Book Review


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*Heritage Language Development: Focus on East Asian Immigrants* is a collection of papers on East Asian heritage languages in the U.S. The book represents a major contribution to the field of HL studies in general and East Asian Languages in particular. Chapters and topics are well selected, and the information presented in them is interesting and valuable. Collectively, they raise the awareness of East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) HL maintenance, promote its research and teaching, and sound a wakeup call that without the mainstream support HLs will disappear in 2-3 generations. *Heritage Language Development* is divided into three sections: heritage language development among East Asian immigrant families, the influence of educational institutions on heritage language development, and heritage language use and proficiency.

In her introduction, the editor defines HL learners as "school-age or young adult children who are using or learning their first-learned non-dominant languages as their primary or secondary languages in various social settings and for different purposes" (p. 1). This definition gives the HL a significant new role, that is, it can be the learner's primary language even if it is non-dominant, although this understanding departs from the mainstream concept that an HL is secondary to a society's dominant language. The chapter outlines the rapid growth of East Asian immigrant populations in the U.S. and Canada, argues the personal and national merits of HL development, and points out that community HL schools play more of a role in HL maintenance than the formal education system.

Section I (Chapters 2-4) examines the roles of the family and social factors in the transmission of heritage language and culture in East Asian immigrant contexts. While Chapter 2 demonstrates the vital role of grandparents in vertical transmission, or passing down language across generations, Chapters 3-4 show that without horizontal transmission, or formal education, heritage language maintenance and development are impossible.

Chapter 2 is written by Guofang Li, a researcher on Chinese HL maintenance in Canada and the U.S. Drawing on data from two of her ethnographic studies conducted over ten years, Li demonstrates how quickly children can stop using and lose their HL under the social and psychological forces of assimilation and acculturation, and also points out that parents' influence on HL development is fragile. Li's conclusions are consistent with discussions among many members of the Chinese immigrant community – that "the small (i.e., HL) culture cannot win over the big (i.e., mainstream) culture," meaning that the loss of HL is inevitable. On the one hand, parents strongly support their children's HL maintenance. On the other hand, they compromise their efforts by expressing concerns
that their children's Chinese proficiency might hinder their English language development. Li painstakingly describes the stories of two Chinese children's L1 shift and loss. One child was a young arrival from China with some prior Chinese proficiency. His parents limited his Chinese studies to asking him to translate English words into Chinese. Once they decided that his English proficiency had improved, they ended his Chinese studies. The other child, born and raised in Canada, reluctantly attended a community Chinese HL school and denied knowing Chinese outside of school. Li's concludes her in-depth description of the Chinese immigrant families losing the battle in their children's HL maintenance by calling on parents, community organizations, and mainstream institutions to collaborate and lend support to each other to improve heritage language education.

Chapter 3 by Mitsuyo Sakamoto investigates Canada-based Japanese immigrant parents' beliefs and choices in their children's HL maintenance, with a focus on the effect of HL use separated by domain. At home, her parent subjects required their children to use their HL for the purposes of family bonding. At school, the children were required to use English only and to build the L2 literacy on a foundation of underdeveloped L2 oral skills. This dilemma resulted in clear-cut HL and L2 separation both in location and motivation and, consequently, the children increasingly "encountered language-related problems in both HL and L2 (p.50)." The data show that the Japanese parents did not have enough English proficiency to communicate with their English-educated children. With such utilitarian motivation for HL use, the children's Japanese skills were typically skewed, as found in similar studies on Chinese HL speakers (Xiao, 2006, 2007): their oral skills were functional or fluent but their reading and writing proficiencies were limited. As the parents painfully expressed, "...the (children's) vocabulary stops expanding... that was a bit unfortunate...they cannot read Kanji. (p.52)" Such results suggest that the exclusive use at home of the HL might last only long enough for the new-generation parents to acquire sufficient L2 proficiency for family bonding.

Chapter 4 by Park examines the process of intergenerational transmission among six Korean immigrant families living in New York. The author demonstrates that young children acquire the linguistic terms and morphosyntactic morphemes required for Korean politeness through oral interactions with parents and grandparents in home settings and that grandparents, who have limited English proficiency, play a more vital role in this process than parents. Park's study supports previous findings that the intergenerational transmission of HLs is the most effective way to preserve languages (Fishman, 2001) and also lend evidence to support immersion or programs abroad, where the learner has direct access to the target linguistic and cultural resources. Park's study is well controlled and the data are convincing. They could, however, be more illuminating if multiple social contexts had been observed and subsequent cross-context comparisons conducted, such as immigrant families with grandparents who have functional English proficiency or immigrant families with second-generation parents only.

Section 2 (Chapters 5-7) examines how educational institutions and policies can make or break HL maintenance and development in the U.S. Chapter 5, by Kiyomi Chinen and
Richard Tucker, examines the role of Japanese community HL schools (Hoshuukoo) in HL maintenance and development. The results suggest that Japanese HL schools play a significant role in promoting both Japanese proficiency and Japanese ethnic identity, in that a strong direct connection is found between Japanese language proficiency and Japanese identity. Namely, students who had higher Japanese language proficiency had a stronger sense of Japanese identity. Chinen and Tucker's data support findings in Chinese HL studies (Jia, 2007) that, among Chinese immigrants, adult or children alike, those who had a stronger self-rated sense of ethnic identity had higher self-rated Chinese proficiency. In addition, Chinen and Tucker report that students who had more positive attitudes toward the HL school generally identified themselves as more Japanese. However, as the authors noted, only a small fraction of the students at the HL school observed volunteered to participate in the study, and these students might have been more inclined to have positive attitudes towards their HL school. Thus, the findings of this study are suggestive rather than conclusive. Moreover, in general, community HL schools are not a full-fledged education system but a fledgling grass-roots effort, where improvements in funding, teacher training, curriculum and pedagogy are much needed to reach the optimal goal. Data from Chinese HL studies, for example, show that Chinese children typically start their HL school at a young age but that attrition rates are high (Xiao, 2007). Similarly, the Japanese school had 1,400 K-6th graders, 460 7-9th grade students (showing about a two-thirds attrition rate) and further down to 40 students at the 10-11th grades. One can hardly imagine such high attrition rate in the formal education system. To raise public awareness and promote HL schools, more in-depth studies should be conducted of HL schools, focusing both on their contributions and their dire need for mainstream support.

Chapter 6 by Shin investigates the impact of the current high-stakes test-driven American educational policies on HL education in general and East Asian languages in particular. This chapter is a pleasure to read although the findings are alarming. The author argues that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), heralded as an effort to improve every child's academic performance, more resembles a mainstreaming machine designed to create English-only speakers. As shown in the chapter, NCLB requires annual testing of all students in reading and math in Grades three through eight, and schools that are deemed ineffective based on test results can face serious penalties, including restructuring or state takeover. To survive, mainstream schools have increasingly focused on English and have removed foreign language education from the core curriculum. Shin notes that public support for East Asian language development at the K-12 level is especially rare. One example is that a Chinese program was forced out in its first year by the school district and was unable to revive no matter how hard teachers, parents, and students tried (p. 129). Such evidence confirms the College Board survey data on Chinese language education (2005), which showed that only thirty-three states had established Chinese programs in elementary and secondary schools. At the time of the study, the nation's 313 Chinese programs were variously distributed by state, ranging from 56 (Massachusetts) to 1 (Utah). Because of the absence of programs in mainstream schools, HL maintenance in general falls on immigrant families, who are powerless to change the inevitable language shift in their children (p. 141). To advance the goal of HL maintenance, the author
suggests a number of possibilities, including the inclusion of HL education in the mainstream curriculum and giving academic credit to students who attend HL schools. Chapter 7 by Asako Hayashi investigates the effect of immersion/bilingual programs in the shaping of Japanese learners' biliteracy by examining their attitudes toward bilingualism, language use, and language proficiency. The data collection, as reported, includes comprehensive surveys, interviews, and essay writings in both languages. The researcher devoted two months of observation to three participating programs—an English immersion program in Japan and two English-Japanese bilingual programs in the U.S., involving a total of 63 4th-5th graders. The results show that all participants have favorable attitudes toward bilingualism and believe that their bilingual abilities will be to their advantage in the future. In addition, participants in schools that offer Japanese instruction have more favorable attitudes towards the Japanese language than those whose schools do not. The language environments in and outside the school also affect the children's language use. Moreover, in contrast to previous studies, which found students' attitudes toward bilingualism correlated with their language use and abilities, this study indicates that they are not significantly correlated. As implications for HL maintenance, the author suggests that schools provide ample time for students to be exposed to both target languages, and offer more focus on the one less frequently used at home. Although the information in this study is valuable, I find much of it is not new. In addition, the study could benefit the readers more if the data coding and analysis were reported with more details and precision.

Chapters 8-10 in Section 3 analyze individual and social-psychological factors associated with East Asian HL use and proficiency. Chapter 8, by E.J. Kim, investigates what contributes to successful HL maintenance by examining various individual and social-psychological predictors for Korean American college students' (N=120) HL maintenance, such as age at immigration, length of Korean language education, degree and frequency of HL use, cultural identity, and motivation. Using a language background survey and a standardized Korean written proficiency test, the study found that degree and frequency of HL use, as well as parental involvement, were the strongest predictors of high HL proficiency. However, the duration of formal Korean language instruction, university language classes, or weekend HL schools was not significantly related to the participants' HL proficiency. Such a finding seems to contradict the previous research findings of abundant empirical studies on instructed SLA which suggest that second language instruction makes a substantial difference in proficiency (Doughty, 2003). The study's conclusion that formal SL instruction was insignificant leads the audience to believe that Korean HL homes and parental involvement were the only significant factors contributing to the Korean HL literary proficiency, which the author defines as knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, writing, and reading comprehension. Perhaps this may be true in Korean HL context, given my limited knowledge of this area, but not in Chinese HL homes. Chinese HL studies showed that although the Chinese immigrant homes and parents fostered the children with rudimentary oral skills, their literacy environment was impoverished, where HL reading materials and literacy activities were, in most cases, inadequate (Xiao, 2007). It would be worthwhile for future studies to explore how Korean homes provide the HL literacy materials and activities for the
children to the degree that they can play a major role in developing the learners' HL literacy skills.

Chapter 9, by Evelyn Yee-fun Man, examines the relationship between the Chinese learners' HL use (N = 115) and the facilitating language contact variables. The results show that the major context of HL use is at home (73.4%) and that the primary interlocutors are grandparents (93.3%) and parents (around 55%). But HL contact in school and outside home/school are rare or occasional. Namely, most contact with Chinese speakers and HL use takes place at home and with relatives. Moreover, a number of facilitating factors are found in the home setting, such as high frequency and strong stability of contact with family members and relatives, strong ties with ancestors' homeland, home media environment, etc. However, the learners' HL use at home seems to be largely limited to oral interactions, while parent-child shared reading or writing activities are either not investigated or not existent, although a list of learners activities at home gave the reader a glimpse of how they spend their time. That is, learners' involvement in reading (9.8%) and writing (9.2%) was very low while that in entertaining media activities was very high. As we all may be aware, if the HL use does not involve literacy development, it can hardly go beyond the family domain or the present time and space.

Chapter 10 by Kimi Kondo-Brown gives a comprehensive summary of the scope, methodologies, and findings of recent empirical research about individual and contextual factors associated with HL proficiency development in East Asian languages, presented in this volume and elsewhere.

This collection presents in-depth analysis of East Asian HLs, promotes their teaching and research, and encourages family, community, and mainstream institutions to unify their support for HL maintenance and development.

References