

# **Chinese heritage language learners in Australian universities: motivations and beliefs**

**YING LIU**

**([ying.liu2@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ying.liu2@sydney.edu.au))**

**The University of Sydney**

# INTRODUCTION

- **Motivation** is one of the key factors that influence language acquisition and extensive research has been done in this area. However, there has been limited research on the motivations of Chinese heritage language (HL) learners in Australian universities. The present study aims to fill this research gap and find answers to the following 2 research questions:

*(1) What are the major motivational factors that influence Chinese HL learners in Australian universities?*

*(2) What are the common home language practices and strategies in promoting Chinese HL learning?*

# LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Chinese HL learners and Chinese HL**
  - A Chinese HL learner is “a language student who is raised in a home where Chinese is spoken and who speaks or at least understands the language and is to some degree bilingual in Chinese and in English” (He, 2006, p. 1). The Chinese language used by these learners can be regarded as Chinese HL.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Motivation**

- Gardner (1985) defined motivation in language learning environment as “the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language (p. 10).
- Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) proposed 2 main types of language learning motivation: **integrative motivation** and **instrumental motivation**.
- Integrative motivation refers to learners’ favourable attitudes towards the language community and their wishes to integrate into the language group by learning the target language.
- Instrumental motivation refers to learners’ desire to reach pragmatic goals to reward themselves through the success in language learning, such as better career opportunities, travelling and getting good grades at the university.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

- **The internal structure model of language learning motivation**
  - Csizér and Dörnyei's (2005) proposed a model to describe the internal structure of language learning motivation. This model consists of the following 7 components: **integrativeness**, **instrumentality**, **attitudes towards the L2 speakers**, **vitality of the L2 community**, **milieu**, **cultural interest** and **self-confidence**.
  - It should be noted that HL learners are similar to L2 learners as both a HL and a L2 are usually non-dominant languages that are acquired under reduced and changeable input or output conditions. As a result, the theoretical models from L2 acquisition are closely related to HL acquisition (Montrul, 2012). Due to this reason, this internal structure model is used as the conceptual framework for this study in the context of HL.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

- **The internal structure model of language learning motivation**

### Integrativeness

- Similar to Gardner and Lambert's (1959, 1972) classification reviewed above, integrativeness represents learners' positive attitudes towards the HL community and its culture.

### Instrumentality

- Instrumentality concerns learners' perceptions of practical benefits of HL proficiency and this coincides with Gardner and Lambert's (1959, 1972) category as well.

### Attitudes towards the HL speakers

- This component is related to learners' attitudes towards having direct contact with the HL speakers.

### Vitality of the HL community

- It is regarding the perceptions about the significance of the HL community.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Milieu

- It refers to the influences from learners' immediate social environment, such as parents, family and friends. For this study, we mainly examine the impact of home environment on the HL learners.

## Cultural interest

- It reflects learners' recognition of cultural products related to the HL and conveyed by the mass media, such as newspapers, TV programs, movies, magazines and music.

## Self-confidence

- Linguistic self-confidence is concerning learners' confident belief that they are capable of grasping the HL. It reflects learners' confidence in completing language tasks or reaching language learning related goals.

## METHODOLOGY

- Ninety Chinese HL learners (52 females, 38 males) enrolled in Australian universities participated in a questionnaire survey and 10 learners joined a focused interview.
- Questionnaire and interview were used as instruments to collect data.



# FINDINGS

- Findings from the questionnaire
  - The participants responded to the question '**what motivates you to learn mandarin Chinese**' on a 5-point Likert scale. Their responses were ranked by the total percentage of 'strongly agree' and 'agree'.

# FINDINGS

- Findings from the questionnaire
  - The 7 orientations that got more than 70% of positive responses are as follows:
    - ✓ Maintaining my Chinese heritage
    - ✓ Travelling in China and other Chinese-speaking regions
    - ✓ Chinese is an important language worldwide
    - ✓ Speaking to my relatives in mainland China or other places, such as Taiwan and Singapore
    - ✓ Encouragement from my parents
    - ✓ I am proud of being Chinese
    - ✓ Finding a good job

# FINDINGS

- The remaining 6 orientations had a positive response rate of between 50% and 70%:
  - ✓ My love for Chinese culture and history
  - ✓ Making more Mandarin Chinese-speaking friends
  - ✓ Getting good grades at university
  - ✓ Having close relationships with Chinese community in Australia
  - ✓ My belief in my ability to grasp a language
  - ✓ I like Chinese pop music and songs

# FINDINGS

- Findings from the interview
  - Four themes in regards to Chinese HL learning motivation emerged from the data:
    - (1) culture;
    - (2) Chinese heritage;
    - (3) ethnic identity and
    - (4) parental home language practices and strategies.

# FINDINGS

- **Culture**

- Culture is one of the main motivational factors that influence Chinese HL learners. The participants tended to hold positive attitudes towards the Chinese culture. On the one hand, they were integratively motivated to learn Chinese as they would want to know more about the Chinese culture. On the other hand, they showed interest in the cultural products related to the Chinese language, such as Chinese historical dramas. Consider the following participants' statements (pseudonyms are used).

- **Abigail:** *"Part of my motivation would be the cultural aspect. I just want to know a little bit more about Chinese culture."*
- **Leo:** *"I want to learn more about the culture by learning Chinese."*
- **Caroline:** *"I would learn about the Chinese culture and I also love dramas a lot, especially those related to history. That is my biggest motivation."*

# FINDINGS

- **Chinese heritage and ethnic identity**

- The data from the interview suggest that Chinese HL learners' motivations are closely associated with their Chinese heritage and ethnic identity.
  - **Chloe:** *"A real motivator [for me to learn Chinese] is when I watch other people who are not Chinese being able to speak fluent Mandarin. I am Chinese, but I cannot even say anything."*
  - **Peyton:** *"It is really important for me to maintain Chinese. It is the part of who I am as a person with Chinese heritage."*
  - **Emma:** *"My goal in the future is to not only be able to help people who speak English, but also to help the Chinese communities in Australia. One day I want to go back to China, and I want to help people there. It is something I am passionate about. I think learning Chinese will really help me reach out to more people."*
  - **Mary:** *"I want to communicate with people who speak Chinese and use my Chinese language skills to help people in my job."*

# FINDINGS

- **Common patterns of parental home language practices and strategies**
  - Two common patterns of parental home language practices and strategies were reported by the participants: interactions in Chinese at home and return visits to the home country.
  - Fishman (1991) maintained that family ought to be a protected place for minority language and minority language should be in full use in families and communities and stressed that special bond with language and language activities were nurtured in the family.
  - Consider the following participants' comments on interactions in Chinese at home:
    - **Peyton:** *"My mum tries to speak Chinese at home because when she speaks Chinese, I will also speak Chinese... Both my parents are Chinese speakers, I must speak Chinese as well."*
    - **Mary:** *"My parents required me to speak Mandarin Chinese at home when I was young. That really helped me."*

# FINDINGS

- According to Oh (2003), when parents decide to use the HL at home and implement a HL only policy in the home milieu, the children are inclined to hold more positive attitudes towards the HL and attain higher levels of proficiency in the HL. They are also more likely to keep on using the HL after being exposed to English when compared with the children whose parents do not make this attempt.
  - **Chloe:** *“I like practice by talking to my parents in Chinese and that really helps me a lot.”*
  - **Danielle:** *“They [My parents] really encouraged us to learn Chinese. When I was young, they helped us practise. When we have to read out the [Chinese] textbook to them, they will listen to that.... That was a really big motivation for me to continue.”*



# FINDINGS

- On the other hand, the participants in general reported that their parents had the practice of sending them back to their home country for visits. As previous studies have revealed, making return trips to the home country plays a crucial role in HL maintenance and development (Jeon, 2012; Minami, 2013). Consider the following participants' comments:
  - **Chloe:** *"The main thing that got me wanting to learn Chinese was when I went back to China for a month to visit my family, I realised how little I could actually communicate with them and if I do not speak Chinese, then in the future I am gonna lose it and not able to speak any time."*
  - **Hannah:** *"We actually go back to visit relatives quite often. Going back and talking to relatives, I realise that my Chinese level is something like a 5-year old, so I want to learn Chinese [to communicate with my relatives]."*
  - **Tessa:** *"We travelled to China for 3 months. I got to learn more about culture and people and that really made me more interested in learning Chinese."*

# DISCUSSION

- Xu and Moloney (2014) revealed that there was a balance between instrumental motivation and integrative motivation among the Chinese HL learners in an Australian university. The major instrumental motivations were job prospects and economic capital of Chinese learning and the main integrative motivations were cultural identity and Chinese heritage. However, while the findings of this study also suggest that culture, Chinese heritage and ethnic identity are the major motivational orientations, job prospects are found to be a less influential motivational factor. Instead of expecting that learning Chinese can bring good jobs, the Chinese HL learners tend to believe that learning Chinese can help them better serve the Chinese-speaking people in their future jobs, which reflects that HL learning is closely related to their sense of ethnic identity.

# DISCUSSION

- As culture is an important motivational factor for Chinese HL learning, the content on Chinese culture can be emphasised in the teaching and Chinese cultural products, such as historical dramas, can be used to stimulate learners' interest.
- Based on the findings of this study, the following practices and strategies would be recommended to the parents:
  - speaking heritage language with children at home
  - giving instructions to children's utterances
  - enabling children to remain connected with their homeland by return visits.

# CONCLUSION

- The results of this study indicate that culture, Chinese heritage and ethnic identity are the major motivational factors influencing Chinese HL learning. In addition, parental home language practices and strategies, including interactions in Chinese at home and return visits to the home country, also play an important role in motivating Chinese HL learners.

# REFERENCES

- Csizér K., & Dörnyei, Z. (2005). The internal structure of language learning motivation and its relationship with language choice and learning effort. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89, 19-36.
- Fishman, J. (1991). *Reversing language shift*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1959). Motivational variables in second language acquisition. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 13, 266-272.
- Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second-language learning*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House.
- He, A. W. (2006). Toward an identity theory of the development of Chinese as a heritage language. *Heritage Language Journal*, 4(1), 1–28.
- Jeon, M. (2012). Korean language maintenance in Canada. In A. H. Kim, M. S. Noh & S. Noh (Eds.), *Korean immigrants in Canada: Perspectives on Migration, integration, and the family* (pp.149-168). Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Minami, S. (2013). *Voices within the Canadian mosaic: Japanese immigrant women and their children's heritage language socialization* [Master's thesis, University of British Columbia]. Google Scholar.
- Montrul, S. (2012) Is the heritage language like a second language? *EuroSLA Yearbook*, 12, 1–29.
- Oh, J. (2003). *Raising bilingual children: Factors in maintaining a heritage language* [Doctoral dissertation, University of California]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Xu, H. L., & Moloney, R. (2014). Identifying Chinese heritage learners' motivations, learning needs and learning goals: a case study of a cohort of heritage learners in an Australian university. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, 4(2), 365-393.

The background is a light gray gradient with several realistic water droplets of various sizes scattered across it. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The text 'THANK YOU!' is centered in the middle of the image.

**THANK YOU!**