Heritage language retention: Challenges for parents in a Chinese Heritage language program

Abstract
This proposed study intends to explore the challenges that minority language parents may face when they help their children with heritage language retention through heritage language (HL) program. Data was collected from interviews with three parents who have registered their children in a community-based Chinese language school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The discussion includes parents’ motivation and expectations of the HL program, and the resources they can find for support. The findings show that Mandarin Chinese is rapidly becoming the Chinese heritage language of choice despite the fact that many parents do not speak Mandarin themselves. There are social, cultural and economic considerations associated with this choice, and this may indicate that new understandings of heritage language retention are developing, at least within this ethnic group. The study may thus shed light on how heritage education may be further developed, and provide educators and policy makers with a better understanding of the importance of heritage education from the parents’ perspective.

Key words: Chinese language, heritage language, language retention, community schools, parental attitudes.

Introduction
Many immigrant parents send their children to heritage language programs in order to help their children maintain connections to their mother cultures and languages. They seem to be aware that if they do not help their children to learn their heritage languages when they are young, their children may lose not only their mother languages, but their ethnic identities as well (Kouritzin, 2000; Wong Fillmore, 1991). This pertains directly to the phenomenon known as language loss, which describes a situation in which an individual loses his/her ability to use a language he/she used to have the ability to speak (Fase, Jaspaert & Kroon, 1992; Kouritzin, 2000; Wong Fillmore, 1991). According to Wong Fillmore (1991), language loss in children is correlated to the age when they begin schooling in a non-mother tongue medium. This implies that when minority language children start their social practice at a younger age in an English dominant environment, they tend to surrender their minority language not only due to external factors (English dominant environment) but also due to complicated internal factors (sense of belonging and acceptance by the dominant groups).

Some literature has examined parental roles and attitudes in helping their children maintain their heritage languages (Li, 2005; Lao, 2004). However, there is very little literature exploring the challenges that parents face when they decide to enroll their children in a heritage language program. What are parents’ understandings of heritage language maintenance? What are the factors that affect parents’ decisions regarding heritage language retention? What do parents expect that their children can learn from the heritage language school? What resources can parents find in the host country? These are important factors, because many studies indicate that language loss will produce negative effects in terms of

With regard to the correlation between language loss and heritage language retention, my role as a researcher and Master’s student in the field of second language education inspires me to investigate what challenges parents may face when they help their children in heritage language retention. In this proposed study, I would like to focus on Chinese heritage language programs in X province and to explore: (1) parents’ perspectives that lead them to send their children to heritage language programs; (2) the expectations that parents have of a heritage language program; and, (3) other means of achieving the goal of heritage language retention used by parents.

Background

Much research focuses on issues affecting minority language groups. Language loss (Kouritzin, 2000; Crystal, 2000; Tigchelaar, 2003) refers to when people lose a language ability he/she used to have due to the changing of environment, political, economic, or religious situation, or personal psychological modification. Other issues like language shift (Sandal, Chao, & Liang, 2006) have also been investigated. Language shift is when a community of speakers of one language becomes bilingual and starts a subtle and gradual shift from a mother tongue to the dominant language. This process could be conscious or unconscious. For example, many immigrant parents notice that their children start speaking the dominant language after they start schooling in a host country (Wong Fillmore, 1991). They seem to lose their heritage language ability gradually if they keep using the dominant language. There are also some issues related to language minorities, such as policy and minority language rights (Blackledge, 2003; D’Souza, 2006; Kouritzin, 2006), minority languages and cultural identities (Kubota, 2001; Pavlwnko, 2003; DeKorne, Byram & Fleming, 2007; You, 2005; Norton, 2000). Studies focusing on the awareness of minority language maintenance provide the field a new understanding of the consequences, including language death (Crystal, 2000), language loss, language shift, and language maintenance. (Tse, 2001; You, 2005)

The theoretical framework informing this study stems from the general understanding of language socialization. Schieffelin and Ochs’s language
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socialization (1986) proposes that children’s acquisition of language has a distinct correlation to their acquisition of culture. Children become linguistically and culturally competent through interactions with their caregivers or other more competent community members. Through language learning and communicating with caregivers or community members, children pick up a variety of aspects around the target cultural context, including the values and beliefs of the language, and the social status of people who speak the language. (Park, 2003) The heritage language program in this study provides minority language children an opportunity to practice the target language in culturally specific ways through interactions with competent community members and classmates who have a similar cultural background.

The research site in this study is the X Academy of Chinese studies (XACS), which is a Chinese community school in X province that was established in 1974. The original intention in founding this school was to promote Chinese culture and language within the context of Canadian multiculturalism during 1970s. The origin funders were local community members who purposed the goal of maintaining heritage language and culture for future generations. It is a non-profit, non-sectarian and non-partisan organization. According to XACS’ official website, there are approximately 200 students enrolled in different classes during the academic year 2005-2006. Mandarin language instruction is based on the Hanyu Pinyin system and Simplified Characters, which are mainly used in Mainland China. Textbooks are of Canadian content written and produced by the XACS’ organization.

Students in XACS are from very diverse language groups including

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1 In English, Mandarin can refer to either of two distinct concepts: 1) to Standard Chinese or Standard Mandarin (Putonghua / Guoyu / Huayu), which is based on the particular Mandarin dialect spoken in Beijing. Standard Mandarin functions as the official spoken language of the People's Republic of China, the official language of the Republic of China (Taiwan), and is one of the four official languages of Singapore. ‘Chinese’ — in practice Standard Mandarin — is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. 2) to all of the Mandarin dialects spoken in northern and southwestern China (Guanhua / Beifanghua / Beifang fangyan). This group of dialects is the focus of this article.—cited by Wikipedia.

2 Simplified Chinese Characters are one of two standard sets of Chinese characters of the contemporary Chinese written language. They are based mostly on popular cursive (caoshu) forms embodying graphic or phonetic simplifications of the "traditional" forms that were used in printed text for over a thousand years. The government of the People's Republic of China has promoted them for use in printing in an attempt to increase literacy. They are officially used in the People's Republic of China or Mainland China, Singapore, Malaysia and the United Nations. Traditional Chinese is currently used in the Republic of China or Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Overseas Chinese communities generally use traditional characters, but simplified characters are used among mainland Chinese immigrants. However, a majority of the Chinese-speaking world does use Simplified Characters.—cited from Wikipedia.
immigrants from China who speak Mandarin or variety of Mandarin dialects and use simplified Chinese characters, immigrants from Hong Kong who speak Cantonese and use Traditional Chinese characters, immigrants from Taiwan who speak Mandarin or a variety of Mandarin dialects and use Traditional Chinese characters. There are also people who have mixed heritage and speak a mix of languages, including immigrants from South East Asian countries who have Chinese heritage and speak languages other than Mandarin. Finally there are people who have no Chinese heritage and who have adopted a Chinese child. Some of the parents speak Mandarin at home, but most of them do not speak Mandarin at home. Such a complex population provides a very dynamic learning environment for language learners.

Methodology

Because the nature of this study is to seek personal experiences and beliefs, the research methodology I chose is the case study method of qualitative research (Bogden, & Knopp Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2008). Data collection techniques include interviews with three Chinese immigrant parents who have children with different lengths of heritage language learning experiences. The recruitment of the subjects was through purposeful sampling in a Chinese heritage language school in X province. Three selected parents were (1) having at least one child enrolled in this Chinese heritage language program and also enrolled in public school in Canada, (2) willing to participate in the research project and (3) willing to devote at least 1 hour to being interviewed and engaging in member checks. Since the subjects are likely to be speakers of English as a second language, and because I am a fluent Mandarin speaker, the interview questions were outlined in both English and Mandarin so that participants could answer in either language.

Three participants were interviewed individually between October and November 2008. A bilingual (English and Mandarin) letter of consent was signed by the three interviewees before interviewing. The consent letter clearly outlined the purpose and procedure of the study, as well as the nature of the subject participation and confidentiality. Before interviewing and tape-recording, I explained the purpose and procedure of the study, and explained that research participants have the right to withdraw at anytime. Also, participants can choose either English or Mandarin in which to conduct interviews. It turned out that they all want to use English during interviewing. Each interview would last approximately 40 minutes to an hour. All
interview processes were audio-taped with some note-taking, and transcribed afterward into text data using pseudonyms. Three participants were also asked to do member checking to ensure the content was true and acceptable to be used in my research paper for the course XXX: Qualitative research methods in education.

The three parent participants are father A, father B, and mother C. Their background information is as following:

Father A immigrated to Canada almost thirty years ago. He received his Bachelor’s degree in England and Master’s degree in Canada. He moved to X city six years ago due to a job opportunity. Before moving to X city, he lived in Toronto and Vancouver due to job opportunities. He has one son who is ten years old and has been learning Chinese for three years in this Chinese school. Father A was born in China and grew up in Hong Kong so he considered himself as a Cantonese speaker. He learned Mandarin in the regular school system till finishing college in Hong Kong. He and his wife speak Cantonese at home so his son is quite fluent in Cantonese.

Father B has a similar background as Father A. He was born in China and grew up in Hong Kong. He learned Mandarin in the regular school system in Hong Kong. He immigrated to Canada about thirty years ago. He received his Bachelor and Master’s degree in X province so he has lived in X city since he immigrated to Canada. He has two sons at the ages of six and nine, who have learned Chinese for three and six years in this Chinese school. Father B’s family lives with the older generation (his parents-in-law) so the language they use at home is mainly Cantonese.

Mother C is a non-Chinese heritage parent who adopted her daughter from China four years ago. Her daughter now is five years old. She helps her daughter sign up for this Chinese school this September so her daughter has been learning Chinese for less than one year in this Chinese school.

My original proposal intended to recruit Chinese immigrant parents in my study and discover challenges they faced in helping their children with heritage language retention in a host country. However, when I visited this Chinese school, I found that this Chinese school contained diverse language groups with different cultural backgrounds. They are Chinese heritage immigrants from China, Hong, Taiwan, South East Asian countries, people who have mixed heritage, and people who have no Chinese heritage and who have adopted a Chinese child. Also, since one of my research participants—mother C—is a non-Chinese heritage parent who enrolled her daughter in this Chinese language program and was interested in this
study, I decided to change my original research title from “Heritage language retention: Challenges for Chinese immigrant parents” to “Heritage language retention: Challenges for parents in a Chinese Heritage language program.” I hope that this study can reflect challenges that parents (heritage or non-heritage parents) encounter when they decide to help their children maintain their heritage language in this Chinese school context.

The interview content was related to: (1) parents’ motivation in sending their children to a heritage language program; (2) parents’ expectations about what a heritage language program can provide; and, (3) other means parents use to support their children’s heritage language retention. All interview questions for parents were related to personal belief, experience, and decision-making.

**Findings**

In order to reflect research questions I proposed, I chose to present the themes from the transcript in three directions: motivation of learning Mandarin as a heritage language, the expectation of what their children can learn from a heritage language program, and the community resources for heritage language retention.

**Motivation for learning Mandarin as a heritage language**

First, father A and B strongly agreed that learning Mandarin was as like learning an additional skill which may assist their children’s career development. They believed that it is necessary for people to possess various language skills in the globalized world. Father B explained why he enrolled his sons in this Chinese program:

I want them to learn one more language. Yes, one more language means to give them more opportunities for their social life, to communicate with other culture and people. When they know other language, they will have different social life. For working life, if you know additional language, there is one special advantage for globalization. You know, you really need to be multilingual. If you just speak one language, the circle could be small, compared to the multilingual ability.

Mother C also agreed that learning an additional language will open up lots opportunities for her daughter. But the main point for her to send her daughter was to learn where she came from and know the people of Chinese culture background. Mother C believes that it might be a better way for her daughter to keep connections with her heritage culture and language based on some readings she has done related to experiences from adult adoptees in United States. She did a lot of readings related to
experiences of adopting children and being adopted. Some articles indicated that Korean adult adoptees feel so angry with their parents who did not help them preserve their heritage culture and language when they were young, and instead, they were raised as American kids. After reading these articles, mother C felt that she had a responsibility to help her daughter preserve her culture and language. She mentioned:

The right thing would be to let these children [adoptees] embrace their heritage culture, heritage language, and to make them proud of where they come from. So that’s what we are trying to do. I mean I am not Chinese and I don’t have any Chinese culture background, and I will never have any Chinese culture. But what I can do is to offer her access to people who do have language and culture. I can as parents to give her access to these people, and I can help her to be proud of where were she come from.

All of three participants mentioned that this Chinese school provided their children a “good” social environment in different ways. Father A indicated that this Chinese school provides him and his son a social community for making friends and exchanging information. And he mentioned that his son loved to go to this Chinese school because he knew some good friends there.

Father B pointed out that many Chinese would go to church and make friends in churches, but he and his family were not religious people so he sent his sons to this Chinese school community for making friends. He also mentioned that this Chinese school was the “right” social place for his sons to find friends with similar cultural backgrounds because he experienced a certain level of discrimination or racism while living in this city. He explained:

Because we don’t have any religious belief at home, so we do not go to the church at all. Besides the school, you want to spend your social life, you go to participate the community activities. So Chinese school is one of good opportunities for them to network. Chinese and people from western culture are different. Ways of discrimination are existing although it is not in major population you know, but I can sense it, you know, even from my work. The situation for the life has already changed. For children, I want them to be able to deal with friendly or rough people.

Mother C indicated that it (transracial adoption) is not a perfect arrangement because people can tell that this family is different by seeing their faces, their skin colours, and their names. She realizes that her daughter will experience being different her whole life so she tries to find a place where her daughter can feel less different from other kids. In this Chinese school environment, her daughter can play
with kids who have similar Chinese looking faces, and some of them also have white parents. Though mother C is not sure if her daughter will fit into this Chinese community, she still wants to provide her daughter many opportunities to connect with Chinese culture, language and people. Her statement was:

For example, let’s say she comes to University of X province. People assume she is Chinese, right, when people look at her, do they expect her at least speak Mandarin or Cantonese? Or they start talking to her, you know. I don’t expect that she will become fluent in Mandarin speaker. If she’s able to communicate with them? If she’s going to feel awkward? In her own country that she can’t…you know there’s expectation and she is not meeting that expectation if she doesn’t have language and culture knowledge. ….You know my daughter is Chinese looking girl, and when she says her name, which is a Canadian name, you know as soon as she says her names, people will go, “it’s very strange!”

Mother C hoped that putting her daughter in this Chinese school would make her feel less different from other Chinese looking children.

I think the most important thing is to put her in this about two hundred children that attend school on Saturday morning, just one of the crowd. Chinese person and Chinese kids just become very normal for her. Whole bunch of Chinese people, some of them are adopted, some of them are not, some of them speak Mandarin home, and some of them don’t. So just depend the situation is. It jus makes everything a little bit normal for her.

Therefore, all of these comments are embedded with social, economic, and cultural perspectives in terms of learning Mandarin as a heritage language.

**Expectation for a heritage language program**

Father A and father B have similar cultural backgrounds, and they both share similar patterns of lifestyle and child rearing plans. They were both Cantonese speakers though they had Mandarin education when they were in Hong Kong. In everyday life, they had rare opportunities to use Mandarin, instead they mainly spoke to their sons in Cantonese. So they used other mediums to help their sons become familiar with the sound and pronunciation of Mandarin. Father A mentioned:

Because we are very fluently in Cantonese and then, you know, it’s not hmm..We don’t practice Mandarin at home. But, instead, we try to switch into the DVD with some interesting movies in mandarin. Therefore, he gets to, you know, he hears that more regularly. That helps him to remember or understand from the story in the motions, and try to, you know, help him to know another world.
Since father A’s family do not speak Mandarin at home, he knew that learning Mandarin is an additional activity for his son. He explained:

Mainly, as I said, an opportunity for him to learn, to expose properly, in the right environment for the Chinese language.

And father B even mixed up Cantonese and Mandarin as Chinese. He kept saying, “We all speak Chinese at home.” I tried to clarify this because I remembered that he mentioned that he grew up in Hong Kong. The dialogue was:

Researcher: So the language policy in your family?
Father B: In my family, we communicate in Chinese.
Researcher: Chinese or Cantonese?
Father B: Cantonese…yeah! Because I live with my mother- and father-in-law. That older generation they only speak Chinese….the language Cantonese. So the kids can keep that language skill.

Also, due to the limited learning time, three of my participants did not expect too much from this heritage language program. Father B mentioned:

…one thing I don’t like this program is too many day-off on the Saturdays. I think we start on September to early June. There are only about 30 days of class. So that’s not really enough. They should rethink about not to have too many day-off because for language, you really need to pay all the time.

And mother C also pointed out:

I mean 3 hours a week. I don’t think she can learn any language in 3 hours a week. I guess it’s 2 and half hours a week. If you study full-time, I think you can certainly learn a language, especially at young age. It’s easily to pick up language when you study full time. I don’t think that 2 and half hours a week is enough for her. I think she will get some basic conversation, she will recognize some characters.

Mother C’s encountered different challenges from father A and B mainly because she was a non-Chinese heritage mother. She became a minority when she took her daughter to these heritage-learning activities.

…I have overcome, I guess, it’s as we try to participate in these activities, I have to overcome feeling of being the minority, and going to places where normally not speaking English, which is very unusual for me. I have I guess very shelter life living in X city. And you know, such as going to a room at Chinese school. We participate in dance classes where all parents were standing around and talking. I had to be brave and go up to the group and stand with them and wait until they switch to English so that I can participate. And I am very often being the only Caucasian person in a room. And that’s very different for me. I don’t have that experience
before so it’s been good for me to experience that because my daughter is going to experience. Because of living in X city, she will be going to classroom and she will be going to activities and she will be the only Asian person there. And she is going to deal with being different one.

Since mother C had no Chinese heritage, it would be difficult for her to supervise her daughter in learning Chinese. She cannot correct her daughter’s pronunciation, or give her help in her Chinese assignments. However, she bought bilingual (English-Chinese) books, CDs, DVDs for her daughter when she was young, and spent lots of time reading these books, listening to CDs, and watching DVDs with her daughter.

I bought some CDs and some DVDs. It’s a series designed for children who do not speak Mandarin at home. So we bought those. And she enjoys watching them and we listen in the car…To learn all that just by listening and watching the CDs and DVDs. So she got very basic, she knows some food, names of fruit, she can count… So she has some exposure. I want her to hear the intonation, because I read that there is a window of language acquisition that you have to hear it from times you were a child. That is so much easier to learn a language and speak the words correctly if you heard. So I just her to have exposure to hearing the language. She seems to pick up something.

And mother C and her husband started an adult Chinese class this September, and right now they learn Chinese as a family activity. Mother C mentioned that it was so challenging for them to learn Mandarin, but they had to try because they wanted their daughter to know that they valued her heritage and it was so important to learn and keep her heritage.

We are struggling. We have really tough time with it. But the reason we do it is to show our daughter that something we value and important for us, too. That’s important to our family.

**Resources for heritage language retention**

All of three participants pointed out similar resources that they found for heritage language learning, such as books, CDs, DVDs, satellite TV. Father B mentioned:

I have Chinese cable. So they can watch Chinese TV all the time, lots of Chinese programs…. So there are Taiwanese, Chinese, and Hong Cantonese programs. I think there is a channel from Taiwan so they can watch whatever is playing. It’s really easy to access. Compared to the old day, the only way in X city, you want to access the Chinese stuff, you can rent a VCR. That is in old day. It wasn’t very convenient. And
you know, besides the Chinese TV, kids can go to Internet to watch Chinese video as well. Or they can listen to the Chinese music.

Father B also pointed out that using the Internet was another good way to learn a language, and the advantage is that you can learn by yourself at any time.

I don’t know about the Chinese program on the Internet. But you know language, for French or English, there are lots of program on the Internet. Even in Canada, the Chinese population is large now. The major Chinese communities probably can work together. The system from Taiwan, Hong Kong China, or Singapore, they should try to build some universal program. So people can learn Chinese from anywhere on the Internet…. people can learn by themselves when holidays or evenings. They can use Internet and learn some more stuff.

Discussion

Based on the research questions, three major themes immerged from the findings. They were the value of learning Mandarin as a heritage language; the challenges in helping children learn their heritage language, and the resources for heritage language retention.

The value of learning Mandarin as a heritage language

The value of learning Mandarin as a heritage language for the three participants lies on its social, cultural and economic considerations. All three participants in this study strongly agreed with the social function of learning Mandarin in this Chinese school community. For the first two participants, due to their Chinese heritage, participating in this Chinese school community has been of benefit not only for their children, but also for themselves. Through sending their children to this school, they had met other parents who have similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They can share information and be supportive within this Chinese community. Therefore, the heritage school is an ideal place for minority language groups to enact their social practice. For non-Chinese heritage parents, they may find families with similar background in this school community and being minority (non-heritage parents) in this school setting provides them with a sympathetic connection with their children.

Cultural value was assumed to be the major reason that parents send their children to a heritage program, though the first two father participants seem to put cultural value of learning heritage language behind its economic value. However, it could not be
denied that both of the fathers had strong a cultural identity themselves, and that they wanted their next generation to maintain this cultural identity. According to Schieffelin and Ochs (1986), there is an interrelationship between children’s acquisition of language and their acquisition of culture. Sending children to this heritage language program would provide them with the opportunity to practice the target language in culturally specific ways. The social interactions within this Chinese school context are embedded in a broader patterns of social behavior and cultural knowledge. All three participants recognized that with Chinese language ability, their children have easy access to this language group and can use that access to keep their Chinese root (heritage).

All participants brought up the economic value of learning an extra language. Being bilingual or multilingual was recognized as carrying personal advantages as well as important potential benefits to society (Tse, 2001). The perception held by the three parent participants was that additional language ability would expand their children’s career development in the future. One participant responded that China would play an important role in the world economic stage in the near future. Therefore, it seems very practical and a privilege to learn Chinese and possess Chinese heritage.

Another issue brought out by the two fathers who were Cantonese speakers was that both of them sent their children to this Chinese school to learn Mandarin and simplified Chinese characters as their heritage language. They all mentioned to me that they knew there was a Cantonese school in X city, but their choice was to make their children learn Mandarin instead. It seemed to reflect the economic considerations mentioned above. They predicted a promising political and economic situation in China and this motivated them to put their children in this kind of arrangement.

**The challenges in helping children learn their heritage language**

The challenges for the three participants were all directed towards how to maintain their children interests in heritage language learning. From the parents’ perspectives, maintaining heritage culture and language would be a benefit to their children socially, culturally and economically. However, most parents’ roles are to encourage their children to learn heritage culture and language. When children become more mature, they may eventually decide what they want to learn and who
they want to be in terms of being a minority language group in a host country. You (2005) as a teacher and the principal in a Korean heritage language school in America, mentions that when children are young, they tend to accept many learning activities that parents arrange for them. Once they grow up to teen age, they might not be so obedient. So the climax drop rate in heritage language program is when these young learners become teenagers. One of my participants (mother C) realized this process and mentioned this to me. However, the other two father participants seemed to neglect the fact that children might have their own desire when they became mature, especially considering that their children were educated in a Western educational system. In traditional Chinese culture, parents have more power to assign or direct their children’s decisions. So there might be some conflicts between immigrant parents and their children who were educated in different school systems. (Tigchelaar, 2003).

Another challenge was related to this community-based heritage language school. This school offered limited learning time—two and half hours a week. It was not enough to be fluent speakers in a language unless students use this language at home as well. But this was not the case for my three participants. The first two fathers were Cantonese speakers and they spoke mostly Cantonese and some English at home. The third interviewee, mother C was a non-Chinese heritage parent so they only spoke English at home. Students whose home languages are not Mandarin Chinese might have only two and half hours in learning Chinese every week. They might have no Chinese-speaking environment outside of classroom because the dominant language in this city was English. It seems like they are learning a foreign language instead of a heritage language. Therefore, the three parent participants did not expect that their children would become fluent Mandarin speakers after this program due to the limited class time and space to practice the target language.

Resources for heritage language retention

Resources like bilingual CDs, DVDs, and books, may help parents who did not understand Mandarin at all (mother C). For parents like father A and B whose mother tongue was Cantonese or those with other dialects from China, cable TV programs would be a good resource for culture and language learning. Besides, using an online language-learning program or the Internet was another way to practice language as well. So technology development not only assists people from different cultures to interact with each other, but also maintains contacts with people from
similar cultural backgrounds.

Parents’ knowledge of the resources for heritage language retention in this city was very limited. The three participants had no clue about this part, but they all referred me to the possibilities of rich resources in bigger cities with large Chinese population, such as Toronto and Vancouver. Support from government or mainstream society under the terms of Canadian multiculturalism was very important in terms of heritage language retention. The statement from the X province government website showed that heritage language education is a part of X province educational system. So far the regular school system offers basic heritage language courses, bilingual heritage language programs, and enhanced heritage language courses, though the website does not point out any specific school division with any heritage language programs. It seems that three of my participants do not share these supports from government. There might be some geographic and demographic disadvantages related to this issue.

**Conclusion**

Parental decisions in heritage language retention are very crucial and necessarily. In this study, I focus on three parents’ perspectives and the challenges they encounter when they sent their children to a heritage language program. Two of three participants had similar cultural and language backgrounds, and one participant was a non-Chinese heritage parent. The findings show some differences between heritage parents and the non-heritage parent. However, the social, cultural and economic values of learning Mandarin are the three major considerations in attending this community-based Chinese heritage school. It also appears that the challenges parents faced when sending their children to a heritage language program involved uncertainty and frustration. What can they actually expect from this program within a limited language learning time? How can they help besides sending their children to a heritage language program? Another aspect is the availability of resources for heritage language retention at the personal level, community level, societal level, and government level. The findings indicate that resources from mainstream society and the government seem very limited and unapproachable in this province. Under the terms of Canadian multiculturalism, how heritage language resources can be fairly shared with different minority language groups still remains an uncertainty. We also need to consider the development of community-based heritage language programs.
not only from the educational viewpoint, but also from that of parents’ expectations.

This study may shed light on minority parent’s perspectives on heritage language retention and the challenges they face when sending their children to a heritage program. It also implicates the policy makers and mainstream society should be more aware of the issue of heritage programs. The current X province educational system includes heritage programs in their curriculum planning, so in any future studies I would like to explore how these language minority groups actually use it.

References


