

Heritage Language Learning and Identity: The Case of Chinese

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An Anecdote: Chen Shuibian's writing Feb. 27, 2006, Taiwan



Simplified characters used in Chen's note



TVBS - 政治新聞 | 2006-03-01 18:47 (獨家) 扁批示終統公文廣用簡體字

記者:古彩彥 攝影:劉頤堃

陳水扁批示「國家統一委員會」終止運作的文件，短短50幾個字，竟然寫了好幾個台灣人不常用的簡體字，被批評在文字的使用上更傾向統一，不過總統府強調陳總統寫的是中文的簡體字，不是中共的簡體字

The controversial characters

- Criticism from Media in Taiwan :
Chen's use of simplified characters actually indicated his tendency for "reunification" in language (highly symbolic).
- Defense from the President's office :
Chen used "simplified Chinese", not "Communist simplified Chinese".

Language and User/Learner Identity

- Language indexes social identity, social acts, affective, epistemic or political stances (Ochs, 1996)
- Language/literacy choice is closely bound up with national and ethnolinguistic identity (David Li, in press-ARAL)
- Heritage language (HL) learning is closely intertwined with learners' identity (re-) construction, attitudes and literacy development (Tse, 1998; He, in press).

Theoretical Framework

- Socio-cultural identity
- Situated practice
- Language socialization

(Cummins, 1996; Duff, 2002, He, in press; Ricento & Wiley, 2002; Tse, 1998; Valdes, 2005; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Wenger, 1998),

Research Questions

1. What is the role of identity in CHL learning at university?
2. How have the CHL learners' attitudes changed during their HL learning histories in relation to their identity?
3. In learning Chinese as a HL, how do social, political and cultural identities affect learners' attitudes towards (and choices of) different varieties of the language (spoken and written)?

This Study

The first part of a longitudinal research project

- Participants: students taking Chinese language and literature courses as their HL at a large Canadian university.
- Methodology:
 1. Survey questionnaires (#= 695 completed out of 975 distributed)
 2. Follow-up interviews (#=20)

Methodology

1. Survey questionnaire
 - Part I: Background information
 - Part II: Preference for the script system (13 items)
 - Part III: Motivation for learning Chinese as a HL (20 items)
2. Interview
 - Participants: (Hong Kong: 5, Taiwan: 5, Mainland China: 5, Overseas: 5, total 20)
 - Interview length: 1 hour each student
 - Issues explored: motivation, HL learning history, identity, attitude, language use, etc.

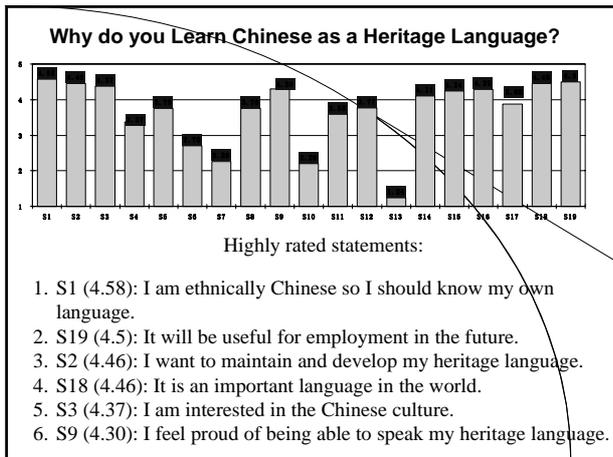
Part I: Background Information

Place of Birth (695 responses, 39 non-heritage, 656 heritage students)



Research Question 1

What is the role of identity in CHL learning at university?



Why Are You Learning Chinese as a Heritage Language?

(Interview Data)

- I study Chinese because it is part of my heritage. I love learning languages, so why not study my own language? Also for the future, I'd like to do business with Asia, which is kind of a big thing. So I find it very important to know some Chinese.
Flora (from China)
- I think Chinese is going to be very useful both in the workplace and in the personal interaction with my family and friends.
Jackson (from Taiwan)

Finding & Discussion (1)

- Although there is a strong instrumental orientation for university students to learn CHL to advance their future career, integrative/cultural orientation is the most critical motivation for them to learn CHL. A desire to understand and reclaim one's ethnic identity leads students to learn their HL.

Research Question 2

How have students' attitudes changed during their HL learning histories in relation to their HL identity?

Ethnic Identity Development Model (Tse, 1998)

- unawareness (passive knowledge of HL)
- ethnic ambivalence/evasion (assimilative pressures at school, sense of shame of HL and culture, HL resistance/rejection)
- ethnic emergence (a renewed interest in heritage identity and desire to (re)claim or develop the HL competence)
- ethnic identity incorporation

Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion

Interview data

- I felt like...ashamed for having to speak Chinese. I remember at that time, nearly everybody else spoke English. They were all Canadians. I didn't like being different. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to eat Canadian food... I wanted to go to McDonald's all the time, I wanted to watch English TV, I wanted to be a Canadian kid, I didn't want to be Chinese. It just didn't seem very cool...
--Tracy (born in Canada)

Attitude Change in HL Learning History Interview data

As a child, since my parents were teaching [Chinese] to me, also since there was no environment, because there were not a lot of Chinese people around. So, to me it was still like being forced to learn a language that has no real use. ... I felt it was really difficult, annoying, and bothersome at that time.

But I guess as I grew up and went to high school, more and more Chinese came here, and at that point I realized, you know, my heritage is not something to be annoyed about or ashamed about. So you know, I want to embrace it. And, yes, that's why I developed the interest in learning Chinese. And my parents are very happy.

Flora (from China)

Interview Data: University HL Learning Experience

- I think as an adult, I have much more sense of the value of learning this language. I didn't try to get out of it the same way I did as a child. There wasn't any force on me.... It was something more of my own interest. I am really interested.

Shirley (born in Canada)

Intergenerational Transmission of HL Interview data

It is an integral part of my culture and it will be an integral part of my children's culture and heritage. So it will be important for them to learn Chinese. And I, you know, you heard the horrible stories that I was forced to go to Chinese school and I hated it and I did not learn anything. But, I will be one of these parents who want their kids to go to Chinese schools, even if they are not willing. I will make sure at least in the future they have a background they are proud of and they know where they come from.

Katie (from Hong Kong)

Findings and Discussion (2)

- Learner identity is a crucial driving force for, and an outcome of, CHL language learning.
- University CHL students are much more motivated than younger CHL learners because of a more positive and mature attitude toward their HL identity.

Research Question 3

How do social, political and cultural identities affect HL learners' attitudes towards different varieties of Chinese (spoken and written)?

HL Learner Identity/ies

- Multiple, hybrid, situated, performed and shifting
- Affected by a complex interplay of social, cultural, historical, political, developmental, personal, and situational influences

(Duff, 2002; Erickson, 1996; Erickson & Schultz, 1982; Fishman, 2001; Gee 1996; He, in press; Norton, 2000)

Special Characteristics of CHL Learning

1. Different Scripts

traditional (or original) vs. simplified characters

學習 (27 strokes) VS. 学习 (11 strokes)

Traditional: Hong Kong, Taiwan, North America, etc.

Simplified: Mainland China, Singapore, Malaysia

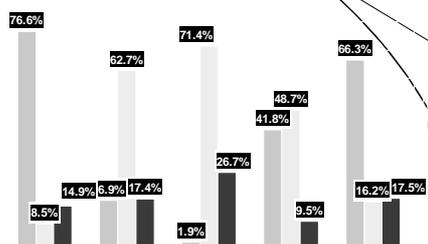
Special Characteristics of CHL Learning

2. Different spoken varieties: Which is the more “prestigious” ?

- Mandarin vs. dialects (many mutually incomprehensible)
- Mandarin vs. Cantonese
- Mainland Mandarin vs. Taiwanese Mandarin

Part I: Preference for Script System

Which kind of Chinese characters do you prefer to write?



Attitudes toward Varieties of the Chinese Language-- Written

- I can read a few words in simpler form, and then I get confused. Because I thought, you know, why do you want to only take part of the word? It's the same word, why do you want to make it simpler? It just killed the beauty of the word.

Helen (from Taiwan)

Attitudes toward Varieties of the Chinese Language-- Written

- I am using simplified right now and since it is simpler and practical, I prefer to continue with that. The original system? It is definitely more attractive, more beautiful and reflects more the meaning of the word itself, which is why probably I feel a little bit sad, because, you know, simplified versions have lost some of the beauty of the language in the written form.

Mandy (from China)

Changing Attitudes toward Varieties of The Chinese Language-- Written

At first I like traditional all the way. 'Cause I was learning traditional. But now simplified words are getting easier to write. ... I think a lot of people are just turning to simplified. And fewer and fewer are using traditional.

Linda (from Hong Kong)

Ideological Index of the Chinese Language-- Spoken

"Last April 30 the hosts of television news programs throughout China were warned (by the State Administrations of Radio, Film and TV) that they should not appear with orange hair, tight pants, or partially nude, and that they should stick to Standard Mandarin and avoid the increasingly popular Southern accents or English words like "cool". . . Southern accent is a euphemism for a Taiwan Accent."

New York Review of Books, February 24, 2005

Attitudes toward Varieties of the Chinese Language-- Spoken

I will say I feel more safe if I was surrounded by people speaking the 台湾国语(Taiwan Mandarin). I think because a lot of politics and stuff like that going on, I don't know what the people from China perceive us as... When I was surrounded by people speaking Beijing Mandarin, I don't know whether they perceive me as a friend or enemy. So when I was surrounded by Taiwan Mandarin speaking people, I know we are from the same place.

Elisa (from Taiwan)

Attitudes toward Varieties of the Chinese Language-- Spoken

It's just so cute because the way they speak is a little bit different from the way we speak in Taiwan. So I thought it was really interesting, that's why I watch it ("Goodbye Vancouver" a Mainland Chinese TV soap opera) every night to see how they speak.

Jason (from Taiwan)

Situated Performance of CHL- Spoken

- You know one thing I found of myself is, if I was with the people in China, I tend to talk the way they talk, and if I was with my friends in Taiwan, then I go back to the normal form of my talking.

William, from Taiwan

- I realized that when I speak with my friends from China, I tend to be more 北京腔 (Beijing accent) and I don't know why. And when I speak to my friends from Taiwan, I will be more like 台湾国语 (Taiwan Mandarin),

Flora (from China)

Findings and Discussion (3)

- The Chinese language and HL identity is not a monolithic entity because the Chinese community is divided along geographic, political and ideological lines.
- These divisions affect the attitudes of learners from different Chinese regions/sub-cultures towards the variety (both written and spoken) of CHL.
- However, there is sign of growing tolerance, understanding, acceptance and accommodation among HL learners.

Concluding Remarks (1)

CHL learners represent a special wealth of research potential in terms of language ecology, language learning/teaching, sociolinguistics, and the interrelationship of language, culture and identity.

Concluding Remarks (2)

Understanding the linguistic heterogeneity and potential of CHL learners will help us to better accommodate linguistically diverse learners in language courses and maximize the social, academic, economic, and cultural benefits of HL maintenance.

The End

Thanks!

谢谢!

謝謝!