotional commitment or connection to the home, community, or other languages and cultures), and language inheritance (the connection to one's ostensibly “inherited” language—the language of the home). These overlapping but often contested aspects of experience, identification, and investment in a (heritage) language are pertinent to our attempts to classify HL learners. Which of the following could be classified as a “legitimate” CHL learner? a 3rd-generation Chinese-Canadian student who has never been exposed to the HL, but has a particular (ethnic) inheritance! a Caucasian, non-ethnically Chinese, native-English-speaking student who received elementary schooling in Taiwan when her parents were doing business overseas, and therefore has some (possibly limited) degree of expertise in and affiliation with that language but not through inheritance! a Cantonese speaker who can write college essays in Chinese without being able to understand basic Mandarin! That is, someone who has expertise in L1 Cantonese but not Mandarin, affiliates with the former and not the latter, and has “inherited” the former but not the latter. Or a fluent Mandarin-speaking student (ethnically Chinese or not) who can’t read even the simplest Chinese characters—someone who may or may not have any kind of “inheritance” of the language, has expertise in one modality but not in another, and may be strongly affiliated with Mandarin but more invested or experienced in orality than literacy. What does it mean to try to create a shared language learning experience for these very diverse learners whose only commonality may have been their own unique, albeit partial, prior experience with a variety or modality of Chinese?

According to Wiley (2001),

The labels and definitions that we apply to heritage language learners are important, because they help to shape the status of the learners and the languages they are learning. Deciding on what types of learners should be included under the heritage language label raises a number of issues related to identity and inclusion and exclusion. (p. 35)

In other words, our labels and classroom discourse practices may position learners in ways that they might not otherwise position themselves.

Generally speaking, in the HL literature there are two perspectives commonly found in definitions of HL learners: (a) a perspective reflecting an ethnic, historical, or sociopolitical investment in the language; and (b) a perspective based on actual linguistic competence as well as familial affiliation. The former might define a HL learner as follows: a heritage student is an individual who has a personal interest or involvement in an ancestral language (Fishman, 2001; Wiley, 2001). This first definition represents an ethnic orientation, harking back to one’s roots but is also sociopolitical in the sense that students may feel a certain entitlement to reclaim aspects
of that history in the present. The latter definition, on the other hand, based more closely on linguistic competence, defines the learner in terms of knowledge: “A heritage student is a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the HL, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the HL” (Valdés, 2001, p. 38).

Of course, both of these perspectives privilege an ethnic or linguistic inheritance (i.e., heritage), which the Caucasian student referred to earlier—whose expertise and affiliation may be comparable to some CHL learners—is categorically denied or excluded from. Thus, for the purpose of developing HL learning programs, proficiency-based definitions of HLL are important. Carreira (2004) notes that because our labels are so foundational to our program characteristics we need to consider them carefully.

In the realm of education, the labels and definitions that teachers and administrators apply to HL learners undergird decisions about course and program design, materials selection, placement and assessment of students, and teacher training. They are also crucial to the task of tracking national and regional trends in language education. (p. 2)

For this reason, many college or university Chinese language programs with HL tracks place 3rd- or 4th-generation Chinese descendants who have had little or no HL exposure in regular FL classes, but include in HL tracks non-Chinese students who have had considerable exposure of the target language by living, studying, or working in Chinese-speaking communities. Some programs have even replaced the term HL students with students with [some Chinese-language] background, precisely because many students who have had previous exposure to the target language are not necessarily “heritage” language speakers based on ethnicity.

However, even within a proficiency-defined “HL” group, learners generally have a very uneven grasp of the HL, falling along a continuum of having very little HL knowledge to being highly proficient. Some may have impressive receptive or conversational skills and tacit cultural knowledge, but their literacy, grammar, and vocabulary typically remain underdeveloped. In addition, they may speak a non-standard dialect and have a limited range of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence as well, that is, the ability to speak or write to people with appropriate levels of formality and politeness, across a range of genres and for different audiences, and for a wide range of purposes (Sohn, 2004). Furthermore, immigrant students who have received elementary or even secondary education in their native (Chinese-speaking) country are joining the increasing population of HL learners.

To cope with this current situation, newer definitions have emerged, such as the following, which appeared on the Slavic Language Program website at UCLA in 2004: “By ‘heritage speaker’ we mean those who grew up with Russian in this country [USA] without a native Russian’s full educational or cultural background.”4 The question then is, At what level is native language education regarded as “full”—elementary, junior high or senior high school? Program directors and instructors commonly question the legitimacy of these newly arrived heritage students, dismissing them as “native speakers” who do not need any instruction.

To investigate the legitimacy of Russian heritage students with a native-country educational background, Kagan and Dillon (2004) compared the Russian language use of native speakers in Russia with Russian HL students at the University of California, Los Angeles. They divided the HL students into 3 groups: (a) students who graduated from high school in Russia; (b) students

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4 In 2007, the website lists only “Russian for Russians” or “Russian for Native Speakers,” with no reference to “heritage speakers” (http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/russian/RussianForRussians.htm).
who attended junior high schools in Russia; and (c) students who were born in the United States to Russian-speaking families, or those who had elementary school education in Russia prior to immigrating. The results showed, not surprisingly, that students from Group 1 were the closest in grammatical accuracy and breadth of vocabulary to educated native speakers or Russian, while both Groups 2 and 3 displayed significant gaps in using the language. The study also supported “the premise that heritage speakers [the latter groups] cannot be considered native speakers and thus are legitimate students in a Russian language program” (Kagan & Dillon, 2004, p. 3). Therefore, at UCLA, the cut-off for a HL speaker of Russian (in 2004) was 8th grade of native-country education.

To some extent, the academic or educational issues connected with definitions of eligible students may become conflated with economic and sociopolitical ones: the larger the (legitimate) student population in a department, the more funding it receives for language instructors and other personnel, and the greater overall viability of that program and range of offerings. Thus, universities must indicate clearly which students can be considered legitimate for a variety of programmatic reasons.

For CHL learners, a comparable situation exists. The “traditional” HL learner with only receptive oral language skills is now being joined by recent immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, many of whom have received elementary or even high school education in their native language (Cantonese or Mandarin). They nevertheless may seek opportunities at university to complete their primary (or “heritage”) language education. For example, Li (2005) conducted a survey of 975 Chinese HL students at a Canadian university (with 695 questionnaires returned and analyzed), regarding their ethno-linguistic backgrounds, their attitudes to and motivations for studying Chinese, and their perceptions of the status of different Chinese dialects and writing systems. Figure 1 reveals that the majority of new, foreign-born CHL learners had received considerable native language education before immigration: 48% had done elementary school in Chinese; 37% had done both junior high and elementary school in Chinese; and 8% had done some senior high school coursework in their native language. Note that only 7% fit the traditional profile of a HL student who might have had some preschool exposure to Chinese.

Figure 1. Native language education of CHL students born outside of Canada (Li, 2005)

Despite such trends in HL programs to enroll students with many years of prior formal schooling in the HL, no research has been conducted to determine which level of Chinese native language education should constitute a “full educational and cultural background” (Kagan & Dillon, 2004), and which students should continue to receive HL education to ensure complete bilingualism and biliteracy.
Hornberger and Wang (in press) emphasize that there is no single profile of HL students, as they cover a very heterogeneous population. A narrow definition such as “those whose home language is the HL” might exclude some language groups and individuals (see Weger-Guntharp, 2006). Thus, regardless of institutional classifications and tracking, researchers and teachers should be made aware of the diversity and multifaceted identities brought into the classroom setting by language learners and should not make unwarranted assumptions about affiliation or expertise on the basis of ethnolinguistic “inheritance” alone. Hornberger and Wang offer an inclusive “ecological perspective” which acknowledges both ethnic/sociopolitical and linguistic definitions and accepts anyone who self-identifies as a HL learner of a particular language, even through multiracial marriages or multinational adoptive families.

The validation of HL learners’ affiliation, motivation, and linguistic rights

As the preceding section has shown, deciding whether to offer HL courses in academic programs and determining who can enrol in these courses is a struggle for legitimacy for both programs and HL students in the educational system. Skepticism about students’ genuine motivation—whether they are seeking “easy credit” or an “easy A” versus a real opportunity to develop in Chinese may disallow some university HL students from taking HL courses. However, very little empirical research has investigated what exactly motivates students to seek enrolment in HL courses.

Since the 1970s, initially within Canadian bilingual contexts, social-psychological research on the role of motivation in language learning has attempted to determine the motives students have for studying particular topics, such as additional languages—whether to obtain employment or some other practical benefit (an instrumental orientation), or to get to know people from other cultures better and to become a potentially valued member of the target-language group (an integrative orientation)—and their eventual language learning outcomes (e.g., Gardner, 1985). Some research has also tried to determine the strength of correlations between one or the other type of motivation and proficiency. But, regardless of the type of motivation, it is well understood that

greater personal motivation—be it “instrumental” or “integrative”—produces a greater likelihood of attaining high levels of L2 proficiency. The same is likely true in HLA [acquisition], though the question of motivation in HL classrooms has gone unexplored to date. (Lynch, 2003, p. 3)

As Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) report, learners’ attitudes and motivation remain the strongest and most consistent predictors of second language success. Motivation, they explain, accounts for “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it” (p. 614). Whereas some earlier conceptions of motivation portrayed it as a rather static trait—rather than a fluctuating and fluid one—and mainly examined conscious, self-reported motives as opposed to subconscious desires, current views are much more dynamic, multifaceted and interdisciplinary. In poststructural and phenomenological work, motivation (or investment as it has been reconceptualized by Norton, 2000) is seen to be a co-construction within discursive, social and political (power) structures that cannot easily be compartmentalized into one “type” or another originating uniquely from or residing within the individual learner. Rather, motivation is also an artifact of social and institutional interactions and experiences. Thinking, for example, of why, how long, and how hard people try to learn an HL according to Dörnyei and Skehan’s formulation, over a HL learner’s lifetime these will change many times over—with different reasons or goals for studying at different ages, different lengths of time and intensity of study, and varying degrees of effort expended. From one context to the next (practicing with a relative, with a peer, or with a teacher), on more engaging versus less engaging
tasks, and performing in low-stakes versus high-stakes situations, motivation is apt to vary considerably. Yet, few longitudinal studies have been able to capture, in qualitative ways, the waxing and waning of HL learners’ psychological or affective orientations and stances in the way that immigrant English as a second-language learners and European language learners have been studied by themselves and others (e.g., Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

A few cross-sectional studies on HL learner motivation have yielded mixed results about students’ reasons for affiliating with the HL. Most of the research reported that HL students show strong integrative orientation (e.g., for Korean HL, Han, 2003; Kim, 1992; for Russian HL, Andrews, 2001; Kagan & Dillon 2001; Geisherik, 2004; and for Chinese HL, Wen, 1997), whereas some found HL students are motivated by strong instrumental orientation (e.g., for German HL; Noels & Clement, 1989). While acknowledging the difficulties of differentiating between types of motivation in HL contexts, Li (2005) found that her large sample of university CHL learners were strongly motivated by both integrative orientation and instrumental orientation. Furthermore, the instrumental orientation was more geared to future career opportunities than to imminent academic achievement (e.g., credits or grades). CHL learners wanted to know more about their cultural roots and identities but also wanted to participate in the burgeoning Chinese economy. Traditional dichotomies of motivation (integrative vs. instrumental) just as those related to “native” and “non-native” speakers or “native” versus “target” languages/cultures become blurred and blended among CHL learners. The theoretical literature on language learners’ identities and agency (Norton, 2000), their discursive positioning by themselves and by others (Duff, 2002), and the language socialization they experience (Duff & Hornberger, in press; Li, 2000) have received a great deal of attention in recent years, but with only minimal reference to HL populations (e.g., He, 2005). Learners’ identities and trajectories in diasporic Chinese communities, like their own affiliation with the language and motivation for studying it, are dynamic, contingent, multidirectional, and hybrid. Chinese HL children may first acquire a dialect of Chinese (their first language), begin to lose that HL after age 5 when English supplants it, go on to learn another language (e.g., French, Spanish), until they come to university and discover the internal desire (unlike the externally imposed pressures of their childhood) to reclaim their HL language and identity, perhaps by learning the standard variety, Mandarin, though they may later show some tendency toward a Taiwanese-accented or Beijing-accented variety. Thus, the motivation of most CHL learners, at least from Li’s (2005) study is not simply to obtain “easy credits,” as is often suspected; rather, they are aiming at a “better investment” (Norton, 2000) in legitimate transformational education and opportunities for their future (Cummins, 2005; He, this volume) in which their desires, hopes, and diverse past experiences and identities can be harmonized somewhat.

**Issues in assessment and placement**

Once HL students are deemed to be legitimate and are accepted into a program, ideally because they are motivated to learn, a major challenge for instructors is to find valid, reliable assessment instruments to place them into appropriate classes, and to monitor and determine their progress and achievement. There is a pressing need for more appropriate instruments to measure HL proficiency and use. Issues such as non-HL students being intimidated by HL students in mixed classes, or low-proficiency HL students being intimidated by higher-proficiency HL learners in HL classes, or criticism of the “easy credit” seekers all speak to the necessity and importance of having effective placement procedures. Locally developed or adapted placement instruments used by different programs mainly include student background questionnaires, oral interviews, proficiency tests, or some combination of the above.
Among these procedures, oral interviews and background questionnaires seem to be the most widely used because there is no existing standardized placement test specifically designed for HL students. The single most reliable indicator of HL proficiency seems to be the amount of schooling received in the target language, which can be obtained from questionnaires or interviews. However, there are considerable individual differences in linguistic skills in the target HL even among students from the same class, not to mention CHL learners from very different educational systems in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. Due to the limited number of courses that can be offered in most 4-year university programs, how can all CHL (and non-CHL) students be accommodated satisfactorily and brought up to comparable criterion levels of proficiency in such a short time—from those with very little exposure to the language to those who have completed elementary or junior high school native language education? In addition, is Cantonese oral proficiency counted as an advantage or a disadvantage in learning Mandarin? For students who are ethnically Chinese but have had no prior exposure to the ethnic language and culture, is it more appropriate to place them in HL or non-HL courses (an issue discussed in a previous section)?

Placement decisions are made by teachers on the basis of students’ individual characteristics as well as organizational constraints (e.g., number and type of courses offered, class size, available materials). We urgently need more research investigating how effective and appropriate such placement procedures are for identifying CHL students’ proficiency across their diverse backgrounds, and their strengths and weaknesses. This information can be used for diagnostic purposes and will thus inform pedagogical decisions.

Secondly, how to assess these students’ progress in our programs remains another issue. Learners enter our programs with varying degrees of prior knowledge and exposure to the HL, depending on their age of arrival, the place and length of their native-language education, and the level of HL maintenance after their immigration. The monitoring and measurement of students’ progress must be also addressed. How do we set criteria for their evaluation and assessment based on our instructional objectives and expected outcomes? And what instruments should be selected for different programs or classes?

Thirdly, in order to accommodate and build upon the diversity of skills which HL learners bring to the classroom situation, the assessment instruments should ideally elicit and measure not only their language proficiency in the standard language required for effective performance in classroom contexts but also their interpersonal language skills in different but related language varieties or dialects. These varieties have value in their own right as part of the learner’s linguistic repertoire, and they may also serve to bridge the acquisition of standard forms. In sum, much research and development must take place in the area of CHL assessment for placement/diagnostic purposes, for establishing students’ linguistic repertoires, and then measuring their progress against language program criteria. On a related note, more research is needed on standardized tests such as the HSK (Mandarin) Chinese Proficiency Test to determine its reliability and validity with our populations of learners (both HL and non-HL) in North America since it was originally designed for non-HL learners, but many HL learners are also taking it for proficiency assessment purposes.

Meeting the learners’ needs through CHL curriculum design

Responding to the complexity of HL learners’ needs is one of the challenges that postsecondary educators face when designing HL programs and planning instruction that has traditionally been geared mostly to “foreign” language learners. What these HL learners already know, what they need to learn, and how to teach them are not clear in our current language curriculum design guidelines or textbooks. As a result, when teachers attempt to apply a standard FL curriculum and
related teaching methodologies to the teaching of a HL, it can lead to frustration or even failure for students (HL and non-HL) and teachers.

Because language indexes social identity, social acts, affective, epistemic or political stances (Ochs, 1996) and because language/literacy choice is closely bound up with national, ethnolinguistic, and personal identities, CHL learning (like all learning) is closely intertwined with learners’ identity (re-)construction, attitudes, and literacy development (Tse, 1998; He, 2004). Their place of birth, length of residence in Canada or the US, age of immigration, and family socio-economic, educational, and political backgrounds all play an important role in the language development and identity formation of HL students. Self-identification by minority groups is closely related to their language environment and social context. Every time language learners speak, they are exchanging information or negotiating meaning with their interlocutors; they are also constantly engaged in identity construction and negotiation (Norton, 1997). According to Norton, “[i]dentit[y relates to des]ire—the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety” (p. 410). It also relates to people’s understandings of “their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 410). CHL learners, like all students, have social-psychological needs as well as linguistic and educational needs which are interconnected and vary enormously from group to group, and from individual to individual. The significance of Chinese as a HL in the global context and the complexity of intersections between varieties of Chinese and identity choices and identity positioning make it necessary to develop a more informed pedagogy that takes into account CHL learners’ special needs and unique profiles.

For example, programs may offer a perceived standard form of a language (e.g., Mandarin) that does not meet the needs of the community concerned (e.g., in a local community that has traditionally been mainly Cantonese). The standard variety may be (almost) incomprehensible to the “HL” community, or may have a damaging effect on relations within the community. On the other hand, CHL learners may need to expand the domains or repertoire of their language use from that of the family (e.g., Taiwanese, Cantonese) and community to those of the academic institution and, later, work. In this way, education doesn’t simply teach them more of what they may already have a good foundation in but increases their verbal repertoires, or the total range of linguistic resources available to them. In addition, HL students typically need to increase, even for their home languages, their sociolinguistic sophistication, and need to upgrade their HL proficiency from that of a child in an intimate or informal family situation to an age-appropriate academic level and register (see Sridhar, 1996; Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998). To date, there has been too little research on the effect of mismatches between the expectations and requirements of students and programs, or children and parents or of gaps between vernacular knowledge and more formal academic registers.

According to Campbell (2000), HL speakers typically have the following skills.

- native pronunciation and fluency
- command of a wide range of syntactic structures (“80% to 90%” of the grammatical rules)
- extensive vocabulary
- familiarity with implicit cultural norms essential for effective language use
At the same time, they also have these typical gaps or discrepancies in their HL knowledge.

- lack of formal or sophisticated registers in the language
- poor literacy
- non-standard variety

However, with CHL learners, these characteristics are not necessarily applicable. Dialect speakers (such as Cantonese) may not necessarily possess “native pronunciation” when they learn Mandarin. What’s worse, they may not even understand Mandarin. As a result, some Chinese language programs (e.g., UCLA) have adopted a 3-track system, further dividing the HL track into a Cantonese-speaker track and a Mandarin-speaker track. But so far, to our knowledge, no research has compared the learning processes between Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking learners in CHL programs.

Unlike learning certain other HLs in which students’ background competence in speaking and listening facilitates reading and writing, several studies (Ke, 1998; Shen, 2003; Xiao, 2006) have found that a home background in Chinese had little or no effect on learning Chinese writing, vocabulary, or reading comprehension. The reason is that the logographic nature of Chinese writing does not help CHL speakers tap into their existing oral skills and phonology, whereas heritage speakers of languages with alphabetic orthographies are able to do so.

Another complication with Chinese language curriculum is that the preferred orthography (e.g., simplified vs. traditional characters, or even the romanization system) differs from region to region and thus geopolitics intersect with HL education in both unpredictable and predictable ways. Certainly, this factor affects the attitudes of learners from different Chinese regions or sub-cultures towards the oral and written varieties of CHL they aspire to learn. The question of which writing system should be taught in Chinese courses has been debated at length. Some programs insist that the simplified character system used in Mainland China is favoured by the majority of Chinese people, and therefore should be used. Opponents of this position argue that the traditional character system used in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese diaspora communities in North America preserves the best of Chinese writing since it is the original form. The debate has stirred up heated responses from supporters on both sides as it is deeply associated with political ideology, social affiliation, and cultural identity in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Some people even link simplified characters with communism and traditional characters with anticommunism or “non-communism.” Li (2006) illustrates how CHL learners’ preferences regarding choice of writing system are closely related to their own social, cultural, and political identities as well as their language ideologies. There is, however, some sign of growing tolerance, acceptance, and accommodation among HL learners on each side with respect to learning both systems. Figure 2 reveals that, as one might expect, 76.6% of Mainland Chinese HL students surveyed by Li indicated a preference for simplified characters, in contrast to just over 7% from Hong Kong, and 2% from Taiwan making the same choice. Conversely, the majority of students from Hong Kong and Taiwan (approximately 70%) opted for the original characters. Diaspora students from other locations were more balanced in aligning with one or another script, but in general also preferred the original characters. But a proportion of students across all groups (ranging from nearly 10% to 27%) thought both systems should be taught, and not just one or the other.

As Cummins (2006) points out,

Behind language/cultural labels such as “Chinese” or “Spanish” there exists considerable diversity and complexity of historically-generated patterns of power relationships. These relationships and identity affiliations express themselves in ways of linguistic expression (e.g.,
speaking/accents, choice of writing system). This diversity needs to be recognized in the design of HL programs—these programs are helping students to become a particular kind of person rather than just attempting to transmit a language. (p. xx)

![Bar Chart showing preferences for script systems among CHL students](chart.png)

**Figure 2.** CHL students’ preference for script systems (Li, 2006)

However, practical limitations often make it necessary to group students with vastly different goals, not to mention abilities, in the same CHL class. It has been documented that tension between home and classroom-privileged Chinese dialects and in the choice of writing systems can make certain groups of students perceive their language abilities as devalued and wasteful (Weger-Guntharp, 2006). Thus, some CHL programs strive to be linguistically hybrid or inclusive, incorporating several varieties of Chinese. Some switch from simplified to original, or vice versa, when students reach higher levels and have mastered the first system. Others make an effort to incorporate both systems in their curriculum and encourage students to make their own choices or to learn both systems simultaneously.

Educators should tailor their programs with these considerations in mind, according to both class-internal and external considerations. External considerations encompass issues related to the sociolinguistics of CHL: the conditions that regulate the use of Chinese (in its many varieties) by individuals and groups in local communities, the country, and around the world. Class-internal considerations relate to the levels of proficiency, and goals and attitudes of students in particular CHL classes. Course sequences should be designed to build on the skills that students bring, develop additional skills, use their HL in new contexts/domains, and increase their pride in their heritage. CHL speakers are legitimate students in our language classes if the curriculum recognizes them as having a unique starting point and particular needs and sets challenging but reasonable and appropriate goals.

**Separate tracks for CHL learners at postsecondary institutions**

The markedly different language and cultural backgrounds between HL learners and non-HL learners, even acknowledging the great variation within each group, supports the development of a separate-track (heritage and non-heritage) system. It is now widely believed that if local conditions and student demographics allow it, a separate track specifically designed for CHL learners’ backgrounds and needs is ideal in helping them learn their HL. As mentioned before, some universities even further divide HL tracks into sub-tracks according to students’ oral and written varieties of the HL. However, due to limited resources, some Chinese programs can only
offer separate tracks for HL and non-HL learners at the elementary and/or intermediate levels (McGinnis, 1996) but many small-scale programs cannot afford to open separate tracks, so HL students are mixed with non-HL students throughout. In these latter programs, if no effort is made to recognize and tap into HL learners' reservoirs of knowledge and the identities that they bring to the classroom, they will most likely find the language learning experience profoundly disappointing and invalidating. On the other hand, if the non-HL learners only feel intimidated by HL students, without being given the opportunity of interacting with “native speakers” and benefiting from their rich linguistic and cultural resources, their learning experience will also be unsatisfactory.

Therefore, curriculum research is needed to investigate the following three questions.

1. What are the advantages (or disadvantages) of separate tracks of HL and non-HL learners?
2. What is the most appropriate level for HL and non-HL tracks to be combined?
3. Are there any advantages (or disadvantages) for both HL and non-HL students in mixed classes, and if so, how can programs make the most of the advantages to counteract the disadvantages?

Teaching high-level registers in postsecondary HL programs

Until very recently, and especially in the United States prior to September 11, 2001, less emphasis was placed on maintaining and developing students' existing HL competencies to advanced levels than developing foreign language competencies to less advanced levels. That is now changing though, with major HL policies and funding initiatives in the US connected with identified “critical languages” (e.g., Arabic, Mandarin, Korean) for reasons of “homeland security” (McGinnis, 2004). Unfortunately, the political tenor of such initiatives is that speakers of these languages are potentially dangerous.

Recent years have seen an unprecedented interest among applied linguists and educators to become advocates for HL education and research in higher education (e.g., Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Campbell & Peyton, 1998; Hinton, 1999), in part to provide a counter-discourse to such national sentiments and suspicions. Scholars have increasingly emphasized that respect for linguistic human rights (Phillipson, Ranut, & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995) and the achievement of high linguistic proficiency of HL speakers will preserve invaluable national resources and thereby contribute to individuals' and societies' well-being (Brecht & Ingold, 1998). HL educators have been interested in developing curriculum models to deal with the discrepancy between HL learners' highly developed competence in informal, non-prestigious (vernacular) language varieties, acquired primarily at home and often restricted to the domain of immediate personal use, on the one hand, and their lack of competence in formal, prestigious language varieties and registers, which are more valuable for academic learning and professional development (e.g., Campbell, 2000; Fairclough, 2001; Valdés, 1995).

Therefore, the acquisition of sophisticated, academic, and other registers is an appropriate goal for advanced postsecondary HL programs. Future research should investigate (a) what higher-level registers, genres, and language varieties should be included in curricula for advanced level CHL learners—modern Chinese language (Mandarin), classical Chinese, modern literature or classical literature, business or professional/academic language proficiency; and (b) the effect of formal instruction on the acquisition of multiple registers in postsecondary CHL.

In curriculum design, programs need to better align standards with students' proficiency levels and needs; value students' heritage, backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities; and promote a balanced
worldview and positive intergroup or intercultural relationships. Ideally, the resulting curriculum will be cognitively appropriate for university-level students; linguistically challenging, so as to engage them; culturally relevant; and academically sound, well articulated across levels, and meaningfully assessed.

**Appropriate teaching materials and teacher education**

This final section is linked to all of the other issues: students’ backgrounds and identities, their motivation, assessment, and the curriculum. The lack of relevant instructional materials for HL students is one of the most frequently raised issues by teachers and students. There are very few textbooks written specifically for CHL learners. So far, only two textbooks have been published for beginners: *Oh, China* by Princeton University Press (Chou, 1999), and a *Primer for Advanced Beginners of Chinese* by Columbia University Press (Li et al., 2003). Published course materials for intermediate and advanced level CHL students are non-existent. Indeed, for many years, most university programs have used the same textbooks for foreign-language and HL learners, only at an accelerated speed for the latter. However, this universalizing approach to teaching two distinct kinds of learners has proved ineffective over the years. The foreign language textbooks produced in North America are ill-suited for HL learners, with their coverage of basic grammar, survival vocabulary, and everyday routines such as greetings.

There is clearly a need for teaching materials designed to meet the unique (and also diverse) needs of heritage students. Such materials need to start at an appropriate linguistic and cognitive level, move quickly but steadily through material, using a systematic, language awareness approach to grammar instruction. They also need to focus on literacy and higher-level register development, and contain relevant (advanced level) cultural, sociocultural, and sociolinguistic information. Only with such instructional materials can we challenge heritage speakers sufficiently, foster their retention in language programs, and promote their attainment of professional-level proficiency. Innovative ways of using media and technology (television, computer, online resources) to enhance language instruction and broaden access should also be explored (e.g., as the online journal *Language Learning and Technology* demonstrates, typically for European languages). HL learners who engage in reading and writing contextualized, vernacular content that expresses their own ethnic identity and heritage will be more highly motivated and competent to succeed academically and in their broader participation in society.

Similarly, to motivate students the emphasis in teacher education and professional development must shift so that educators realize that (a) they need to examine their beliefs and attitudes toward HL speakers and their oral/written language varieties; (b) they must understand the linguistic needs as well as social-psychological orientations of HL students in order to maximize the effectiveness and suitability of their instruction; (c) they must develop curriculum and instructional approaches, materials, and assessment tools that respond meaningfully to that complexity as well as to the needs and profiles of non-HL students.

In this way, we will maximize the supply of qualified CHL educators who embrace the opportunities and responsibilities for being proactive in nurturing HL development or fostering language and literacy socialization within mainstream classrooms. CHL education should therefore start where the students are and move forward with them; it must be relevant. Without appropriate articulation of the curriculum, old material will continually be recycled at a basic level without the accumulation of new knowledge and students’ language proficiency will plateau early. Students must be made aware of the linguistic strengths they possess and can build upon. We should also help them develop a sense of pride in their heritage through language and culture.
study, and expand their ability to use HL in new contexts and at higher levels in both speech and writing.

**Future directions in CHL research**

Throughout this chapter, we have tried to identify salient current issues in CHL education, drawing on existing research and identifying apparent gaps in the literature. Valdés (1995) pointed out that Spanish HL instruction, regretfully, “has developed multiple practices and pedagogies that are not directly based on coherent theories about the kinds of language learning with which they are concerned” (p. 308). She urged that “it is time for teachers and applied linguists working in this area to examine their research and practice and to begin to frame the agenda that will guide them in the years to come” (p. 321). The same plea could be made for CHL, which has a shorter research history in applied linguistics than Spanish, fewer developed materials and trained teachers, and a more complex set of issues connected with literacy.

To summarize, HL students’ identities must be seen as dynamic, multiple, situated, and diverse. Students often feel a great deal of ambivalence about their dual or multiple identities and about how they have been positioned, sometimes unfavourably and sometimes in contradictory ways (Duff, 2002), by their families, communities, peers, and mainstream schools, with respect to their heritage and their language and academic abilities—as “model minority students” or as “linguistically deficient” or as possessing inadequate literacy skills in L1 and L2, as Generation 1.5 students, for example. Using longitudinal qualitative (and/or quantitative) multiple-case studies (e.g., Duff, in press-b), the personal trajectories, investments, and abilities of students with respect to their HL and the other languages and literacies they know could be documented and tracked over time. Our own work in progress, funded by a 3-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant, is tracking 20 CHL university students from four different HL backgrounds in a large multiple-case study of students’ evolving CHL language practices, identities, literacies, and ideologies over time.

Researchers must also investigate in a more fine-grained way the highly situated and contingent nature of motivation itself across learning contexts, geographical and transnational space and communities, and as learners mature (e.g., He, 2005, this volume). In addition, appropriate research-based materials, curriculum, and assessment tools and procedures must be developed in accordance with widely divergent levels of students and types of programs.

A broader set of research questions relevant to HL education to be explored include the following two from Hornberger (2003b).

1. What global, societal, and local factors encourage and promote intergenerational transfer, maintenance, revitalization, and development of HLs?
2. What educational approaches—policies, programs, and practices—best serve HL learners attain the highest levels of proficiency possible and the intergenerational transfer of their languages?

To these questions we can add the following: How are oral and written language development related, especially for those who already have highly developed oral skills but underdeveloped written language (and possibly equally underdeveloped writing in English) and vice versa? What are the upper limits possible for HL versus non-HL students in four-year university programs in terms of the attainment of accuracy, fluency, and complexity in language and literacy?

A third set of questions might examine ethnographically the discourse communities of HL students, both locally and globally, the mediating tools such as pop culture, the Internet, or other
technologies and new media that connect them to the languages and cultures they affiliate with, and mediate their socialization into new modes of language use, possibly involving hybrid texts and semiotic systems (e.g., Lam, 2004). Lastly, whereas considerable study-abroad research has been conducted on students learning European languages, little has been done on Chinese HL learners and their socialization within target-culture contexts where they may be mistaken for native speakers but then criticized for their incomplete mastery of Chinese. Thus, many opportunities exist for researchers, program administrators, and teacher educators in CHL.

Conclusion

Examining Chinese as a HL language at the postsecondary level is a relatively new endeavor. Rigorous research is needed to help develop more effective curriculum, pedagogical approaches, instructional materials, and assessment practices to better harness and build on the knowledge of these students and communities. Encouraging HL learning can expand worldviews and possibilities which confer personal, professional and economic benefits that will continue long after the students leave university. Researchers should look into the complex ecology of CHL, not only in Canada and the United States but in the various other diaspora contexts worldwide in which Chinese is being taught and learned. The role of policy in fostering CHL in postsecondary programs and the ongoing struggle for curricular and administrative legitimacy of CHL learning and teaching must also be addressed in an ongoing manner. Sociolinguistic and educational issues connected with language, literacy, and identity among contemporary CHL learners as global, multilingual, potentially transnational citizens should also be investigated. Understanding their linguistic heterogeneity and potential will help us to better accommodate linguistically diverse learners in language courses and maximize the social, academic, economic, and cultural benefits of HL maintenance and will help us improve our educational offerings for non-HL students as well.

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