Diversity and Difference: Identity Issues of Chinese Heritage Language Learners from Dialect Backgrounds

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Abstract
The goal of this study is to explore the identity constructions of Chinese heritage language students from dialect backgrounds. Their experiences in learning Mandarin as a “heritage” language—even though it is spoken neither at home nor in their immediate communities—highlight how identities are produced, processed, and practiced in our postmodern world. Based on 64 interviews with Mandarin learners from various Chinese dialect backgrounds, we present their identity issues in three conceptual categories: imagined community, linguistic hegemony, and language investment. The findings lead us to rethink our pedagogical emphasis to better attend to the concerns of the dialect speakers, and hopefully, to make a contribution to the fast emerging field of Chinese heritage language development.

Introduction
Recent efforts to enrich the linguistic landscape of the United States have drawn scholarly attention to heritage language learning, of which Chinese is an increasingly prominent part. Despite the ethnic, cultural, and familial connection, or perhaps because of it, heritage language instruction presents both promises and problems. One of the main challenges is the variety of dialects spoken by the student body. Chinese heritage language learners embody a wide range of linguistic varieties apart from the “standard” Mandarin. Furthermore, many Chinese dialects are mutually unintelligible. Whether Chinese dialects should be considered as distinct “sinitic languages,” indeed, remains a controversial topic (Baxter, 1992; DeFrancis, 1984; W. Wang, 1997). Besides the dialect differences, there are two versions of the writing system: simplified characters for Mainland China and Singapore as well as traditional characters for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Chinese-speaking regions (Chen, 1999; He, 2006).

Current studies on Chinese heritage language usually take an all-inclusive approach with a broad definition, considering both Mandarin and dialect speakers as “heritage” students.\(^1\) Since Mandarin is not used at home or in their immediate communities, dialect Chinese speakers—especially those from the Southern provinces such as Guangdong (Canton), who form a large portion of the overseas Chinese population—face different, and at times difficult, tasks in learning Mandarin. Most of them are already puzzled by the fact that they live under the influences of two cultural systems with conflicting values and practices. For dialect Chinese speakers, the predicament is further complicated by their struggle with learning the “standard” Mandarin and maintaining their dialects simultaneously in an English-dominated society. With different Chinese language and cultural backgrounds, dialect speakers may easily become a subset within the heritage language learners, encountering “unrealistic expectations of teachers and peers, while finding their needs unmet” (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Kim, 2003; Tse, 2001).
Examining how Chinese dialect speakers navigate identity issues as they learn Mandarin as their heritage language is the aim of our project. Carreira (2004) points out that heritage language learning is a way for students to fulfill not just linguistic but also identity needs. Post-structural and post-colonial theories, among many other postmodern paradigms, have assumed a far greater role in delineating the link between identity and language acquisition (Giroux, 1992, p.vii). Many researchers have thus put forward more comprehensive notions of identity that integrate the language learner and the language learning context. McKay and Wong (1996) along with Norton (2000) highlight how the second language learning process is impacted by individual identities as well as social and power relationships—especially the imagined role that the learners themselves assume in the community. Heller (2000) argues that not all languages are equal, and in the case of bilingual speakers, the dominant languages always receive higher recognition and social values, not least due to the hegemonic ideologies in our postmodern world. He (2006) proposes that the development of Chinese heritage language learning relies on how students can find coherence in creating hybrid, multilingual identities. Accordingly, the negotiation of the “Chinese” component in dialect learners’ hybrid identities becomes more complicated, for Mandarin may not represent their linguistic affinity or cultural roots.

Inspired by these pioneering works, we endeavor to examine Chinese heritage language learning from the standpoint of the dialect students. The research is based on 64 interviews with Chinese language students of heritage background (45 of them from dialect or bi-dialect families; 19 from Mandarin-speaking families). Applying a ground theory methodology, we generate three conceptual categories from our data to better understand the identity issues among Chinese dialect speakers’ Mandarin learning experiences—1) imagined community; 2) linguistic hegemony; and 3) language investment. We also discuss our findings in light of current theories in each of the three areas that can further open a window onto the complex processes of their identity construction. Since “heritage” is the central theme, the emphasis falls primarily on ethnic identity. A host of other important aspects—such as gender and class—warrants separate investigation. Given the subject of our inquiry, we begin with a brief overview of terms used in our discussion, followed by a closer look at the controversy in defining Chinese language and dialects. Our analysis of the three key aspects in dialect speakers’ experiences constitutes the core of this article, which concludes with some pedagogical implications for Chinese heritage language instruction.

A Brief Overview: Identity, Heritage Language, and Chinese Language Pedagogy in America
While there are definitive connections among identity, heritage, and language practice, these concepts are not always easily defined. In the contemporary world, identity cannot be readily accounted for as a “self-fashioning,” “agentive,” “internal project” of the individual (D. Hall, 2004; Taylor, 1989). Rather, recent developments have positioned identity in a more public and collective framework. A language learner’s identity, hence, “must be understood with reference to larger inequitable social structures,” which are produced and reproduced in daily social interactions (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.13). S. Hall (1994) sees identity as “a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p.392). The notion of representation unavoidably binds identity to myriad power relations.
Fighting against the essentialist idea of preexisting “cores” of self, postcolonial and postmodern theorists further picture identity as flexible, fluid, and fragmentary. Identity as “negotiated experience, community membership, and learning process” lies at the center of our discussion (Wenger, 1998, p.163). How individuals act on their “agency”—to assume or resist particular identities in certain sites and times—is also our concern. One of our students’ responses to how he identifies himself best exemplifies the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of identity:

I guess it would depend on how the question was asked. Most of the time I would say that I’m Chinese. Seldom I would say I’m American. Most of the time if it comes to that question, if they are asking me if I am American, I would say that I am Chinese American.

Above all, identity is about “belonging” (Weeks, 1990, p.88), and in our case, a sense of heritage belonging for those dialect Chinese students who choose to learn Mandarin.

If pinning down the concept of identity seems precarious, defining the term “heritage language” is equally problematic. Heritage language learners are generally described as “any learners who have acquired their cultural and linguistic competence in a non-dominant language primarily through contact at home with foreign-born parents and/or other family members” (Kondo-Brown & Brown, 2008 UCLA Steering Committee, 2001; Valdés, 1995). While Clyne (1991) defines heritage language as a “language other than English (LOTE),” Fishman (2001) refines it as “a language of particular personal and family relevance other than English” and divides it into three categories: indigenous, colonial, and immigrant heritage languages. Still, how much previous exposure to, personal relevance of, or linguistic proficiency in the language are required in order to qualify a student as “heritage” varies from one school to another, for this is not only a “pedagogical issue but an administrative one as well” (Kono & McGinnis, 2001, p.197). What counts as a minority in a nation-state is also relative, as Chinese or Spanish may be deemed “immigrant” languages in America but are major world languages in their own right (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, pp.216-7). Despite recent initiatives and promotion by the field of foreign language education, Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) notes that heritage language in the United States “remains ill defined and is sensitive to a variety of interpretations within social, political, regional, and national contexts” (p.212). Labeling a complex situation with a single term is a tricky business; the “elasticity” of the term heritage language “raises a number of questions” related to not just linguistics but also “the politics of identity” (Wiley, 2001, p.30).

The quandary of identity politics and over-generalized definition, likewise, applies to Chinese as a heritage language. Its learners include both Mandarin and dialect speakers who are born in the United States as well as in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Chinese communities. Their diverse origins are matched by their variation in Mandarin skills. The language proficiency of Chinese heritage students differs drastically, from those “who can speak Mandarin fluently but are unable to read and write” to those “who read and write Chinese well but can only speak dialects other than Mandarin” (Wu, 2008, p.275). Distinguishing the uneven abilities among heritage students, McGinnis (1996) uses the terms “true beginners” for the ethnic Chinese...
learners who lack any rudimentary Chinese skills, “semi-native” for those with strong aural or oral skills but comparatively weak reading and writing skills (mostly non-Mandarin dialect speakers), and “true native” for those who possess certain fluency in all counts. The ideal is to teach each of these groups in its own proficiency-appropriate classes. Nevertheless, few institutions can afford to offer special courses for heritage students; most schools mix them with other foreign or second language learners in a single track system (Kondo-Brown, 2003).

However, Chinese language instruction is likely to become more demanding and specific in terms of class offering, not least due to the profound demographic change in the United States. Since the 1980s, the number of Chinese immigrants (including those from Hong Kong but not Taiwan) has increased nearly fivefold, making them the third-largest immigrant group in America (Migration Policy Institute, 2008). The influx of Chinese immigrants has made Chinese, at 4.4% of the total speakers of languages other than English, to be the second most spoken non-English language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Although Spanish and Spanish Creole (62.0%) is, by a huge margin, the most spoken foreign language in the United States, the rise of Chinese can no longer be ignored. The trend is also reflected in the rapid expansion in Chinese language learners nationwide. In language course enrollments in American institutions of higher education from 2002 to 2006, Chinese has become the second fastest-growing language (51.0%) (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2007). Based on SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) and AP (Advanced Placement) participation, Chinese has also started to attract a great number of secondary school learners (Yao, 2005).

This surge of interest in Chinese, in part, is caused by heritage students, be they young immigrants themselves or later generations of Chinese descent, who see studying the language of their ancestors as a rewarding experience. Correspondingly, interest in researching Chinese heritage language has also been building. Studies by D. Chao (1997), He (2006), Ke (1998), Luo & Wiseman (2000), McGinnis (1996, 2005), Shen (2003), Tse (1998, 2000, 2001), M. Wang (2003), S. Wang (1999, 2001), and Wu (2007), among many others, have joined special textbooks (Chou, Link, & Wang, 1997; Li, Liu, & Liu, 2004) and edited volumes related to the topic (Kondo-Brown, 2006; Kondo-Brown & Brown, 2008; X. Wang, 1996). Specifically, He and Xiao’s (2008) Chinese as a Heritage Language is a welcome entry. These contributions on heritage language pedagogy notwithstanding, literature that deals with dialect Chinese students is rare. Therefore, we believe further exploration of their identities may help us to better serve the Chinese heritage language learners in particular, and to a greater extent, heritage language instruction in general.

Problems in Defining Chinese Language

Before addressing the identity issues of the dialect students, it is advisable to consider the prevalent ideologies of the standard Chinese language. “Chinese” does not necessarily mean Mandarin. That China is a multiethnic and multilingual country is often overlooked. “The ‘Chinese’ spoken by close to a billion Han Chinese,” DeFrancis (1984) claims, “is an abstraction that covers a number of mutually unintelligible forms of speech” (p.39). The recent nationwide survey on language use in China reports the number of people who can communicate in
Mandarin at 56.03% (Zhongguo, 2006). Still, the figure is enormous and easily makes Mandarin the most spoken language in the world (Gordon, 2005).

In addition to the minority languages (such as Zhuang, Tibetan, and Uygur), the other non-Mandarin speaking population can be divided into six major Han dialect groups—Min, Wu, Yue, Gan, Hakka (Kejia), and Xiang. Each dialect group is comprised of many variations; Cantonese is part of the Yue group that covers the Guangdong area, for example. It preserves the fullest complement of Middle Chinese tones and word-final consonants (such as p, t, k) that do not exist in Mandarin (Y. Chao, 1943; Norman, 1988). Taiwanese belongs to the Min family that is regarded linguistically as the furthest removed from standard Mandarin and includes various forms in Fujian, Hainan, Teochew (Chaozhou), and Southeast Asia (known as Hokkien) (R. Cheng, 1985). Overriding all the oral differences is the unified written form of Han characters (Ramsey, 1987, pp.17-8). However, dialect communities may write according to their own grammatical rules or even create their own characters and words. In the vernacular press in Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is easy to find writing that is incomprehensible to other Chinese readers. The authors of the Dictionary on Cantonese of Guangzhou, for instance, list over 300 regional characters that are illegible to people from other regions (Rao, Ouyang, & Zhou, 1981; W. Wang, 1997).

The notion of a singular “Chinese language” is more politically motivated than factually based. It is tightly woven into the fabric of the nation-state ideology. In both mainland China and Taiwan today, it is “Mandarin,” originally a Beijing dialect (known as guanhua) that was used as the administrative language by imperial officials. Its propagation at the expense of other minority languages and regional dialects became firmly established at the turn of the twentieth century with the rise of nationalism that saw linguistic unification as progress (DeFrancis, 1984, pp. 225 & 227). After overthrowing the Manchurian dynasty in 1911, the Republican government sanctioned it as the “national language” (guoyu) in 1913. The vernacular Mandarin—“plain language” (baihua)—also replaced the “classical Chinese” (wenyan) to become the standard written form, as a result of the literary and cultural reforms headed by modernist writers (T. Chow, 1960).

The marriage between standard language and politics has been celebrated throughout modern Chinese history. The “national” status of Mandarin was maintained in Taiwan when the Nationalist Party (Guomindang or KMT) retreated to the island in 1949. The succeeding People’s Republic of China continued to promote Mandarin, although calling it a more egalitarian name “the common language” (putonghua) in 1955. In the same year the Communist regime also instituted a reform of the written script and phonetic system (Yuan, 2004). The project simplified and reduced the number of traditional Chinese characters, which are still used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other overseas Chinese communities. The pinyin system was implemented in 1958 for Mandarin, replacing the phonetic alphabets (zhuyin fuhao) created in 1913, but not for other dialects (fangyan). Meanwhile, Mandarin, known as Huayu, was recognized as one of the official languages in Singapore, even though most of its ethnic Chinese population comes from Southern dialect groups (Huang, 2008; Lee, 2000; Zhan, 2001). The Mandarin campaign has also been featured prominently in Hong Kong and Macao since their
reunifications with China in 1997 and 1999 respectively, in order to enforce a common tie to the mainland (Saillard, 2004; Tian, 2001; Zhang & Yang, 2004).^{13}

Issues with dialect, for better or for worse, are not going to vanish soon. The yardstick to define the “standard” language and dialect is never objective.^{14} Socio-political factors, perhaps more than linguistic ones, seem to be the key. “Machiavellian as it sounds,” W. Wang (1997) ironically comments, “the difference between a dialect and a language is that the latter has (an army and) a navy” (p.54). There is ambivalence among the mostly Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong about taking up Mandarin (Humphrey & Spratt, 2007). Advocating a unique local identity, Taiwan now endorses Taiwanese (taïyût), the regional form of speech derived from the Southern Min dialect (minnanhua), as an official language (P. Chow, 2002; Qiu, 1996; Tsao, 1999)^{15} Various languages of the aborigines are also included to be a part of the island’s linguistic family and education curriculum.

Similarly, dialect brings the diversity among Chinese heritage language learners into the forefront, raising concerns about both linguistic structures and identity politics. The differences—syntax, semantics, and phonetics—among the dialects, especially between the North (such as Mandarin) and South (such as Min and Yue), can be sharp (Y. Li, 1984, 1990). Taking one step further, Y. Chao (1976) claims that what is spoken of as Chinese dialects are “practically different languages,” as their gaps are as great as those between English and Dutch (pp. 97, 105). A comparable situation can be found in the case of Arabic, a language that covers as many nations and communities as Chinese. Morrison (2003) and Ryding (2003) point out that “diglossia is a pertaining concept in Modern Standard Arabic.” While Arabic speakers read and write the standard “classical” or “high” form of the language, they speak substantially different variants in everyday communication. In addition, the spoken vernaculars and dialects, which are often mutually unintelligible, differ from region to region in the Arab world, especially those separated by vast distances such as Morocco and Kuwait (Morrison, 2003; Ryding, 2003). Like Arabic, to consider Chinese a single language with varying degrees of regional differences is to misjudge the disparities among the dialects. But, on the other hand, “to call Chinese a family of various languages” is to ignore “the unique linguistic situation in China” and imply “extra-linguistic differences that in fact do not exist” (DeFrancis, 1984, p.56). The problem is not simply about terminology. The cultures, customs, and histories of different dialect groups are also very different. Typically, dialects mark the origins and kinships among the Chinese peoples (W. Li, 1994). One may reasonably doubt whether Mandarin can serve as the “heritage” language for those whose forebears, families, and friends speak another dialect.

The heterogeneity of Chinese heritage language learners calls for research in a variety of areas, including dialect. Many scholars have initiated discussions about dialect in heritage language pedagogy (Martínez, 2003; Sophocleous, 2006; Valdés, 1981; Villa, 1996, 2002; Wolfram, 1999; Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999). The profession of teaching Spanish has tackled the subject of dialect, a discussion which, at times, becomes heated over language rights, political motivations, and linguistic subordination both in the classroom and in society at large (Martínez, 2003; Villa, 1996, 2002). Whereas some conclude that instruction should prescribe the “best” dialect, however it is defined and by whoever is in charge, others believe that “the local variety is
just as good or bad as any dialect when it comes to language education” (Martínez, 2003). Valdés (1981) states that heritage language curriculum should promote “development and enrichment of language skills within existing dialects” and “wider communicative competence and enhancement of self-image” (p. 19). It is our belief that constructive debate about dialect awareness can benefit the field of Chinese heritage language as well.

Identity of the Chinese Dialect Speakers and Mandarin as Their Heritage Language
How dialect Chinese speakers perceive themselves in the process of studying Mandarin intrigues us both personally and professionally. Sociocultural theory and activity theory underscore the personal histories of the individuals as well as the communities of practice to which they belong in order to nourish their new learner identities (Cook, 1999; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Murphey, Chen, & Chen, 2005). We cannot help but wonder what identity issues may be entailed in Chinese dialect speakers who now study a “heritage” language that sounds different from their “mother tongue” and perhaps is not spoken in their communities. From our own teaching experiences, we have witnessed not merely students’ accomplishments but also their frustrations. Chinese heritage language development, He (2006) asserts, “depends on the ability to find continuity and coherence in multiple communicative and social worlds.” This project is our attempt to bridge some of these “social worlds.”

Accordingly, we interviewed 64 Chinese language students of heritage background: 15 from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and 49 from the University of California, Davis. They were all American citizens—37 were born in the United States, and 27 migrated with their parents at a young age (Tables A1-4). Forty five came from dialect or bi-dialect groups and 19 were Mandarin speakers (Table A5). Forty four participants were our former students and the rest learned about the study by referral. There were 30 males and 34 females, at the average age of 20 years old (Table A6).

Central to our study is the effect of identity issues on dialect speakers’ Mandarin learning experiences as opposed to those of the Mandarin-speaking students. As with mapping interview and fieldwork data, we first conducted “basic grounded-theory strategies” of coding the materials (Clarke, 2005, p.187). With no particular hypothesis in mind, we looked for central ideas expressed in the interviews and positioned our coding and reading of the data in their unique contexts. Interview transcripts were examined to extract a full range of responses and to identify all the patterns in those responses. The series of codes were then assigned to similar contents in the data. Finally, we sorted the codes into three conceptual categories—learning Mandarin to consolidate their connection with the Chinese communities, the tension between the standardized Mandarin and their own dialect in the learning process, and studying Mandarin as a language investment in the global marketplace.

argues that identity should “reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 4). Juxtaposing our conceptual categories with respective theoretical premises, we present the dialect speakers’ Mandarin learning accounts in three parts: 1) Imagined Chinese communities and dialects; 2) Linguistic hegemony and transculturation; and 3) Language investment and globalization. These three areas are deeply interconnected and mutually defining. How the students imagine themselves in the community has an impact on their investment, for example, and their imagination is doubtlessly conditioned by the power relations in their social environments. None of these factors exists in isolation, and each merits a discussion of its own.

1) Imagined Chinese Communities and Dialects

Q: How would you identify yourself?
I: I would say I’m American if a Chinese person asks me, but if an American person asks me I’d say Chinese American, ‘cause… when other foreigners see you, you are still Chinese no matter where you are born, but in China, they see you as a foreigner, if you are not born there. (#34)  

In coding and analyzing our Chinese heritage language learners’ experiences, we came to believe that identities are flexible formations, variously possessed, produced, and practiced within social relations (De Lauretis, 1987; S. Hall, 1994; Wenger, 1998; William, 1991). An individual is “a site of differences,” as diverse identities intersect in and amount to who that person is in particular circumstances (Ong & Nonini, 1997, p. 25). It is then not surprising that all students illustrate a contingent side of their ethnic selves; they can be Chinese, Chinese-American, American, or somewhere in between, depending on the time, location, and context. “I’m more Chinese than American, in the sense of an American,” one student (#13) states, “but then I’m more American than a Chinese person.”

Positing a “primordialist” perspective, Smith (1989) argues that there is a concrete “ethnic core” to national identities. All students view their “Chineseness” as fundamental, simply because they have Chinese surnames or genealogy. This applies to those born outside of Chinese nation states. The above quote (#34) clearly indicates that in the eyes of “foreigners,” he is always a Chinese. What he means by “foreigners” includes Americans, of which he is one. Another student who was born in Vietnam, speaks fluent Vietnamese, and has Vietnamese nationality, also looks deep into his ethnic roots for self identification.

I always define myself as a Chinese… It’s really funny how, like, I was born in Vietnam, so people always think I must be Vietnamese, but I always…clarify the point that I’m Chinese... because that is my origin. That’s my original culture. (#21)

Their ability to speak Mandarin or dialects counts as a defining quality that fortifies their heritage, even making them “unique” among other overseas populace of Chinese descent.
I know people that are third generation and their parents are born here and, you know, they are basically, like... American, straight American, so it’s just different. It’s not as unique. (#30)

The identification with one’s ethnic core and his or her relations to the world is a creative process, which Norton (2001) calls “imagined communities” (pp.163-4). The concept of imagined community, first introduced by Anderson (1983), has been a widely celebrated theory for cultural studies in discerning the rise and spread of nationalism. Although the members of a nation, however small it may be, would never know, meet with, or hear of most of their fellow compatriots, “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983, p.6). Many scholars in second language acquisition have transplanted his idea to explain the imagined and practical bond to the target language community by its learners. Kanno and Norton (2003), for example, edited a special issue in Journal of Language, Identity, and Education devoted to the theme of “imagined communities.”

Wenger (1998) suggests that identity formation requires three modes of belonging—engagement, imagination, and alignment—through which the participants can conjure broader connections apart from their “communities of practice” and find their place in the larger scheme of the world (p.173). One way or another, most students imagine themselves as being a member of a Chinese network, from their immediate family to distant ethnic origin. Learning Mandarin is a means to foster such a connection.

No matter what, being Chinese is a part of who I am, and in order to be confident in it, and confident in myself, it’s kind of necessary to understand the language, the culture, my heritage too, just have... the inner confidence in who I am... I really appreciate... things that I learn from my family, and all over the place. (#64)

There are notable differences between students from Mandarin and dialect backgrounds in their imagined Chinese communities. To the Mandarin-speaking students, learning their heritage language allows them to envision their integration into the broader Chinese community. Regarding her reason for studying Mandarin, a student (#57) states, “I wanted to be able to speak to people in my church... my parents and my grandmother. It embarrasses me when I have to throw in English words.” Her ability to communicate in Mandarin becomes the prerequisite for a proud and gratifying community experience. No longer confined by the four walls of a language classroom, this imagined attachment to the Chinese community transcends time and space (Norton, 2001, p.164), as the anticipated future of another student demonstrates:

One of my biggest fears is that later on having kids and them not being able to speak Chinese, because my level of Chinese is not at the same level of my parents, and so I’m scared that it will get lost. (#62)

This imagination takes a different route for the dialect speakers. Mandarin is the language of neither their ancestral home nor daily communication. Hence, it may not be the code that helps to
construct or reinforce their imagined communities. Answering the question “which language they perceived as Chinese (zhongwen) when they first heard the term,” two out of five dialect speakers say they think of their own dialects or dialects other than Mandarin. When they are further asked to identify their “heritage” language, all of them choose their dialects over Mandarin. They also tend to be more precise regarding their ethnic identities compared to other Mandarin-speaking students, detailing their locations within the general Chinese category.

I identify that I’m… specifically from Hong Kong, ‘cause I do, I watch a lot of Hong Kong movies and I take a lot of cultural practices directly from Hong Kong… as for difference between Chinese and American, I think, literally they are a part of me, both a part of me, ‘cause during the day I speak English, and at home I speak Cantonese. (#2)

Raising the issue of place “is to raise the issue of difference on a whole range of fronts,” including those of politics, class, and race, Dirlik (2001) maintains. It also raises “the question of history in identity” (p.88). The boundaries that their place-based imaginations draw among China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are not only geographical but also personal. Dialect is, as a Taiwanese student (#42) attests, “what separates us from them, the mainlanders.” She continues: “My grandparents told me Chinese people can speak Mandarin, but you are from Taiwan, so you have to speak Taiwanese; that’s what is unique about us.” Another dialect speaker (#37) sighs: “If I lose it (Cantonese), I’ll lose a connection with my family… as if I didn’t know them.” Many students take great pride in their dialects, which strongly color how they see themselves in the collective Chinese community.

I’m a proud Cantonese… because it is a part of our heritage … If the language were to die, if we’re only to learn, just Mandarin, the art of our culture would die, too… Well, on my own, I watch Cantonese films and listen to Cantonese music. I’m trying to speak more with my family to keep it alive, also I hope to pass it on to my kids… so they can keep it alive. (#32)

Accordingly, the maintenance of their dialects as “heritage” is a common theme in our conversations. “I feel Cantonese is just part of me. I don't feel Mandarin is part of me (because) I didn't grow up with that,” a student (#17) avers; “for families with Cantonese background, I feel like it is important to let your children learn the language.” Seldom do the dialect speakers use Mandarin outside the classroom, except when sometimes listening to Mandarin popular songs. Instead, they enjoy films, music and chats in their dialects, mostly Cantonese in our interviewees. Their ties to their dialects are often emotional, as a student (#41) declares:

Cantonese is very important to me. It’s how I communicate with my family. Most of my family doesn’t speak English very well, and my grandmother doesn’t speak English at all; so if I want to talk to her, I have to use Cantonese… And my grandmother is very important to me. She helped raise me… I hold it very dear in my heart to maintain my Cantonese heritage.
In discussing the importance of language in projecting and connecting oneself to the imagined communities, we must also examine how the dialect speakers maneuver their identities amidst the complex power relations among the standard Mandarin and different dialects, and how the students utilize their past and present experiences to pursue future opportunities. The two dimensions that dominate our informant’s experiences and to which we want to particularly attend here are linguistic hegemony and language investment.

2) Linguistic Hegemony and Transcultration

Q: What is your feeling towards learning Mandarin?
I: …People who spoke Mandarin were…very conceited. I remember I was eating lunch in the fall quarter when I was just learning (Mandarin), and then this guy came up to me, and it turned out he was a… visiting professor from China… I noticed that he had this accent, so asked him do you speak Chinese? And yeah, I speak Chinese. And what Chinese do you speak? The real dialect, referring to putonghua (Mandarin).… I found it all slightly offensive. (#41)

The story of this Cantonese-speaking student is by no means an exception. Language learners are inevitably caught in the webs of power structures and social discourses. Wiley (2000) notes: “linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard” (p.113), a “total system of hegemony” that is consistently sustained through politics, media, as well as institutions, and consequently, supported by the acquiescence of the minority groups (Fontana, 1993; Gramsci, 1971; Suarez, 2002). The comment by a Mandarin speaking student (#60) is revealing:

I think Mandarin speakers always have slight feeling of superiority over other dialects … everyone should speak Mandarin, and that’s how it should be… Just as we have traditional and simplified (characters), and obviously 1.2 billion people… use simplified, so a lot more universities are switching to the simplified version… I think that there should be a unification in terms of the verbal portion, and if Mandarin is the native language then it should be the one that is taught.

It matters as much how Mandarin speakers perceive the official language as how speakers see the unofficial versions of their own. The development of the self often is “a process of acquiring a particular ideological version of the world” that serves “hegemonic ends and preserves the status quo” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.31). Nearly all students we interviewed hold Mandarin in high esteem even though they feel more comfortable speaking their own dialects. “I think Cantonese is easier for me,” a student (#12) admits, “but I think Mandarin is more worldly, scholarly language.” Whereas Mandarin reigns supreme in the interviewees’ minds, they consistently label their own dialects as “slang,” “harsh,” and “loud.”

Cantonese is easier for me to speak ‘cause I grew up with it, but I think that Mandarin is more standard Chinese, and I think it sounds better than Cantonese ‘cause I think Cantonese sounds like really tough, like street language, not
really proper... I think the tone of it, and probably also the pronunciation of it, ‘cause I think Cantonese sounds kind of harsh. (#48)

The bias perhaps has something to do with language instruction. “I feel Mandarin is a lot more formal or polite,” a student (#59) states; “maybe I just haven’t been exposed to any Mandarin slang. Maybe there is slang; I just don’t know any of it from class.” For the dialect speakers, the Mandarin they learn in school is mainly in a pedagogical context, which is often presented by teachers with a Beijing accent and appropriate manner. On the contrary, the dialects with which these students have contact on a daily basis are in less controlled environments. Certainly, there are “slang” and “dirty” words in Mandarin as in any other languages; they are just not taught in class. However, the students’ experiences with Mandarin are limited to the classroom, and therefore impacting their evaluation of the standard language as a more proper version of the Chinese language.

The dialect speakers are very aware of the official position of Mandarin. A great number of them cite its “national” status as the driving force behind their taking it in classes. “I study Mandarin because it is the national language of China,” a student (#6) explains, and “Mandarin is a little more than Cantonese.” That Mandarin is “useful,” “popular,” and “important” rounds up the most-frequently mentioned reasons for studying it, often at the expense of their dialects, which they deem as their “culture,” “root,” and “heritage.”

Cantonese is part of my culture, but for me, it’s not as important to learn it. I think Mandarin is more useful, so... I would take Mandarin over Cantonese... Mandarin is like a universal language in China. (#35)

The hegemony of Mandarin does not necessarily make it a favorite or popular among dialect speakers. “Power is both repressive and enabling,” Weedon (2004) states; it “is a relationship that inheres in all discourses,” allowing “for different types of identity and agency to both comply and resist” (p.19). Although the dialect speakers choose to learn Mandarin in school, they do not have to like it or use it in leisure.

A lot of the time when a movie comes out, it comes out in Mandarin first. I’ll wait till the Cantonese release to watch it... I don’t watch too much Mandarin movies... I don’t like the fact that I watch... Cantonese actors and they have like a fake, dubbing. I do watch like...“(The Curse of) the Golden Flower” and “Se Jie” (Lust, Caution)... I didn’t watch the whole thing. I got bored. I stopped. (#5)

While Mandarin may overpower other dialects, there is hegemony at work among minority dialects as well. Those dialects that are related to more prosperous metropolitan centers (such as Cantonese from Hong Kong) are gradually replacing lesser-spoken or rural forms of speech in the region. Other axes of power must also be considered. The maternal dialect, for example, may give way to the patriarchal one. “I speak Cantonese at home,” one student (#12) says, “but my grandma speaks a different kind of dialect from a little village. But I don’t know what it’s called.”
A student of Taishan background, a provincial area in Guangdong from where a large number of the first wave Chinese immigrants originated, feels the connection to her own “heritage” is slipping from her grasp:

My heritage language is definitely Toishan (Taishan), but even so, my parents don’t always speak it fluently, so… I know somewhere down the line, I’m probably the last one to even speak it … and I feel like it is not my heritage anymore. (#8)

Attempting to maintain their “heritage,” many students are eager to keep their dialects alive. While their investment in the new order of globalization is taken up in the next section, it is worthwhile to explore how these students seek a sense of belonging to their dialects through Mandarin learning. The lack of opportunity to study their dialects in the university does not prevent them from keeping informed about their “heritage” languages. Rather, dialect speakers often use Mandarin as counter-strategies, or “reverse discourses” (Foucault 1990, p.101), to reposition themselves against marginalization. A lot of students turn the Mandarin class around as an alternative route to learn their dialects.

I thought since they don’t teach you how to read and write Cantonese here, so I would take Mandarin… I can take what I learn in that class, and kind of learn Cantonese. How you read and write Cantonese, it’s pretty much the same thing. (#2)

If I read a poem for example, I will read it in Mandarin, and then I will also read it in Cantonese… so if I don’t know the sound or the word in Cantonese, I’ll go online and check the dictionary. They have the online dictionary. Also, I watch a lot of movies, and that’s how I maintain my Cantonese. (#21)

Their strategies also highlight the “transcultural” approach to the language learning process, in which subordinated dialect speakers adopt the dominant Mandarin to maintain, or even reinterpret, their own identities. Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined the term “transculturation” in 1947 to describe the phenomenon of the merging and converging of Afro-Cuban cultures (1995). He proposed the concept to replace “acculturation” and “deculturation” that perceived the transference of culture in reductive fashion (Pratt, 1992). In second language acquisition, the acculturation model (Schumann, 1978) has met its critics as well (Berdan, 1996; Norton, 2000). We find the notion of transculturation—how marginalized groups select, adopt, and invent from the materials of the dominant culture—an appropriate portrayal of the dialect speakers we interviewed. The majority of them see themselves as Chinese Americans in the dominant English-speaking society. At the same time, they also identify with their dialect groups within the official, Mandarin-speaking Chinese culture. Their lives have been unfolding “transculturally” in both Chinese (mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, or other communities) and American cultures. The question for us then is how the dialect speakers gainfully invest in Mandarin in order to give them a particular sense of who they are and where they belong in the global network, which is the final part of our inquiry.
3) Language Investment and Globalization

Q: How would you compare Mandarin to Taiwanese (your dialect)?
I: Mandarin is more international, more wide known... I think Mandarin is more like a tool I would use, like in the future, if I want to do business, or talk to other people, but Taiwanese is more like my heritage, that’s my culture, so there’s like cultural and then there’s like economical things. (#42)

The reasons behind these students’ choice to learn Mandarin, from a boost in their career prospects to a tactic to maintain their dialects, direct our attention to studies of motivation in second language acquisition. Leading the field are Gardner and Lambert (1972) who establish the concept of “instrumental” and “integrative” motivation, generally referring in the former to utilitarian purposes such as employment and in the latter to more personal desires such as integration into the target language community (Gardner, Day, & MacIntyre, 1992).

However, the complexity of the individual language learners’ identity often eludes the dual factors. Applying Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of “cultural capital,” Norton Peirce (1995) launches the term “investment” to signal how learners reorganize their identities and relationships with the social world through acquiring a second language. Norton (2000) underlines that she does not equate investment with the “unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learners” who are driven by “instrumental motivation” (p.10). Their intents and needs are more complicated, she asserts. Learners expect “good return” on their “investments,” expanding their range of symbolic or material resources, which in turn increases the value of their own cultural capital and grants them access to hitherto unattainable resources (Norton, 2000, p.10). Moreover, Norton (2001) maintains that a learner’s investment must be understood within the context of imagined community—how a person envisions herself or himself in the respective society. Along a similar theoretical line is Dörnyei’s (2005) “L2 motivational self system,” in which the imagined community of a language learner is partly based on real life experiences with the members of those linguistic communities and partly on the learners’ own imagination of their “ought-to-be” and “ideal” selves.22

The new approaches to motivation allow us to see the dialect speakers through new “transcultural” lenses. Heritage language development has long been thought to benefit one’s sense of ethnic and cultural identity (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Cho, 2000). Its advantages have recently taken an economic turn. The understanding of language as “primarily linked to the construction and operation of nation-states” has slowly merged with the idea of language as the means to the “control and access to economic resources” (Heller, 2000, p.12). “The expansion of the global marketplace has made proficiency in languages other than English a necessity rather than a luxury,” Carreira and Armengol (2001) point out, and heritage language speakers are in high demand as experts with “an excellent source of skills not easily found in our society” (p.109-10). Obviously, professional opportunities discriminate, going mostly to languages with larger populations or greater political roles, such as Spanish and Mandarin (Carreira & Armengol, 2001, p.110). All the students contend that adding Mandarin on top of their dialects would give
them a comparative edge in their careers. “Learning Mandarin would help me overcome the barrier of being an American as well as being a Chinese,” a student (#33) states, for she can leverage her new language skill to not only connect with the Chinese communities but also compete with other American compatriots in the job market.

Many of our students, therefore, invest in Mandarin because it is as much a prominent currency in the world economy as it is the majority language of their ethnicity. The emergence of China as a major player in the global economy has had a transformative effect on the Chinese American self image as well as on the overall perceptions of Chinese Americans by the society (Dirlik 2001, pp.74-5). Many of the interviewees admit learning Mandarin was once an unpleasant activity forced on them by their parents. Yet they see it as a wise and worthwhile investment. “Mandarin will be very important to me in the future,” a student (#38) claims, “especially if I want to work internationally.” The ethnic identity development model by Tse (2001) proposes that minority students change their attitudes towards their own identity in early adulthood, evolving from “ethnic ambivalence/evasion” to “ethnic emergence” to “identity incorporation.” While many of the students follow this trajectory, their identity negotiation is now also influenced by economic as well as ethnic concerns.

I started taking Mandarin when I was in kindergarten, and that was because my parents wanted me to. I went up to about eighth grade, and then I stopped… But when I came to university here… I really wanted to learn how to read and write Chinese… It’s a part of my culture, and I feel like it will be very useful in the future too. (#62)

One fascinating aspect of their imagined selves is to be a multilingual individual in the global arena. The implications of globalization, the kaleidoscopic life under the “cultural logic of late capitalism” (Jameson, 1991), are widely debated in political, economic, or cultural terms, from the spread of multinational corporations to cross-cultural appropriation of popular forms to the omnipresence of the World Wide Web (Weedon, 2004, p.20). Heller (2000) agrees that “language practices of all kinds are at the heart of the new economy,” and “they are, in a sense, commodified” (p.13).

Moving beyond associating heritage language maintenance with “traditional claims to authenticity and group solidarity,” the dialect speaking students strive instead for “internationalism” and “diversity,” as learning Mandarin means accumulating symbolic capital, which can be used to favorably position themselves in the global markets (Dagenais, 2003, p.272). Mandarin is not only an attribute they “ought to” possess but also prized capital that can help them to fully realize their goals and reach their ideals. Their investment is expected to pay off financially and symbolically. All of them believe fluency in Mandarin can enhance their job prospects. They are equally convinced that Mandarin can enable them to become members of the “dominant” group, putting them atop the power list and ahead of the global trend. “Mandarin is going to be like English,” a student (#14) says, “the next world language.” Others express similar sentiments:
I need to learn Chinese, and Mandarin is the most popular language... it’s important because pretty soon, China’s going to be, Chinese people are going to be everywhere, and Mandarin’s the dominant language... That’s a big plus. (#4)

Unlike their parents’ generation, English is not enough to articulate their American dream, which, according to them, is now set on an international stage. In order to be globally competitive and to feel good about themselves, they need to break away from the monolingual tradition in America.

Because I was born here, my parents... think that English is the language of the world, (but) I tell my mom that Mandarin is important, and she doesn’t think so. She’s kind of stuck in the old ways...like America is the only way to make money... I feel that as a Chinese American... second generation, I’m the first one to actually not to follow what was followed before. (#8)

The ground-breaking path for these students also stipulates boundary-breaking conceptions of their identities. The idea of becoming an “international” person—not just Chinese, American, or even any hyphenated combination of both—appears repeatedly in our discussions with the students. This new identity construct is best exemplified through diasporic discourses. In Clifford’s (1997) view, “diasporic subjects are distinct versions of modern, transnational, and intercultural experience” (p.266). S. Hall (1995) further notes that diaspora represents the identities of those moving between cultures. What matters are not the spots on the map, but the lines that link them. These students’ identities, thus, must be “understood not in terms of the real world but also in terms of possible worlds” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p.249). Their investment in Mandarin becomes their capital in the “overlapping networks of communication, travel, trade, and kinship” that connect various communities of the “transnational” Chinese people (Clifford, 1997, p.269). “Since Mandarin is the universal language,” a student (#26) remarks, “it is important to know when you are looking for jobs, or going overseas... like visiting China and other regions.” Another student concurs:

If I want to go back to Asia, a lot of countries in Asia speak Mandarin and they use Chinese. I can pretty much read a lot of Chinese but I can’t really speak... If I want to go somewhere else, they all speak Mandarin. I think that is a very important language to know. (#19)

It’s important for me to know Cantonese and Mandarin, just to benefit me in the future, my career... It would be nice to know more than just English. Being able to say that I can speak these different languages is a really good, positive... feeling for yourself... to be... like, you know, an international person. (#22)

While Mandarin may not be considered their own heritage language, it is their guide across different Chinese “symbolic universes.” And with Mandarin under their belts, they believe, their potential is much broadened.
Implications for Chinese Heritage Language Instruction

The identity constructions of the dialect speakers, from the perspectives of imagined community to language hegemony to globalization and investment, steer us to review some of the issues in Chinese heritage language pedagogy. One of the questions is how to help learners optimize their investment portfolio according to their distinctive linguistic traits, character preferences, and cultural practices. McKay and Wong (1996) demonstrate how students’ investment in each of the four language skills is highly selective, for different skills have different values in relation to the learners’ identities and social demands. To most students of dialect backgrounds, speaking—a skill that is deemed the easiest by other heritage students of Mandarin background—is the one component about which they are most anxious. “I think the disadvantage of my learning Mandarin is the accent,” a Cantonese speaker (#5) utters; “it is worse for the Cantonese people.” Another student (#17) also feels a sense of distress about speaking: “I think teachers expect more from me, but I am not particularly having an easy time in this (heritage) class… I can read, but I can't speak it well; it is not my form of language.” Others agree:

I try to speak Cantonese a little off to make it sound like Mandarin, but sometimes it is completely off. It’s not even a word… the tone is also difficult. Sometimes when I listen to the teacher when she speaks, it sounds like that one word in my head, but it’s completely another word and it sounds different. (#19)

Many dialect speakers also find that Beijing speech sounds alien to their ears. The usage of the “er” pattern, for instance, is not common among other dialects. Retroflex consonants (such as zh, ch, sh) are usually not distinguished from dental sounds (such as z, c, s) in the South. A student (#31) points out: “My main difficulty is the zhi, chi, shi… In Taiwanese Mandarin we don’t really say it that way.” Another student (#41) encounters a similar problem:

Cantonese flows off the tongue a lot more easily. (But) in Mandarin… you have to roll your tongue for certain sounds and consonant sounds, and in Cantonese, it’s mostly just like… Taiwanese Mandarin (Mandarin spoken in Taiwan), you don’t have to differentiate between ze and zhe.

It is not just the pronunciation that bothers dialect speakers. The grammatical patterns of standard Mandarin and the dialects are quite different at times. They often have to think twice before they speak.

(When) the instructor asks me questions and I have to respond back, I guess some of the words in Cantonese if you add it onto Mandarin it wouldn’t make sense, or some of the sentences don’t make sense in Mandarin, so those are the things that I would need to think carefully… and improve on. (#22)

In addition, many of the dialect speakers, especially those whose families come from Hong Kong and Taiwan, express strong attachment to the traditional script, which has by and large been
replaced by simplified characters in most academic programs. The survey by Wiley et al. (2008) on language attitudes among native Chinese immigrants and international students from Hong Kong and Taiwan also supports this assumption. After all, as one of the students (#41) says, tradition lies at the very heart of heritage.

I just prefer writing traditional, I don’t really like writing simplified… I’d like to maintain that part of Chinese heritage, keeping with the traditional… that’s where the history and culture is, in the writing… Rather than you go to simplified and a few strokes turns into one stroke, and the word “ai meiyou xin” (love without heart—as the simplified character of love (ai) omits the component of the character “heart” (xin) from the traditional one)… It’s sacrificing culture for the sake of progression.

Dialect students can greatly enrich heritage language pedagogy, bringing with them “a profound experiential understanding of language variation and subordination” (Martínez, 2003, p.4). The recent developments in the instruction of other heritage languages are excellent references for Chinese teachers. For example, Wolfram and his colleagues suggest that we should treat dialects as natural phenomena, regular patterns, and different variations of a language (Wolfram, 1999; Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999). Furthermore, Martínez (2003) proposes a “robust model” of “classroom based dialect awareness” (CBDA) program for Spanish heritage language instruction. Its theme is to draw attention to the functions, distributions, and evaluations of dialects that can answer the questions of not only the “what of variation” but also the “why of variation” (p.7). Valdés (2001) argues that “it is the historical and personal connection to the (heritage) language that is salient and not the actual proficiency of individual speakers” (p.38). The entire notion of standard and vernacular dialects, as Martínez maintains (2003), “is really much more of a social issue” (p.4).

Accordingly, a socio-cultural orientation towards heritage language instruction may prove to be helpful. Accent variation is only one aspect in respect to the “heritages” of these learners, whose indexical differences carry unique “information about the speaker’s identity or location” (Martínez, 2003, p.6; Urciuoli, 1998, p.7). Although the Chinese teaching profession has not yet come up with an agreeable or systematic methodology on dialect awareness, there are conscious efforts, particularly by textbook writers, to touch on the complexity of the Chinese language. Many of them include both traditional and simplified characters, lists of terms that are used differently on the mainland and Taiwan, as well as cultural notes on dialects or regional differences. Just as the students’ identities are the site of contest and compromise, Mandarin, as a living language, is also evolving. Yet the sociolinguistics issues that Gutiérrez (1997) indicates as a critical module in the training of heritage language teachers are hardly raised in the Chinese field.

The challenge for Chinese educators is to make the students’ dialect backgrounds work to their advantage. We should emphasize that learning Mandarin is an additive skill in their multilingual performance. They do not have to disparage the importance of their dialects or forfeit their regional identities. While the nuances of power and hegemony should be discussed, the linguistic differences and similarities should also be placed at the center of explanation, making it easier
for students to comprehend Mandarin in lieu of their dialects, a task most of them are already executing on their own.

Every time I learn a word, I try to translate it into Cantonese, and that’s the easiest way I can learn. I mean each vocabulary word I try to read it in Cantonese, so I can easier, have an easier time memorize… Right now, the most difficult is the speaking… like fluently and quickly, ‘cause I have to take a while to come up with a sentence. (#25)

While they may be divided over the idea whether there should be a separate heritage track for dialect speakers, they are confident that more realistic expectations from the teachers and a better understanding of their backgrounds can enhance their learning processes.

I think it should be separate but it might help if they are together. The Mandarin speaking ones can help the Cantonese speaking ones. They would be able to learn from each other more. That might be better. But then… everyone is on a different level, and they can’t be graded the same or shouldn’t, I think. (#23)

How much special attention teachers can pay to the needs of the dialect speakers depends on the resources and curriculum of the institutions. McGinnis (2005) notes that Chinese heritage language instruction is more active at the community level than in the universities. The inclusion of dialect is also more commonly practiced in Chinese community schools. Kono and McGinnis (2001) argue that “higher education needs to recognize heritage language education not as a discrete academic course of study but as part of a learner’s lifelong education career” (p. 201). “Ethnicity means my language and it means my languages,” Nieto (1997) rightly puts it; “and how I combine my languages, and how I express myself” (p.177). We believe that understanding this linguistic combination and expression of ethnicity is crucial to heritage language pedagogy and “emancipating in the intellectual development of students” (Martínez, 2003, p.11). More specifically, such awareness can allow our dialect speakers to generate more positive images of their roots and hence formulate better-informed self-identities.

Conclusion
The Mandarin learning experiences of dialect speakers elicit further thoughts on the concept of Chinese heritage language, which cannot be easily collapsed into the national culture of China or their own familial tradition. He (2006) argues that heritage learners study their heritage language “to reestablish similarities with members of one’s heritage culture or reestablish differences from members of mainstream American culture,” and that heritage learners are motivated “not merely to inherit one’s heritage language and maintain one’s heritage cultural identity but also to transform the heritage language (in terms of changes in dialect, script, accent, discourse norms, etc.) and recreate one’s identity” (p.7). Nonetheless, this “transformation” is a constant struggle for the dialect speaking students, who require specific assistance from pedagogues.

With a deeper understanding of their Mandarin learning experiences, we are in a better position to implement more vibrant and versatile programs to benefit the field as a whole. From a dialect
learner’s point of view, the notion of Mandarin as Chinese heritage language should expand from identifying a bounded entity—be it mainland China or Taiwan—to focusing on the international networks in which these students seek to partake. Learning Mandarin for them is no longer simply about looking back into the past but, more notably, about accumulating cultural capital in the globalized Chinese communities for their future. We should assist them in formulating new identities that embrace their global aspirations. After all, establishing “translingual” and “transcultural” competence, that is, to “place values on the ability to operate between languages,” as well as help students “reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another culture,” is a primary goal for students majoring in language according to the Modern Language Association (MLA Ad Hoc Committee, 2007, pp.3-4).

The stories of the dialect speakers are only one starting point from which to explore the issues of identity in heritage language learning. We hope our dialogue with the students, albeit modest in scale and depth, provides a preliminary study of some of the problems. Our investigation is not meant to be comprehensive. It is limited in that all of our participants are young college students from middle-class backgrounds in the Pacific region and represent only a small fraction of the heritage language learning population in the United States. There are also many factors that come into play in language acquisition and instruction besides the three themes we tackle here. Prestige assigned to different dialects must be considered, of course. The minority status of Cantonese, for example, is related to Mandarin, but as the popular Southern dialect, Cantonese can also assume a hegemonic position in other circumstances.

“What is especially heartening about (heritage language) development is its grassroots nature,” Peyton, Ranard, and McGinnis (2001) maintain, as the movement “has grown out of a deeply felt desire on the part of immigrants and indigenous peoples to preserve their languages and cultures” (p.4). The issues of dialect strike a fundamental chord in this earnest conviction. He (2006, 2008) encourages us to contemplate Chinese heritage language development across time and space as “a socialization process with multiple agencies, multiple directions, and multiple goals.” The dialect speakers’ experiences offer us a glimpse into their multiple identities, from bridging imagined communities, overcoming linguistic hegemony, and expanding language investment, enabling us to visualize in new ways the past and present, homeland and diaspora, and perhaps more importantly, understand who our heritage students are and what they want to become. It is by looking at their diversity and differences that a less tidy yet livelier picture of Chinese heritage language emerges.

Acknowledgment
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References


## Appendix

### Information on Participants

### Table A1 (back)

*First Language of the Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaozhou</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanchang Dialect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A2

*Strongest Language (Self-Evaluated) of the Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
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<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
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<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>English &amp; Chinese</td>
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<td>9.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table A3

**Place of Birth of the Participants**

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<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macau</td>
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<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A4

**Age of the Participants who Migrated to the United States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>0-4</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A5 (back)

Dialect Backgrounds of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect Background</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin &amp; Cantonese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin &amp; Jiangxi dialect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin &amp; Shanghainess</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaozhou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese &amp; Chaozhou</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese &amp; Taiwanese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A6 (back)

Age of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Age: 20.12
Notes
1. Most Chinese scholars’ definitions of heritage students include both Mandarin and dialect speakers. For example, acknowledging Valdés (2001), He (2006) defines a Chinese heritage language learner “broadly” as someone “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.” Wu (2008) refers to “Chinese heritage learners” as “students who have had exposure to Chinese outside the formal educational system, typically in their home or community.” Their works thus count both Mandarin and other dialects speakers as “Chinese heritage” learners.

2. Grounded theory was originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), referring to both the method and the product of inquiry. Charmaz (2005) explains that grounded theory methods are essentially a set of flexible investigative guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection, from which an integrated set of concepts can successively emerge (pp.507-8).

3. Based on the data provided by the Migration Policy Institute (2008), Chinese immigrants (including those from Taiwan) comprised only 1.0 percent of all foreign born in the United States in 1960, ranking at twenty first overall. Their share more than doubled to 2.6 percent in 1980, ranking tenth, although it excluded immigrants from Taiwan and included Hong Kong-born Chinese. The number rose to 4.1 percent in 2006, ranking third.

4. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2005), about one out of five Americans (19.2%) over the age of five speaks a language other than English. Spanish or Spanish Creole (62.0%) is the most spoken language, followed by Chinese (4.4%), French (2.7%), German (2.2%) and Vietnamese (2.2%).

5. In terms of the total enrollment in foreign languages at U.S. institutions of higher education, the Modern Language Association (MLA) survey (Fall 2006) shows that Spanish is the most popular language (822,985), followed by French (206,426), and German (94,267). Chinese ranks seventh with a total of 51,582 students. Between 2002 and 2006, Chinese had the second highest rate of increased enrollment (+51.0%) after Arabic (+126.5%), and followed by American Sign Language (+29.7%). See N. Furman, D. Goldberg, & N. Lusin, (2007) for the complete report.

6. There are officially a total number of 56 ethnic groups in China. The majority, Han, makes up about 94% of the total population. The other 55 ethnic groups are usually referred to as “minority nationals” (shaoshu minzu). Based on research in the 1980s, the popular minority languages include the language of Zhuang (about 12 million), Uygur (about 5 million), Miao (about 4 million), Tibetan (about 3.5 million), Mongol (2.7 million) and Korean (1.7 million). See Norman (1988, pp.252-3).

7. According to the seven-year nationwide survey (Zhongguo, 2006), only slightly more than half of the Chinese subjects can speak Mandarin (56.03%). The rate is higher for males
(56.76%), urban dwellers (66.0%), and young adults between the age of 15 to 30 (70.12%), compared with females, (49.22%), country folks (45.0%), and seniors between the age of 60 and 69 (30.97%).

8. Gordon (2005) reports that Mandarin Chinese tops the chart of the most spoken language in the world with a total number of 1.051 billion people (873 million natives and 178 million second-language speakers). English is the second (510 million), followed by Hindi (490 million), Spanish (420 million), and Russian (255 million). If the measure counts only native speakers, Mandarin still has the most speakers, followed by Hindi, Spanish, English, and Arabic.

9. The Mandarin (guanhua) group includes eight sub-dialects—Beijing, Dongbei, Beifang, Jiaoling, Lanyin, Zhongyuan, Jianghuai, and Xinan (R. Li, 1985; X. Li, 2005).

10. During most of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), “national language” actually meant Manchu and not Han Chinese. On the other hand, the popular terms “Zhongwen” (Chinese) and “Hanyu” (language of the Hans) refer to any variety of spoken or written Chinese and do not necessarily mean Mandarin. For the modern development of the standard Chinese language, see Norman (1988, pp.133-51).

11. One of the notable efforts in modern language reform was the May Fourth Movement (wusiyundong). On May 4, 1919, students in Beijing protested against the Chinese government’s humiliating policy toward Japan, resulting in a series of strikes and associated events amounting to a social ferment that was soon dubbed the May Fourth Movement. The adoption of the vernacular in writing was among its most important achievements. The new reformers declared that classical Chinese (wenyan) was a dead language because it was no longer spoken by the people. The spoken language (baihua), being a living language, was the only fit medium for the creation of a “modern” China. For the details of the movement, see T. Chow (1960).

12. The four official languages of Singapore are Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and English. The “Speak Mandarin Campaign” (SMC) was first launched in 1979 by Singapore’s then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, with the main objective of encouraging Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin as a common language, instead of using dialects, in order to better understand and appreciate their culture and heritage. Most Singaporean Chinese are of dialect-group descent, however, including Lee, who came from a Hakka (Kejia) family. From 1979 to 1981, the target of SMC was Chinese Singaporeans in general. Beginning in 1982, SMC targeted specific groups, such as hawkers, public transport workers, white-collar workers and senior executives. From 1991 onwards, the SMC started targeting English-educated Chinese Singaporeans whose Mandarin ability had gradually declined. For the development of SMC, see its website (Promote Mandarin Council, 2010).

13. Since 1997 the Hong Kong government has begun a “Bi-literacy and Tri-lingualism” (liangwen sanyu) policy, making Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin) as well as English its
official language. Mandarin hence became a compulsory subject in the education curriculum from elementary to secondary schools.

14. Politzer (1993) suggests that some may consider a language “the total of all the dialects subsumed or classified,” while others define languages as those dialects that have become recognized and standardized for political or other reasons. He further notes: “Mutual intelligibility...[is] not a factor which can be used to clarify the general use of the terms dialect and language, e.g. Spanish (based on the Castilian dialect) and Portuguese (strongly related to the Spanish Gallego dialect) probably share higher mutual intelligibility than Spanish (Castilian) and the Spanish dialect of, let us say, the Alto Aragon” (p.45).

15. The promotion of a unique local identity apart from mainland China has gained momentum throughout the 1990s, which led to the first general election for the National Assembly in 1991 and the victory of the Democratic Progressive Party in 2000 over the Nationalist Party. Taiwanese (taiyu) or the Southern Min dialect (minnanhua) is now considered an official language besides Mandarin. The languages of the aborigines are also promoted by the government in the education curriculum. The return of the Nationalist Party in 2007 seems to have dampened the “independent” movement. The encouragement of the Taiwanese, however, remains strong among the islanders.

16. At the time of the survey (April-May 2008), the students from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) either were enrolling in or had taken regular Mandarin language classes. Out of the 49 participants from U.C. Davis (UCD), 18 were taking a Mandarin class for Cantonese speakers, 31 were currently taking or had taken bilingual track Chinese classes designed for students who already possessed an elementary level of speaking skills.

17. We are aware that power relationships are at play in interviews, especially when the interviewees are students and the interviewers are faculty members. Accordingly, we invited only our former students (and their friends) who had never been or were no longer in our classes. We emphasized the purpose of the conversation was for an academic paper and the information was not reported to either author’s university. We assured the participants that the contents would also be analyzed and reported anonymously, according to the exemption rule of protection of human subjects, IRB #: IORG0000169 at UHM and IRB protocol #: 200816329-1 at UCD. The excerpts from their interviews are quoted only by their identification numbers. Moreover, we chose neutral areas on campus as the interviewing locations, such as the students’ lounge and library, in an attempt to make the students more relaxed, and thus, their responses more genuine.

18. In the interview excerpts, “Q” represents the interviewers (us), and “I” stands for the interviewees (students). The number that follows is the identification number of the interview recording.

19. Smith (1989) believes that “cultural differences” were not just a matter of outside observation. The people who possessed specific cultural attributes often formed a social
network or series of networks, which over the generations became what we today designate ethnic communities‖ (p.337). These communities, which he calls ethnies, generally display a syndrome of characteristics: 1) a common name for the unit of population; 2) a set of myths of common origins; 3) some common historical memories; 4) a common “historic territory” or “homeland”; 5) one or more elements of common culture such as language and religion; 6) a sense of solidarity among most members of the community.

20. Wenger (1998) explains the three modes as: 1) engagement—active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning; 2) imagination—creating images of the word and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience; 3) alignment—coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises (pp.173-4).

21. Both the UHM and UCD had offered Cantonese courses in the past but they were discontinued in recent years. Mandarin courses for Cantonese speakers are currently provided instead. Still, UHM has kept its Taiwanese language (taiyu) program.

22. Dörnyei’s (2005) “L2 motivational self system” is made up of three dimensions: 1) Ideal L2 Self, referring to the specific facet of how learners would like to become L2 speakers. It is a powerful motivator because they would like to reduce the discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves; 2) Ought-to L2 Self, referring to the attributes that learners believe they need to possess (such as various duties, obligations, or responsibilities) in order to avoid possible negative outcomes, and which therefore may bear little resemblance to the person’s own desires or wishes; 3) L2 Learning Experience, concerning executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience.

23. Diaspora, meaning the dispersal of a people from its original homeland at its simplest, has gained unprecedented popularity in academia since the last decade of the twentieth century. Pan (1998) notes: “The word ‘diaspora,’ meaning ‘dispersal’ in Greek, has been reserved historically for the Armenian, Greek and, in particular, the Jewish communities settled outside their original homelands. Yet… since the 1990s many scholars have been tearing down the intellectual fences surrounding the term, and to describe African Caribbean people, Italians, Indians, and many others as people ‘in diaspora’ is no longer to make an outré generalization”

24. Tu (1994) proposes the idea of “Cultural China,” which “can be examined in terms of a continuous interaction of three symbolic universes”: 1) Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—the societies populated predominately by cultural and ethnic Chinese.; 2) Chinese communities throughout the world, or the members of the Chinese “diaspora,” also known as huaqiao (overseas Chinese), including a politically significant minority in Malaysia and a numerically negligible minority in the United States; 3) Individuals such as scholars, teachers, journalists, industrialists, traders, entrepreneurs, and writers, who try to understand China intellectually and bring their conceptions of China to their own linguistic communities (pp.13-4).