Hui Ling Xu and Robyn Moloney

Identifying Chinese heritage learners’ motivations, learning needs and learning goals: A case study of a cohort of heritage learners in an Australian university

Abstract: There is increasing enrolment of Chinese heritage language learners in tertiary Chinese language classrooms across Australia. Educated in English, Chinese heritage learners are of diverse national origins and the Chinese language varieties to which they have been exposed through family or community are also diverse. Recent research in this field has called for greater attention to pedagogical questions in heritage language study, entailing a better understanding of learners and their learning motivation. This study was driven by pedagogical concern as to the perceived underachievement of the learner group and low retention rate at the beginner level. Through an analysis of quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data, the study closely examines the particular motivational orientations, learning needs, and goals of a group of Chinese heritage language learners in one Australian university setting. Motivation from heritage and cultural identity is balanced by the drive towards employment prospects, or perceived economic capital of learning Chinese. The students’ goal of communicative competence is at odds with the apparent traditional Chinese teaching goals, which have stressed complex written literacy construction. This study fills a significant gap in the field by identifying research-based pedagogic implications and strategies for teaching Chinese heritage learners in the Australian context.

Keywords: Chinese heritage language, motivation, learning needs, Australian tertiary context, foreign language pedagogy

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1 Introduction

There is a growing desire on the part of diaspora migrant communities in multicultural and multiethnic countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia to maintain their ethnolinguistic traditions. In the case of Chinese, the strong interest in heritage language (HL) acquisition is also due to the perceived increasing capital and sociopolitical significance of Chinese. The learning of Chinese has been promoted in Australian education as part of the Australian Government’s drive to produce “Asia-literate” graduates (Commonwealth of Australia 2012). As such, at tertiary level, there has been a steady increase of students choosing to study Chinese, including HL learners from Chinese-speaking family backgrounds. This situation parallels the North American tertiary context (see He and Xiao 2008; Weger-Guntharp 2008: 212), but as Kondo-Brown and Brown (2008: 17) note, we know much less about HL learners than we do about foreign language learners. In Australia, this situation is even more pronounced at post-secondary level, as the HL learner phenomenon is under-researched amidst the rapid enrolment of HL learners in university Chinese programs.

Research in HL education (see Brinton et al. 2008) emerged more than a decade ago and primarily in the North American context has thus far focused on a number of areas such as HL learners’ linguistic profiles, identification of subgroups, differences between HL learners and traditional foreign language learners’ affective factors, and HL learner identity development (see Kondo-Brown 2005; Noels 2005; Comanaru and Noels 2009; Li and Duff 2008; Carreira 2004; He 2010). Drawing on other studies that reveal some differences between the HL learner group and traditional foreign language learner group (see Kondo-Brown and Brown 2008; Wen 2011; Xu and Moloney forthcoming), our study sets out to identify in greater depth the motivational orientations, learning needs and goals of a group of HL learners in one Australian university setting. Such a study was driven also by pedagogical concern as to the perceived under-achievement of the HL group and low retention rate at the beginner level. As such, we will also discuss pedagogical implications arising from the learners’ particular motivation profiles.

Motivation is one of the key factors driving language success and is what students bring into the classroom in one form or another. It is one aspect in the classroom that teachers can cultivate, promote and sustain to enhance learning. Montrul (2012) has called for greater attention to “pedagogical questions” in HL study, which must entail a better understanding of our learners. Thus our study of the profile of an HL learner group, using quantitative survey and qualitative interview data, aims to shed light on these questions: Who are our HL learners? What are their social and linguistic backgrounds? How much prior knowledge do
they bring into the classroom? What motivates them to learn Chinese? What learning goals do they aspire to achieve? What are their particular learning needs? Our article is organized in this way: we first review some relevant studies and findings (section 2), followed by the methodology of the study (section 3). We then present the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data (section 4) and a discussion of key findings (section 5). The last section (6) is devoted to the discussion of pedagogical implications and conclusion.

2 Literature review

2.1 Heritage language and heritage language learners

More than a decade ago, it was observed that foreign language enrolment in the United States had made a dramatic shift from European languages towards less frequently taught community languages such as Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean and Arabic, and that these enrolment trends included a significant increase in speakers of these immigrant languages enrolling to study their ancestral languages (Van Deussen Scholl 2003). In the Australian context, although the situation is not exactly parallel, there is nevertheless an increasing presence of Chinese HL learners in foreign language classrooms (Xu and Moloney forthcoming).

In the extant literature, numerous definitions of heritage languages have been used. According to Montrul (2012), heritage languages refer to the languages spoken by immigrants and their children. As such, they are not the majority languages with official status but minority languages. In some early studies, Cho et al. (1997) simply define a heritage language as the language associated with one’s cultural background. In other countries such as Australia, analogous terms used are “ethnic languages” or “community languages”. Definitions of HL learners are thus based on different perspectives involved, and on national, educational and linguistic contexts (see Valdes 2001; Kondo-Brown and Brown 2008). But we find Montrul’s (2012: 4) definition most aligned with the Australian situation: heritage speakers “are the children of immigrants born in the host country or immigrant children who arrived in the host country some time in childhood”.

Defining Chinese HL learners is not as straightforward as defining other HL groups such as Japanese or Korean, where the HL is associated historically with a more homogeneous population, a more precise geographical area or nation-state, and has only one shared standard language variety. In the case of Chinese, both the national origins and the language varieties are diverse (Li and Duff 2008: 15). Thus, a broader definition including both Mandarin and dialect speakers, needs
Hui Ling Xu and Robyn Moloney’s study (forthcoming) found that most of the HL learners are indeed from dialect-speaking backgrounds. As such, in examining the cohort of HL learners of Chinese in this Australian tertiary context, we adopt a broader definition of HL speaker to describe those who have contact with or exposure to some variety of Chinese through family or community connection but have been educated primarily through English. They thus are fluent in English but with varying degrees of proficiency in their HL. This may include students of Chinese-speaking families born in Australia or who migrated here at a young age from China, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Indonesia.

2.2 Relevant literature on second language learning motivation

The pioneering and the most influential work in L2 motivation has been that by Gardner and his associates, who carried out large-scale research as early as the 1960s in the Canadian multicultural context, in an attempt to explore what was then the relatively new idea that affective variables might play a role in learning the language of another cultural community. For example, in their initial work, Gardner and Lambert (1959, cited in Gardner et al. 1992) demonstrated that language achievement relates not only to aptitude, but also to attitudes and motivation. Their subsequent extensive research through many decades continues to focus on the role of attitudes and motivation in second language acquisition (Gardner 2007). Central to their theoretical framework such as the social-educational model of second language acquisition developed by Gardner (1985) are three key components: integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation and motivation (Masgoret and Gardner 2003: 127).

The concept of integrativeness, central to Gardner’s extensive work, is concerned with the individual “being interested in learning the language in order to interact with valued members of the other community and/or to learn more about that community . . . it could also involve an open interest in other cultural communities in general” (Gardner 2007: 15). According to Gardner (2005), individuals who are competent in integrativeness are willing and able to take on features of another language group as part of their own behavioural repertoire. Differences in integrativeness can be influenced by the interplay of factors such as culture, family beliefs and attitude (Gardner 2005: 10). Motivation in Gardner’s theoretical framework is a multifaceted concept but can be identified by three measures: effort, desire to achieve a goal and attitudes (Gardner 2005: 10). Thus, motivation is seen as referring to the extent to which the individual strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the enjoyment experienced in the learning.
activity. The goal reflects the orientations or reasons why the individual is studying the language.

Two major orientation categories implicated in learning an L2 and central to Gardner and associates’ work, are integrative orientation and instrumental orientation. The former refers to classes of reasons for learning a second language that emphasize interest in the target language community and culture, that is, the notion of identification with the community (see Gardner 2005: 10), and are used to assess the level of integrativeness. Instrumental orientation, on the other hand, is defined by Gardner as referring to “conditions where the language is being studied for practical or utilitarian purposes” (Gardner 2005: 11), that is, functional benefits such as using it to get a good job, to obtain credits, or to use the language for travel. However, to Gardner, competing dichotomies of motivation such as integrative vs. instrumental or intrinsic vs. extrinsic are not of essential importance. This is because many of Gardner and his associates’ studies have demonstrated that it is the intensity of motivation, incorporating cognitive and affective components that is important (Gardner 2007: 19), and responsible for achievement in the second language (Masgoret and Gardner 2003: 214).

A search of the extant literature shows that there has been a great number of empirical studies (a review of which is beyond the scope of this study) that investigate the nature and role of motivation in the L2 and foreign language process; many of them draw on Gardner’s theory and motivational constructs. However, in recent decades, concepts from educational psychology have broadened the research scope, which has led to the establishment of numerous new theories and conceptualizations of L2 motivation. Some of these theoretical frameworks include self-determination theory (see Ryan and Deci 2000) and its accompanying intrinsic and extrinsic paradigm; self-efficacy theory, which acknowledges the importance of perceived competence for motivated engagement (see Busse and Walter 2013); the process model of L2 motivation (see Dörnyei and Ottó 1998), which, instead of conceptualizing motivation as a static attribute such as integrativeness, looks at motivational factors that influence the student’s learning behaviour in the classroom setting. It recognizes the dynamic nature of motivation, i.e. changing and evolving in time in the learning process.

Another important and influential theory of motivation in more recent years is the L2 Motivational Self System developed by Dörnyei (2005; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009). Central to this theory are the components of an Ideal L2 Self and an Ought-to L2 Self, which were adopted from Higgins’s ideal self and ought self. The ideal self refers to the representation of the attributes such as hopes, aspirations, or wishes that one would like to possess while ought self refers to the representation of attributes such as duties and obligations or responsibilities that one believes one ought to possess (Higgins 1987, quoted in Dörnyei 2009: 13). Applied
to L2 motivation, Dörnyei explains how his self theory matches the traditional integrative and instrumental motivation constructs. According to Dörnyei, an *ideal L2 self* is the L2-specific facet of one’s *ideal self*. Thus, if our ideal self is concerned with the mastery of an L2, then the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because our ideal language self image will give rise to positive attitudes towards members of the L2 community. Our ideal self also naturally wants to be professionally successful and as such, it is linked to the instrumental motives related to career advancement. However, if the instrumental motivations are with a prevention focus, for example, to study in order not to fail an exam or not to disappoint one’s parents, they form part of the *ought-to self* (Dörnyei 2009: 27).

Looking at our data (see section 4), it is obvious that our students possess both ideal self and ought-to self attributes reflected in their self-reported effort expended in studying the language.

The emerging body of research on HL learner affective variables has frequently adopted existing motivational constructs and orientations such as instrumental, integrative, intrinsic and extrinsic orientations, which are found to be relevant to the student populations surveyed (see Wen 1997; Winke 2005; Xu and Molony forthcoming). However, we find two additional concepts important and relevant in the HL context: *vitality of the L2 community* and *milieu*, identified in Csizér and Dörnyei’s much broader (2005) framework of L2 motivation, which also includes five other components: integrativeness, instrumentality, attitudes towards the L2 speakers/community, cultural interests, and linguistic self-confidence (Dörnyei 2005: 20). Vitality of the L2 community concerns the “perceived importance and wealth of the L2 communities in question”, defined by sociocultural status, demographic and institutional support factors (representation of the ethnic group in the media, education, government, etc.) (Dörnyei 2005: 22). Milieu refers to social influences such as the perceived influence of significant others such as parents, family and friends. In multicultural Australia, the vitality of L2 community and social milieu are two relevant and important motivational factors in influencing university language choice. Due to the perceived increasing capital and sociopolitical significance of Chinese, the growing Chinese speaking community, and the support of government initiatives, many students are motivated to study the official language of China. Currently, economic, cultural and social ties with Australia are getting stronger and China’s status as a world economic power is evident. Indeed, instrumentality in terms of better job prospects has been shown to be a powerful motivational factor among Chinese HL learners in a number of studies (see for example, Lu and Li 2008; Wen 1997, 2011).

However, characteristic of HL learners are also sociocultural factors such as heritage, identity, and family connections. Weger-Guntharp’s (2008) study suggests that a learner’s heritage is an important factor in that it affects the construc-
tion of a language learner’s identity and the co-construction of motivation. As Carriera (2004) points out, HL learners undertake the language course not just to fulfil linguistic needs but also identity needs. In other words, they want to understand their own heritage culture and to become literate in a language that is spoken in the home or by extended family members so as to better communicate with immediate and extended family members. Thus, in the HL learner’s context, examining motivational variables needs to address an understanding of the specific context against the student’s particular cultural and linguistic background.

2.3 Effort as indicator of motivation

Wright (2008) points out that there is a distinction between potential motivation and intensity of motivation. The former refers to “the upper limit of what people would be willing to do to satisfy a motive” while the latter refers to effort. The two can be termed *willingness to act* and *action* respectively. Indeed, the effort aspects of motivation have also been acknowledged elsewhere (see Gardner 1985). Ely (1986: 28) points out that it is important to investigate the strength of motivation, i.e. to distinguish between “the goal toward which concerted activity is directed and the effort or persistence demonstrated in the process of striving for the goal”. Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) argue that the amount of effort the students intend to exert can indicate their motivational magnitude, echoing a view by Masgoret and Gardner (2003). In Wen’s study (1997: 237), expectations of effort were assumed to be direct indicators of motivation, i.e. persons who had high expectations of strategies and effort would be actively engaged in their learning. We hold the same view that learning behaviours such as strategies and effort can be mediated through motivation, which in turn supports language learning. As such, in order to gauge students’ motivational level, we include a number of questions on effort spent outside of formal instruction such as number of hours spent to facilitate practice.

3 Methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach. Quantitative data were collected using a survey questionnaire, while qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews. The survey data were designed to construct a detailed demographic and motivational profile of the students. The focus group interview was used to provide triangulation and access deeper personal and affective aspects of being a heritage learner. The focus group context was chosen rather than individual interviews for its affordance of both individual and group perceptions, and as
an important research method in language studies (see Ho 2006). By creating a variety of lines of communication, the focus group offers a safe environment where students can share ideas, beliefs and attitudes (Madriz 2000). It offers insights from the nature of students’ conversation together, and their interaction and response to each other’s ideas. It is clear that at the same time, the influence they may exert on each other’s responses may affect the validity of the data. The participants of this study, 44 in all, were Chinese HL students from first, second and third-year undergraduate Chinese studies in one university in Sydney, Australia.

The questionnaire (see Appendix), developed based on our research questions, consists of (1) demographic information, (2) biographical background, (3) linguistic background, (4) knowledge of Mandarin prior to undertaking Chinese language study, (5) types of motivational orientation, (6) commitment to the language, and (7) desired goals of the course. It was thought that by including some questions on topics (6) and (7), a more complete and valid description of the motivation of the targeted population would result. Most responses were made using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (note: if not mentioned otherwise, 1 indicates the lowest and 5 the highest level).

For the second source of data, the focus group interviews, seventeen HL students volunteered to participate in the interviews at the end of 2012 and six second and two third-year HL students volunteered to reflect again on their motivation and learning experience at the end of 2013. The interviews were audio-recorded and the transcriptions were read and re-read to carry out thematic analysis. When reporting the interview data, the students are referred to by their year-level class and number allocated in the interview. For example, Y1S2 indicates year 1 class, speaker 2.

4 Results

In this section, we present results arising from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data; discussion of the findings is in section 5.

4.1 Quantitative results

4.1.1 Social demographic and linguistic background

The participants were between the ages of 17 and 24, with 26 female and 18 male students. 77% of the respondents were born in Australia and the rest in other
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countries, including China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, North Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. In terms of living arrangements, over 80% of the students resided with their parents and the rest resided independently.

To identify heritage speaker status, we asked students three questions to find out if one or both sides of a their family, grandparents and parents, spoke any variety of Chinese. As mentioned in the literature review, we define our students as heritage speakers if they come from a Chinese-speaking ethnic background, disregarding whether the students were born in Australia or if they migrated here when they were young. Thus, an affirmative answer to any of the three questions qualifies them to be a heritage speaker. Our data shows that all of the students reported that their ancestors, grandparents and parents spoke Chinese.

In reporting what they considered their mother tongue or first language, about half of the students said it was Cantonese and a similar number said it was English. The rest of the students reported varieties of Chinese as their mother tongue.

4.1.2 Prior knowledge of the target language

The participants were asked to rate their proficiency level prior to taking Chinese in six areas pertaining to learning Mandarin: listening, speaking, reading,
recognition of characters, writing characters, and writing composition. It was thought that information from this section could help course design and placement in the future. In general, students rated themselves low in all areas, with the highest mean score being just over 2 for listening. Following a significant analysis of variance (ANOVA) test for differences (p = 0.003), a multiple comparisons test (based on Tukey’s 5% family significance level) revealed two groups, labeled A and B in Table 1. (Note that the data shown in Tables 1, 2, 5 and 6, if not stated otherwise, were analyzed using the Minitab statistics analysis tool. In the presentation of the results, we use the alphabetic letters to indicate groups that are statistically the same or different. Thus, means of the variables that share a common letter in the group column are statistically the same while those that do not share a letter are significantly different).

From Table 1 we can see that the means for students’ self-rated proficiency in the six areas measured are all very low (max = 2.07, min = 0.93). Looking at the groups column, we can see that whatever prior knowledge students reported to have as measured by the six variables, listening is rated significantly higher than both character writing and composition abilities, but not speaking, character recognition or reading. What this means is that the students’ minimum prior knowledge of Mandarin before enrolling in the course was in the oral and aural skills and a little bit of reading ability. They were not confident with writing characters let alone compositions. Thus, along the spectrum of HL groups with different prior language proficiency, most of the students in this cohort tended to rate themselves as true beginners.

### Table 1: Measurement of prior knowledge of target language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Options</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>listening</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.070</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speaking</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.581</td>
<td>A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>character recognition</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.535</td>
<td>A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.279</td>
<td>A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>character writing</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.186</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composition</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Motivational orientations

There were 14 statements in the survey covering major motivational variables identified in existing literature, including those pertaining to the HL learning
context. Following a significant ANOVA test (p = 0.000), a multiple comparisons test was then performed to identify the differences. The test revealed five groups, labeled A to E in Table 2.

If we consider only the value of each of the means, Table 2 shows that the first four orientations, which relate to job prospects and cultural heritage and identity, score higher than the rest, with the last two orientations related to study requirement receiving the lowest scores. Orientations 11 and 12, which indicate external influences such as parental opinions and social pressure, also receive lower scores. Upon further analysis, the groups column shows that the first four reasons are rated significantly higher than the last four but not so much from the middle section from orientations 5 to 8. This middle section contains orientations which can be characterized as (a) integrative: like the people and culture; (b) intrinsic: like Mandarin language and love foreign languages, and (c) instrumental: travel. From the data, we can say that this cohort of students generally possessed favorable attitudes toward Chinese-speaking people and Chinese culture, which is likely to be linked to their heritage-specific motives, i.e. the target language is part of their ethnic and cultural identity. It appeared to be important to the students that they learn Mandarin so as to gain more future capital in the job market. This could be influenced by the present context where China has taken a more dominant role in the world economy. Such an orientation could possibly explain why the students viewed studying the language for credit points and future study the least important. What the data also shows is that their decision to study

Table 2: Reasons for learning Chinese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Measurement option</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Job prospects</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.326</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Cultural heritage</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.209</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cultural identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.045</td>
<td>A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Parents' opinion-better job prospects</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Like Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.884</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 For travel</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.841</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Like the people and culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.791</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Parents' opinion-own culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.705</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Love foreign languages</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.512</td>
<td>A B C D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Parents' opinion-own heritage</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.182</td>
<td>A B C D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Parents' opinion-communicate with own community</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.091</td>
<td>C D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Expected by society</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.068</td>
<td>C D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Needing credit points</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.791</td>
<td>D E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 For postgrad study</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.932</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mandarin was not so much influenced by their parents’ point of view or society’s expectation that they should learn the language.

4.1.4 Motivational strength

As mentioned previously, research has shown that the effort component should not be ignored when examining learning motivation. As such we wanted to find out how students reported on the effort they invested in learning the target language beyond the compulsory work of the course requirements. We used three factors as measurements: (a) seek practice outside class, (b) the number of hours spent practicing outside class, (c) reasons given as to the number of hours spent. With regard to the question (a), 86% of the students responded “Yes”, while 14% gave a negative response. The results of question (b) are shown in Figure 2, which shows that of those students who practiced outside of class, 67.4% spent three hours or less, with the majority of them (46.5%) spending 1–3 hours.

An open-ended question was also used to elicit students’ reasons for their outside-class hours of study. Several themes were identified and summarized in Figure 3, which also shows the relationship between the reasons given and number of hours spent. As can be seen, students who enjoy the course and want to do well spent three or more hours, while the one student who reported spending more than six hours gave the reason want to do well. Those who gave don’t want to fail as a reason, tended to spend only up to three hours because of other com-
In other words, the ought-to self (see section 2) did not seem to propel effort towards the study. The two students who said they did not enjoy the course naturally spent the least amount of time practicing – less than one hour. It thus appears that the more intrinsically motivated students tended to exert more effort and vice versa.

In terms of self-rated motivational level (Table 3), the data (mean = 3.6; median = 4) show that less than 7% of students rated their motivation in the bottom two levels while the top two levels contain almost 57% of the responses. Slightly over one third of the students rated their motivation in the middle level. The overall result shows a reasonably motivated group of students.

Table 3: Tally for discrete variables: self-rated motivational level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N = 44)
4.1.5 Learning goals

This section consists of three parts: primary learning goals, expected levels upon graduation, and intention to continue Chinese study to the next level. It is believed that finding out what students want will bear relevance and significance to course and materials design.

(A) Primary goals. In this section, we asked students to rate in order of importance, using a Likert scale of 1–5, five areas pertaining to learning Mandarin: speaking, listening, reading, writing characters and writing essays. For us, these represent the basic goals of learning the target language. While some students may view becoming a fluent speaker of Mandarin of primary importance to them, others might want to improve their reading and writing skills, for example. Following a significant ANOVA test for differences (p = 0.000), a multiple comparisons test was conducted which revealed two groups, shown in Table 4. From this table, it can be seen that for the HL students as a whole, they equally want to improve the first four skills which are the basic literacy skills. However, to learn to write characters is slightly less important than the first three variables, while to be able to compose essays in the target language is considered the least important.

(B) Desired levels of proficiency upon graduation. In this section, we provided students with four statements, each of which corresponds to a level of proficiency, from basic to advanced. Level one is the beginner level, which pertains to basic literacy skills. In level two, equivalent to an intermediate level, students are expected to have more adequate communication skills in everyday situations, while level three defines an upper intermediate level where communication, oral and written, expands to a wider range of topics and contexts. Level four is the advanced level where students are expected to have achieved proficiency that enables them to express more abstract concepts and understand complex topics.

Table 4: Primary goals of enrolling in the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement option</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Groups*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>improve speaking</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.705</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve listening</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.341</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve reading</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.250</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve writing characters</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.159</td>
<td>A, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve writing essays</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.523</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
such as politics, history and academic subjects. After an ANOVA test for differences \( p = 0.006 \) was conducted, we performed a multiple comparisons test, which revealed two groups, shown in Table 5. From this table, it can be seen that upon graduation, students specifically indicated that they desired to reach an upper immediate level; they did not aspire to the highest level nor did they just want a basic proficiency level.

(C) Intention to continue. A very important aspect of motivation is whether students have sustained interest in continuing to a higher level. From Table 6 it is clear that the retention rate starts from a high base and increases continuously, with 100% retention rate of the third-year students, although the sample size is very small.

### 4.2 Qualitative data

Similar questions to the survey were asked in the focus group interviews. This enabled explicit parallel, deeper exploration of students' perceptions of their motivation for studying Chinese, their learning needs, and their aspirations or goals. In this section we report a number of important themes identified.

---

**Table 5: Self-reported desired level of proficiency upon graduation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement option</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Groups*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>have basic conversation, reading and writing skills</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.4091</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>able to communicate adequately in everyday situation</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.4545</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>able to communicate across a wider range of topics in informal and formal contexts</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.7045</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>able to express more abstract concepts and understand more complex topics such as politics and academic subjects</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.3636</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: Intention to continue studying Chinese**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I intend to continue studying Mandarin</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Year (N = 21)</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Year (N = 17)</td>
<td>94.12%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Year (N = 5)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(A) **Personal background and diverse language ability levels.** Each participant in the interviews was given the opportunity to briefly describe their cultural and linguistic background. The information in this area triangulates the survey data, in confirming the diversity of students’ linguistic backgrounds, as shown in the quantitative data above, and as observed in other studies. Participants reported that their families had emigrated from different parts of mainland China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, or Cambodia, most typically in their parents’ generation. A variety of Chinese dialects had been spoken in the home by parents and grandparents but participants described linguistic development typical of other studies of Chinese heritage language learners and that shown in our quantitative data above, i.e. development of some oracy skills but very limited literacy in domestic and Mandarin Chinese, even though some attended community language schools to learn Chinese:

> Both my parents are from Hong Kong. We mainly speak Cantonese at home with bits of English, but I’ve never been to Chinese school so I’ve never actually learnt any sort of Chinese, like Cantonese or Mandarin. I can’t really read Chinese. (Y1S8)
> I don’t know how to write anything even though I went to Chinese school. (Y1S4)

The HL students themselves understood that there was a range of linguistic competence amongst them, and that they positioned themselves along a spectrum of exposure and competence:

> I do feel like I’m a heritage speaker, but I’m on the low end of the spectrum. (Y2S1)
> Both my parents are Indonesian and so are my grandparents, so we don’t speak Mandarin at home, my parents spoke to me in English, so I was more like technically Australian. And my parents speak Hakka, so obviously I’m from China but I didn’t grow up learning any Mandarin. (Y2S3)

Several students noted that with the mixture of language history in their families, they now felt confused as to what their first language was. This is reflected in the quantitative data where quite a large number of students nominated English as their first language:

> When I first came to primary school, I actually couldn’t speak English. And now I can’t speak Hakka. I find that really strange because I don’t know what my first language is. I really can’t speak my first language anymore, which is a real shame. I think I’m learning Chinese because it gives my culture heritage. (Y1S9)

(B) **Motivations for learning Chinese.** From content analysis of the interview data, we found that similar to the questionnaire data presented above, students’ domi-
nant reasons for studying Chinese related to personal identity and family communication, together with job/career considerations, as the word “useful” occurred frequently:

- I felt that I should learn Chinese to better connect with my heritage/background. I had a little sense of shame that I couldn’t read or write in the language of my family. I thought it would make communicating with my grandparents easier and it has. (Y3S1)
- I actually made the resolution to learn Chinese at uni, so I wouldn’t feel like I was losing Chinese-ness, because my Chinese at home is very quickly deteriorating . . . (Y1S10)
- I’m learning Chinese because it gives my culture heritage. (Y1S7)
- I know it’s probably one of the most useful languages to learn right now. (Y2S4)
- I guess I want to learn because it will be useful for me, because I want to work overseas. (Y2S2)

In the follow-up interviews at the end of 2013, identity and family connection remained a strong focus for learning Chinese:

- I think I just wanted to learn the language so I can speak to my family overseas. (Y3S1)
- I chose Chinese because I want to get back in touch with my culture, that’s really it. And I’m not forced to do it by my parents . . . I thought that the first one I should try to do is my own, going back to where I’ve come from. (YR2S4)

(C) Student perceptions of learning experiences. Students were asked about the “fit” of the Chinese course to their abilities and needs, and what personal learning priorities they had in their Chinese study. Some students were critical of what they perceived to be an outdated course book, which featured language and cultural items that were old-fashioned.

- If your goal is to acquire spoken Mandarin, some of the language is a bit archaic, . . . if you actually said something that was in there [i.e. in the textbook] to a girl, you’d get slapped. (2013, Y3S2)

In particular students expressed their desire to acquire speaking fluency:

- We need help with speaking . . . I found it so hard to speak without a Cantonese accent. (Y3S1)

A number of HL students described their difficulties in learning Chinese characters due to their lack of literacy. Importantly however, they identified the cognitive learning facility they have, afforded by their multilingualism, in their ability to make metalinguistic transfers between languages. They were also able to identify that they were actively searching for linkages with their prior knowledge:
For those such as myself who have a Chinese heritage, we tend to need to find a linkage between what is taught, and what we already know. Hence for heritage learners, we would appreciate being guided to a linkage. (2013, Y2S4)

(D) Students’ perception of learning needs. Students displayed a good critical sense of their differentiated needs as HL students. The needs are diverse, and reflect the different levels of language achievement within the group. They included a desire for more intellectual depth in language and culture, a desire for a faster pace of learning than non-learners, and a desire for exposure to variety and challenge of real-life authentic language (not textbook language). Conversely, other HL students asked for more basic help with speaking, pronunciation and character retention.

A number of students expressed their awareness of being part of a unique social trend in their HL generation to reclaim their identity, while at the same time increasing their economic capital:

*I think it’s largely due to how China’s expanded, I mean the economic growth is quite large . . . So people may be feeling like “maybe I should feel a sense of belonging back to the Chinese community by learning that extra language, because in future I may have use for it” . . .* (Y1S10)

We’re all at that age where we’re realizing that Chinese is really important . . . The people who were refugees or immigrants have now had enough time to create another generation of Australian-Chinese people, who like us are struggling to connect with heritage and language . . . I think around this time, there’s just this huge, huge group of ABC’s (Australian Born Chinese), just realizing that there’s a need to re-learn a language. (Y2S9)

5 Discussion of findings

In this study we adopted quantitative and qualitative methods to collect our data. The quantitative method of a survey questionnaire showed that the majority of the students had grown up in Australia in diverse Chinese dialect-speaking families; a majority had been born in Australia and considered English their first language. Previous studies have found that HL learners are not a homogeneous group as regards their sociolinguistic background and their proficiency level in the HL (see Kondo-Brown and Brown 2008). Our data showed that almost all of the students surveyed had very limited prior knowledge of Mandarin. This finding confirms other studies on several issues: that the Chinese HL situation is unique in that HL students come from non-Mandarin speaking backgrounds. As such, they are not studying a home language, nor a foreign language, but rather a language that has historical, cultural heritage importance for them. Related to this is
the fact that their prior knowledge of Mandarin is very limited, especially their literacy skills, which refutes some perception that HL learners are taking a “soft” subject to gain advantage. Their claim that English is their first language is an interesting finding which shows that although most students recognized Mandarin as ethnically, historically and culturally related to who they are, their current linguistic identity is linked to English, which is their primary language in school, university and the work place, and which accounts for much of their social life.

Our students’ common status as heritage learners meant they shared important motivational orientations of heritage and cultural identity, confirming various studies (see section 2) which found that the heritage factor is important in HL learners’ language choice and persistence. Nevertheless, both parents (as reported by students) and students themselves also valued job prospect and the usefulness of Chinese in their future life. In fact, studying Mandarin for career advantage features strongly in both sets of data, aligning well with the global enthusiasm for learning Mandarin for its perceived usefulness. In other words, the students were motivated by the belief that learning Chinese would give them an edge in the job market and by the perceived importance of the language in today’s global economy. Instrumentality has thus proven to be a powerful motivation in our study as well as in many other such studies (Lu and Li 2008; Wen 1997), reflecting the fact that heritage learners feel they have a personal stake in the future. At the lower end of the scale are students’ orientations relating to academic study. Our data showed that the students were not learning Chinese because they wanted to pursue serious study in this subject. Such a trend calls for a reanalysis of the traditional instrumental construct in the Chinese HL context, and the need to separate those orientations that relate to career prospects from those that concern academic study. It may be a limiting concept that learning Chinese in recent decades has been associated with some kind of economic gain rather than a deeper and higher level of intellectual and cultural pursuit.

With such a motivational profile, together with the social cultural context in which most of them had grown up, it is not surprising to find that the students generally did not aim too high, as shown in their aspiration regarding their learning goals. Most of them chose intermediate and upper intermediate levels as the goals to reach. To them, these levels would be adequate for functional communication with Chinese-speaking parents and grandparents, as well as being an advantage when seeking employment.

In terms of motivational intensity, the study supports the claim that although HL students may have the motivation to achieve a certain personal goal, it may not match their effort in outside study. As other research shows (e.g. Wright 2008), although action can match willingness, it often does not. Also, it shows
that as the majority of the students had been born in Australia and grew up in Australian society, they were more likely to be influenced by the Australian way of life and culture, including the education schema that shapes their study habit and aspiration. One important reason given for lack of study outside formal instruction was *other commitments*, which clearly demonstrates that like most Australian students, their student life also consisted of working part-time to support their social life. We have noted also that their motivation was not aligned with high academic goals requiring great effort and commitment. Their prioritization of language skills to improve basic literacy was also reflected in their lack of interest in postgraduate studies and aspiration to acquire adequate communicative competence rather than overtly ambitious academic levels.

The qualitative data offer greater depth of personal perception both individually and in the group than the survey data, adding to our understanding of the HL learners. A number of observations can be made. The focus group interviews support the quantitative survey in many ways, but also raise some interesting contradictions. In the survey data, career and job-related motivation was more prominent, whereas in the focus group interviews much greater emphasis was placed on motivation arising from family and heritage considerations. We conjecture that this may be due to the possible effect of peer group pressure on focus group data: students may feel the need to agree with their fellow learners. Despite the diversity of the students and their backgrounds, most demonstrated an affective sense of belonging to the group, and there was a lot of nodding and shared agreement across the group. These were students who shifted daily between cultures and languages, not always easily, and shared at least some common aspects of intercultural development. Their intercultural development may have affected them cognitively, affectively and behaviourally (Bennett and Hammer 1998). In fact, for some students the career motivation may not be at odds with the family heritage motivation but continuous with it. Rather than an individual decision, career choice may be the focus of family encouragement, equally with family language communication issues. However, regardless of our conjecture, both of these two important motivational factors appear to operate regardless of dialect, temporal distance from immigration, or degree of family linguistic abilities.

The students' motivational profile explains the priority they give to the development of speaking skills. There is a degree of tension between their communicative learning goal and the traditional teaching goals of the Chinese curriculum, which stresses complex written literacy construction. The call for changes to the pedagogical nature of heritage Chinese studies is part of the bigger picture of pedagogical change taking place in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language (see, for example, Moloney and Xu 2012; Orton 2008).
A final finding to emerge from the qualitative data is the interesting relationship between past and future expressed by the students. They spoke of “belonging back”, “getting back in touch”, and “going back”. This is balanced with a strong sense of their Chinese language also being part of a forward movement. It is a “useful” part of their future, for both family and career reasons. For these students, Chinese may be an essential link between two areas of their life.

6 Pedagogical implications and conclusion

The development of heritage Chinese studies must be considered as part of the bigger picture of research into issues effecting the development of Chinese as a foreign language. Although our sample was limited, our findings enable us to identify what may be some emerging implications for Chinese heritage language learning in Australia and beyond. Our study may be the first to identify, through a close examination of motivational profiles, some research-based pedagogic implications and strategies for teaching Chinese heritage learners in the Australian context.

Firstly, we noted that the HL learners unanimously asked for more emphasis on speaking and pronunciation, and for more authentic language, aligned with their expectation of relevant and meaningful constructivist learning. We highlight the pedagogic need for tertiary teaching of Chinese HL learners to include more time for and greater emphasis on oral competence, including authentic contemporary language, and informed critique of the language offered in the textbook.

Secondly, we highlight a pedagogic opportunity arising from motivation related to the family. Following the increasing trend towards task-based teaching (Du and Kirkebaek 2012), teachers should consider designing more learning tasks that involve interaction with students’ families, such as interviews with family members or family research.

Thirdly, we highlight that teachers must avoid making assumptions of superior language competence. Students themselves recognize their different linguistic backgrounds and abilities in oracy and literacy. While the occasional heritage student may appear to experience little difficulty in the three-year program, students in general are not taking the course as a soft subject, which is a common perception among non-HL students (Xu and Moloney forthcoming). As such, they need help with various aspects of the language, in particular learning vocabulary and retention of characters. Heritage learners’ oral exposure to their home language, in many cases not Mandarin, does not necessarily lead them to acquire
speaking, reading and writing skills more quickly than non-heritage learners. This is because many Chinese dialects and Mandarin are mutually unintelligible. Home language may not support reading comprehension or learning the characters if the home knowledge has not included exposure to the script system (Xiao 2006). Thus, some heritage learners may need the same level of support as non-heritage learners. The teaching of Chinese HL learners needs to tap into the rich professional resources that support understanding of principles of differentiation, individual student learning support and autonomy (Benson 2013).

Fourthly, some students were aware of prior knowledge that they were able to apply to achieve transfer between languages, making intuitive recognition of Mandarin syntax easier. When syntactic, character or cultural connections arise, we urge teachers to use open questions to facilitate enquiry, varying traditional patterns of classroom interaction in order to draw on students’ prior knowledge (Moloney et al. 2012; Morgan 2008). This requires some relaxation of the model where the teacher is the only authority and source of knowledge in the room. This accords with the notion common in language pedagogy today of “making linguistic connections” (New South Wales Board of Studies 2003) to facilitate metalinguistic comparison and deduction.

Fifthly, we highlight an implication that is less positive for tertiary language departments. An inherent goal of undergraduate degree courses is to produce a number of students who will go on to undertake postgraduate study. Only two heritage Chinese students in this study mentioned such a possibility. Motivation arising either from communicative goals for familial heritage or post-graduation career prospects does not necessarily match well with longer-term academic goals. Again, however, we suggest that such postgraduate study may need to offer research in areas of relevance to heritage learners, to capture their interest and represent extended social cultural or economic capital to them.

Finally, although transition from first-year to second-year study was not an explicit focus of this study, we believe the study also underlines the critical nature of establishing successful confident study in the first year, as a platform for future studies. The nature of the first-year language learning experience has been examined elsewhere (see e.g. Fielding and Scott 2011; West-Sooby and Bouvet 2004). Where a successful retention can be achieved into second-year classes, sustained study, and the individual’s identity (or “future self”; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009) as a user of Chinese, becomes a reality.

Our participants were undergraduate university students who may represent only a small fraction of the Chinese heritage language learning population in Australia. We thus do not claim that these students’ experiences represent all Chinese tertiary learners’ experiences, but they may be indicative of common trends among the wider circle of HL Chinese learners.
We see exemplified in these students the contested nature of the label “heritage”. For them choosing to learn Chinese is no longer only about looking back into the past, or even being able to speak to family: these considerations are balanced by the forward-looking accumulation of cultural and economic capital as members of the globalized Chinese-speaking communities of the future. In other words, heritage Chinese students envision a future self, arising from imagined future opportunities (Stake and Nickens 2005). In particular, for these heritage language students, borrowing from the second language future self model (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009), we may say that a heritage language future self is motivating them to pursue further study. The strength of this heritage language future self may be part of the instrumental motivation which Macaro and Wingate (2004) found to be essential in supporting success in early tertiary study, and is an area for future research.

References


Ho, Debbie. 2006. The focus group interview: Rising to the challenge in qualitative research methodology. Australian Review of Applied Linguistics 29(1). 05.1–19.


**Appendix – Survey Questionnaire**

1. **Demographics:**
   1.1 What is your gender? Male □ Female □
   1.2 What is your age?
   1.3 Do you live with your parents? Yes □ No □

2. **Biographical background**
   2.1 I was born in Australia □ China □
   Other □ (please specify)
   2.2 If you were not born in Australia, how old were you when you arrived in Australia?
   2.3 If your parents migrated to Australia, in what year did they arrive here?
   2.4 If you attended school in another country, how many years did you attend school in that country?
   2.5 If you attended school in another country, what year level did you reach in that country?

3. **Linguistic background**
   3.1 Your ancestors (one or two) speak a dialect or a variety of Chinese (e.g. Cantonese, Hokien, Mandarin, etc.)
   Yes □ No □
   3.2 If yes, please specify which variety
   3.3 Your grandparents (one or two) speak a dialect or a variety of Chinese (e.g. Cantonese, Hokien, Mandarin, etc.).
   Yes □ No □
3.4 If yes, please specify which variety ___________ (e.g. Cantonese, Hokien, Mandarin, etc.)

3.5 Your parents (one or two) speak a dialect or a variety of Chinese (e.g. Cantonese, Hokien, Mandarin, etc.).

Yes □ No □

3.6 If yes, please specify which variety ___________

3.7 What would you say is your mother tongue(s)? Or first language? __________

4. Prior knowledge of Mandarin

Prior to this course, your language proficiency of Mandarin in the following areas is:

0 means ‘not able at all’.
1 means ‘minimum proficiency’ (only can say/understand/read a little bit and can recognize/write a few words)
2 means ‘basic proficiency’ (can hold a basic conversation / read very simple texts and write simple information)
3 means ‘intermediate proficiency’ (able to communicate in speaking and writing mostly adequately in everyday situation, e.g. with family and friends who speak the same language)
4 means ‘near native proficiency’ (able to communicate in speaking and writing across a wide range of general topics in a variety of formal and informal contexts, such as business situations, in the work place, etc.)
5 means ‘native proficiency (able to express in speaking and writing more abstract concepts and analyse more complex topics, e.g. politics, science, other academic subjects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading (texts)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of characters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing of characters</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing of composition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Motivation orientations

5.1 I am learning Mandarin because I like the language itself.

(where 1 means ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 means ‘Strongly agree’)

1 2 3 4 5

5.2 I am learning Mandarin because I like the Chinese people and its culture.

1 2 3 4 5

5.3 I am learning Mandarin because I love learning many foreign languages.

1 2 3 4 5

5.4 I am learning Mandarin because I consider it my cultural heritage.

1 2 3 4 5
5.5 I am learning Mandarin because I consider it part of my cultural identity.
1 2 3 4 5
5.6 I am learning Mandarin because it will give me a better job prospect for my future career.
1 2 3 4 5
5.7 I am learning Mandarin because I need the credit points for an elective.
1 2 3 4 5
5.8 I am learning Mandarin because I want to pursue postgraduate study in a Chinese Studies field.
1 2 3 4 5
5.9 I am learning Mandarin because I want to travel to the country (countries) where Mandarin is spoken.
1 2 3 4 5
5.10 I am learning Mandarin because it is expected of me because I am Chinese.
1 2 3 4 5
5.12 My parents think it is important to learn Mandarin because we are part of Chinese culture.
1 2 3 4 5
5.13 My parents think it is important to learn Mandarin because it is useful and will give me an edge in finding a job when I graduate.
1 2 3 4 5
5.14 My parents think it is important to learn Mandarin so that we can connect to and retain the family’s heritage.
1 2 3 4 5
5.15 My parents want me to learn Mandarin so that we can communicate with them and the Chinese community.
1 2 3 4 5

6. Commitment to the language
6.1 Do you try other means to help you practise and improve apart from the formal instruction at university?
6.2 How many hours per week do you spend studying (including speaking) this language outside of class
☐ 0–1  ☐ 1–3  ☐ 3–6  ☐ 6+
6.3 What are your reasons, to put in this amount of study time?
6.4 Can you rate yourself on how motivated you are in studying this language?
(where 1 means not motivated at all, and 5 means very motivated)
1 2 3 4 5

7. Expectation of this course
7.1 When you enrol in this course, your primary goal is to improve:
Identifying Chinese heritage learners' motivations

(For each of the following areas, rank in order of importance from 1–5 where 1 is least important and 5 most important)

Speaking 1 2 3 4 5
Listening 1 2 3 4 5
Reading (texts) 1 2 3 4 5
Writing (recognition and writing characters) 1 2 3 4 5
Writing (writing essays and compositions) 1 2 3 4 5

7.2 Do you plan to continue into higher levels of Mandarin study after your first year (if you are the first year student) / second year (if you are currently second year student) study?
Yes □ No □

7.3 What levels of proficiency in Chinese do you hope to achieve when you graduate?
□ To be able to hold a basic conversation /read and write basic information
□ To be able to communicate adequately in everyday situation
□ To be able to communicate (speaking and writing) across a wide range of general topics in a variety of formal and informal contexts (e.g. Business situations, people of different social status, etc.)
□ To be able to express more abstract concepts and analyse more complex topics, e.g. Politics, science, other academic subjects
□ Other (if your expectations/needs are not described above, please explain below:

Bionotes

Hui Ling Xu teaches in the Department of International studies, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University. Her research interests include linguistic typology, applied linguistics, teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and intercultural language learning pedagogy.

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Identifying Chinese heritage learners' motivations, learning needs and learning goals: A case study of a cohort of heritage learners in an Australian university

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Abstract

There is increasing enrolment of Chinese heritage language learners in tertiary Chinese language classrooms across Australia. Educated in English, Chinese heritage learners are of diverse national origins and the Chinese language varieties to which they have been exposed through family or community are also diverse. Recent research in this field has called for greater attention to pedagogical questions in heritage language study, entailing a better understanding of learners and their learning motivation. This study was driven by pedagogical concern as to the perceived underachievement of the learner group and low retention rate at the beginner level. Through an analysis of quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data, the study closely examines the particular motivational orientations, learning needs, and goals of a group of Chinese heritage language learners in one Australian university setting. Motivation from heritage and cultural identity is balanced by the drive towards employment prospects, or perceived economic capital of learning Chinese. The students' goal of communicative competence is at odds with the apparent traditional Chinese teaching goals, which have stressed complex written literacy construction. This study fills a significant gap in the field by identifying research-based pedagogic implications and strategies for teaching Chinese heritage learners in the Australian context.

Keywords: Chinese heritage language; motivation; learning needs; Australian tertiary context; foreign language pedagogy

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