

The Pennsylvania State University  
The Graduate School  
College of Education

**CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO LANGUAGE LEARNING AS PERCEIVED  
BY UNIVERSITY-LEVEL CHINESE HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS  
IN THE UNITED STATES**

A Dissertation in  
Curriculum and Instruction

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2016

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## ABSTRACT

Research has shown that heritage language learners (HLLs) have different characteristics and needs than foreign language learners (FLLs). Heritage language learners acquire or learn their heritage languages at home or at community-based schools whereas foreign language learners typically learn a language in the classroom setting. In recent years, U.S. colleges and universities have experienced a rapid rise in the number of learners who have studied their heritage language of Chinese in the classroom. However, there has been little empirical research from the perspectives of university-level Chinese heritage language learners about their learning experiences and needs.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the factors that these learners perceive contributed to their heritage language learning, and how they influence that learning in both positive and negative ways. The research methods for this study included collecting data from six university-level Chinese heritage language learners' written language autobiographies, conducting semi-structured interviews with each, member-checking the interviews, and holding focus-group interviews in order to investigate their perceptions of these factors.

The results from this study showed that these students' family cultural/linguistic background, early exposure to their heritage language, parental involvement in promoting their use of their heritage language, personal motivation, and the agentive role of the learners themselves in decision-making effectively promoted their heritage language learning. While the results from this study showed the importance of these contributory factors to heritage language learners, it is equally important to understand the cultural identities they have constructed during their heritage language learning process. Finally, I offered the study's implications for foreign language instructors and areas for future research.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people around me have greatly contributed to this dissertation. First, I am extremely grateful to my adviser, Dr. Elizabeth Smolcic, for her tremendous help during the period of my dissertation writing. Without her valuable comments on every draft of this dissertation, her guidance and suggestions that helped to direct my research, her encouragement and patience that helped me go through difficult times, I would not have finished it. Second, I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Jamie Myers, for his valuable advice and guidance during the entire period of my studies in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, The Pennsylvania State University. Third, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Susan Strauss and Dr. Meredith Doran, for generously offering their guidance, time, and support to help me to achieve my degree.

Thanks must go to the Department of Asian Studies at Penn State and the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations at Colorado University-Boulder where I have been working hard toward achieving my goal as a foreign language teacher in the United States. Thanks are also due to the six participants who took part in this study for contributing to my research, and to the friends whom I have made in State College (Pennsylvania) and Boulder (Colorado) for their encouragement and support. I enjoyed all the time I spent with my friends. Finally, I thank my family who have always encouraged and believed in me for such a long time. I could never have accomplished my dissertation without their endless love and strong support. They, especially my parents Guo-Liang Li and Jui-Mei Chen, are always there when I need them.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of students in many higher education institutions in the United States who have either a Chinese cultural background or prior knowledge of Chinese, and wish to develop or maintain Chinese as their heritage language (hereinafter referred to as HL) through foreign language (hereinafter referred to as FL) programs. The term “Chinese” includes East Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Island languages as categorized by the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, and is one of the less commonly taught foreign languages according to the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages. In the context of FL education in the United States, the term “Chinese” usually refers to the commonly acknowledged dialect Mandarin Chinese. The criteria for differentiating Chinese from Mandarin Chinese are provided in Chapter Two.

A 2009 Modern Language Association (MLA) survey reported that more than 60,000 college and university students were learning Chinese at 2,694 institutions of higher education in the United States (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010). The numbers seem to be increasing; in 2013, as many as 61,055 students were learning Chinese at these institutions (MLA, 2013). Students who learn Chinese as a heritage language (hereinafter referred to as CHL), generally in their home environments, are distinguished from those who are exposed to the Chinese language for the first time in the FL classroom. To date, although the current number of CHL learners at the university level has not been identified specifically, a sizeable number are currently enrolled in Chinese language programs across the United States (Xiao, 2016).

CHL learners have different cultural and linguistic characteristics and needs than students learning Chinese as a foreign language (hereinafter referred to as CFL) who typically only learn it in the classroom setting (ACTFL, 1996; Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Carreira & Kagan; 2011; Li & Duff, 2008; Renganathan, 2008; Valdés, 2001, 2005; Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 2011; Wiley, 2001). Therefore, understanding the CHL learners' experience, from their perspective, could provide language educators a better understanding of how to effectively support them culturally and linguistically in the language classroom. Although there is extensive research literature on young and adolescent CHL learners, little attention has been given to university-level CHL learners' perceptions of their language learning experiences. This study was therefore designed to add to the research on adult CHL learners and contribute to the fields of heritage language and heritage learners.

### **Personal Philosophy of Language Teaching**

As a foreign language teacher, I believe that constructive FL learning must be learner-centered. To effectively teach CFL, I create a learner-centered environment where my students can easily engage in active communication in the target language, which positively contributes to the language development of my students. Furthermore, since all my students are active participants in their own learning, I give careful consideration to understanding their personal characteristics, individual needs, and previous language learning experiences in order to plan course lectures and class activities, and select or design teaching materials before teaching them Chinese. Creating a learner-centered environment not only accommodates foreign language learners' (hereinafter referred to as FLLs) needs but also motivates their learning. Therefore, making teaching learner-centered is essential to my language teaching.

Also, as a foreign language teacher, I believe that constructive FL learning must be differentiated. There are many discussions on which instructional methodologies are the best to teach CFL. However, since I believe that many factors contribute to FL learning, and that every FLL acquires language differently and are at different stages of language acquisition, I cannot use just one specific method. Instead, the fact that each FLL brings individual differences in their language background, cultural knowledge, learning style, and interests to the language classroom serves as the basis for identifying the most appropriate teaching methods. Therefore, a professional language teacher like myself must be familiar with different language learning theories and instructional methodologies, and know when and how to appropriately apply them to different learning situations in the language classroom.

Additionally essential to my language teaching is culture because language is a part of culture, a fact that must be taken into account when thinking about teaching CFL in the United States. When I teach the Chinese language to my students, I am inviting all of them to experience a new culture. Incorporating the culture that is associated with the target language is important in foreign language teaching. For example, I provide my students with opportunities to develop a beginning awareness of the Chinese culture in the language classroom through the use of authentic materials such as Chinese literature, movies, videos, and newspapers. I encourage my students to engage with native Chinese speakers daily to gain insight into the Chinese culture outside the language classroom. Most importantly, I hope they can develop cross-cultural competence in interactions with Chinese-speaking people.

To conclude, my ultimate goal as a foreign language teacher is not only to teach college students the written and spoken Chinese language but also to incorporate the cultures of the Chinese-speaking peoples around the world into their learning, both in the classroom and in their daily lives. However, the learning of Chinese should be considered a long-term process, one that usually involves study in a progression of different learning environments, especially since

learning to use the Chinese language accurately within the culture is a lifelong endeavor. Thus, ultimately my hope is that my students will be able to use the four skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) to communicate, compare, and connect appropriately in a given cultural context as well as in global Chinese-speaking communities.

However, with more and more CHL learners who have been raised in Chinese-speaking households where one or both parents speak Chinese, and who have oral proficiency but little or no formal schooling in the Chinese language, being placed in my FL classes in addition to my regular CFL learners, I began to think how I could better support this group culturally and linguistically.

### **Personal Purpose of the Study**

As the researcher in this study, I illustrate its purpose by comparing one of my former university student's experiences of her HL and Chinese language acquisition with my own. Mandy (pseudonyms are used for all schools and students in this study), born and raised in New York City, graduated from Green State University (hereinafter referred to as GSU) two years ago. Her father is Korean and her mother is Chinese and Japanese, but both were born in Shanghai, China. They had come to the United States individually to study when they were very young, and after graduation met and married. As Mandy started getting older, her parents considered it a "disadvantage" that she could not speak Chinese, Japanese, or Korean because only English was mainly their home language.

Fourteen years ago Mandy's parents first took her to China and employed a private tutor from Taiwan to teach her Chinese. Since then, Mandy has gone to different Asian countries, including China, Japan, Korea, or Taiwan, every summer. She looks Asian, but could not speak any Asian language before these visits. She said that sometimes she feels that everyone in an

Asian country looks at her as if she is “stupid” because she cannot speak their language. Feelings of embarrassment inspired Mandy to fervently learn Chinese. After going to several different cities in Asia, and developing a deep appreciation of and connection to the people and their cultures, she felt a need to learn their languages. She particularly wanted to learn to speak and understand Chinese to become more involved in the Chinese community as that is her heritage. Mandy also wanted to be able to understand what her parents were saying in Chinese.

Before high school Mandy just listened to the Chinese spoken by her parents, but at times did not understand them. Not until she was in high school did she take formal courses to learn Chinese. She studied both Chinese and Spanish for two years in high school. After graduating from high school, Mandy did not want to take any Chinese courses as a university student because she thought it would be extremely difficult to learn Chinese well. However, she wanted to learn more Chinese characters and grammar, which were of great importance because she eventually wanted to use the language properly. So she decided to take her first Chinese language course during her sophomore year at GSU.

While at GSU, Mandy took my beginning-level Chinese language course particularly designed for CHL learners. Her experiences of growing up in the United States and being a CHL learner in the language classroom are completely different from my own, but were really quite similar to other CHL learners in my class. Because I was born in Taiwan, I could speak and understand my HL, which is Hakka, a dialect of Chinese, which was spoken by my grandparents, parents, and other immediate relatives in the household I grew up in.

My parents always spoke Hakka to me in an effort to increase my understanding of it. However, it was hard to maintain it constantly because, right after going to elementary school in Taiwan, I was instructed in Mandarin Chinese, another dialect of Chinese, in school. In Taiwan, Mandarin Chinese is the default language of instruction and the language that every student is taught. Hakka, although still important, is the language I spoke only on certain occasions. For

instance, when I was not at school, I usually spent afternoons conversing in Hakka with my grandmother, who was my primary caretaker when my parents were at work during the day. My parents also took great pains to convince me of the importance of Hakka; therefore, our dinner table conversations each night were conducted completely in Hakka.

Mandy and I acquired our individual HLs, that is, Chinese and Hakka, in different ways. However, cultural and familial factors both influenced the acquisition of our HLs. Mandy's main language learning experience showed her specific need for cultural and familial connections with her HL and underscores one of the rationales for this study. Many CHL learners, as growing enrollments in Chinese language courses at colleges and universities show, want to retain their Chinese culture and improve their Chinese language skills, especially to communicate with family and the Chinese community.

This study therefore builds on my personal experience as a heritage speaker of Hakka, my teaching experience as a Chinese language instructor at the university level in North America, and my research interest in teaching and learning CHL. Motivated by the relatively limited research on CHL learners' language learning experience, specifically at the university level, I conducted this study to understand how a number of university-level CHL learners perceive their learning of HL, to uncover the factors that contributed to their development or maintenance of HL, and to explain how these factors affected how they developed or maintained their HL throughout their lives.

### **Research Questions**

The central question that guided this study was: How does a CHL learner perceive their learning of Chinese as revealed by their language autobiography and personal interview? In order to reveal the impact of the CHL learner's Chinese cultural background or prior knowledge on

their classroom Chinese language learning, the specific questions addressed in this study included the following:

- What factors did the CHL learners report that contributed to their learning of Chinese?
- How did the CHL learners describe the influence of these contributory factors on their learning of Chinese?

To address these questions, this study explored and documented the Chinese language learning of six university-level CHL learners in the United States as expressed in their written language autobiographies and personal interviews.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Although a number of studies have focused on CHL learners and the influences on the development or maintenance of their HL, including emotional factors (Chen, 2006), familial factors (Lü & Koda, 2011; Wang, 2012; Xiao, 2006, 2008b), motivational factors (Chen, 2013; Xiao, 2008a) and socio-psychological factors (Lei, 2012), less has been studied from the point of view of these students' long-term learning processes. Therefore, this study intended to fill the gap by providing a better understanding of the contributory factors to CHL learning and their effect on an individual's capacity to develop or maintain their CHL. It is hoped that the insights gained from this perspective could help Chinese language instructors, Chinese language programs and educators, or linguists who are interested in CHL, to develop an awareness of the potential factors that may positively or negatively relate to university-level CHL learners' learning of Chinese in the United States.

### **Significance of the Study**

First, it is important to note that numerous heritage language learners (hereinafter referred to as HLLs) beyond three generations may encounter great difficulties in understanding their HL. As Valdés (2001) stated, “Bilinguals of different generations have different proficiencies in English and in the heritage language” (p. 42). For example, first-generation bilinguals may be “dominant in the heritage language and in the beginning stages of learning English” while second- or third-generation bilinguals may change from being HL dominant to English dominant or even English perfect (pp. 42-43). Finally, by the fourth-generation it is assumed that “most individuals of an immigrant background will have become monolingual English speakers” (p. 43). There are, however, a few who will “retain some competence” in their HL (2001, p. 43). If HLLs potentially cannot understand their HLs beyond three generations, as Valdés asserted (2001), they may lack the skills or abilities to communicate with family and community members accordingly. In view of their circumstances, how CHL learners acquire their HL beyond three generations and succeed in retaining their CHL is a question that needed to be focused on and investigated.

Second, this study was an attempt to acknowledge the Heritage Language Initiative launched in 1988 by the National Foreign Language Center and the Center for Applied Linguistics as stated in the following:

The goals of this initiative are to strengthen the ability of the United States to participate effectively in an increasingly interdependent world, produce a broad cadre of citizens able to function professionally in both English and other languages, and build an education system that is responsive to the national language needs and the heritage language communities in this country. (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001, p. 14)

This initiative has begun to draw the attention of schools nationwide to focus on research in HL education, provide teacher education for HL instructors, and develop relevant instructional and assessment materials for HLLs (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000). However, not much research has addressed university-level CHL learners that could significantly advance their development or maintenance of their CHL. Such was the potential for the findings of this study.

From my literature review, a few studies have been conducted to understand CHL students' learning of Chinese but none through their writing of a language autobiography at the university level. Some specific language learning issues have been investigated in Chinese language classrooms, including the effect of implicit and explicit feedback (Han, 2010), paired interaction among CHL-CFL learners (Huang, 2013), issues of identities, pedagogies and policies (Kelleher, 2010), learning anxiety (Luo, 2013, 2015), issues of motivation (Wen, 2011; Xie, 2011), and linguistic knowledge of Chinese language (Zhang, 2014). Although there has been research on understanding university-level CHL learners, very few known studies (Chen, 2013; Xiao, 2006, 2008b) were completed to uncover which factors contributed to their developing proficiency, how the learners' home background impacted their Chinese learning, and the ways in which their home literacy environment influenced their CHL development. As Scalera (2003) argued,

A heritage student who is treated with respect for her linguistic and cultural knowledge and taught in ways that tap into her special linguistic competencies will excel in a foreign language class while a student whose heritage knowledge is ignored is less likely to be successful. (p. 4)

HLLs bring their own cultural background or prior knowledge of their HL which contributes to their distinct learning experiences in the classroom. Therefore, their existing cultural and linguistic knowledge should be integrated into their HL instruction as a resource, rather than as a barrier.

Finally, this study was intended to provide insights into elements of the sociocultural context, that is, how personal, familial, and motivational factors may have contributed to language learning for a number of university-level CHL learners. Further, the study examined how they were able to learn Chinese with their instructors' attention to their diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics and needs.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. After providing the contextual background to the study, an outline of the research questions, and purposes in this introductory chapter, Chapter Two, after a note on terminology, reviews the related literature. Chapter Three provides a description of the research context, settings and participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods used to answer the research questions. Chapter Four presents three case studies and the findings from three participants in the study to provide insights into their language learning experiences. Chapter Five discusses four significant influences on the six participants' development in their learning of CHL. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the findings in relation to the current research, presents the implications for CHL teaching in the United States, and recommends areas for further research on heritage learning and language teaching.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The number of HLLs has significantly increased in the United States since the 1960s, particularly for those whose home languages are Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese (Klee, 2000). The concept of the HLL, however, is difficult to define or characterize due to its broad and complex nature, thus influencing how scholars define the term, and proving to be problematic for both linguists and educators (Valdés, 2001, 2005). The research literature offers different definitions of what an HLL and I will give a rationale for the one that seems to be best suited for my research project below.

This chapter first provides the terminology for differentiating Chinese from Mandarin Chinese, which is followed by definitions of HLLs with a specific focus on CHL learners and the unique characteristics of HLL and CHL learners in the context of the United States. The discussion that follows focuses mostly on currently known factors contributing to CHL learners' learning of Chinese. Finally, the chapter provides a summary of HL education in the United States, with the first publication of guidelines on HL instruction with which to provide effective language instruction to university-level HLLs.

#### **A Note on Terminology**

“Chinese” is an umbrella term used to cover several dialects of a single Chinese language (e.g., Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien or Taiwanese, Mandarin Chinese, Shanghainese). The most widely spoken dialect in China and worldwide is Mandarin Chinese (Wang, 2011). It has a number of different names used by its speakers. Mandarin Chinese is generally known as

*Putonghua* (the common language) in China, *Zhongwen* (the Chinese language) in Hong Kong, or *Guoyu* (the national language) in Taiwan (Wang, 2011). In the context of teaching CFL, Chinese is specifically referred to as *Hanyu* (the language spoken by the largest ethnic group *Han Chinese* in China) in China, *Huayu* (the language spoken by Chinese speakers) in Taiwan, and Chinese or Mandarin Chinese in the United States. To follow the literature on CHL learners, especially in the context of the United States, I consistently use the term “Chinese” to refer to the commonly acknowledged dialect Mandarin Chinese.

The Chinese language has very different syntactic structures and morphological features as compared to European languages. It also has a very different sound inventory, making pronunciation very challenging for non-native speakers. Additionally, as a tonal language with five tones, it is difficult to differentiate for speakers of non-tonal languages because the same syllable can carry different tones to mean different words. Finally, Chinese, written in a script, is radically different from European alphabets. In order to be able to read and write in Chinese, a person has to master a number of Chinese characters in either traditional or simplified orthography, in which Chinese characters can differ more or somewhat less.

## **Defining Heritage Language Learners**

### **Broadly Defined Understanding of Heritage Language Learners**

The term “heritage language speaker” and its general use first appeared in the publication of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (hereinafter referred to as ACTFL) in 1996 (ACTFL, 1996, p. 29). Since then, several alternative terms have been used to refer to HLLs in the United States, including speakers of languages other than English (LOTEs) (Clyne, 1991; Van Deusen-Scholl,

2003), language minority students (Campbell & Peyton, 1998), native speakers, bilingual speakers, home background speakers (Draper & Hicks, 2000), heritage language speakers (ACTFL, 1996; Valdés, 2001; Wiley, 2001), and heritage students (Valdés, 2005).

Wiley (2001) contributed to the term “heritage language speaker” addressed by ACTFL (1996), further characterizing HL speakers according to the perspectives of program, community, and language use. From the program perspective, for example, HL speakers are different from FL speakers or bilingual speakers because they have specific needs (Wiley, 2001). Because the variety of dialects of any HL produces different needs, HLLs need a supportive heritage community to retain and support their HLs (Wiley, 2001).

As Carreira and Kagan (2011) stated, “A broadly defined HL is part of that person’s family or cultural heritage” (p. 41). From the broader view of an HL, an HLL is defined as a learner who has cultural or familial connections with his or her HL. For example, Campbell and Peyton (1998) specifically defined an HLL in the United States context as someone whose first or native language is other than English, “either because they were born in another country or because their families speak a language other than English at home” (p. 38).

Furthermore, Hornberger and Wang (2008) defined HLLs as “individuals who have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English” in the United States (p. 27). Most notably, regardless of whether the HL is understood or spoken by the HLL or not, the learner is still recognized as an HLL (Fishman, 2001; Hornberger & Wang, 2008; Valdés, 2001). However, three groups of scholars have additionally used language proficiency as one means to identify who HLLs are (Lacorte & Canabal, 2003; Valdés, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003) and each scholar presented a slightly different framework of what constitutes language proficiency.

When considering an HLL as a bilingual, the traditional definition is of one who is equally fluent in all four domains (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) of two languages, specifically an English and a non-English HL (Valdés, 2001, 2005). However, this term is often

employed today more loosely than by the traditional, narrow definition, and refers to an ability to communicate using English and the HL, but does not necessitate being completely proficient in both (Valdés, 2001, 2005). For example, Lacorte and Canabal (2003) provided a comparable yet relatively broad definition of HLLs as “students from homes where languages other than English are spoken, or who have had in-depth exposure to another language” (p. 107).

Similarly, Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) defined bilingual HLLs broadly and claimed that, “The most commonly agreed-on definition sees the heritage learner as bilingual in English and a home language other than English with varying degrees of proficiency in the home language” (p. 221). This definition provides a basic explanation of an HLL’s connection between two languages. This definition, however, privileges degrees of home language proficiency and does not provide any insight into learners’ familiarity with the home culture.

### **Narrowly Defined Understanding of Heritage Language Learners**

Although a particular definition of an HLL depends on whether an individual has any connections with their culture, family, community or bilingual proficiencies, Valdés’ (2001) narrow definition of an HLL undoubtedly provided major detailed criteria for identifying an HLL in the United States, which are the most accepted and widely used criteria to delimit HLLs in the literature to date. An HLL is a person “who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and English” (Valdés, 2001, p. 38). According to her definition of HLLs, Valdés’ focus is on planning language instruction and developing pedagogical theories for them (Valdés, 2001). It is this narrow understanding of HLLs in the United States that underpins the term HLLs as employed in this study.

From the review of definitions of HLLs in the research literature, it is evident that this learner's relationship to his or her own family or heritage culture should be emphasized, and that varying degrees of bilingual proficiencies play a partial yet fundamental role in recognizing HLLs. That is to say, several scholars (Lacorte & Canabal, 2003; Valdés, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003) value the role of language proficiency to help clarify HLLs and their HL proficiency.

### **Understanding Heritage Language Learners**

Numerous scholars, who have worked to differentiate between HLLs and FLLs, have stated that the differences in cultural knowledge and linguistic skills between these two groups of learners are obvious (ACTFL, 1996; Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Draper & Hicks, 2000; Renganathan, 2008; Valdés, 2001, 2005). It has become increasingly significant that HLLs' specific characteristics be integrated into their learning of HLs.

### **Characteristics of Typical Heritage Language Learners**

Past research (ACTFL, 1996; Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000; Carreira & Kagan; 2011; Valdés, 2001, 2005) has shown that HLLs and FLLs frequently differ on both cultural and linguistic dimensions. The ACTFL's Standards established in 1996 indicated that HLLs have listening and speaking skills sufficient to conduct everyday conversation in their HLs with their family or community members, but have limited skills in reading and writing their HL. They appear to be more comfortable at speaking their HLs in informal settings. Campbell and Rosenthal (2000) compared HLLs' abilities with those of traditional FLLs who have had two years of formal language instruction. Their findings demonstrated significant differences between these two populations. For example, HLLs have more advanced oral abilities than their FL peers',

but based on these researchers' observations and experiences, HLLs' reading and writing skills are inadequate (Campbell & Rosenthal, 2000). Moreover, both HLLs and FLLs may choose to learn the language for career purposes, for better job opportunities or finding jobs in the country of the language spoken, and for social purposes, communicating with people who can speak the same language. However, HLLs will have more opportunities to use the language being learned to communicate with family or extended family members through speech and writing.

Additionally, Campbell and Rosenthal (2000) generalized several "working hypotheses" used to describe HLLs at the university level from both their observations and other scholars' work with this typical group of learners:

- (1) HL students have acquired nearly 90% of the phonological system of their HLs;
- (2) They have acquired 80% to 90% of the grammatical rules;
- (3) They have acquired extensive vocabularies; however, the semantic range of their vocabulary is limited to just a few sociocultural domains;
- (4) They have typically acquired sociolinguistic rules that govern the choice of appropriate registers to use;
- (5) They have learned and adopted many of the customs, values, and traditions (collectively, "culture") of their ethnic groups;
- (6) They rarely have opportunities to gain literacy skills beyond elementary levels;
- (7) They present a wide range of reasons for wanting to study their HLs. (pp. 167-168)

Based on their research, university-level HLLs usually acquire basic grammar rules, practice listening and speaking, and reach a high level of proficiency in daily life in their family environment. This group of language learners may appear to be articulate, but their linguistic knowledge may be inadequate since many of them did not learn their HL in the language classroom prior to university. Therefore, Campbell and Rosenthal's (2000) work pointed to the need for additional but effective linguistic support to ensure that HLLs can benefit from their learning in the language classroom.

In terms of HLLs' cultural, linguistic, and personal characteristics, Valdés' (2001) research explored some of the characteristics of HLLs relevant to their oral performance. As she (2001) pointed out, some bilingual HLLs are equally fluent in two languages while some are relatively more proficient in one than the other. Valdés (2001) specifically indicated that "the spoken language of these students may often contain a number of features typical of casual and informal registers of the language that are totally inappropriate in the classroom" (p. 44). That is to say, an HLL may be familiar with basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) (Cummins, 1994), but have acquired little academic language, much less the kind of metacognition of language typically learned in a FL classroom.

More recently, Carreira and Kagan (2011) conclusively summarized the characteristics of university-level HLLs in eight languages (Spanish, Mandarin/Cantonese, Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Persian) based on a national HL survey conducted by the National Heritage Language Resource Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, from 2007 to 2009. According to Carreira and Kagan (2011), a university-level HLL is a student who:

(1) is an early sequential bilingual who acquired English early in life, after acquiring the HL; (2) has limited exposure to the HL outside the home; (3) has relatively strong aural skills but limited reading and writing skills; (4) has positive attitudes and experiences with the HL; and (5) studies the HL mainly to connect with communities of speakers in the United States and to gain insights into his or her roots, even though career plans feature prominently in learners of some languages as well. (p. 62)

According to Carreira and Kagan's research, due to family background and school attendance, most HLLs at the university level have some prior contact with their HL before they enter the university. These HLLs have general listening and speaking skills to conduct everyday conversation, but their skills are insufficient for reading and writing in their HL. This deficiency

is also reflected in their self-evaluation which is part of the pre-placement test for their HL course. HLLs tend to rate their listening and speaking at the moderate level while reading and writing at the lowest level. They seem to be more proficient in listening and speaking than in reading and writing in their HL.

Both Campbell and Rosenthal's (2000) working hypotheses and Carreira and Kagan's (2011) survey findings present a descriptive picture of HLLs with their unique characteristics. With the understanding of HLLs' cultural, linguistic and personal characteristics to determine the instructional approach and methods suitable for their learning, one issue of great concern to language educators who teach HLs to HLLs at the university level is the demand for separate programs, known as "dual-track programs," which meet the disparate objectives of HL and FL courses (Kelleher, 2008a, p. 14). As Campbell and Peyton (1998) stated, FL courses are designed for monolingual speakers of English who have little or no knowledge of the language and culture they are choosing to learn. However, with the increasing numbers of HLLs in FL classrooms, two tracks of FL courses, regular (non-heritage) and heritage, applied separately to HLLs and FLLs at varying levels should be offered. Since HLLs have different needs from FLLs who typically learn the language in the classroom setting, developing an understanding of the cultural, linguistic and personal characteristics of HLLs can provide language educators with a better understanding of how to effectively support them culturally and linguistically in language classrooms.

### **Characteristics of Chinese Heritage Language Learners**

Based on the literature defining HLLs in the United States, a CHL learner is identified as a language learner who is raised in a home where Chinese is spoken, who speaks or at least understands some Chinese, and who is to some degree bilingual in Chinese and English, according to Valdés' (2001) narrow view of HLLs (cf. He, 2006). In particular, He (2006)

indicated a CHL learner is “English-dominant with no or limited reading/writing ability in Chinese” (p. 1).

Standing on these definitions, university-level CHL learners in the United States could be generally grouped into two categories in terms of their differences in language backgrounds: (a) learners who have some Mandarin Chinese language background; and (b) learners who have some Chinese language background other than Mandarin Chinese. Whether or not a CHL learner is literate in either dialect of Chinese is not important. Since all of the participants in this study reported that they have either Mandarin Chinese or Chinese language background with varying degrees of proficiency and literacy skills in either Mandarin Chinese or Chinese, they fall into the definition of CHL learners in the context of the United States.

University-level CHL learners usually have BICS (Cummins, 1994) in their CHL but limited academic language in their reading and writing skills. Cummins (1994) suggested that the language first acquired by language learners is composed of the cultural, grammatical, and lexical knowledge and skills required for social interaction. To meet their cultural and linguistic needs, CHL learners develop their integrated language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, with an emphasis on reading and writing. That is to say, they expand their learning of not only oral language but also written language. In addition to constructing their linguistic knowledge, CHL learners also identify their heritage culture since language and culture are intimately interrelated (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). As Scalera (2003) argued, it is imperative to preserve and use HLLs’ own languages and cultures as valuable tools of successful language teaching and learning. As scholars have stated, this study asserts that cultural and linguistic knowledge is of vital importance for teaching CHL learners with various backgrounds and language proficiency levels.

### **Factors Influencing CHL Learners' Learning of Chinese**

A few significant factors were uncovered in the research literature to influence language development or maintenance in HLLs related to their unique backgrounds, learning experiences, and learning contexts. More specifically, Xiao (2008a) identified contextual factors, namely, insufficient HL input, multi-level social contact, high pressure for social acceptance, immigrant family background, and parental views that are associated with the development or maintenance of CHL. These factors continued to be of interest to researchers in CHL, and several researchers' empirical studies have provided evidence to support Xiao's identification of these factors. Because these factors are directly related to my study, I outline in more detail below the research conducted regarding motivational and familial factors for CHL.

#### **Motivational Factor: Motivation**

Motivation as one of the key factors that contributes to FL learning has been recognized since the 1990s (Dörnyei, 1998). Since HLLs generally attain their HL in environments where it is not the mainstream language, most of the studies on them have combined FL and HL, and researchers in HL hold the same belief. In recent years, a growing number of researchers have aimed to understand the influences on the motivation of university-level CHL speakers or learners (Chen, 2013; Wen, 2011).

Wen (2011) compared CHL learners with non-CHL learners (317 in total) at three universities regarding their attitudes and motivation for learning either CHL or CFL. Her data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, but only 14 CHL learners and 13 non-CHL learners from one of the three universities agreed to be interviewed. After determining six motivational factors, including positive learning attitudes and experience, instrumentality, interest

in current culture, intended strategic efforts, social milieu, and fulfilling the language requirement, Wen argued that CHL learners have both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation for learning the Chinese language. For example, a CHL learner was integratively motivated to “better understand and appreciate Chinese language and culture” (Wen, 2011, p. 49). At the same time, a CHL learner’s motivation for learning Chinese was instrumental because they believed that “Chinese proficiency will bring them future career opportunities” (Wen, 2011, p. 55). Wen determined that positive learning attitudes and experience were considered the most influencing factors, whereas instrumentality was considered as second in terms of learning Chinese by CHL learners in her study.

Chen (2013) investigated how well 10 second-generation Taiwanese Americans spoke and read Chinese as their HL. Most importantly, she examined the factors that contributed to their proficiency. With ages ranging from 19 to 28 as undergraduate students, graduate students, or recent graduates, this group of CHL speakers first self-evaluated their four language skills and secondly took individual reading and speaking tests in the form of an interview with the author. All CHL speakers in this study explained their motivation for learning CHL. For example, being able to communicate with their parents or Chinese-speaking friends was the most mentioned motivational factor because many of their parents only spoke Chinese. Furthermore, several CHL speakers indicated that they were self-motivated learners by appreciating their Chinese culture, maintaining their CHL, or being embarrassed at not being able to understand Chinese. For example, being able to speak their HL, Chinese, helped them develop an appreciation of Chinese culture as well as self-confidence in understanding their HL.

In addition to being motivated intrinsically, only a few CHL speakers, however, claimed that they had extrinsic motivational factors for learning their HL, such as improving their literacy skills in Chinese or opening up their career opportunities in Chinese-speaking countries. For example, if CHL speakers can speak their own HL, they are motivated to learn how to read and

write it, which could increase their chances of finding work in Chinese-speaking countries. Chen (2013) concluded that both integrative motivation (e.g., being able to communicate with people who speak Chinese and being interested in Chinese culture associated with their HL) and instrumental motivation (e.g., learning Chinese for practical reasons such as career advantages) fostered CHL speakers in developing or maintaining their CHL.

In summary, previous research (Chen, 2013; Wen, 2011) on understanding CHL learners' motivation to learn Chinese has revealed that several aspects of motivation play an important role as Xiao (2008a) initially corroborated. CHL learners generally have few clear instrumental motivations for learning their own HL such as using Chinese to facilitate effective communication with family members and an interest in Chinese language that coincides with their interest in Chinese culture. Further, they are slightly influenced by instrumental motivations such as satisfying their university's FL requirement and doing business with people in Chinese-speaking countries.

### **Familial Factor: Immigrant Family Background**

An earlier study by Xiao (2006) showed that the home backgrounds of 18 university-level CHL learners in their Chinese language and culture significantly facilitated their Chinese language development, in their speaking, listening, grammar, and sentence constructions, compared with 18 non-heritage learners at the same instructional level. Two sets of data, including achievement tests and writing samples of letters, were analyzed to understand each CHL learner's phonological, graphemic, and semantic performance in the Chinese language. Her study (2006) also showed that home background in Chinese language and culture played a significant role in the Chinese syntactic development of 54 university-level CHL learners in their grammar and sentence constructions, compared with 94 non-heritage learners at three different

instructional levels. Two sets of data, including grammaticality judgment tests and English-to-Chinese translation tests, were analyzed to understand each CHL learner's knowledge of well-formedness in the Chinese language. "Although heritage students do not always speak their home language, the exposure to linguistic input and meaningful communication at home and in their community facilitates the development of their listening and speaking skills," stated Xiao (2006, p. 54). Her findings (2006) therefore demonstrated that "a genuine language environment, in which the language is used for real-life communication, facilitates language learning" (p. 54).

In a more recent study, Xiao (2008b) built on her work to investigate CHL learners' home literacy environment and presented them among the considered factors that are associated with immigrant family background, in which the home literacy environment was found to be substantially relevant to the development of literacy in CHL. Her data were collected from questionnaires and interviews of 127 university-level CHL learners at three instructional levels at three universities. Xiao (2008b) identified four variables, including (a) CHL home literacy resources; (b) parent-child CHL literacy-related activities; (c) learners' independent CHL literacy-related activities; and (d) their parents' Chinese education in order to determine whether the home literacy environment has positive correlation with CHL learners' attainment of Chinese language. Her findings confirmed those of her previous work, indicating that the higher the instructional level of a CHL learner has attained, the richer the CHL home literacy environment of the learner had been (Xiao, 2008b). That is to say, the home literacy environment has substantial correlation with CHL development or maintenance. Therefore, the immigrant family background has been shown to greatly benefit CHL learners in their development or maintenance of their CHL.

## **Heritage Language Education in the United States**

### **Why America Needs Heritage Language Education**

Since its establishment, the United States has been a developing society of multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual people. In 2005, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, almost 20% of the population spoke a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a). More specifically, 43.2% of speakers of LOTEs were citizens of the United States, while 56.8% were foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b, n.p.). This phenomenon has been explained by a dramatic increase in immigration in the United States since the 1960s (Espenshade, 1995). Moreover, the number of immigrants is expected to rapidly increase in the coming decades (Capps et al., 2005). Immigrant children or children of immigrants can be basically categorized into three groups: "Immigrants who arrive in the US [United States] in their late teens or as adults are first generation" (Abrego, 2006, p. 213); those who are born in the United States with at least one immigrant parent are second generation Americans; those who are born in the United States with parents born here as well are considered third generation Americans.

Accordingly, a large number of LOTE speakers are first-generation immigrants who migrated from their home country to the United States at a very young age, or they are second- or third-generation Americans who have exposure to their home language and culture only through family or community members. The generational timing of immigration is important to speakers' acquisition of their HLs because potentially they may be unable to understand HLs beyond three generations (Valdés, 2001), which relates to the abilities that the speakers develop and maintain in relation to communication with their family and community members.

From the 1970s, the recognition of the importance of HLs created greater emphasis on the HLLs of FL education in Canada, whereas HL education grew more slowly in the United States and as a national as well as an educational phenomenon has only merited considerable attention since the 1990s (Hornberger & Wang, 2008). Why speakers of LOTEs or HLLs need HL education has been revealed as critical due to the needs of “national security”, “economic competitiveness”, “social well-being”, and the FL capacities of the United States (Robinson, Rivers, & Brecht, 2006, p. 458; see also Brecht & Rivers, 2000; 2005). For example, the United States may need professionals to be conversant with LOTEs in order to compete economically in a global context (Asia Society, 2010; Robinson et al., 2006). According to the latter, for example,

Research on the LOE [Languages other than English] readiness of the national security community, as well as on the overall LOE capacity of the United States, has revealed significant deficits in LOE skills, as well as clear needs for more professionals with increased levels of proficiency in more languages. (p. 458)

Thus, if English is the primary language used to engage the world and compete globally, the question of how the United States can compete in national and economic power with other countries is a concern that needs to be discussed (Asia Society, 2010; Robinson et al., 2006).

Since the issue of development or maintenance of HLs has been recognized for the purpose of the national, economic, social and linguistic needs of the United States, the review of the literature relating to the term HL education in the context of the United States is addressed.

### **Heritage Language Education vs. Bilingual Education**

The term HL education originated with Canadian bilingual education programs (Baker, 2001; Duff, 2008). One of the potential goals of bilingual education is to promote the frequent use of or constant exposure to two languages for minority-language learners in a classroom where

either “formal instruction is to foster bilingualism” or “bilingual children are present, but bilingualism is not fostered in the curriculum” (Baker, 2001, p. 192). For example, bilingual education in the United States potentially aims to encourage minority-language learners to understand the majority/dominant language, in this case, English, used in the mainstream society or promotes and uses two languages in settings where the minority-language learners acquire knowledge of or increased exposure to a language that is either an additional or a FL in the United States (Baker, 2001). It is within the notion of bilingualism that the term HL education has been created and used to refer to a “strong form” of bilingual education as “language minority children use their native, home or heritage language in the school as a medium of instruction” (Baker, 2001, p. 208).

While HL education referred to as a strong form of bilingual education, the term additive/subtractive bilingualism, introduced in 1975 by Lambert (1980), undoubtedly provided the foundation of HL education in the United States. As Lambert (1980) stated, bilingualism has two different perspectives, additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism, used to indicate whether the first language and culture (hereinafter referred to as L1 & C1) are diminished or replaced by the addition of a second language and culture (hereinafter referred to as L2 & C2) or not. Additive bilingualism occurs when a bilingual learner’s L1 & C1 are still maintained or developed along with the acquisition of a L2 & C2, whereas subtractive bilingualism is when a learner’s L1 & C1 are diminished or replaced by the addition of a L2 & C2 (Baker, 2001; Lambert, 1980).

To respond to the advancement of subtractive bilingualism, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, language-minority groups began to rely on their ethnic communities to provide formal or informal opportunities for HL instruction to promote or maintain their own HLs and heritage cultures (Blanton, 2004; Fishman, 2001). Ethnic community schools outside the mainstream education system therefore played significant roles and began to make contributions to American

HL education (Fishman, 2001). Accordingly, HL education in the context of the United States initially referred to outside-school education for the purpose of maintaining and developing HLLs and heritage cultures by ethnic communities. But in the 21st century, in addition to ethnic community schools, HL education is positively promoted by public and private schools, after-school programs, and private educational institutions from the kindergarten to university level.

### **Effective Language Instruction for University-level CHL Learners**

With respect to the demand for specific language courses for heritage speakers and national language standards for HLLs mentioned previously, in 2003 the *University of California (UC) Guidelines on Heritage Language Instruction* was published by the UC Heritage Language Institute, the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching, and the Language Resource Center at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The major goal of the *UC Guidelines* was to understand the issues of HL education and make recommendations for the teaching and learning of HLLs in the state of California. Although these guidelines were designed specifically for educational institutions, program directors or coordinators, curriculum designers, and language educators in the state of California, it was the first publication of HL instruction that emphasized the teaching and learning of HLLs at the university level.

### **UC Guidelines on Heritage Language Instruction**

The *UC Guidelines on Heritage Language Instruction* made a great effort to identify the current issues of HL education at the postsecondary level and made recommendations for the teaching and learning of HLLs in the state of California. These guidelines put forth a plan for

improving the teaching of HLs, which consists of an introduction, a section of definitions and statistics, a statement of the issue, a section of recommendations, and a conclusion.

*The Guidelines* (2003) first offered a definition of the term HLL and provided numbers of HLLs enrolled in public schools between 1993 and 2001 in the state of California. Then they cited several concerns about students, instruction and faculty, and HL programs at UC. The first indicated the cultural and linguistic differences, that is, FLLs usually have little or no knowledge of the language and culture they are choosing to learn while HLLs have a basic knowledge of the spoken language but limited reading and writing skills. FLLs and HLLs therefore have different linguistic and cultural needs in the classroom. The second concern was in regard to the increase in HLLs in the FL classrooms, and the type of instruction provided by language faculties that could meet their linguistic and cultural needs distinct from FLLs at the same time. Without being provided with efficient instruction, HLLs often sat in FL classrooms where the teachers and peers felt they were likely to have an “easy A”; and yet where they risked hearing that their dialect is improper and undervalued, as is the culture they bring with them. The last concern was that since their different linguistic and cultural needs could not be met at the same time, dual-track courses or programs were needed to emphasize and accommodate HLLs’ diverse needs.

To respond to these needs and concerns, eight pedagogical recommendations were made by *The Guidelines* (2003) to suggest:

- (1) recruiting and motivating heritage learners;
- (2) offering an advanced proficiency certificate;
- (3) using both oral and written placement exams;
- (4) providing separate tracks of courses;
- (5) emphasizing curriculum design;
- (6) producing appropriate materials;
- (7) establishing training and professional programs;
- and (8) promoting technology-assisted learning. (*UC Guidelines on Heritage Language Instruction*, 2003, pp. 3-6)

As *The Guidelines* (2003) stated, HLLs cannot receive different teaching methodologies that meet their specific needs if they are placed with FLLs. Compared to FLLs, HLLs have a greater need for pre-assessment and differentiated instruction (Carreira, 2004; Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). The uses of formative and summative assessments in the classroom are mandatory and must be differentiated as well (Li & Duff, 2008). To gain a better understanding of HLLs' needs, a program developer or course designer should integrate students' self-assessment and individual evaluation into the process of course development to ensure that course goals and objectives are achieved.

The idea that each HLL should be individually assessed and appropriately evaluated therefore could serve as the basis for designing curricula, language instruction, and learning materials for HLLs elsewhere. In summary, to improve the effective instruction of HLs and motivate HLLs' learning, knowing the needs of the HLLs and designing the content of a HL course according to these needs is of vital importance. It is the language program that requires the collaboration of every HL teacher and HLL to provide suitable HL courses for the HLLs.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

As discussed in previous chapters, there is a considerable body of research on understanding CHL learners and investigating factors that influence their development or maintenance of their CHL (Chen, 2013; Chen, 2006; Lei, 2012; Lü & Koda, 2011; Wang, 2012; Xiao, 2006, 2008a, 2008b). However, little of the work has focused explicitly on the perspectives of university-level CHL learners about their own language learning experiences. Additional research is required to uncover the factors that learners perceive to be important to language learning experiences and how they influence Chinese language learning in both positive and negative ways. This study therefore attempted to fill the research gap with regard to a better understanding of contributory factors to language learning as perceived by university-level CHL learners in the United States.

In this chapter, the research methodology for this study is described. First, an overview of the research context and research site for this study are provided. Next, the participants in this study are introduced. This is followed by an explanation of the data collection methods and procedures. Finally, I explain the process of my qualitative data analysis.

#### **Research Context**

Currently most CHL learners at the university level are likely to have been born in the United States or immigrated here with their family or extended family at a pre-school age (He, 2006). Many are asked to attend a community or weekend language school by their parents in order to maintain or develop their HL of Chinese when they are children. A CHL learner who was

born in the United States tends to not speak the HL at home because they are monolingual in English, but may have some language-related exposure to the HL. For a CHL learner who is an immigrant at a considerably younger age, although unable to continually retain their HL outside of the home, the learner may be asked to speak the HL at home as a home language because of being raised in a setting where English and Chinese are simultaneously used. Whether the CHL learners were born and schooled in the host country or in the United States, their HL serves to maintain the cultural and historical resources of their Chinese ethnic group.

To support university-level CHL learners who would benefit greatly by developing or maintaining their Chinese language competencies, a considerable number of university departments of East Asian Languages or programs of Chinese Language have offered two tracks of Chinese language courses, non-heritage and heritage, to separate CHL learners from CFL learners at beginning, intermediate, or even advanced levels nationally. As Kelleher (2008a) stated, “Dual-track systems seem most likely to emerge in contexts where a foreign language program exists and heritage language learner enrollments are increasing” (p. 14).

One reason to promote dual-track systems of language programs, as Kondo-Brown (2003) argued, is that “they [the heritage language learners] are able to learn the target HL at a greatly accelerated speed” since HLLs have “linguistic skills that are beyond those which are typically developed by non-HL equivalents in traditional foreign language programs” (p. 5). In dual-track systems of Chinese language programs, CHL learners, for example, at different levels of proficiency can be placed in different classes, and their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and needs of curricula, instruction, materials, assessment can be emphasized and accommodated.

### **Research Site**

All the CHL learners who participated in this study were enrolled in Chinese language classes at Green State University, a pseudonym for a large public university in the Northeastern United States. Founded in 2005, the Chinese program at GSU began offering four years of Chinese language and a wide range of upper-division courses in Chinese literature, culture, and film. Before 2008, CHL learners were usually placed with non-CHL learners, that is, FLLs in the same Chinese language class because of limited enrollment and insufficiently-trained instructors. Since more and more CHL learners enrolled in the language class at GSU to retain their Chinese proficiency over time, the Chinese program decided to provide three Chinese language classes specifically for CHL learners at the beginning and intermediate levels. Beginning in the Fall semester of 2015, there was one new Chinese language class at the advanced level explicitly for CHL learners. Table 1 shows the Chinese language courses in the HL track offered by the Chinese program at GSU at the time of this study.

**Table 1** *Chinese Language Courses for Heritage Speakers at GSU*

Year of Study/Level	Courses
First year/Beginning level	CHIN-002 (spring semester)
Second year/Intermediate level	CHIN-003 (fall semester) CHIN-110 (spring semester)
Third year/Advanced level	CHIN-401 (fall semester)

As the first course of the Chinese language series, CHIN-002 in the HL track is designed for heritage speakers of Chinese at GWU. Upon successful completion of this course, CHL learners will be able to (a) improve their Chinese pronunciation by identifying and targeting pronunciation errors; (b) develop Chinese literacy in reading and writing, including computer literacy in typing Chinese; (c) learn sociolinguistic appropriateness and acquire discourse competence in the Chinese language, and (d) gain a better understanding of the Chinese culture.

CHIN-003 and CHIN-110 continue to focus on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These two courses introduce CHL learners to frequently used grammatical constructions in the Chinese language and to give them an active vocabulary of about 500 words. Building on the skills they acquired in CHIN-002 (the prerequisite to CHIN-003), CHIN-003 and CHIN-110 expand their knowledge of the language and cultures of the Chinese-speaking peoples in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other parts of the world. To that end, there are both language-learning and socio-cultural objectives in the courses. About 85% of class time is spent on language learning and about 15% on cultural issues.

Through active participation in language-focused instructional sessions and student-centered discussion sessions, the CHL learners in CHIN-401 can deeply understand selected topics in relation to traditional and modern Chinese culture, and examine unique cultural phenomena and make comparisons. Course materials mostly come from the textbook, but also encompass supplementary reading and multimedia materials selected by the instructors. Overall, CHIN-002 and CHIN-003 count toward the Chinese minor requirements while CHIN-110 and CHIN-401 count toward the Chinese major requirements at GWU.

### **Participants**

All six participants in this study were university students ages 19 to 22 who were taking at least one beginning-level Chinese language course at GSU, which was determined by prerequisite and placement tests. This course in the HL track is designed for CHL learners who already have adequate listening and speaking skills to engage in everyday conversation in Chinese, but whose reading and writing abilities are still at the novice level according to ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012). The main objective of this course is to help CHL learners develop integrated skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking Chinese, with an emphasis

on bringing their print literacy skills to the same or a similar level of development as their oral language skills.

The participants were in their freshman, sophomore or senior year, and included physical therapy and business majors who chose to take the Chinese language courses either to meet the FL requirements for their degree or to obtain a minor in Chinese at GSU. I used aliases for all the study participants in order to protect their anonymity. The six CHL learners who took part in this study were all former GSU students of mine, whom I had personally contacted either by phone or email.

Tracy has been a student in two of my courses in intermediate-level Chinese in the Fall semester of 2013 and Spring semester of 2014. In the Spring semester of 2014, Brenda and Teagan began studying Chinese with me at the beginning level, and a semester later, Amy and Tom joined two intermediate-level Chinese language courses with Brenda and Teagan until the Spring semester of 2015. I knew Emily for only eight weeks in the Spring semester of 2015 because her instructor was on maternity leave, and I was the substitute instructor for her beginning-level Chinese language class.

Before taking university-level Chinese language courses at the University, the participants had different experiences of community-based CHL schooling, ranging from one day to eight years as shown in Table 2. The exception was Tracy whose parents chose not to enroll her in any community-based Chinese schools or programs.

**Table 2 Summary of Study Participants**

Name	Amy	Brenda	Emily	Tracy	Teagan	Tom
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Year	Freshman	Sophomore	Freshman	Senior	Sophomore	Freshman
Major	Undeclared (Planned to major in Business)	Business	Undeclared (Planned to major in Business)	Physical Therapy	Business	Undeclared (Planned to major in Business)
Minor	Planned to minor in Chinese	Planned to minor in Chinese	Planned to minor in Chinese	Chinese	N/A	Planned to minor in Chinese
Years of Community- based CHL Schooling	Four	Three	Five	N/A	One day	Eight
Numbers of CHIN Courses Taken at GSU	Two	Three	One	Five	Three	Two
	Courses:  CHIN-003 CHIN-110	Courses:  CHIN-002 CHIN-003 CHIN-110	Courses:  CHIN-002	Courses:  CHIN-002 CHIN-003 CHIN-110 CHIN-401 CHIN-402	Courses:  CHIN-002 CHIN-003 CHIN-110	Courses:  CHIN-003 CHIN-110

### **Data Collection Methods**

My research methods for this study included collecting the participants' written language autobiographies, conducting semi-structured interviews with each, member-checking the interviews, and holding focus-group interviews. Reviewing each participant's language autobiography about their learning experience of the Chinese language not only provided me a primary source of data but also enabled me to view the whole picture of Chinese language learning from the CHL learners' perspectives.

## **Language Autobiography**

A language autobiography is a collection of what language learners already know about the target language from their personal learning experience and what they comprehend about language learning from their own perspective. According to the Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER, n.d.), writing language autobiographies is beneficial for language learners to “recognize the richness of their prior language use/learning experiences and how those experiences have shaped them” (para. 1). Most importantly, “As students reflected upon their own unique experiences, they were reminded of the critical factors surrounding language development and use” (Danielson, 1989, p. 261).

Since the CHL learners are the only ones who know all of their language learning experiences, I chose to use their language autobiographies as a research tool for this study. In the mid-1980s, the use of diaries had become widely acknowledged as a beneficial tool to understand what FLLs did and their individual learning experiences (Bailey, 1998). Bailey (1998) emphasized that regularly keeping diaries of direct reactions to “teacher, method, text, target language, its speakers, and the culture in which it is embedded” could critically broaden FLLs’ reflective views of their own learning of FLs (p. 103).

In addition to diaries, the use of learner autobiographies has been extensively discussed and used as a valuable tool because “it involves first-person analysis of experiences of second language learning by those who directly experience them” (Benson, 2004, p. 12). Guided by open-ended questions regarding FLLs’ learning histories, experiences and opinions, Tse (2000) used student autobiographies to collect data from FLLs to fully understand the relationship between students’ perceptions of classroom atmosphere and instruction and their learning outcomes as described in their autobiographies. Giving the rationale for a qualitative analysis of autobiographies, Tse (2000) stated that “autobiographies allow students to express their views on

a wide variety of topics in greater depth than is typically allowed in most surveys” (p. 70).

Therefore, I employed this learner-centered autobiographical methodology.

The purposes for asking the CHL learners to write their language autobiography for my study were: (a) to explore their experiences of learning Chinese as an HL; (b) to identify the contributory factors that influence their language development or maintenance; and (c) to categorize these factors in order to understand how they influenced their language development or maintenance. Therefore, all six participants were required to write their own language autobiography individually, giving a general description of their learning experience of the Chinese language from an early age until now. In addition, they were specifically asked to: (a) recall a time when they were speaking/learning Chinese; (b) write down a particular incident related to speaking/learning Chinese during this time; (c) write down a positive or negative experience while speaking/learning Chinese, and (d) list the things that they believe positively contributed to or negatively influenced their learning of Chinese. These prompts were intentionally designed to assist the CHL learners in constructing their language autobiographies and to provide their learning experiences in more detail (See Appendix A).

Using the language autobiographies of these CHL learners, I examined their learning experiences in order to develop an in-depth description and analysis of the factors that influenced their Chinese language learning, especially the effect of their Chinese cultural background or prior knowledge of Chinese on their Chinese language development or maintenance from an early age until now.

## **Interviews**

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

In addition to collecting and reading each participant's language autobiography, I conducted an interview with all six individually, because interviews can potentially provide rich and highly illustrative information, particularly about people's feelings, perceptions and reflections (Creswell, 2013; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015; Seidman, 2013). As Glesne (2005) noted, interviews are recommended in conjunction with different types of qualitative data such as documents, field notes, observations, or reports. Therefore, my interviews enabled me to collect essential yet abundant information about the CHL learners.

My interviews with the participants were semi-structured, mainly because this interview style provided flexibility by promoting a natural and realistic conversation, which offers a deeper insight into each participant's responses (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Robson, 1993; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Furthermore, unlike in structured interviews, the majority of questions are not pre-established, but created during the semi-structured interview itself (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). This interview style helps the researcher and participant give and receive information more spontaneously. As Roller and Lavrakas (2015) stated, the exchange between the interviewer and interviewee is "a unique and important benefit to qualitative research" (p. 53). My review of the literature and each participant's language autobiography helped me decide how to design the semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix B), which would reflect the main points of the literature review and the students' language autobiographies.

### ***Member-checking Interviews***

Subsequent to collecting data from the language autobiographies and individual interviews, I conducted member-checking interviews after I analyzed the data to identify major themes within-case and across-case. My aim in conducting member-checking interviews was to share my initial analysis of each participant's Chinese language learning experience with each interviewee and have them individually reflect on their own learning experience of language development or maintenance, and my accuracy in reflecting it. As Roller and Lavrakas (2015) indicated, "member checking is the technique used ...to confirm the research findings and interpretations with some (or possibly all) of the actual study participants" (p. 43). This procedure could therefore contribute to the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis (Seidman, 2013; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### ***Focus-group Interviews***

Focus groups, as a type of data collection method in qualitative research, involve interviewing a small number of people with the goal of "fostering interaction among participants" and "resulting in an exchange of experiences and ideas" (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 105). I therefore conducted two focus-group interviews, one having three participants (Brenda, Emily, Tracy) the other having four participants (Amy, Brenda, Teagan, Tom), to gain insights into several participants' views on the four major themes my data analysis had generated (i.e., early exposure, parental involvement, community-based HL schooling, and agentive role).

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Language Autobiography**

The six CHL learners who took part in this study all agreed to write their own language autobiography and be interviewed as follow-up on a voluntary basis. Although they were encouraged to participate in the study, it was made clear that they were not required to. Also, they might therefore choose not to write their own language autobiography or not to be interviewed at any time, if it became uncomfortable.

Before I began my data collection, I gave all the participants a general introduction to my background and interests, and informed them both orally and in writing about the purpose of the study. Furthermore, I obtained informed consent from each participant with their signing of a consent form. Once consent had been received from the participants, any questions that they had were welcomed, which I answered honestly after all of the interviews. The Institutional Review Board of the University the students attended gave me permission to conduct human subject research before I began the study.

Data collection for this study began in the middle of June, 2015, with each participant's writing of their language autobiography which was submitted by email. After reading each participant's autobiography, I scheduled the initial interview with them. All of the initial interviews were conducted at the GSU library, except one, whom I individually interviewed at a restaurant near the school. All the interviews were either in the early evening after school or on weekends depending on each participant's summer semester schedule.

## **Interviews**

All interview sessions were conducted in English at the option of each participant. In the semi-structured interviews, each lasted approximately one hour starting with more general questions about the students' Chinese language learning experiences and gradually focusing on more specific questions about influential factors revealed by the literature review and data from their language autobiography. All of the questions were answered orally and digitally-recorded with the hope of catching every word, as all speech data were saved and transcribed carefully for analysis. I labeled all the digital audio-recordings of the interviews (which I transcribed) with pseudonyms by first name and number (e.g., Amy 1, Amy 2, etc.) and stored them in my own laptop computer with password protection.

In the member-checking interviews, each ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour, and was conducted to ensure that the initial data were transcribed truthfully and that my perceptions of my initial findings were interpreted accurately. The data collected from the member-checking interviews were also in the form of digital audio-recorded files, labeled with pseudonyms by first name and repeated numbers (e.g., Amy 11, Amy 22, etc.), and stored in my laptop computer with password protection. There were only two focus-group interviews, the purpose of which were to assist me in "pooling [the] ideas" I had gathered at the individual level "for further consideration and discussion" (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 105). The average focus group interview time for each group was approximately 40 minutes due to the participants' time conflicts. In these interviews, the participants were encouraged to specifically reflect on certain factors that might have potential influences on their learning of Chinese through group interaction and discussion. Some factors such as heritage cultural/linguistic background, parental involvement, personal motivation and community-based HL schooling were discussed. These two focus group

interviews were also audio recorded, labeled with pseudonyms by first name and tripled numbers (i.e., Amy 111, Amy 222...etc.), and stored in my laptop computer with password protection.

In summary, to minimize my personal bias, I used multiple data sources to triangulate the findings in this study as suggested by several qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2013; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015; Seidman, 2013; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The information I gathered from the combination of language autobiographies and the three kinds of interviews provided a more complete understanding of the study participants and their Chinese language learning experiences.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Thematic Analysis**

Central to this study is how six CHL learners perceived their learning of Chinese according to their written language autobiographies. I examined these autobiographies and transcripts of my follow-up interviews with these participants to gain a more in-depth understanding of the contributory factors and their influences on these CHL learners' Chinese language learning. I adopted thematic analysis, a strategy to discover patterns and develop themes from qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), to categorize all my data by codes and themes. More specifically, I performed six phases of thematic analysis (i.e., familiarizing myself with my data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report) as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify the recurring and meaningful patterns in the data.

As a result, four major patterns across the data sets, or themes, that repeatedly surfaced from the data were: (a) the CHL learners' early exposure to their HL, (b) parental involvement in

promoting their child's use of their HL, (c) the CHL learners' community-based HL schooling, and (d) the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves in deciding to study or continue their study of Chinese. Then I decided to offer an in-depth case study of only three of the CHL learners, which are presented in Chapter Four, because their experiences gave a full view of the differences and similarities across the six study participants. Moreover, the insights gained from the focus group interview with these three CHL learners greatly contributed to a better understanding of a number of factors that might have potential influences on their learning of Chinese. Lastly, I do not present a case study of the other three participants because they seemed unable to remember certain incidents from their childhood or adolescence and unable to provide more detailed information in their interviews about their learning experiences. An initial summary of the thematic analysis of the data gathered from the three case studies (Brenda, Emily, Tracy) can be found in Appendixes C, D, and E.

Chapter Four describes the findings from these three case studies with respect to the participants' language learning history, motivation for learning HL, and positive influences and constraints on learning HL, and which best represent the purposes of this study, although all six CHL learners are included in a cross-case analysis in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THREE CASE STUDIES OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNING**

In this chapter, the narrative cases studies of three study participants (Brenda, Emily and Tracy) are presented to illustrate the range of perceptions that the CHL learners interviewed in this study hold differently of themselves in relation to learning and/or maintaining their HL, Chinese, and to best capture the results in relation to my research questions. The specific questions addressed in this study included: (a) What factors did the CHL learners report that contributed to their learning of Chinese? and (b) How did the CHL learners describe the influence of these contributory factors on their learning of Chinese? These three participants are therefore representative of the characteristics of and different views held by the six university-level CHL learners in this study.

#### **Brenda**

##### **Summary of Brenda's Language Learning History**

Both of Brenda's parents were born and raised in China; her mother was raised in Beijing and her father in Qingdao. After her parents got married, they moved to many places including Germany and the United States. Finally, they decided to settle in California and have lived there since. Brenda was born in 1995, a year or two after her parents had been living in California. Shortly after she was born, her parents sent her to China so that her paternal grandmother could take care of her, because they did not have much money at the time. Having such a prolonged exposure to the Chinese language at such a young age helped Brenda quickly acquire the language. However, after she returned to the United States, around the age of three and a half, she

rarely used the Chinese language and forgot a large part of it. However, her parents insisted it was “imperative” to maintain her Chinese language ability because it plays a large part in her culture.

By the time Brenda’s parents had her, they both were fluent in English. Because they could speak two languages, Brenda was raised to speak both Chinese and English at the same time at home. “Growing up I have always spoken Chinese and sometimes English if I didn’t know how to express myself in Chinese with my parents because they liked to hear me speaking Chinese,” said Brenda (2015). In addition, they enrolled her in the Chinese American Cooperation Council (CACC) Chinese School around the time she was starting middle school. Brenda attended a weekend Chinese program that only met once a week and assigned the homework all at once, so she would just do the homework and study for the quiz the day beforehand. She recalled never really having to struggle with learning either language.

Compared to other children at her age in her Chinese-American community, Brenda started to learn Chinese later. When she was in middle school, her parents had decided that because she was “Asian” she should learn how to read and write Chinese. To provide Brenda with formal schooling for Chinese, her parents enrolled her in a Chinese program at the CACC Chinese School, which rented half of a high school in her city during weekends to teach Chinese language and host classes related to Chinese culture, such as *Yishu* (art), *Wushu* (martial arts), *Guzheng* (a 21- or 25-stringed plucked instrument somewhat similar to the zither) and *Pingpang* (ping pong). Brenda began her study of the Chinese language at the CACC Chinese School when she was in the sixth grade, which was around 2006 and continued until 2009. After reaching the highest proficiency level, Brenda decided not to go to the Chinese School anymore and focus on her high school studies and college entrance exams.

To conclude, Brenda’s parents had started teaching her the official phonetic system *Pinyin* in order to speak Chinese at a young age. She watched many Chinese TV dramas with her parents, but had no formal schooling in how to write and read Chinese until she started attending

the CACC Chinese School when she was about 12. In addition to being exposed to Chinese from an early age, Brenda had been to China with her parents several times over the past 20 years. Each time she went to China for about two to four weeks, they went to either Beijing or Qingdao for family visiting and traveling. A table of Brenda’s personal timeline in Table 3 shows her “constant” exposure to the Chinese language and culture at home, at school, and in China as noted by herself.

**Table 3 Brenda’s Personal Timeline**

Year	Life/Learning Activities
1995	Born in California. Maternal grandmother came to the United States to help look after Brenda.
1995	Sent to live with paternal grandmother in China.
1998	Came back to the United States.
2000	Went to China for vacation.
2004	Went to China for vacation.
2006	Enrolled in CACC Chinese School Chinese Program.
2009	Stopped enrollment in CACC. Went to China. Began to learn Spanish in high school.
2011	Went to China for vacation.
2012	Stopped learning Spanish in high school.
2013	Went to China for vacation.
2014	Enrolled in two Chinese language courses at GSU.
2015	Enrolled in two Chinese language courses at GSU. Went to China for vacation.

### **Brenda’s Motivations for Learning Her Heritage Language**

#### ***Influenced by Heritage Linguistic Background***

After leaving the CACC Chinese School, the next time that Brenda attended a Chinese class was at GSU as an undergraduate student. Although Brenda had taken four years of Spanish in middle and high school, she decided to continue studying Chinese, instead of Spanish, for the following reasons according to her language autobiography.

Although I had taken two years of Spanish in middle school and another 2 years of Spanish in high school, I had taken enough Spanish classes to know that I didn't want to pursue the language any further. Memorizing the vocabulary was simple because the Spanish vocabulary was so similar to the English language. For example, ambulancia means ambulance in English. But the Spanish grammar was too different than the English grammar and I struggled to learn it. In comparison, Chinese seemed like the better option because I had heritage background in the language, so grammar should come easier. (Brenda, 2015)

As Brenda indicated in this excerpt, she experienced Chinese in a day-to-day setting because her parents communicated with her mostly in Chinese. As long as she frequently hears the Chinese language, it should not be too hard for her to incorporate the grammar she hears into writing sentences. She therefore assumed that learning Chinese would be easier for her because it is part of her heritage linguistic background.

### *Effective Communication with Family Members*

In addition to her heritage linguistic background through her parents, according to Brenda's language autobiography, another reason that she continued to consistently expose herself to the Chinese language after first arriving at GSU was to enable her to communicate effectively with her family members in China.

Having a heritage background definitely influenced my decision of learning Chinese at GSU. I chose Chinese because I felt like it would be the least time consuming language to pick up because I have past experience and knowledge. I was also driven by the fact that I actually have a purpose for learning this language. By learning Chinese, I can better communicate with my family

members back in China. Whereas if I continued learning Spanish I would most likely never use it after I had completed my major requirement and would forget everything. (Brenda, 2015)

Brenda further explained in her interview as well that she chose to take Chinese at GSU for personal reasons.

The majority of my relatives live in China and they're unable to understand English. By taking Chinese in university, I can better my language skills and better my communication with my family. When I call my grandparents, I had a hard time communicating with them because it would take me awhile to think of the word I want to say. I hoped that learning Chinese in university would give me a chance to practice speaking. (Brenda, 2015)

As shown in this excerpt, Chinese, for Brenda, is a form of personal communication. By learning it, she can communicate with her family, and maybe even expand her horizons by getting a job in China later on. This motivated Brenda to continue learning Chinese, which has become her potential minor at GSU. She has completed three semesters of Chinese language courses (i.e., Beginning Chinese for Heritage Speakers, Intermediate Chinese One for Heritage Speakers, and Intermediate Chinese Two for Heritage Speakers) offered by the Department of Asian Studies at GSU and was considering taking the fourth beginning in August 2015.

### **Positive Influences on Brenda's Heritage Language Learning**

Three major contributory factors were found to facilitate Brenda's learning of the Chinese language: early exposure, daily practice, and personal benefits.

My parents communicated with me with English and Chinese since I was born, so I learned both languages at the same time. From a young age I was also partially

raised in China by my grandma. Because of this I had a lot of exposure to the language and picked up Chinese early on in my life. (Brenda, 2015)

As she noted in her language autobiography, having grown up in China until age four, Brenda had a very “early exposure” to the language. Even after returning to the United States, Brenda heard Chinese every day from her parents, which kept her in practice and able to retain the language. Therefore, hearing and speaking Chinese from a very young age in China, and continuously with family members were the first contributory factors that positively influenced her Chinese language development.

Brenda also believes that a lot of “daily practice” has dramatically improved her Chinese language development. “The helpful thing I have found with my experiences learning Chinese is exposure to the language—whether it is speaking or listening—need to happen on a regular basis because otherwise the language will never be mastered”, as excerpted from Brenda’s interview transcript. When Brenda first entered the CACC Chinese School, her speaking skills were considered very limited, and, in fact, she said she stuttered a lot when speaking Chinese. However, since she went to Chinese class every weekend and spoke Chinese to her Chinese teachers who are all from China or Taiwan and only spoke Chinese to each other, she was able to consistently practice the language. As Brenda indicated in her interview, her mother also admitted that her speaking skills got “stronger” after she began her study at the Chinese School.

Lastly, the “benefits” of learning Chinese made Brenda realize that she could apply this language in many other ways other than just being able to communicate with her parents.

In 7th grade we were learning about Chinese history in World History class and there was this assignment...to interpret an essay a woman wrote to her dead husband who [had been] working on the Great Wall of China. The essay was in Chinese, and I was pleased that I could understand bits and pieces of it. I felt

proud that I could understand some of it. Before this experience, I had never been able to apply my skills in Chinese to my everyday life outside of going to Chinese classes and speaking to my parents. (Brenda, 2015)

As shown in this excerpt from Brenda's language autobiography, this rewarding experience later helped her realize that she might be able to use the Chinese language for not only the purpose of communication but also the practical purpose. For example, Brenda mentioned in her interview that she was told by several alumni from School of Business that knowing how to read and write Chinese is a critical skill if she wants to expand her job horizon after college graduation.

### **Constraints on Brenda's Heritage Language Learning**

When Brenda had first started school in the United States, she became more and more exposed to English, so it became more natural for her to speak it. As the years passed, it became easier for her to reply to her parents in English rather than thinking of the word she wanted to use in Chinese. Similarly, her parents spoke to her in Chinese because the language came easier to them

My mom has told me on multiple occasions that I should reply to them in Chinese because it's part of my culture. However, it's difficult to hold an entire conversation in Chinese for an extended amount of time because it's mentally draining so I end up switching back and forth between English and Chinese when she pressures me to speak Chinese. If I can't remember the Chinese word on the spot, my brain will automatically switch back to English. It's very draining mentally. (Brenda, 2015)

As described by Brenda in her interview, she spoke a combination of Chinese and English (Chinglish) with her parents. She now has a difficult time maintaining a long conversation in Chinese because she has to constantly think of how to translate from English to Chinese before she speaks. Her mother now strongly encourages her to reply to her in Chinese more frequently.

In Brenda's language autobiography, as she recalled throughout her Chinese learning experience, there was one particular incident that had discouraged or hindered her from learning this language in some way.

A negative thing that I found while learning Chinese was not being able to speak Chinese fluently like a Chinese and getting really flustered when people identified my broken Chinese after they spoke to me. This was very embarrassing for me and something that discouraged me from speaking Chinese for the rest of the day or even longer. (Brenda, 2015)

Brenda had always been told that her Chinese speaking skills were comparatively strong. Never had she thought that she had some kind of accent in anyway, especially not an American accent. A few years ago when she went back to China to visit her family, and was walking around with her cousin at the largest shopping mall in Beijing, a shop clerk came up and started talking to her cousin whose Chinese speaking skills were very limited. So he pushed the conversation onto Brenda. She recalled feeling that she had done a pretty good job of communicating with the clerk. However, at the end of the conversation, the clerk asked her if she was from the United States because she had an American accent when she spoke Chinese.

The clerk's response really shocked Brenda because she did not have a positive view of American accents, which made her question what she really sounded like when she spoke Chinese. Thus, Brenda had felt very discouraged about speaking to strangers in

China for a while. Although, thinking back on it, her cousin's broken Chinese was probably a very strong indicator that they were not native Chinese speakers and made the clerk listen more closely to try to tell where they were from.

Another negative experience Brenda wrote about in her language autobiography was similar to the previous one about losing her confidence in learning Chinese. When she attended the CACC Chinese School, she was assigned to write a short essay at the end of each lesson as homework. These assignments were given before she understood how to use translation software online, so she had done many translations using a small paperback dictionary. It took her a long time to finish each essay. She put considerable effort into each assignment. However, her reading comprehension skills were "poor" back then, so even if she wrote something using her dictionary, she had a hard time reading it later.

I remember there was this one time when I got frustrated with how long it was taking I just continued to write the assignment, without ever double checking it. When I was done, I had shown my mother to get her to proof read it before I turned it in. She started laughing for a long time saying that what I wrote made absolutely no sense, and though I agreed that some of the translations I did were very funny it still hurt to have her laugh at my hard work like that. (Brenda, 2015)

This experience lowered Brenda's confidence in writing essays in Chinese significantly. It took her a long time to become confident in her Chinese reading and writing skills again. To conclude, having confidence, or not, has strongly affected Brenda's ability to do anything, including learn a language. Being confident in what she is doing unquestionably increases her willingness to keep on learning and improving her Chinese.

## Emily

### Summary of Emily's Language Learning History

Emily's parents were both born and raised in Taiwan, and came to the United States for graduate school. After graduation, they moved to New Jersey where Emily was born in 1996. Chinese is her parents' first language and must have been more "natural" to them since it was the language they spoke to Emily and her younger brother when they were young. As Emily recalled in her language autobiography, her first words were in Chinese, but as soon as she started going to school, where all her teachers and fellow students spoke English, she began to forget Chinese as she revealed in this excerpt.

Prior to attending school, my Chinese was better than my English, to the point that I was put into an ESL [English as A Second Language] program for a short period of time in school. Over time, as I hung out more with my "exclusively American classmates", my English proficiency became much better while my Chinese didn't. (Emily, 2015)

Therefore, Emily's parents decided to send her and her brother to one of the local Chinese schools, the Edward Chinese School, which was held at a nearby middle school and met weekly on Saturdays. Her parents wanted them to "be able to communicate with them and their relatives in Chinese", but Emily said that she and her brother were very "reluctant" to go.

When Emily was about six or seven years old, she did not understand why she had to learn another language. All her teachers and friends at school spoke English, so why she needed to know Chinese was a question she frequently asked her parents. The Chinese school that Emily attended went from kindergarten through fourth grade and began at nine o'clock on Saturday mornings, so she was usually back home around noon. At the Chinese school, Emily first went to

a classroom where a teacher would teach or quiz her. There were about 20 students in a class. The Chinese school also offered additional after-class activities, such as *Taiquandao* (Taekwondo) and *Liuliuqiu* (Yo-Yo), which Emily especially enjoyed as noted in her language autobiography.

“I thought that as long as I understood what my parents were saying, there was no need to spend Saturday mornings at Chinese school. As a child, all I wanted to do over the weekends was play,” Emily explained in her interview as to why she stopped going to Chinese school in the fourth grade after years of “begging” not to go, from kindergarten on. This attitude kept Emily from learning anything throughout her five years at Chinese school. After her parents allowed her to drop out of Chinese school, she felt as if she was “finally free from the grasp of Chinese.”

When I was around five or six, my parents enrolled me in Chinese School.

Learning the language suddenly became more of a chore to me at that time because of all the homework issued from the Saturday classes. I spent a not quite good five or so years attending Chinese School, and I honestly didn't learn much from it. I didn't care about learning how to read or write; however, my *Pinyin* skills were greatly improved. Eventually by the time I hit the fourth grade I stopped attending Chinese School. (Emily, 2015)

As she recalled in her interview, she did not retain “much” or “any Chinese characters” from her five years' attendance at the Edward Chinese School.

To conclude, after dropping out of Edward Chinese School, Emily did not take any more Chinese classes until she entered GSU. To date, she has completed one semester of a Chinese language course (i.e., Beginning Chinese for Heritage Speakers) offered by the Department of Asian Studies at GSU, and was considering taking the second one beginning in August 2015. Aside from learning Chinese, Emily has been to Taiwan with her parents only twice in the past 19 years. Each time she went to Taiwan

for about two weeks, visiting family and friends in different places on the island. Emily's personal timeline below shows her "limited" Chinese language and cultural exposure at home, at school, and in Taiwan as noted by herself.

**Table 4** *Emily's Personal Timeline*

Year	Life/Learning Activities
1996	Born in New Jersey.
2001	Enrolled in the Edward Chinese School.
2006	Continuously enrolled in Edward Chinese School until near the end of the year.
2007	Began to learn French in middle school.
2008	Went to Taiwan for vacation.
2010	Continued to learn French in high school.
2013	Went to Taiwan on vacation.
2015	Enrolled in two Chinese language courses at GSU.

### **Emily's Motivations for Learning Her Heritage Language**

#### ***Become a Fluent Bilingual***

Emily can understand and speak Chinese because her parents speak it to her at home, but it was not until she took a Chinese class at GSU that she learned how to read and write Chinese characters. As she grew older and more mature, she started to realize her need and the value of learning to use Chinese. As shown in the following excerpt from Emily's language autobiography, what stood out to her most in this regard was the summer of 2013, when she went to visit Taiwan.

Not being able to read menus, street signs and store names was obviously a big disadvantage. Additionally, I was unable to connect well with my relatives because of the language barrier. I then realized that I wanted to learn how to read and write Chinese, and that I wanted to be bilingual. (Emily, 2015)

Based on Emily's definition, a fluent bilingual can speak, read, and write two different languages with professional working proficiency. In her interview, she claimed that being bilingual could be helpful to her when she visits Taiwan again or when she applies for jobs in the future.

I think that being bilingual will help if the company needs a translator or if I am ever put in a situation when I need to make a business trip to China. Hopefully, the next time I go back to Taiwan, I will not have to be so reliant on others to survive because I will have my own language skills. (Emily, 2015)

Therefore, in addition to broadening her understanding and use of the Chinese language as a fluent bilingual, Emily believes it will provide her a competitive edge in her future career choices.

### **Positive Influences on Emily's Heritage Language Learning**

There are two major contributory factors that apparently helped Emily learn the Chinese language: daily exposure and being placed in the HL track at GSU.

One thing I think really helps with Chinese is daily exposure, which is something I don't necessarily agree with for other languages. However, Chinese is different in that you don't have an alphabet where you can sound out spellings or pronunciations of words, but you need to have characters memorized. In this regard I believe that "busy work" is actually really important and helpful to learning the language. (Emily, 2015)

As shown in this excerpt from Emily's interview, since she enrolled in a Chinese class that met every day in the spring semester of her freshman year at GSU, "daily exposure" to the language really did allow her to retain what she learned from day to day.

Emily also mentioned that from the first day of her first Chinese class at GSU, she knew that she would enjoy it because she was “placed in the HL track” and all the other students were just like herself: “[they] grew up listening and speaking the Chinese language, but do not have the ability to read or write it.” She said she enjoyed “learning Chinese with students who have a similar family background and learning experience” because they all understood each other’s experiences and struggles. Since how Emily learned Chinese is different from students who have never been exposed to it, the Chinese class specifically designed for heritage speakers of Chinese fit her needs perfectly. She knew that she would face similar challenges to other students in her Chinese class when learning her language.

### **Constraints on Emily’s Heritage Language Learning**

As Emily reported in her interview, waking up early on Saturdays, having extra homework throughout the week, and feeling too shy to answer questions in class caused her to feel as though she was being “forced” to learn Chinese at Chinese school as a child.

I would say the most negative experience I had while learning Chinese was my time in Chinese school. I felt that at the time the only thing holding me back from becoming very good in Chinese was my own negative feelings toward the [Chinese] school. I was at an age where I only thought of having fun on weekends, not sitting down for a few hours every Saturday to learn a language that I felt would never help me in the future. I convinced myself that the language of Chinese was tiresome and something to be avoided. (Emily, 2015)

Furthermore, because she was so resistant to learning, she was never as competent in the Chinese language as her classmates as she revealed in the following excerpt.

Every year, my Chinese school held a speech contest in which each student had to compose a speech relating to a topic and present it in front of the class. The best couple of speeches from every class would then present in front of the whole school, and a winner would be chosen. I had one family friend who was a year younger than me and constantly excelled in these speech contests, always receiving first or second place. Hearing her speeches made my own speeches seem amateur and poorly written. (Emily, 2015)

As Emily indicated, this experience added to her diminished sense of confidence in her language learning, and she gradually lost the motivation to continue.

Within the scope of her nearly five years at Chinese school, this negative experience did not positively enhance her language learning process. However, in the larger scheme of Emily's language learning, her negative experience in her younger years actually motivated her to learn Chinese as a college student.

I think maturity impacted my development of learning Chinese because the reasons that I disliked learning Chinese would not be valid reasons for me to dislike Chinese now. For example, one of the reasons I disliked learning Chinese was the fact that I had to wake up early and go to an extra class. I am now mature enough to not allow extra effort and work be hindrances to learning Chinese.

Another reason I disliked learning Chinese as a child was I wasn't good at it. I am now mature enough to ask for help when I need it and use my competency or incompetency as a reason to improve, not as a stumbling block. (Emily, 2015)

As found in Emily's language autobiography, if she had not felt that those first few years at Chinese school were a waste of time (along with her trips to Taiwan), she might not have been so eager to make up for it by taking a college Chinese class and learning the language to the best of her ability.

Thus, learning Chinese as an undergraduate student was a choice Emily made for herself, which automatically made learning it more enjoyable than in elementary school when it was forced on her, as she explained in her interview.

I think the main factor that impacted my motivation to learn Chinese was confidence. I felt like I would never need it and would never be good at it and therefore wished to stop. However, when I started taking a Chinese class at GSU, I had motivation because I was the one who wanted to learn the language. It was out of my own accord, not my parents'. (Emily, 2015)

Emily noted that she practiced speaking the language all the time in class, which helped her improve her understanding of Chinese grammar. She also learned many new Chinese characters. Although learning how to write and recognize the characters was definitely a big challenge, it was the challenge she wanted. Now, when she sees Chinese characters on signs or magazines or anything, she automatically figures out how many characters she can recognize.

However, "how easy it [is] to forget the characters" as Emily has learned, something that frequently discourages her. Sometimes she wonders how much she is going to retain over the summer or over the years after she has graduated and stopped taking Chinese classes. If she cannot even remember the words she learned at the beginning of the semester, she wonders how much learning is going to help her in the future, in her job as a business person or future travels to Chinese-speaking countries. For now, Emily just tries her best to remember as much as she can and practice reading and writing the language when given the chance.

## Tracy

### Summary of Tracy's Language Learning History

Tracy was born in Massachusetts. Her father is from Quanzhou, China, and her mother is from Chiayi, Taiwan. At two months Tracy was already flying between China, Taiwan, and America with her parents on business and family trips. Her first language was a mixture of Chinese and English. Tracy attended kindergarten in Taiwan for a while, but started school in New York at age five. Her parents spoke both Chinese and Taiwanese at home; they also have a background in Japanese from college. Therefore, she spoke Chinese or Taiwanese at home but upon leaving the house would switch to English.

Growing up at home where Chinese is often spoken, I remember the first word I could recognize on paper were the Chinese characters for “mother” taught by my mom. Through the years, the Chinese language has followed me in whatever I do with my parents. I can even recall being in preschool, sitting at my desk, trying to introduce my Chinese name in English to my teacher. My parents and I ended up with the name “Tracy”. (Tracy, 2015)

In Tracy's language autobiography, she said that her first Chinese teacher was her mother. Additionally she learned Cantonese from her babysitters while growing up. In order for Tracy to communicate with her grandparents in Chinese or Taiwanese, although she had early exposure to at least four languages, the one rule she grew up with was to “speak either Chinese or Taiwanese at home” as insisted by her father.

Tracy's parents never considered enrolling her in community Chinese school or weekend Chinese school to learn Chinese since it was already the language that she and her parents maintained at home, as Tracy explained in her interview.

I grew up in a Chinese-speaking family. For me, Chinese has generally been the primary form of oral communication between my parents and me. As a result, I have been learning to speak and comprehend Chinese since I was very little.

(Tracy, 2015)

Growing up at home speaking Chinese regularly, Tracy never thought much about it because she could easily and quickly switch between Chinese and English. Looking back now, she said she is really glad that her father had the rule of only speaking Chinese or Taiwanese at home when she was growing up. Now she sees many of her peers struggling to speak Chinese with their parents and grandparents and is truly glad she can still communicate with hers in their language. “My speaking remained at a decent level because I constantly practiced while living at home with my parents. It was not until I reached college that I truly buckled down and tried to learn Chinese”, meaning more than speaking it, as Tracy further explained in her interview.

To conclude, Tracy’s father used to make flashcards and newspaper cutouts for her to practice Chinese, but her parents never considered putting her in a Chinese school to learn the language. Since Chinese was already the language that Tracy and her parents maintained at home, her parents found it “unnecessary for her to go through extra schooling to learn Chinese.” Besides speaking Chinese at home, Tracy did not really have any formal learning of Chinese until she attended GSU. Although she did not have a problem with speaking and listening, she did not know how to read or write Chinese, which she learned in her college courses. Tracy’s personal timeline below shows the best part of the learning experiences she gained from frequently traveling between China and United States in order to advance her skills in swimming and playing violin.

**Table 5 Tracy's Personal Timeline**

Year	Life/Learning Activities
1993	Born in Massachusetts.
1993	Went to Taiwan to live with maternal grandmother.
1994	Went to China to stay with paternal grandparents.
1995	Back to Taiwan and stayed for kindergarten.
1998	Back to the United States to start elementary school.
2000	Went to China for swimming and violin training.
2001	Went to Taiwan for vacation. Went to China for swimming and violin training.
2002	Went to China for swimming and violin training.
2009	Went to China for swimming and violin training.
2012	Went to China for vacation.
2013	Enrolled in two Chinese language courses at GSU.
2014	Went to Taiwan for vacation. Enrolled in two Chinese language courses at GSU.
2015	Enrolled in one Chinese language course at GSU.

### **Tracy's Motivations for Learning Her Heritage Language**

#### *Effective Communication with Family Members*

It was not until Tracy's sophomore year in college that she decided to take Chinese just as a refresher course to learn some basics, and soon decided to stick with it throughout the rest of her years at GSU.

I began in the level 002 Chinese class, and there I re-fortified my skills with *Pinyin* and basic reading. The class gave me the confidence to attempt to learn Chinese again, and from there I returned to the Chinese program by enrolling in the 003. I found that learning Chinese seemed easier to me, and I picked up reading and writing a lot faster than I had at home when I was younger. I suppose that the major difference was that now I had a reason and desire to learn Chinese.

(Tracy, 2015)

As excerpted from Tracy's language autobiography, she explained why she decided to learn how to read and write Chinese.

Chinese has generally been the primary form of oral communication between my parents and me. But learning Chinese wasn't something that my parents had asked me to do. I just decided it was time for me to learn more about Chinese than just speaking and listening. I also thought that knowing how to speak and listen a certain language was not quite enough, I wanted to be able to recognize words. (Tracy, 2015)

Learning how to read and write Chinese helps Tracy build a better understanding of the Chinese language and become "not illiterate" in Chinese as noted in her interview.

### ***Influenced by Heritage Cultural Background***

As to her freshman year, entering GSU was a bit of a cultural shock for Tracy. Starting school in New York at the age of five, she did not really think twice about people's backgrounds or where they came from. However, after arriving at GSU she felt as if she had to keep reminding people that she was from New York and knew English.

I remember freshmen year, I felt really disconnected from everything. Back home I had my group of friends that was pretty diverse, but among the group there were Asian Americans that grew up in a similar background as I did. I really wanted to connect with some of those people. (Tracy, 2015)

After the first year of college life, as noted by Tracy, she has learned to be more understanding of cultural and linguistic differences since she has been exposed to them all the time. It was her cultural shock that made her realize she likes to learn the language to associate with the people who can speak it. She also believes that each opportunity she takes to learn more of the language

will lead to more opportunities in the future. If she had not overcome her cultural shock as freshman, her personal life would have taken a different turn. Now she truly feels glad to be a Chinese speaker and embraces the cultural diversity around her that has contributed to it.

I know this because my current level of Chinese has granted me so many things that I appreciate. I can communicate with my parents effectively; I can communicate with other native speakers both in China, Taiwan and around the world, wherever I might see them; and I can engage in the culture of China and Taiwan, be it regarding celebrations, food, or whatever cool thing that is happening right now. (Tracy, 2015)

In Tracy's interview, she stated that the Chinese language has always been part of her life. Her parents speak it, her relatives speak it, and some of her good friends even speak it. She believes that to continue learning Chinese is a great opportunity that will come with even greater rewards. Upon her graduation from GSU in 2015, she had successfully completed five semesters of Chinese language courses (i.e., Beginning Chinese for Heritage Speakers, Intermediate Chinese One for Heritage Speakers, Intermediate Chinese Two for Heritage Speakers, Advanced Chinese One, and Advanced Chinese Two).

### **Positive Influences on Tracy's Heritage Language Learning**

Several times when Tracy visited her paternal grandparents in China, they reminded her "how important it was to not forget one's own native language." On one of her visits to China, her grandfather had one of his friends come over and teach her *Pinyin*. It did not seem too hard for her since it had some resemblance to English. During her short stay in kindergarten in Taiwan, she learned some very basic and simple words, but they did not stick with her as she recalled.

There were also several times that Tracy's parents tried to teach her some simple words. She remembered when her father created some flashcards with Chinese and English words to teach her to recognize Chinese characters. She also remembered several times when her mother read Chinese storybooks to her or cut out articles written by Chinese children in *Pinyin* for her to read. Even though none of what she learned at a young age really stayed with her until she began to develop an interest in retaining her native language as an undergraduate student, Tracy advocated that "parental involvement" was one of the most significant factors in her HL development as a heritage speaker of Chinese.

As Tracy described in her language autobiography, her parents were always quite supportive of her wanting to learn Chinese.

I started texting them in Chinese. There are a lot of times where I would have to use google translate to respond to them. Even with the translation they still didn't understand, but they would call me to figure it out and correct me. There are times where I would mess up on one word because of the *Pinyin*, and my parents would just send back the correct form of word. (Tracy, 2015)

When Tracy put herself down for not being able to figure out a word, her mother was always very supportive in saying that she was doing really well already for someone who was born in the United States with no prior background in learning Chinese before college.

Her language autobiography revealed another significant factor that contributed to Tracy's learning of Chinese, which was learning about "Chinese culture" along with the language.

I feel that for today's generation, the most important factor in terms of learning Chinese is the desire to connect with the culture. As you can see, there are more and more people becoming interested in learning Chinese because of the rapidly expanding economy in China at the moment. However, I feel that a genuine

necessity for anyone really wanting to learn Chinese is the appreciation of the culture. (Tracy, 2015)

Tracy's grandparents and relatives mostly live in China or Taiwan, and her family visits them all frequently. When she reached high school, she began to appreciate China and Taiwan more for their culture. Going to China during her high school years was what convinced her that she needed to start learning Chinese again. As much as she enjoyed the culture, it bothered her that she was unable to read road signs or menus. She could speak to Chinese people as easily as she could speak to her own parents, because she has always spoken Chinese at home. However, not being able to read or write was a severe handicap that made her feel out of place. So when she got to GSU, she decided to start learning Chinese again. She wanted to become more fluent. Most importantly, she wanted to be able to one day live in Taiwan. "Thinking about Taiwan makes me smile. I love America, but Taiwan is my second home. It is a place inside my heart. I wish one day my Chinese is good enough to live there" (Tracy, 2015).

According to Tracy in her interview, being "placed in a small class in the HL track" and being "with people that share the same interest in learning their parent's native language" were also encouraging.

The classes [in the HL track] were all fairly small, considering how big some intro classes were during my sophomore year, it was a big change walking into a class with only 8 students where everyone knew who everyone was. It was refreshing knowing that the professor knows who you are and over time, the class becomes closer. (Tracy, 2015)

Moreover, since Chinese class at GSU met every day of the week, it helped Tracy to constantly speak the language and be tested on it.

Being away at college has caused me to slowly forget some terms in Chinese or mix up some word usage. But since there is an allotted time every day that forces

me to speak in only Chinese, my speaking skills didn't become hindered. (Tracy, 2015)

Overall, as Tracy recalled in her interview, her three years of Chinese learning at GSU have greatly improved her skills in reading and writing Chinese. She could honestly say that if she had not taken Chinese as a class as a college student, she would not have been able to make such a big improvement over the years.

### **Constraints on Tracy's Heritage Language Learning**

I really dislike the fact that I have to memorize so many characters, which is not all that bad. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep words in my vocabulary if I am not using them very often. So, certain characters are easy to remember because they are used so often, but many times there are obscure characters that I never use. (Tracy, 2015)

As Tracy commented in her interview, her biggest hindrance to learning Chinese is “the lack of opportunities to use it.” Unlike English, which is her predominant language from living in the United States, she does not use Chinese every moment of her life. Without “prolonged exposure” and “constant usage”, some Chinese is just forgotten because it is simply not used at all. Even her parents, for whom Chinese is their first language, have forgotten many words and phrases from disuse. Being a character-based language, Chinese is a hard one to read and an even harder to learn how to write. Given the thousands of character and stroke combinations, only constant practice and use can preserve it in one's mind. Thus, Tracy considered writing and reading Chinese as the hardest to learn and retain.

“Because many times if you need to know the language, you will try harder to communicate with others and this is a very strong effect”, as Tracy observed. Therefore, being in an atmosphere where Chinese is sometimes needed is the best way to learn Chinese. Tracy also advocated that being in an environment where people are constantly speaking the language helps reinforce it.

In conclusion, all three participants seemed to have acquired their HL at home as a child, simply by speaking with their parents and grandparents while growing up, and only using the Chinese language at home. Although they were all raised in a Chinese community, they seemed to differ significantly in terms of their particular learning trajectories. For example, there were major differences in their exposure to their heritage language whether at home or in the community school, reaction to their heritage language after their dominant language replaced their primary language, and a strong or weak cultural connection with their HL. Furthermore, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, the three cases differed by several dimensions of their language learning.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS**

The data analysis for this study revealed four significant influences on the six participants' development in their learning of CHL: early exposure to their HL, parental involvement in promoting their child's use of their HL, their community-based HL schooling, and the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves. The CHL learners in this study demonstrated the specific CHL characteristics in regard to learning Chinese, discussed in Chapter Two, compared with those of non-CHL learners. However, this study found that the CHL learners in this study did not always follow the same path through their development of CHL.

#### **Early Exposure to Their Heritage Language**

The literature (Jia & Bayley, 2008; Xiao, 2008a) has shown that one of the characteristics of CHL learners is their childhood exposure to their HL. In this study, all six CHL learners had been exposed to the Chinese language at an early age. However, several differences may have influenced the quality and quantity of their early language exposure and acquisition.

From the time all six CHL learners were born, their parents had communicated with them either in Chinese or in another dialect, and sometimes English, so they acquired at least two languages at the same time. However, if the parents' first language was other than Chinese, it also seemed to play an important role in their children's language acquisition.

Both Amy's mother and Teagan's father grew up in Fujian, China, emigrating to the United States in their late twenties. Therefore, Amy and Teagan mainly spoke Fuzhounese, another dialect of Chinese, in their early childhood. As a small child, Amy could only speak

Fuzhounese, which is her mother's first language, although Chinese is her father's. However, because Chinese is widely spoken by more Chinese people than Fuzhounese, her mother decided to register her and her brother for Saturday Chinese classes to formally learn their HL.

Amy remembered that when she and her family went back to Fujian to visit all their families, including cousins that she had never known she had on her father's side, she had a language barrier.

In China, people mainly speak Mandarin [Chinese] now except for some villages that still speak Fuzhounese. My cousins only spoke Mandarin [Chinese] because their parents only taught them Mandarin [Chinese] instead of Fuzhounese. If I say anything in Fuzhounese, they wouldn't understand. (Amy, 2015)

As Amy wrote in her language autobiography, it was difficult to converse in either her cousins' Chinese or her Fuzhounese, and that she had to beg her mother or her aunt to help her translate what she wanted to say and do with her cousins.

It was because of the language barrier between Amy and her cousins that she began to learn Chinese, finding it interesting to learn another language other than Fuzhounese.

Ever since then [her visit to Fujian], I have been begging my mom to buy me cartoon movies that can teach me Mandarin [Chinese]. The movies turned out to be really helpful because my mom told me that I have never been so serious in studying and learning the language. I believe that it is great to learn a new language because that makes me to be more part of my culture and to see what my parents grow up from. (Amy, 2015)

However, after studying Chinese for four years, Amy still could not speak fluent sentences in Chinese, only a few basic words. Her mother then decided not to make her and her brother go to Saturday Chinese class anymore. As Amy recalled, her learning to

speak the Chinese language progressed very slowly or not at all after she stopped attending Saturday Chinese class.

Similarly, one of Teagan's parents only speaks Fuzhounese, not Chinese. Before the age of 10, she did not know how to speak Chinese: "My father comes from a small province in China called Foochow, Fuzhou, where the most commonly spoken dialect is Fuzhounese. Therefore, growing up, I mostly learned to speak this language," she said. Beginning in kindergarten, Teagan primarily studied English as her second language, and eventually lost most of her Fuzhounese speaking ability, as she was encouraged to learn English to keep up with her fellow American students.

When Teagan turned 10 in April of 2004, her parents encouraged her to join a Chinese Sunday school in the local area, where many other American-born Chinese children at her age joined together to learn Chinese. On their first day at Sunday school, she and her sister went together, with much excitement and high hopes of learning their home language. The first hour of the day, all the boys participated in a *Taiji* (Tai Chi) class, while the girls participated in a dance class. Afterwards, they spent the next three hours in a classroom setting. However, because Teagan had never studied Chinese and did not know how to write in it, she experienced "humiliation" when someone in her class said, "You are a Chinese girl but you don't understand Chinese." After class, when she climbed into her mother's car, she broke down in tears, explaining that someone had laughed at her in her classroom. The memory of this incident has never left Teagan. When her parents asked her to continue with other Sunday schools, or even a private tutor, she always said "no."

Tom, whose father is Chinese and mother is American, was told by his father the importance of Chinese as a powerful tool in his future career. Growing up in a household that was divided by language from the very start, his mother and grandmother both spoke to him in English in an effort to increase his understanding of it. Although his father was not excluded from

these conversations after attending graduate school in the United States, where he would have had to use English, his side of the family did not speak English at all.

At Tom's father's insistence, he enrolled in an American kindergarten where he was instructed in English, with the option to take an additional class in Chinese. This was still the case even when he entered first grade in elementary school. Outside of school, he attended a Sunday Chinese school for children, which focused on learning Chinese through the use of *Pinyin*. He also had a private tutor whom he and his family visited for an hour or two at a time for extra help in reading, writing, and speaking in Chinese. Tom said,

Even though I dreaded going, my father still pushed me through Saturday school and meeting with the private tutor. My father constantly stressed that I should never give up learning the language because by the time I was old enough to work, Mandarin [Chinese] would be beyond crucial, not only to me but to the world. (Tom, 2015)

Even with all this extra instruction, Tom felt that his language skills still suffered. Living in a small town where not as many people spoke Chinese, English was becoming more and more prevalent in his environment. Chinese became increasingly a language of study, rather than a language of everyday conversation. Like many children, he detested any work outside of school that he did not have to do.

In contrast to Amy whose mother mainly spoke Fuzhounese, Teagan whose father mainly spoke Fuzhounese, and Tom whose mother only spoke English, the other three CHL learners' first parental language was Chinese, thus their early exposure was only to Chinese. Nevertheless, all six CHL learners in this study had been exposed to at least two languages at an early age, which is associated with several strengths as indicated by Barker (2001) and Marcos (1998). For example, bilinguals are able to communicate with more people of different linguistic backgrounds, access greater resources of different languages, and have better job opportunities (Baker, 2001;

Marcos, 1998). In addition, there is evidence of cognitive benefits, including creative thinking, greater creativity and meta-linguistic skills (Baker, 2001; Marcos, 1998)

In addition to being exposed to two languages during childhood in the United States, Brenda and Tracy were partially raised in China and Taiwan with their grandparents until age four or five. They were both born in the United States, but sent to China or Taiwan when they were very young. Since they stayed in the Chinese-speaking countries for some time, they learned how to speak Chinese first and were immersed in Chinese culture at a young age. Their early exposure to the target language environment also partially influenced their development of a strong Chinese identity as described previously.

### **Parental Involvement in Promoting Heritage Language**

Several studies have revealed that certain familial factors, such as immigrant family background (Xiao, 2006, 2008a), parental views (Xiao, 2006, 2008a), and a home literacy environment (Xiao, 2008b) can contribute to the CHL learner's language development. Among these factors, parental involvement plays a significant role, illustrating how these learners' parents contribute to maintaining their children's HL, whether the involvement is direct or indirect. However, the results of this study showed a negative relationship between parental involvement and their children's attitudes toward formal HL schooling.

As an exception in these cases, Tracy's parents considered learning Chinese to be additional work for her if she went to a community Chinese school or weekend Chinese school; therefore, they preferred teaching her at home themselves. For instance, they started teaching her *Pinyin* using the instructional materials her grandparents sent from China. As Tracy recalled in her language autobiography,

I've always loved that Chinese is something I share with my family, particularly my parents. We always sit and talk in Chinese and communicate well with each other. I never feel embarrassed about my speaking when I am with them. They will correct me if my pronunciation is wrong or I used a phrase incorrectly. I think my Chinese always improves because I am forced to use Chinese at home.

(Tracy, 2015)

With the involvement of parents and other caregivers in Tracy's learning of Chinese, she was always very proud when she spoke with the older generations in her family, such as those on her father's side in China. The elders were always impressed that Tracy could speak and listen in Chinese since she had grown up in the United States. Although they were not living in a Chinese-speaking country, Tracy's parents still raised her with both languages, Chinese and English, and continued to maintain the traditions from where they were born in China and Taiwan.

In addition to Tracy, the other five CHL learners mentioned how their parents supported their learning of Chinese, especially if one did not speak the language him or herself. First, Brenda and Emily were encouraged by their parents to speak in Chinese while they were at home. However, having been raised in a country where Chinese is not the dominant language, the only people that the CHL learners spoke Chinese with were their own parents. They are able to communicate with simple phrases such as "How are you" or "I am hungry." As they grew older, they were able to communicate more effectively; however, their vocabulary never really expanded according to their age and developmental level as previously indicated by Campbell and Rosenthal (2000), and mentioned by Brenda in her interview.

The conversations I would have with my parents in Chinese never really had any substance because I never learned how to use the appropriate words before I attended CACC Chinese School. For the most part our conversations ended up being in Ch-English, half in Chinese and half in English. I would place several

English words in every sentence I spoke because it had become a bad habit.

(Brenda, 2015)

The CHL learners realize that although they can speak and understand Chinese, their overall comprehension of the language was not fully developed. Most of the time when Emily tried to have a conversation in Chinese with her parents, they needed to stop and translate certain phrases into English to make sure they properly interpreted what she said.

Amy, Teagan, and Tom's first home language is not Chinese, as their parents chose to use either their own HL, Fuzhounese, or the socially dominant language, English, in their homes. Therefore, these parents placed even greater emphasis on creating a language-rich environment for their children. However, this type of parental involvement might have possible negative effects on these CHL learners' attitudes toward HL schooling. Take Teagan for example: she was encouraged to attend Chinese school by her parents. Since she was a new student, she felt she did not fit in on the first day as noted in her language autobiography, and soon learning Chinese became very "painful" rather than "pleasurable."

Once we entered the classroom and each student had taken their seat, we were all asked to sing the Chinese national anthem. Again my sister and I were the outcasts and were not able to sing along. We both glanced at each other and chuckled, while we mouthed "watermelon" to the tune of the Chinese national anthem, in order to fake lip sync the song. But we were both called out by the teacher for giggling in class and not singing along, which for me at least was very discouraging. That was one moment of the day where I felt completely out of place. (Teagan, 2015)

Although Teagan only stayed in this Chinese school for one day, she refused to go to any other Chinese school, and tended to become less interested in learning Chinese, which do not give her pleasure.

Tom had a similar experience to Teagan when his family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, when he was in the fifth grade. There, his parents enrolled him in a new Chinese school. As he remembered in his language autobiography, although he had loved his first Chinese school, he “hated” this one:

I was new and I had no friends here. Class was boring and tedious. I felt like I didn't fit in, and soon learning Chinese became more painful than it was fun. By the time I was in high school, I had resorted to temper tantrums and whining to convince my parents to let me quit. (Tom, 2015)

As seen in excerpts from each CHL learner's language autobiography and interview transcripts, there are some distinct advantages to parental involvement in promoting HL by building their children's language awareness from an early age, solely speaking the HL at home, and providing an out-of-home language environment. Contrarily, there are possible negative influences from parental involvement in CHL learners' development or maintenance of their HL. For example, their negative emotions arising out of the school experience led to lack of learning interest or school refusal.

### **Community-Based Heritage Language Schooling**

In 1886, the first Chinese heritage language school built in the United States was in San Francisco (Liu, 2010). For a long time, Chinese communities in the United States have been continuously organized after-school or weekend programs to pass on their HL and culture from generation to generation. An Asia Society analysis in 2010 reported that more than 750 community-based CHL programs were found throughout the United States, and approximately 150,000 students annually enroll in these programs to retain their Chinese language and culture (Asia Society, 2010). These programs are undoubtedly a potential helpful source for CHL

learners who endeavor to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage (Fishman, 2001; Kelleher, 2008b; Wiley, 2001). However, the findings of this study showed that although all CHL learners hold positive attitudes toward Chinese language and culture, some hold negative view about HL schooling.

As previously noted, Brenda's parents enrolled her in CACC Chinese School when she was starting middle school. She enrolled later than most other children, so she was comparatively older. Since she was always tall, she was also taller than her classmates. She felt "embarrassed" that she was so much older than everyone else and at the same level of children a few years younger than she. Therefore, she felt "pressured" to learn better than other children. Because she was unaccustomed to the pressure of being a model student, she did not put much effort into her learning. Moreover, feeling pressured also contributed to her lack of motivation towards language learning.

When I was taking a Chinese program during middle school, I wasn't motivated to do well in the class or learn. Because of that, I just completed assignments and memorized vocab words the night before. Even though I received good marks on my assignments and quizzes, I retained very little of the information because I had learned it last minute and forgot everything quickly after. (Brenda, 2015)

In Brenda's interview, although she did not reflect strong negative attitudes toward CACC Chinese School, there is likely a relationship between her lack of motivation toward her learning of Chinese and her limited learning outcomes.

Emily had been studying Chinese at the Edward Chinese School from kindergarten to fourth grade. The class began at nine o'clock on Saturdays and had three components. At nine, the boys had martial arts class and the girls had a dance class, then at 10 all the students went to their respective classrooms to learn the Chinese language. After 11, there were after-class activities that everyone could attend. Emily attended this school for five years before quitting.

Although in Emily's interview, she admitted that her *Pinyin* skills were greatly improved and her understanding of Chinese culture increasingly broadened over her five years of HL schooling, she did not retain "much" or "any Chinese characters" after she quit Chinese school.

I learned a few Chinese words and was able to learn about the Chinese culture through after-class activities, but I didn't retain very much or any Chinese characters. Attending Chinese Saturday school from kindergarten to 4th grade must have been a little helpful since at least I had some experience writing and reading Chinese characters. (Emily, 2015)

Furthermore, as shown in her interview as well, Emily held more negative attitudes toward participating in community-based CHL programs.

It got to the point where I started to hate going to Chinese school, started to find ways to cut corners while learning and really cheated myself out of a lot of learning. I couldn't understand why I, and by extension, people of Chinese descent were always subjected to many more stringent demands than American students. So by 4th grade I convinced my mom that I wanted to quit Chinese school. (Emily, 2015)

As Emily asserted in her interview, the only motivation for her to go to Chinese school was to collect coupons that were given for answering questions in Chinese in class to exchange for toys after every two to three weeks. Without sufficient motivation as a young CHL learner, she tended to feel completely discouraged by her perceived difficulty with the language and had little interest in learning it, producing her negative attitudes toward community-based HL schooling.

Similar to Emily's negative attitudes, Teagan and Tom showed even stronger ones toward community-based HL schooling. After the first day of Chinese Sunday school, Teagan refused to go to any Chinese school due to her feelings of unfamiliarity and humiliation.

Although Tom continued to learn Chinese in two different Chinese Sunday schools for almost eight years, he also “declined” to go anymore for three reasons.

First, he had encountered teachers who got easily frustrated and sometimes even violent when students could not understand them.

I remember them yelling and threatening to hit me with a ruler when they told me to do something and I would simply sit there because I just couldn't understand their commands. In addition, the unfortunate thing for me was that I didn't know how to say “I don't understand you” in Chinese. (Tom, 2015)

Second, besides these scary moments, he always felt lost in class.

I remember always trying to sit in the back and praying that the teacher wouldn't pick me. It was a quite traumatizing period in my life. Luckily, all the years while I was learning Chinese in my Sunday Chinese school, those moments had failed to relive. (Tom, 2015)

Lastly, the time he spent on participating in his second Chinese Sunday school evidently did not build his confidence in learning Chinese either.

When I was in middle school, some of my classmates would be amazed by the fact that I was able to speak and understand another language. There were often times that they ask me to teach them how to say simple phrases in Chinese, and I would happily oblige. Other times, they would even ask me to teach them how to write their made up names in Chinese. However, what they didn't know was the fact that my knowledge of the Chinese language was very limited and superficial even though I went to Chinese school. (Tom, 2105)

According to the excerpts from Tom's interview, negative attitudes toward community-based CHL programs among CHL learners for different reasons such as lack of learning interest or motivation as a young learner and negative emotions arising out of the school experience also

demonstrate their views of their HL, Chinese. They may have positive or negative views about their heritage culture as well. Regarding the different kinds of attitudes towards community-based HL schooling that they expressed, they can hinder their HL learning in general, often directly.

### **The Agentive Role of Chinese Heritage Language Learners**

The last significant influence highlighted by the findings of this study is that the six CHL learners took ownership in acquiring Chinese as engaged learners. In other words, they were not simply passive recipients in learning the language.

Brenda's parents were heavily influenced by their co-workers in their decision to enroll her in CACC Chinese School for almost three years. With many more unhappy experiences than pleasant ones, she had negative feelings towards learning Chinese and tried to avoid it. However, when she first arrived at GSU and realized that she had to take a language class for her major, she immediately decided that she wanted to take Chinese for her FL requirement. "I had made my own decision for myself at that time," said Brenda in her interview.

When I was taking Chinese in University, it was important to me to get good grades and do well in the class because it directly affected my GPA, so I put in a lot more effort and had a better attitude toward the class. I was more willing to complete the assignments before they were due, and go over the questions to make sure they were right. Because of this, I remembered a lot more of the vocab I had learned previously. (Brenda, 2015)

Taking Chinese classes at the university was extremely time-consuming for Brenda. Between the constant vocabulary quizzes and written assignments, it can be argued that Chinese was the class that took the most time out of her entire course work as a university student. Despite the fact that

learning Chinese required a lot of practice on her own time outside of class, she has enjoyed learning it and felt rewarded when she studied it.

In the case of Emily, when as a child she began to learn and absorb everything in English and gradually forgot Chinese, her parents sent both her and her brother to Chinese School. Thus, she felt as though she was being “forced” to learn Chinese at Chinese School. She disliked having to wake up early to go to Chinese School and having extra homework to do throughout the week. Because of her resistance to Chinese School, she was also very reluctant to learn Chinese. “I didn’t put very much effort into homework or learning,” Emily said in her interview. However, after her trip to Taiwan with her family in the summer of 2013, she immediately changed her mind.

I didn’t want to simply look Chinese, I wanted to be able to read and write and speak it well. Whether a Chinese-American pursues a Chinese education is his or her own choice, I personally wanted to fluently speak both languages. So, I came to realize that I wanted to learn Chinese for myself, and not just to please my parents. (Emily, 2015)

This is the main reason that Emily enrolled herself in a Chinese class in the spring semester of her freshman year at GSU. She decided to learn her HL of her own accord, not by her parents’ wishes or expectation. As she elaborated,

If someone dislikes learning about a subject, then they will naturally be less receptive to it. I find that it was much easier to learn Chinese when I took a Chinese class in college because it was my choice to learn Chinese and I wanted to learn it for my own benefit. (Emily, 2015)

As noted in Emily’s interview, because she made her own decision to learn Chinese at a more mature age, she now feels satisfied with her choice and learning progress. She believes that

mastering a language is a non-stop process that “begins after birth and continues throughout life.”

Language acquisition, as Emily understands it, takes a long time.

Similar to Brenda and Emily, Tracy began to learn Chinese formally in the classroom in the spring semester of her sophomore year at GSU.

I decided sophomore year of college that I wanted to learn how to read and write Chinese. It wasn't something that my parents had asked me to do; I just decided it was time for me to learn more about Chinese than just speaking and listening. I remember the first day of Chinese class and how intimidating it was, being told I didn't belong in the regular class and had to be part of the heritage speaker class.

(Tracy, 2015)

Overall, being placed in the HL track has helped Tracy improve on her Chinese language skills. She was “happy” that she decided to continue with a Chinese minor. Besides providing an atmosphere where she can practice Chinese, learning the language in the classroom has also helped her to work on her social speaking skills. “Being able to express myself in front of a class frequently really helps me with that,” she said in her interview.

Next, in the case of Teagan who was hurt and discouraged after her first day of Chinese Sunday School as a 10-year-old girl and subsequently refused to go to any Chinese school. “I had no reason and desire to learn Chinese,” Teagan said in her interview. However, after she entered GSU, she decided to make an effort to improve her Chinese language abilities after careful consideration.

When I came to college, I thought long and hard about learning Chinese once again. Though I had gone through some tough experiences, I did genuinely want to connect with my elderly relatives. I also know that China is becoming an important country especially in terms of business, which is my intended major.

Knowing Chinese would allow me to stand out among my many peers. The

experiences I have gone through definitely pushed me to learn Chinese, because it makes sense for me to know Chinese. (Teagan, 2015)

In Teagan's language autobiography, she said she is hoping to eventually get to the point where she can pass as a native Chinese when speaking with other Chinese speakers. Although the going has been fairly slow so far, she said she has been making noticeable improvements in her Chinese language abilities.

As Tom indicated in his language autobiography, he chose to take a Chinese class at GSU because he had been speaking Chinese almost his entire life, and it seemed like the right choice to continue.

Continuing a language is for both an academic and business purpose.

Academically, it is important for me to stay learning a language because it is not something everyone can do. Also, taking Chinese is important for the future, if I begin a career in another country, another language could come in handy. For international business trips or jobs, companies and corporations all over will need people who speak other languages to conduct business. Knowing more Chinese than another potential worker could greatly help my chances in getting the position over another less qualified person. (Tom, 2015)

After two semesters of learning Chinese at GSU, he found his own persistence was making a true effort to learn Chinese. Although he did not use the Chinese language too much outside of the classroom, the frequency of his Chinese class and the amount of coursework it entailed certainly helped advance him on the path to becoming a fluent speaker of Chinese.

In this chapter, the findings from this study revealed different learning trajectories among six university-level CHL learners. To answer the research questions, there are several important factors that have shown positive or negative influences on a number of CHL learners' learning of

Chinese in this study. The summary of findings and discussion is presented in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This chapter presents the findings in relation to the research questions addressed by this study. First, I discuss the meaning of the findings in relation to prior and current research. Second, I suggest the implications for teaching university-level CHL learners and note the limitations of the study, and, finally, based on the results and findings, I offer suggestions for future research on heritage learning and language teaching.

#### **Summary and Discussion of the Findings**

The goal of this study was to explore the contributory factors to HL learning as perceived by six CHL learners at a university in the Northeastern United States. To answer the research questions, I analyzed data from these students' written language autobiographies and individual and focus-group interviews.

#### **Factors Contributing to the CHL's Learning of Chinese**

To the first research question regarding which factors contributed to the CHL learners' learning of Chinese, data from their autobiographies and interviews identified a number of strong influences on the development or maintenance of their CHL as follow.

### ***Heritage Cultural/Linguistic Background***

Growing up in a family or community where there is frequent or daily contact with the HL provides HLLs with first-hand connections to their cultural and linguistic heritage. The findings from the data in this study revealed that cultural heritage and/or linguistic background made it possible for the CHL learners, who were mostly raised in the United States, to gain early exposure to their HL, Chinese, whether in a target language country or not. For example, Brenda who is now 20 years old was born in the United States but was sent back to China when she was about one to two months old. Thus, Brenda acquired Chinese first and was totally immersed in Chinese culture at a very young age. After she came back to the United States when she was almost four, she continued speaking Chinese at home with her parents and their friends. Tracy, who is 22 years old now, grew up in a household in the U.S. that spoke only Chinese or Taiwanese because her parents required her to speak only her HL at home. In addition to the “language requirement” at home, Tracy attended kindergarten in Taiwan, being immersed in the Chinese language and culture at an early age. Since exposure to the HL from a young age is crucial to mastering a language later on, having a heritage linguistic or cultural background can undoubtedly be seen as a beneficial resource for its speakers, as Scamera (2003) argued.

### ***Parental Involvement in HL Maintenance***

Parental involvement was found to significantly affect their child’s use of their HL in a positive way, according to the participants in this study. It is well known that parents are naturally involved in their children’s language acquisition and development. All parents of the CHL learners in this study encouraged their children to maintain their Chinese language ability in order to at least be able to effectively communicate with their extended family members who have

limited English proficiency or do not speak English at all. These parents purposefully spoke Chinese at home to their children, and taught them the official phonetic system *Pinyin* and basic Chinese characters at a young age. Some parents whose first language is not Chinese intentionally created a language-rich environment for their children outside the family, such as enrolling their children in community-based Chinese schools or programs. However, not every CHL learner was highly motivated, and some were even resistant to learning Chinese due to their lack of interest or motivation as a young learner, and negative emotions or attitudes arising from their Chinese school experience.

### ***Personal Motivation of the CHLs***

Personal motivation has always been recognized as one of the key factors that contributes to the development or maintenance of CHL by CHL learners (Chen, 2013; Wen, 2011; Xiao, 2008a; Xie, 2011). Although the reason CHL learners in this study chose to regain or retain their HL varied from person to person, one common purpose was to be able to use Chinese for social (Brenda, Tracy, Amy, Teagan) or career purposes (Emily, Tom). The findings in this study supported Carreira and Kagan's survey (2011) results which demonstrated that the reasons for learning HLs by HLLs were "to communicate better with family and friends in the United States" or "to communicate better with family and friends abroad" and "for a career or job" (p. 57). Therefore, since these reasons are CHL learners' motivations for studying their HL, language teachers should reinforce and develop their motivation and programs to meet these students' interests and needs, as well as encourage them to study their HL on entering the university.

### ***Community-based Heritage Language Schooling***

The literature asserts that community-based HL schools or programs facilitate the preservation of HLLs' linguistic and cultural heritage (Fishman, 2001; Kelleher, 2008b; Wiley, 2001). As can be seen from this study, whether to implement community-based HL schooling or not has never been a controversial issue for the parents of the heritage speakers of Chinese as it is being actively promoted in Chinese heritage communities and is seen to provide a beneficial immersion experience outside the family. However, there are certain potential disadvantages for doing so, according to this study as some of the case studies showed. Specifically, community-based HL schooling may have had a negative effect on certain HLLs' development or maintenance of their HL, such as a lack of learning interest (Brenda, Emily, Tom) or school attendance refusal (Teagan). The reasons that the CHL learners in this study gave for losing interest in studying their HL at community-based HL schools or even refused to go to them included lack of self-confidence, resistance to learning, and negative attitudes towards these schools.

### ***Agentive Role in Language Learning***

A highlight of the findings in this study was that CHL learners played an active role in managing their various experiences of Chinese language learning. Although extensive literature has focused on understanding CHL learners in language classrooms regarding their learning processes and outcomes, little research has explored the learners' perspectives on and experiences of HL learning. This limitation risks ignoring CHL learners who come from very different backgrounds and have various learning needs. As the case studies showed, there was a shift from a passive to an active role in the HL learning process by the CHL learners in this study.

Apparently, once a CHL learner gets to a certain point of maturity that allows them to make their own decisions that can best meet their needs, they begin to see their HL in a different way than as a child.

### **Factors Influencing CHL Learners' Identity Development**

In addition to being beneficial for its speakers, a heritage cultural or linguistic background seems to affect HLLs' identity development. According to Lacorte and Canabal (2003), HLLs may aim to "reinforce the development of their own identity as members of a group with specific cultural characteristics" (p. 116). The unique ways in which HLLs construct their identity reflect the on-going negotiation between their own heritage backgrounds and the norms and values they encounter in their exposure to non-heritage cultures. Some HLLs value their own heritage membership, but some may reject the ways it categorizes them and wish to change this.

In this study, Brenda confidently considered Chinese to be her HL since she believes it has made her who she is. Her parents still live a very Chinese lifestyle: they eat Chinese food, watch Chinese movies and TV shows, and even listen to Chinese music during long road trips. Although Brenda may not have grown up in China and gotten the full authentic experience of what it means to be a Chinese on Chinese soil, she did grow up in an environment where she was exposed to the Chinese culture secondhand. Because her heritage is Chinese, she believes it is crucial for her to at least know how to speak the language.

Emily is very proud to be "Taiwanese-American." Taiwanese are culturally Chinese and speak Mandarin Chinese, but maintain their own autonomy as the Republic of China, being separate geopolitically from Mainland China. However, growing up in the United States made it very hard for her to maintain and utilize Chinese. In a society where inter-racial marriages and mixed-race families have become more and more common, she found it necessary not to "lose"

her heritage. Emily would consider it a “shame” to be a Chinese who cannot read or write her own language since many American students are learning to speak Chinese just as well as she does. She also believes it is very necessary to be able to speak Chinese with her children in the future and pass along her Chinese culture through language, food, and traditions.

Emily had not really thought about her own identity as a Taiwanese-American until after she began her freshman year at GSU. She realized that she is not fully American because she said that people look at her and automatically see that she is Asian. She also realized that when she went to Taiwan, people would not look at her as a Taiwanese because she was born and raised in the United States. As Emily stated, “I wanted to retain and maintain the Taiwanese identity because it is a part of my heritage and I cannot deny that it is there.” However, she wanted to embrace both sides of her identity.

Tracy believes that Chinese has always been a huge part of her life. In order to maintain her linguistic background while growing up, she was required by her parents to speak only Chinese or Taiwanese at home. Although she strongly believes in her Chinese heritage, she does not believe it is her main, or only, HL. Because Tracy “grew up in the United States” but was “raised in a Chinese family,” she considers both English and Chinese her HLs, equally.

Currently Tracy fully believes that the language she speaks has the ability to influence the way she looks at the world. She has learned to be more understanding of differences since she is exposed to both western and eastern culture all the time. She has put a lot of effort into balancing the life she has at home and the “proper Chinese girl” she is with her family with her persona as a young, contemporary woman in western society. While most of the time these identities give her a holistic and diversified view, since she believes she can combine the best qualities of both cultures, she seems to be comfortable with both of her diverse cultures and traditions.

Regarding the relationship between HL and identity, according to He (2004), “To learn one’s heritage language is in part to (re)establish similarities with members of one’s heritage

culture or to (re)establish differences from members of mainstream American culture” (p. 213). As illustrated by the data obtained from the six CHL learners in this study, the relationship between heritage cultural or linguistic background and identity is also reciprocal. Although the struggles with identity crisis have not been a problem for all the participants in this study, finding a group of CHL learners who understand what it means to live in two cultures and sympathize with each other had positive influences on their HL learning as Emily and Tracy indicated in their interviews.

### **Implications**

First, as the results have shown, this study revealed that CHL learners may lack literacy skills but still be comparatively proficient in listening and speaking in their HL, Chinese. They seemed to have the advantage of obtaining communicative competence over non-CHL learners because of early exposure to their HL and parental involvement in promoting their use of their HL, especially at home. Considering language development or maintenance, CHL learners’ parents gave much attention to their own heritage culture and language, created a language-rich environment, and maintained their children’s ability to read and write Chinese both within and outside the home. For example, they chose to enroll their children in various types of community-based Chinese schools or programs with the hope of maintaining the culture and language of their own heritage background.

Although some CHL learners were found to develop their Chinese phonetic skills early in community-based Chinese schools or programs, this study also revealed the somewhat surprising finding that most CHL learners held strong negative attitudes toward attending these community-based Chinese schools or programs, which is contrary to Carreira and Kagan (2011)’s assertion that university-level HLLs have “positive attitudes and experiences with the [their] HL” (p. 62).

These learners could have a negative attitude towards the Chinese schools, but still have respect for their HL and culture. If community-based HL schooling seems to promote any negative feelings toward a CHL learner's learning of Chinese, it can potentially discourage CHL learners from learning their HL, or they may even give up learning the language.

Second, this study also found that since CHL learners' communication skills or abilities appeared to be a factor that differentiated them from non-CHL learners in the language classroom, teachers of university-level Chinese language classes should offer guidance or further instruction to promote reading and writing to help CHL learners increase their literacy skills, such as learning Chinese characters, vocabulary words, and grammar. Moreover, in order to further develop their verbal communicative skills in their HL, in addition to conducting everyday conversation in it, more focus should be placed on a variety of topics in various formal settings because HLLs tend to use "casual and informal registers of the language" as noted by Valdés (2001, p. 44)

Third, the results from this study also determined that although CHL learners were raised in a Chinese-American community, they seemed to differ significantly in terms of their particular learning trajectories. CHL learners' personal characteristics, previous learning experiences, and individual needs therefore need to be taken into consideration in their learning of their HL. Thus, it is important for language instructors to focus on the language skills that CHL learners want to learn and to figure out how to best support them in doing so. It is also vital for language instructors to understand more about individual differences in learning and performance among CHL learners. When looking at teaching Chinese to a group of CHL learners with different backgrounds (e.g., family background, cultural background, educational background), careful consideration should be given to understanding their previous learning experiences, cultural and linguistic characteristics, and any potential factors that may positively or negatively influence their learning of Chinese.

Finally, this study also found that to respond to the individual differences among CHL learners, dual-track language programs should be promoted and CHL learners should be placed in the HL track, which is consistent with *The UC Guidelines*' (2003, p. 4) pedagogical recommendation that "providing separate tracks of courses" for HLLs is pedagogically beneficial because language instructors can focus exclusively on CHL learners and provide specific language instruction to meet their own needs.

### **Limitations**

At least two limitations were identified in this study. First, it should be noted that this study, which focused on only six university-level CHL learners, was an initial investigation into the long-term learning process of CHL among heritage speakers of Chinese adults in the United States. Second, to better understand this development or maintenance of HL, ideally this study should have included more participants, instructors' and parents' perspectives, as well as other research methodologies, such as classroom observation, language proficiency assessments, and documentary evidence (e.g., writing samples). Such inputs would have helped provide a more comprehensive description of the issues under investigation. However, the findings obtained from the language autobiographies and interviews did provide an initial picture of the issues around CHL learners' Chinese language learning experiences which could be built upon in future studies.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study showed that several elements of the sociocultural context (e.g., personal, familial, and motivational factors) may have contributed to language learning for the six CHL learners, but further studies are needed to understand such factors in more detail.

First, although parental involvement in promoting their child's use of their HL was identified as a contributory factor which affected HL learning and learning process, more details on how exactly CHL learners' parents managed to maintain both languages, either Chinese and the parents' own HL or Chinese and English, at home or in the family context are needed. Future studies are also needed to know what they specifically did to encourage their child's use of their HL and in what contexts they used the parents' HL or English, and in which settings Chinese.

Second, language-learner identities constructed in the language learning process were found to be important in determining the CHL learners' actions, emotions, and motivation related to learning their HL. For example, when Tracy went to the university as freshman, she was no longer interacting within a Taiwanese-American community, which later motivated her to regain the Chinese proficiency she had originally gotten from her family's heritage background and move more towards her Taiwanese identity. However, after starting to formally learn Chinese, she realized she was more comfortable with claiming a culturally hybrid identity. Therefore, understanding the social connectedness and sense of social and cultural belonging in CHL learners merits the focus of future research. More studies are needed to clarify the relationship between HL learning and the construction of language-learner identity.

Lastly, going back to one of the research questions (What factors did the CHL learners report that contributed to their learning of Chinese?), several factors uncovered in this study seemed to have a significantly positive or negative impact on a number of the university-level CHL learners' learning of Chinese, although this might not apply to all CHL learners in the United States. With more CHL learner participants, future research could further explore and document the Chinese language learning of university-level CHL learners as expressed in their language autobiographies and make the results more significant. Overall, these considerations suggest a need for much more research on CHL to be undertaken.

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## APPENDIX A

### Language Autobiography Prompts

Your language autobiography may include but is not limited to:

- 1) Recall a time when you were speaking/learning Chinese. Any time will do and it may be a long while back when you were speaking/being taught at home or school or it may be relatively recently. Write down the actual year and place of the learning experiences and as much as you can remember about it.
- 2) Write down a particular incident during this time which you found particularly helpful to you in your learning. Perhaps it was something you did for yourself or some family members did for you or something that the teacher or some material resources provided for you or some positive experience in trying out the Chinese language.
- 3) Write down a negative experience you had when speaking/learning Chinese: something that discouraged you or hindered your progress in some way.
- 4) List all things which you believe positively contribute to the learning of Chinese: all things that help Chinese language learning. Try to write down as many as possible.
- 5) List things that you feel to hinder or slow down your learning of Chinese. Again think of as many of these as you can.
- 6) Others (anything related to your learning of Chinese past and present).

## **APPENDIX B**

### **List of Potential Semi-structured Interview Questions**

- 1) What are the characteristics of Chinese heritage language learners do you think that distinguish you from Chinese foreign language learners?
- 2) How do you self-identify yourself?
- 3) What has motivated you to learn Chinese?
- 4) How did you keep motivated to learn Chinese?
- 5) How to keep learning Chinese when you do not live in a Chinese-speaking country?
- 6) Have you ever lived in any Chinese-speaking countries?
- 7) How does your family support your maintenance of Chinese/learning of Chinese?
- 8) Which language did you first speak?
- 9) Follow-up question: How did you begin speaking this language?
- 10) Which language did you first learn to read and write?
- 11) Follow-up question: How did you begin learning this language?
- 12) Have you ever attended any community-based Chinese language schools/programs in the United States?
- 13) Why did you choose to take Chinese language courses at GSU?
- 14) What factors do you think that contribute to your learning of Chinese?
- 15) What factors do you think that hinder your learning of Chinese?

## APPENDIX C

### Initial Summary of the Thematic Analysis of Brenda's Data

Theme	Pattern	Data Source	Excerpts from Data
language learning history	heritage linguistic background; parental involvement	interview	Growing up I have always spoken Chinese and sometimes English if I didn't know how to express myself in Chinese with my parents because they liked to hear me speaking Chinese.
the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	heritage linguistic background	language autobiography	Chinese seemed like the better option because I had heritage background in the language.
the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	motivation	language autobiography	By learning Chinese, I can better communicate with my family members back in China.
the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	motivation	interview	By taking Chinese in university, I can better my language skills and better my communication with my family.
Positive influences; early exposure to their HL	early exposure to the Chinese language	language autobiography	I had a lot of exposure to the language and picked up Chinese early on in my life.
positive influences; the agentive role of the CHL learners	daily practice/exposure	interview	The helpful thing I have found with my experiences learning

themselves			Chinese is exposure to the language—whether it is speaking or listening—need to happen on a regular basis because otherwise the language will never be mastered.
positive influences	the benefits of learning Chinese; motivation	language autobiography	I had never been able to apply my skills in Chinese to my everyday life outside of going to Chinese classes and speaking to my parents.
constraints on learning Chinese	felt discouraged by struggles with CHL	interview	It's difficult to hold an entire conversation in Chinese for an extended amount of time because it's mentally draining.
constraints on learning Chinese	felt discouraged by struggles with CHL	language autobiography	This was very embarrassing for me and something that discouraged me from speaking Chinese.
constraints on learning Chinese	felt discouraged by struggles with CHL	language autobiography	It still hurt to have her laugh at my hard work like that.

## APPENDIX D

### Initial Summary of the Thematic Analysis of Emily's Data

Theme	Pattern	Data Source	Excerpts from Data
language learning history	heritage linguistic background	language autobiography	Prior to attending school, my Chinese was better than my English, to the point that I was put into an ESL program for a short period of time in school.
the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	motivation	interview	be able to communicate with them and their relatives in Chinese
community-based HL schooling	motivation; negative attitude toward Chinese school	interview	very "reluctant" to go
community-based HL schooling	motivation; negative attitude toward Chinese school	interview	I thought that as long as I understood what my parents were saying, there was no need to spend Saturday mornings at Chinese school. As a child, all I wanted to do over the weekends was play.
community-based HL schooling	negative attitude toward Chinese school	interview	finally free from the grasp of Chinese
parental involvement in promoting their child's use of their HL; community-based HL schooling	parental involvement; negative attitude toward Chinese school	language autobiography	My parents enrolled me in Chinese School. Learning the language suddenly became more of a chore to me at that

the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	motivation; decision maker; the benefits of learning Chinese	interview	time because of all the homework issued from the Saturday classes.  I wanted to learn how to read and write Chinese, and that I wanted to be bilingual.
the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	motivation; the benefits of learning Chinese	interview	I will not have to be so reliant on others to survive because I will have my own language skills
positive influences	daily exposure to the Chinese language	interview	One thing I think really helps with Chinese is daily exposure.
positive influences	social belonging	interview	learning Chinese with students who have a similar family background and learning experience
community-based HL schooling	negative attitude toward Chinese school	language autobiography	the most negative experience I had while learning Chinese was my time in Chinese school/my own negative feelings toward the school
constraints on learning Chinese	felt discouraged by struggles with CHL	interview	Hearing her speeches made my own speeches seem amateur and poorly written.
the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	change of attitudes	language autobiography	I think maturity impacted my development of learning Chinese because the reasons that I disliked learning Chinese

positive influences	motivation	interview	would not be valid reasons for me to dislike Chinese now.  I think the main factor that impacted my motivation to learn Chinese was confidence.
positive influences; the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	motivation; decision maker	interview	I had motivation because I was the one who wanted to learn the language. It was out of my own accord, not my parents'.
constraints on learning Chinese	felt discouraged by struggles with CHL	interview	how easy it to forget the characters

## APPENDIX E

### Initial Summary of the Thematic Analysis of Tracy's Data

Theme	Pattern	Data Source	Excerpts from Data
early exposure to their HL	heritage linguistic background	language autobiography	growing up at home where Chinese is often spoken
early exposure to their HL	heritage linguistic background	interview	speak either Chinese or Taiwanese at home
early exposure to their HL	heritage linguistic background	interview	Chinese has generally been the primary form of oral communication between my parents and me. As a result, I have been learning to speak and comprehend Chinese since I was very little.
early exposure to their HL; parental involvement in promoting their child's use of their HL	daily exposure to the Chinese language	interview	My speaking remained at a decent level because I constantly practiced while living at home with my parents.
positive influences	heritage linguistic background	language autobiography	I found that learning Chinese seemed easier to me, and I picked up reading and writing a lot faster than I had at home when I was younger.
the agentive role of the CHL learners themselves	decision maker	language autobiography	Now I had a reason and desire to learn Chinese.
the agentive role of the CHL learners	decision maker	language autobiography	I just decided it was time for me to learn

themselves			more about Chinese than just speaking and listening.
positive influences	heritage cultural background	interview	There were Asian Americans that grew up in a similar background as I did.
positive influences	motivation; appreciation of Chinese language; the benefits of learning Chinese	interview	My current level of Chinese has granted me so many things that I appreciate.
parental involvement in promoting their child's use of their HL	parental involvement	language autobiography	My parents would just send back the correct form of word.
positive influences	motivation; heritage cultural background	language autobiography	The most important factor in terms of learning Chinese is the desire to connect with the culture.
positive influences	motivation	interview	I wish one day my Chinese is good enough to live there
positive influences	social belonging	interview	It was refreshing knowing that the professor knows who you are and over time, the class becomes closer.
positive influences	daily exposure to the Chinese language	interview	But since there is an allotted time every day that forces me to speak in only Chinese, my speaking skills didn't become hindered.
constraints on learning Chinese	felt discouraged by struggles with CHL	interview	It becomes increasingly difficult to keep words in my vocabulary if I am not

constraints on learning Chinese	felt discouraged by struggles with CHL	interview	using them very often.
positive influences	motivation	interview	the lack of opportunities to use it  Because many times if you need to know the language, you will try harder to communicate with others and this is a very strong effect.

## **VITA**

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