

**NEGOTIATING LANGUAGES AND LITERACIES:
INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL CHINESE HERITAGE LEARNERS' ESSAY WRITING**

by

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Abstract

With the interrelated trends of globalization and immigration, Chinese heritage language (CHL) learners have become a noticeable and growing constituent in language programs in postsecondary institutions. Despite impressive oral vernacular proficiency, they typically lack formal and sophisticated registers and their HL literacy is often underdeveloped. Although it has been widely acknowledged that the major goal of university HL education is to cultivate formal registers and develop literacy for academic or professional success, the research literature includes very few studies on university CHL learners' Chinese literacy, and particularly essay writing proficiency.

This thesis investigates intermediate level CHL learners' HL essay writing, providing a detailed description of the unique features of their Chinese essays by close examination of their writing samples both on local and global levels. Furthermore, from the sociocultural perspective of literacy, the study explores the CHL learners' daily language and literacy practice through one on one semi-structured interviews, which offers a greater understanding of the factors that have contributed to the existing features of their essay writing.

This study finds that the CHL learners' essay writing demonstrates their active use of all the language and literacy resources in their language repertoire. Their essay writing also shows certain amounts of hybridity and syncretism, characterized by a lack of formal vocabulary, transfer of syntax, organization and rhetorical strategies from the dominant language- English, on the one hand, their use of certain sophisticated words and set phrases, on the other hand, reflects the HL assets that they bring to Chinese classes and language production. Furthermore, the interviews reveal that English, Mandarin and Cantonese are

practiced in different domains of the CHL learners' lives, with English as their dominant language. Their literacy activities are far more mediated by English than Chinese, and their use of Mandarin and Cantonese is more oral than written. The thesis concludes that the ecology of the languages and literacies in the CHL learners' lives strongly influences the features of their essay writing on both local and global levels.

Preface

With Chinese reported as Canada's third most widely spoken language after English and French and the second most spoken language other than English after Spanish in the U.S., Chinese heritage language (CHL) learners constitute a significant part of language programs in North American postsecondary institutions. Typically possessing oral proficiency of the heritage language (HL), these learners are seeking to upgrade their HL proficiency to a formal sophisticated register and develop respective literacy. As a Chinese language teacher and also an immigrant parent, my interest in finding out the features of CHL learners' literacy, especially their essay writing proficiency and the path they go through in developing HL literacy led me to the conducting of this study.

This study is a qualitative inquiry to intermediate level CHL learners' essay writing. The research design includes examination of participants' essay writing samples and semi-structured interviews. I appreciate the help offered by the instructors of relevant Chinese courses with the distribution of recruitment letters and my recruitment speeches in class. I also thank my participants who earnestly shared with me their experience and thoughts in Chinese essay writing. I sincerely thank my co-supervisor Dr. Patricia Duff for her encouragement and insightful suggestions on the writing of the thesis. Finally, this thesis would have never become a reality without the vital support from my supervisor, Dr. Duanduan Li.

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Chapter1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Along with globalization and immigration, our society is becoming more and more culturally and linguistically diverse. In North America, the United States Census shows that more than 55 million of the population speak a home language other than English (the United States Census Bureau, 2010). In the case of Canada, the population with a mother tongue other than English and French grew steadily from 18% in 2001 to 20% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012). In the profession of language education, there has been a corresponding trend: heritage language (HL) learners who “are raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, speak or at least understand the language, and are to some degree bilinguals in that language and in English” (Valdés, 2001, p. 38) have become an important constituent of language programs in postsecondary institutions. Among this population, the vast number of Chinese heritage language (CHL) learners is gaining more and more attention from language educators and researchers. In this chapter I first provide a description of CHL learners in terms of heritage language competence, I then discuss the goal and challenges of CHL teaching and learning determined by the characteristics of their heritage language proficiency. I move on to introduce my research questions, and finally outline the organization of my thesis.

1.2 CHL learners: a unique learner group

CHL learners share the common characteristics of the learners of other heritage languages. At the same time, they bear unique characteristics that are intrinsically related to the nature of Chinese language.

1.2.1 Characteristics of HL learners

HL learners are unique, compared with either native speakers of the language or traditional foreign language learners. However, their uniqueness was not well-recognized and addressed in educational programs for quite a long time. A common response of educational programs toward HL learners is, as Li and Duff (2008) point out,

HL students are treated either the same as non-HL students and then placed in classes they are overqualified for (and consequently often bored with), or simply dismissed as “native speakers” who do not need any instruction, or are viewed derisively by administrators, teachers, and classmates as people seeking inflated grades, “an easy A” (p.15).

Fortunately, with the increasing number of heritage language learners and thus increasing attention to this population, language educators have realized that in several respects heritage language learners are different from either non-heritage students or native speakers. In terms of motivation, they have deep-rooted reasons to pursue the language either from more “integrative” orientation of reconnecting with their ancestry (e.g., for Russian HL, Andrews, 2001; for Chinese HL, Wen, 1997, cited in Li & Duff, 2008) or more “instrumental” orientation (e.g., for German HL, Noels & Clement, 1989, cited in Li & Duff, 2008) such as for friendship, travel and knowledge reasons, or both (Li, 2005). In terms of language proficiency, many of them are far more advanced than the traditional foreign language learners, particularly in everyday (colloquial) oral language. Nevertheless, by no means they could thus be deemed as “native speakers”, with the fact that obvious language gap, particularly regarding formal registers, exists between their heritage language proficiency and that of educated native speakers. Then precisely how do they differ from educated native speakers? Based on the observation of educators who work with

heritage student populations, Campbell and Rosenthal (2000) proposed as a “working hypothesis” (p. 167) the characteristics of heritage learners. According to them, although heritage learners typically master most of the phonological system and grammatical rules, their vocabulary and sociolinguistic registers, which only reflecting those of “the immediate environment of home and neighborhood”, are less well developed (p.168). Studies on heritage learners across a range of languages firmly support this hypothesis (e.g., Isurin & Ivanova-Sullivan, 2008; Kagan & Dillon, 2004; Sridhar, 1996; Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998), revealing that the language gap between heritage learners and educated native speakers and writers is that heritage learners typically lack formal or sophisticated registers in their language repertoire, and their heritage language literacy is much less developed than their oral skills.

1.2.2 Characteristics of CHL learners

While sharing the characteristics of HL learners in general, Chinese heritage language learners, as Li and Duff (2008) point out, bear some unique characteristics. Some of the characteristics of HL learners that Campbell and Rosenthal (2000) proposed are not necessarily applicable to them. For example, “Dialect speakers (such as Cantonese) may not necessarily possess ‘native pronunciation’ when they learn Mandarin. What’s worse, they may not even understand Mandarin” (Li and Duff, 2008, p. 23). In addition, due to historical, political, cultural and social factors associated with Chinese language, CHL learners not only speak in some cases not mutually understandable varieties (in terms of phonology, lexicon, even grammar) of the language but also they are exposed to different orthography (simplified or traditional characters), either of which is notorious for its difficulty. These unique characteristics inevitably lead to the special needs of CHL learners regarding their development of language and literacy, which will be discussed in the following section.

1.3 Developing CHL writing proficiency: the ultimate goal and the challenges

1.3.1 Struggles of HL learners with writing

Compared with traditional foreign language learners who seek to develop proficiency in all aspects (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of the target language, HL learners, with distinct characteristics in terms of language skills, have different language needs. As Campbell and Rosenthal (2000) observed, “Because the HL learners could already speak and understand the target language, they needed to focus on reading and writing skills” (p. 173). Quite reasonably, developing heritage language literacy has become an appropriate priority in HL education. Literacy development not only can upgrade learners’ heritage language proficiency to more sophisticated level, but also allows them the possibility of further academic study in their HL which they otherwise would be unable to do.

Nevertheless, literacy development is far from easy or smooth. Literacy is something that people usually cannot naturally acquire simply through exposure but rather need to *learn*. As Brown (2001) puts it, “we learn to write if we are members of a literate society, and usually only if someone teaches us” (p.334). Admittedly, compared with reading, writing is much more demanding since “written products are often the result of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures that require specialized skills, skills that not every speaker develops naturally” (Brown, 2001, p. 335). Not surprisingly, many HL learners, despite their high fluency in oral expression, often struggle with writing. For instance, in Tse’s (2001) study, even when learning an alphabetic language, a Spanish HL speaker described his predicament when writing in the language: “... I was struggling in that class. The reading wasn’t a problem; it’s the writing and all the grammar rules...”(p. 697). An advanced Spanish HL learner in Alarcón’s (2010) study, while self-assessed as “native-like” in speaking, listening and reading, reported only having

intermediate proficiency in writing: “I will frequently have to double-check what I’ve written,” “if I am writing something academic I often find my vocabulary inhibiting” (p. 276).

Undoubtedly, writing in HL poses a huge obstacle for these learners along their path to full-developed HL proficiency. Yet, as a productive skill that is of great significance for academic and career success, writing proficiency is in great need, especially for upper-level HL learners.

1.3.2 Challenges CHL learners face when developing HL writing proficiency

For CHL learners, literacy development is even more challenging. Studies show Chinese home background has little effect on CHL learners’ acquisition of vocabulary, reading and writing skills (Ke, 1998; Shen, 2003; Xiao, 2006). This is mainly due to the logographic Chinese writing system. When processing reading and writing tasks, unfortunately, unlike the case of HL learners of alphabetic languages, CHL learners cannot “tap into their existing oral skills and phonology” (Li & Duff, 2008, p.23). Rather, they have to wrestle with the logographic Chinese characters.

Taking character writing, a basic task in writing as an example, CHL learners have to put much energy into orthographic accuracy. It is time-consuming to write Chinese characters by hand, and the complicated and confusing ways that strokes compose the characters make the task even harder. Acknowledging the difficulty, researchers have proposed computer-assisted approaches to Chinese character inputting (Kubler, 2002), since these approaches “can speed up the composition process by allowing learners to focus on composition per se rather than on the production of individual characters which is, after all, the most time-consuming factor in traditional handwritten composition” (Kubler, p. 114). However, typing Chinese characters is not an ideal solution. There are so many characters that share the same pronunciation, not to mention that the most popular (and probably the easiest for learners) pinyin typing program does not

differentiate tones.

Another challenge for CHL learners to learn writing in Chinese is the logographic writing system (which was mentioned earlier) because the system not only disallows learners to get help from their oral language competence but at the same time hinders their acquisition of vocabulary through reading.

Finally, as discussed earlier in this section, writing is the process of a series of higher mental activities such as thinking, drafting, and revising. For CHL learners, “if the writing of Chinese characters alone has been difficult for learners, developing writing skills in Chinese seems to be even more challenging” (Zhang, 2009, p.722).

All in all, CHL learners, like learners of other HLs, have urgent need of developing higher writing proficiency in the language. Responding to this need, Chinese language educators face such fundamental tasks as identifying resources that CHL learners may draw upon as well as challenges they face when writing in Chinese. Only with in-depth understanding of these questions can CHL educators facilitate CHL learners’ literacy development effectively.

1.4 Purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate intermediate-level CHL learners’ essay writing by analyzing the features of their course-related essays and exploring factors that may have contributed to the features, with the hope that it will consequently provide pedagogical implications for CHL writing instruction, so as to facilitate CHL students’ essay writing development effectively and efficiently. As demonstrated above, developing HL literacy, especially writing proficiency, constitutes a functional goal of HL education. In the case of CHL, determined by the unique characteristics of Chinese language, learners face special challenges regarding writing development. However, research in CHL has paid little attention to heritage

language writing, as will be demonstrated in my literature review. To address this gap in the research literature, I investigate intermediate-level CHL learners' essay writing through a case study involving 10 CHL learners. Specifically, the research questions explored in this study are:

1. What are the features of intermediate-level CHL learners' essay writing in terms of complexity and accuracy both at the local (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, mechanics) and global level (e.g., organization, content)?
2. What factors account for the features of these intermediate level CHL learners' essay writing?

These questions will be explored by examination of the intermediate-level CHL learners' essay writing samples, as well as individual interviews with them. The procedures will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.5 Organization of the thesis

In this chapter, I have put forth the issue of CHL writing development as a major challenge of CHL education, arguing that CHL educators need to further their understanding of CHL students' needs regarding their literacy development. I have also introduced the purpose of my study and my research questions. Chapter 2 provides a review of research literature that is relevant to both HL writing in general and CHL writing in specific. Chapter 3 provides the theoretical framework of my study and outlines the methodology I used in conducting this study. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of my study and discuss them in relation to the theoretical framework, as well as to existing HL and CHL writing research. I then discuss the implications of the findings to CHL writing instruction. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the study, suggestions for further research, and a personal reflection.

Chapter2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Discussion in Chapter 1 has demonstrated that the primary instruction need for HL learners is to develop literacy in the HL, especially writing proficiency. In the case of CHL, the special challenges CHL learners are facing call for specialized instruction that has to be based on in-depth understanding of the development of CHL literacy in general and writing in particular. With the understanding that CHL writing development shares certain features with other HLs while having its own characteristics, in this chapter I first review HL writing research in general, then I review specifically research on CHL writing.

2.2 HL writing research

2.2.1 Overview

Despite the pressing need, literacy has not yet received much attention in the realm of HL research. To date in the research literature of many heritage languages including Chinese, especially in the U.K. and U.S., what has received most attention and remains the most fruitful area so far is heritage learners' identity construction (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2008; Brown, 2009; Creese, et al. 2006; He, 2004; McKay & Wong, 1996; Palmer, 2007; Weger-Guntharp, 2006; Wong & Yang, 2010). Only recently, has HL literacy begun to gain more attention (e.g., Lee, 2006; Yi, 2008), while research specifically on HL writing is still rare.

2.2.2 HL literacy research following the sociocultural theory

Recent research on HL literacy reflects the sociocultural theory in literacy research. Initiated by Barton (1994), Gee (1990) and Street (1984), literacy research has shifted its focus from the dominant English academic literacy to “multiple *literacies* as well as multiple paths for

literacy development” (Yi & Hirvela, 2009, p.1). Conceptualizing literacy as social activities that are socio-culturally, historically, and politically situated in various social contexts, these studies (e.g., Hull & Schultz, 2002; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000) examine multiple literacies practiced in a wide range of social contexts within and beyond school, with the purpose of bridging out-of-school literacies with classroom practices. Along with the increasing attention to HL education, literacy research from sociocultural perspective has extended its realm to HL literacy.

Joo’s (2009) case study of four Korean-American adolescents provides a detailed description of their rich literacy practice at home and in community. Analysis of the data collected from multiple sources (e.g., home visits, participatory observation, interviews, literacy-related document analysis) demonstrates that these bilingual young people engage at various levels with both English and HL reading and writing activities out-of-school. However, their involvement with HL reading and writing is much less than with English, and in both languages writing is significantly less than reading. The occasional writing activities in heritage language (Korean) are mostly oriented to family members. Although HL literacy practices, particularly writing, are much less common than in English, both the students and their parents hold very positive attitudes toward HL literacy development. The study reveals that bilingual students have “significant degrees of engagement with literacy outside their ‘regular’ school activities and thus valuable opportunities to enhance their literacy skills” (p. 94) in both languages. Moreover, HL literacy activities at home and in the community enhance “their connections to and possibly affiliations with the heritage language and culture” (p. 94).

In addition to traditionally investigated social contexts such as home and community, some HL literacy research has noticed an emerging new site for literacy practice: cyber space. Today’s computer technology, especially the Internet, has made it possible for people not only to

access rich language and cultural resources but also to communicate with each other without the restriction of concrete boundaries. For young people who are usually more interested and capable users of new technology, blogs, instant messaging, emails, online community postings, etc. provide them with authentic situations to use the heritage language. Thus the effect of online literacy practice on heritage language and literacy maintenance and development has become a field of interest to researchers.

Through a series of interviews with two undergraduate Korean heritage learners and observation of their literacy activities in a web space over three months, Lee (2006) examines “the effects of electronic literacy and online communication on heritage language learners” (p.93). She finds that although Internet provides ample opportunities for authentic and meaningful use of HL, the effects of online literacy practices on HL development are two-sided. On the one hand, flexible language use in cyberspace allows HL learners to experiment with the language without the risk of losing face and thus benefits both their oral proficiency and literacy skills. On the other hand, characteristics of online language such as omission, addition, and phonological approximation frequently expose HL learners to confusing circumstances where they cannot tell deliberate deviations of online language from unintentional errors. Lee (2006) therefore suggests that additional formal instruction is needed to “help them understand the differences between online, playful language use and offline, formal literacy practices to be able to strategically utilize the linguistic and pragmatic norms of both online and offline communities” (p.108).

Yi’s (2008) qualitative case study investigates two adolescent Korean HL learners’ voluntary writing. Through analysis of multiple data sources including interviews, literacy activity checklists, field notes, and literacy artifacts, the researcher finds the two HL learners

involved in a wide variety of HL writing activities such as instant messaging, online community posting and diary writing. They “moved fluidly between their two cultures and languages” in HL writing and these writing practice “helped them develop a great sense of fluency and confidence in and motivation for writing in HL”(p. 88). HL writing helps the two HL learners to pursue personal interests, socialize with ethnic peer groups and maintain ties to the home country. The researcher further addresses the importance of online HL peer community, as well as pop culture for developing HL literacy. Echoing Lee (2006), while acknowledging the significance of online literacy practices in young HL learners’ lives, Yi (2008) cautions the necessity of helping them to differentiate online and offline language use.

A series of HL literacy studies in Spanish tapped into the issue of “literacy transfer”. In Spanish HL research, literacy transfer (retention and development) has been “a major preoccupation among heritage language researchers” (Martinez, 2007). Under the influence of sociocultural theory in literacy research, new understanding of literacy transfer has emerged in recent studies of Spanish HL writing texts.

Earlier study by García (2002) proposed the concept of “backward bi-literacy”. Her study of uncertified Spanish-English bilingual teachers who failed to pass the bi-literacy assessment includes an analysis of their HL writing, showing that these HL speakers often “write backwards” towards the dominant language. Evidence of this backwards bi-literacy includes transfer of English orthography, structure patterns, high frequency of passive voice, etc. Most importantly, their essays were “being composed from an English rhetorical tradition, following a rigid template” (p. 254). The researcher attributes this backward bi-literacy to these learners’ unfamiliarity of Spanish academic voice and their possession of the “controlled and limited English literate voice” acquired in the “many remedial (English) writing courses” (p. 254).

From a different perspective, Spicer-Escalante (2005) proposed bi-directional transfer. Utilizing Connor and Lauer's models (1988), the researcher conducted a rhetorical analysis of Spanish HL learners' writing in both Spanish and English, as well as writing samples of Spanish second language learners (SSLs) and Spanish native speakers (SNSs). Examination of the rhetorical strategies (analysis of the claim, data, and the use of warrants) and persuasive appeals (rational, credible, and affective) used in the writing samples of these three groups shows that HL learners "do not thoroughly follow the rhetorical patterns of either SSL or SNS, but discover their own space within the confines of the writings of both SNS and SSL, creating a unique mode of written expression" (p. 220). This "forward bi-literacy" suggests that heritage learners "nourish their writing in both Spanish and English by using rhetorical strategies that correspond to both of these languages, reflecting the cultural borderland in which they live, where elements of North American and Latino cultures meld together into a unique syncretic composite" (p. 235).

"Backward bi-literacy" and "forward bi-literacy" are seemingly contradictory, while Martinez's (2007) study, from a sociocultural view of literacy, argues that "backwards and forward writing are discursively situated in the context of situation of literacy practices" (p. 31). He compares the variable use of null and overt subject pronouns by heritage learners in two writing tasks with the same topic: one formal (academic) writing, the other, free writing which students were informed would not be graded. The findings revealed that "In formal writing contexts, the processing appears to conform to the rhetorical traditions bequeathed through several years of schooling in English" while in free writing, "the processing appears to be more influenced by the discourse patterns used routinely in the heritage language community" (p. 38). Based on such findings, he proposes a multi-dimensional model of literacy transfer and

expression that “opens up the potential transfer by including a multiplicity of contents and by drawing on practices developed within the context of the heritage language community” (pp. 38-39). With this new understanding of literacy transfer, the researcher argues “we will not only validate the literacies students bring with them to the classroom but we will also make these literacies more salient as we attempt to develop academic discourse within the classroom context” (p. 39).

In short, the studies presented above foreground the fact that HL learners practice multiple literacies across contexts and languages, using multiple resources and strategies stemming from different sources. This situation requires researchers to take into account learners’ holistic literacy practices and contexts when examining any particular form of literacy.

2.2.3 Other HL writing research

Unlike the studies adopting a social-cultural perspective, Friedman and Kagan’s (2008) study of Russian heritage language learners’ writing focuses on linguistic features of HL writing texts. They compare the academic writing of Russian HL learners (RHLL), native speakers (RNS), and advanced foreign language learners of Russian (RFLL) to examine the characteristics of HL learners’ writing, the relationship between HL literacy and age of migration, as well as HL literacy and English literacy. The examination of writing focuses on two areas “that distinguished the writing of heritage learners of Russian from that of native speakers: (a) the formation of complex sentences through relative clause constructions and (b) the use of temporal cohesive devices (such as logical connectors and adverb clauses)” (p. 183). Analysis of their (7 RHLLs, 4 RFLLs, 3 RNSs) academic writing texts shows how HL learners’ academic writing is different from the other two groups: Compared with FL learners, the HL learners command a wider range of linguistic resources such as adverb clauses of time and a greater variety of

temporal logical connectors. Compared with native speakers, linguistic devices the HL learners used are relatively limited although they can construct complex sentences and create temporal cohesion in their essays. The small sample size precludes the researchers drawing compelling conclusions on the relationship between HL literacy and age of migration, but they do find a positive correlation between the HL learners' writing ability in Russian and in English.

2.3 CHL writing research

As discussed in Chapter 1, CHL writing is an even more demanding task compared with other HL writing for students from non-sinographic first languages, since CHL learners have to also attend to the notorious task of character writing and they cannot refer to their HL oral proficiency because of the logographic nature of the orthography. To facilitate the development of CHL learners' literacy and writing proficiency, in-depth understanding of this issue is needed for educators to provide well-informed instruction. However, contrasted with the large number of CHL learners, very few studies on CHL literacy and writing have been found in the relevant literature (including peer reviewed journals in North America such as *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association*, as well as studies published in China). In the research literature, including Chinese as a second or foreign language, most studies concerning Chinese "writing" are actually on character learning (e.g., Allen, 2008; Ke, 1996; Z. Zhang, 2009). As for essay writing in Chinese, there has been little research either in Chinese as a foreign language or second language (except for Hong, 1998; Jin, 2007; Yang, 2011; Yuan, 2010). Likewise, research on writing instruction is also rare. As Zhang (2009) points out,

...little research has been conducted on writing instruction for Mandarin Chinese as a second and foreign language (CSL/CFL) at either a theoretical or practical level. In fact, Chinese writing instruction is one of the least researched issues in

the CSL/CFL field. (p. 722)

As a newer field of study compared with CFL/CSL, CHL research literature has even fewer studies on literacy and especially writing. While Zhang (2009) identified the gap of Chinese writing research in the literature, her own study is not about essay writing per se. She examines essay writing in a Chinese WebCT discussion board with the major research question “How effective is essay writing in the Chinese WebCT environment in *creating community bonds* among the heritage and non-heritage learners” (p. 728, italics added), focusing on the effectiveness of online writing tasks as a way of building a supportive learning community.

To my knowledge, existing studies that tackle CHL literacy have mainly dealt with school-age children (e.g., Li, 2006; Li, 2009). In keeping with traditions in sociocultural literacy research, the contexts examined in these studies include home, the heritage language community, and community schools where the heritage language is taught. Findings in these studies suggest home literacy environment, parental support and community school instruction all play a crucial role in children’s HL literacy development.

In the case of university CHL learners, Liu's (2009) research on the characteristics of advanced-level Chinese heritage students' essays is so far the only one that examines CHL writing proficiency. Liu (2009) analyzed 320 expository essays written by third and fourth-year CHL students, examining five aspects, namely grammar, word use, content, structure and overall impression of their writing. He found that these samples showed insufficient written lexicon, “transfer in syntax from English” and “disorganization in textual structuring”(p. 68). With organization as the focus of his study, Liu (2009) further discusses the “disorganization” of these essays and proposes that even at the advanced level, heritage learners “may still treat writing as a way to expand their Chinese vocabulary and to guarantee grammatical and orthographical

accuracy and are therefore distracted from textual organization” (p. 71). His study made a contribution to the limited knowledge regarding CHL learners’ academic writing. However, the analysis takes a “deficit” view that highlights the deficiencies of CHL learners’ writing but neglects the resources, creativity, and constructive strategies that they bring to their writing. Moreover, while conceptualizing literacy (writing) as individual cognitive skill, the study limited its discussion to the factors in formal instruction contexts, without consideration of influence from learners’ literacy practices across a variety of historical and social contexts.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I first reviewed research on HL literacy and writing in general, followed by the review of literacy and writing research on Chinese as a heritage language. As the review shows, heritage language literacy development, especially writing development, which is one of the major goals of HL education, has not received due attention. In the existing HL research, Spanish HL is explored more, while literacy research in Korean as a heritage language is catching up fast. In addition, with a traditional focus on linguistic features of written texts, there has been a shift toward the sociocultural aspects of literacy practice and writing. Regarding CHL literacy and specifically writing, very few studies have been done, with fewer at the university level. Furthermore, sociocultural aspects of literacy and writing have not been adequately addressed in CHL compared with studies of other HLs.

In the following chapter, I will explain the theoretical framework and methodology of the study and introduce my participants.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for the study and outlines the methodology. I first offer a description of the theories that guide the study and the research design, building on the brief review of literature in the previous chapter. Next I describe the criteria for inclusion of participants in the study and the process of recruitment, and introduce my participants. I then explain how I collected my data, which include both participants' writing samples and the interview recordings. I further explain how I conducted my interviews, discussing my theoretical approach to the interviews. Next I discuss how I analyzed the data of writing samples and the interviews respectively.

3.2 Theoretical framework

This study investigates intermediate-level Chinese heritage language learners' essay writing. When approaching this issue, how to conceptualize literacy is crucial. Rather than viewing writing as individual cognitive skill, I adopt a sociocultural view of literacy (e.g., Barton, 1994; Gee, 1990, 2012), which views literacy as socio-culturally, historically, and politically situated practice. The more traditional view of literacy as the ability to read and write (i.e., to decode and encode), as Gee (2012) critiques, "takes literacy out of its sociocultural contexts and treats it as an asocial cognitive skill" (p.69) and therefore inevitably restricts research to a narrow psychological path while neglecting the broad sociocultural contexts where literacy is situated. By contrast, a sociocultural view of literacy emphasizes that literacy has a social context (Levine, 1985) and is socially constructed (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). The New Literacy Studies in the 1980s and 1990s represent this sociocultural trend in research. As Barton (1994) points out, the key to these new views of literacy is "situating reading and writing in its social context" (p. 23).

The understanding that “people have different literacies which they make use of, associated with different domains of life” (Barton 1994, p. 34) leads to an examination of situated literacy in various social contexts, in addition to the traditional research focus on academic literacy. Furthermore, Barton (1994) points out that although “distinctive practices give rise to particular literacies” in different domains such as school, home and work, there is no clear-cut boundary of these literacy practices in different social contexts: “the reality is more fluid”; “the practices leak from one domain to the other and there is much overlap” (p. 40). As it is in our everyday life, school related literacy is practiced at home, and home based reading and writing may contribute to academic literacy in school. Moreover, literacies are not only “different *literacies* as existing within one language”, but also “different literacies being associated with different languages” (Barton, 1994, p.70, italics in original) in bilingual and multilingual situations.

In addition, literacies situated in different social contexts may interfere with or otherwise interact with or influence each other. Embedding literacy within the framework of “Discourse”, Gee (2012) posits that “Discourses are all about how people ‘get their acts together’ to get recognized as a given kind of person at a specific time and space” (p.152), of which distinctive ways of language use, including the literacy practices of writing and reading, are important constituents. According to Gee (2012), “primary Discourse” is the initial socialization of people as “everyday person”, while “secondary Discourses” involve social institutions beyond the intimate sphere of families. Gee (2012) therefore defines literacy as “the mastery of a *secondary Discourse* involving print in some fashion” (p. 173, italics added). He further points out that “aspects of one Discourse can be transferred to another Discourse” (p. 172), so do languages and literacies related with them. Cummins (1981), as I discuss below, has much the same view,

arguing that skills or knowledge obtained in one language can easily transfer to another as part of a “common underlying proficiency”.

In a nutshell, the sociocultural perspective views literacy as “literacies” situated in different domains of people’s life, as well as related to different languages in bilingual and multilingual situation. At the same time, these literacies overlap and interact with each other in people’s everyday lives and are, moreover, connected to issues of identity, voice, audience, purpose, and so on.

From this perspective, as emerging bilingual and biliterate people, Chinese heritage language learners practice multiple literacies involving the dominant language and heritage language (and possibly other languages as well) across a variety of social contexts including formal academic settings, home, and cyberspace. Moreover, their literacy practices within the respective “Discourses” mutually influence each other. Therefore, as the literacy practiced within academic contexts, CHL learners’ essay writing cannot be isolated from the ecology of their multiple literacies. Consequently, a better understanding of their essay writing can only be gained when examined against the background of their overall practice of literacies across contexts and languages.

To summarize, within the theoretical framework discussed above, my study of CHL learners’ academic writing, with its focus on features of the product—written essays- will not restrict the analysis to the text itself. In addition, I explore CHL learners’ multiple literacy practices within and beyond their academic contexts so as to better understand factors that may have contributed to their existing writing proficiency.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Research design

The research design for this study was an exploratory, multiple case study. Its purpose is to gain a better understanding of an under-researched field in the literature by posing related questions and offering new perspectives on the issue of inquiry. It took place in a Canadian university over a period of 12 months.

The research involved 10 participants. With each participant, academic writing samples were collected and a 40-minute semi-structured interview was conducted. The writing samples included assignments for homework and essays from an examination in their heritage Chinese courses. The writing samples were expository and descriptive essays. Scrutiny of these samples provided information regarding the features of CHL students' essay writing, which demonstrated not only their less successful experiments with language (i.e., errors), but also their successful, creative and syncretic (drawing on various languages) use of all resources available to them. Meanwhile, the follow-up semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore in detail my participants' Chinese essay writing experiences and their daily literacy activities, which were crucial to identify the contributing factors to the features found in their writing samples.

3.3.2 Case sampling

3.3.2.1 Criteria for inclusion in the study

The participants of this study were intermediate-level (second year or 200-level) Chinese heritage students who had completed approximately 250 hours of formal instruction (or having the equivalent proficiency) in Chinese heritage language programs.

The recruitment of participants from this particular student group was based on the following considerations. First, through previous instruction (or experience), these students were expected to have an active (written) vocabulary of at least 1,200 Chinese characters and good command of basic grammar, as well as some exposure to formal written Chinese. Hence they should be able to write comparatively long essays (400 words or more) in Chinese. Secondly, they were still learning to compose. Therefore, along with the expansion of their vocabulary and grammar, they were being apprenticed into Chinese essay writing in terms of rhetoric, organization, formatting, and other features. The examination of writing samples by students from this population, it was hoped, would provide knowledge of this crucial stage that CHL students experience in the process of developing their writing proficiency, which is a crucial factor in whether and how students continue with further Chinese language and literacy education or opportunities to learn in Chinese-medium postsecondary contexts.

3.3.2.2 Participants

3.3.2.2.1 Recruitment

According to the criteria presented above, participants were recruited from a population of Chinese heritage language learners who were attending intermediate-level heritage Chinese courses at a Canadian university. With the help of the instructor, and after receiving approval from the university's ethical review board, in April 2012 I made recruitment announcements in class and was able to recruit eight students initially. However, when the study began, only half of them ($n=4$) were able to attend the interviews. In order to recruit more participants, I made an additional recruitment announcement in another class at the same level in September 2012. This time I recruited six additional participants, all of whom attended the follow-up interviews. Due to the difficulty of recruiting volunteer participants, which is not uncommon in qualitative research,

my 10 participants come from two intermediate-level classes, and not one, taught by different instructors. Because of differences in instruction, the writing samples I collected are of somewhat different topics and lengths, as further explained in Section 3.3.3, Data Collection. Each participant was offered a gift certificate to the university bookstore as a small honorarium for participating in the study and some also asked me for assistance with their Chinese.

3.3.2.2.2 Participant profiles

In this section I provide a brief description of the 10 participants (see Table1) in terms of their demographic information and home language. Pseudonyms are used in this study according to agreements between participants and me based on informed consent guidelines.

Table 1: Participant profiles

Participant	Age of arrival in Canada or other English speaking countries	Home language
Amy	10	Cantonese
Grace	7	Mandarin
Michelle	Born in Canada	Cantonese
Participant	Age of arrival in Canada or other English speaking countries	Home language
Vanessa		
Rebecca	7	Mandarin
Maya	Born in Canada	Cantonese
Sarah	Born in Canada	Cantonese
Daisy	5	Mandarin
Sharon	5	Mandarin (Taiwan)
Maggie	Born in Canada	Cantonese

3.3.3 Data collection

3.3.3.1 Essay writing samples

Three writing samples were collected from the four participants in class 1, two of which were homework assignments; another was an in-class exam essay for the same Chinese heritage language course. The homework essays were expository, while the exam essay was descriptive. The topics of the three essays were “My opinion of international marriage”, “Environmental protection and me” and “A person that I admire,” respectively. For the six participants in class 2, I was able to collect two writing samples from each of them. One was a descriptive essay with the topic “A person that I am impressed with”. The other was from their final exam with the topic “The meaning of life”. Some of the essays were graded by their instructors or teaching assistants (with comments shown on the drafts they shared with me) according to both local and global features described below.

3.3.3.2 The interviews

3.3.3.2.1 Procedure of the interviews

The interviews took place in a university faculty office. When participants arrived, I introduced myself and asked them to read and sign the consent form (Appendix A). The interviews were audio-recorded using a portable digital recorder placed on the table.

The interviews lasted between 30-40 minutes and included four parts (see Appendix B for interview questions). First, I asked background questions about the participant’s home language, age of arrival in Canada, and Chinese learning experience. The next part of the interview focused on questions regarding their perceptions and experience of Chinese essay writing. The third set of the questions mainly concerned their perspectives on formal Chinese

writing instruction they received at any stage of their education. Finally, I asked questions specifically on their daily reading and writing activities in Chinese, as well as in English.

The interviews were semi-structured. I asked questions listed in the interview protocol in a relatively fixed order. I was careful to let the conversation flow naturally; therefore there were some points where I had adjusted the order of my questions. I also asked clarification and did member check on certain answers my interviewees provided.

3.3.3.2.2 Theory of the interview

As Roulston (2010) points out, “how we think about the qualitative interview has implications for how interviews are structured, the kinds of questions posed, and how data are analyzed and represented” (p.51). A (neo) positivist or romantic conception of the qualitative interview takes interviews as a resource for collecting “truth” from the authentic “self” of interviewees, focusing exclusively on the “content” that is elicited carefully by “interviewer who contributes minimally to the talk” (Roulston, 2010, p.52); in contrast, the “active interview” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003) acknowledges the “active” role of both the interviewer and interviewee, viewing interview data as co-constructed, and thus attends to both the content and the “interactional [and] narrative procedures of knowledge production” (p.68). Talmy (2010, 2011) contrasts these different conceptualizations of qualitative interview in applied linguistics and refers to them as “interview as research instrument” perspective and “research interview as social practice” orientation. The “social practice” orientation of qualitative interviews aligns with Holstein and Gubrium’s (2003) active interview, viewing data as socially constructed in the very process of interviewing; data are not objective “truths”, but “representations or accounts of truths, facts, attitudes, beliefs, mental states, etc., co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee”

(Talmy, 2011, p.27.). By attending to both *what* (content) and *how* (the process), rather than by keeping minimal influence from the interviewer, data cannot be “contaminated.”

When approaching my interview, I followed Talmy (2010, 2011) in adopting a social practice perspective. I acknowledge that the interview is a site of social practice where the interviewer is never neutral and will inevitably contribute to the knowledge through his/her participation. I also acknowledge that the “active” interview can have a transformative influence on both the interviewer and interviewee. During the interviews I sometimes carefully provided my opinions regarding the interviewees’ literacy practices. For example, when some interviewees mentioned that they had picked up new words through watching Mandarin TV shows, I commented that it was a very good way to enlarge their vocabulary bank but might be limited in the sense that the words used in such shows were mostly colloquial.

The social practice perspective of interviews also requires the interviewer to be reflexive as well as reflective. As interviewer, I acknowledge that my position as a female Chinese graduate student and former Chinese language teacher, which I mentioned when I did my recruitment speech, was helpful in building rapport with my CHL student interviewees (all of whom were female), and thus created a comfortable atmosphere which made it possible to elicit more details in the interviews, especially on questions about their daily literacy activities in Chinese and English. I also acknowledge that an unequal power relationship might exist between me, a former Chinese language teacher, and the interviewees, novice Chinese writers, which might have an impact on my interviewees’ answers regarding their literacy practices. Meanwhile, as a novice interviewer, I sometimes failed to catch opportunities to explore even deeper certain questions while the interviewees were narrating their experiences.

3.3.4 Data analysis

3.3.4.1 Essay writing samples

As noted earlier, compared with L1 and L2 writing research, the heritage language field is still an emerging arena of inquiry. Like L2 research that at its beginning stage drew heavily on L1 theories and practice, heritage language research constantly refers to theories and practices in L2 research. When approaching my analysis of heritage students' writing samples, I drew upon an established assessment profile of L2 written texts (Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981) to examine both linguistic and textual features of the writing samples. Specifically, I focused on vocabulary, syntax, as well as organization and content; I also attended to mechanics.

With linguistic aspects, I looked into the lexical and syntactic complexity, as well as accuracy. The measure of complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF) is frequently used in L2 research to describe L2 performance. Although there is ongoing debate on issues such as how the three constructs should be defined, or whether they as a whole are sufficient to measure L2 output, researchers "agree on the usefulness and validity of the constructs" (Pallotti, 2009, p. 590). Acknowledging that each construct involves various aspects and "they do not exhaust performance description" (p. 590), I limit my use of "complexity" and "accuracy" to the description of vocabulary and syntax, and "accuracy" for mechanics. As for fluency, which is usually measured by production rate, it was not relevant to my research questions and hence is not measured in this study although certainly the ease and speed with which students could write, particularly for in-class essays, was no doubt a factor in what they produced.

When describing the complexity of vocabulary used in the participants' essays, I choose to measure respective levels of the words against the *HSK Guideline for Vocabulary and*

Characters (《汉语水平词汇与汉字等级大纲》, 2001), rather than the *New HSK Guideline* (《新汉语水平考试大纲》, 2010). This decision is based on the following considerations. First, there is no such guideline specifically for heritage students. The HSK vocabulary guideline, although orienting to foreign language learners, reflects the requirements of vocabulary for all learners in general. Secondly, compared with the former HSK test, the test takes into account factors such as the actual situation of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language, the possible different proficiency of CFL learners and CSL learners, different motivation and goals regarding Chinese learning of learners who major in Chinese and those who do not. Therefore in general the new HSK test is easier and oriented to wider range of learner groups. Reflected in the requirement of vocabulary, the most significant difference between the former HSK guideline and the new guideline is that the new HSK guideline does not further differentiate word levels over the level of 5,000, while the former HSK guideline has a benchmark at 5,253 words with another 3569 words at the highest level, which together form a vocabulary bank of 8822 words to cover 95% of the words in most publications. This difference makes the new HSK more accessible while still able to accommodate high proficiency foreign language learners who can understand the information that they hear or read with ease, and can capably express their ideas with oral or written Chinese. However, when it comes to heritage learners who typically are more advanced in terms of proficiency and seek to develop more formal and sophisticated repertoires, the former HSK guideline is more appropriate compared with the new one, since it is more suitable to measure their current lexical variety, which is usually more advanced than that of foreign language learners.

However, as I mentioned earlier, the HSK guideline was initially oriented to foreign language learners and there is no such guideline specifically for heritage students. Therefore, in

addition to the measure of the vocabulary against the HSK guideline, I also attended to those words that are not included in the guideline, which I refer to as “words beyond the HSK guideline” in this study.

Furthermore, to reflect the measure of accuracy, I identified inappropriate word usage and categorized lexical choices according to possible sources.

As for syntax, undoubtedly the complexity is demonstrated not only by complex sentences, but also fixed or idiomatic structures. I mainly focused on complex sentence, since complex sentences typically show learners’ mastery of basic structures and their ability to form more complex structures. Analysis of complex sentence includes the ratio of complex sentences in the writing samples, as well as the level of the complex sentences against the *Guideline of the Standard of HSK Level and Grammar Level* (《汉语水平等级标准与语法等级大纲》, 1996). In addition to complex sentences, I also examined fixed or idiomatic structures that appeared in the writing samples. In terms of accuracy, I identified incorrectly structured sentences and categorized them according to possible sources of errors.

Regarding mechanic, only the measure of accuracy was applicable. The analysis included an examination of characters, punctuation, and format.

I now illustrate my analysis of the aforementioned aspects respectively.

The analysis of linguistic features is illustrated in detail as below (see Table 2).

Table 2: Analysis of linguistic features

	Vocabulary	Syntax	Mechanics
Complexity	Words within the HSK guideline	Complex sentence ratio:	N/A

	Vocabulary	Syntax	Mechanics
	HSK A word ratio: Measured by counting words at HSK A level and dividing by the number of different words within the HSK guideline used	Measured by counting complex sentences and dividing by the number of total sentences used	
	HSK B word ratio		
	HSK C word ratio	Types of complex sentences and respective levels in HSK Grammar Guideline	
	HSK D word ratio		
	Words beyond the HSK guideline	Fixed or idiomatic structures	
Accuracy	Inappropriately used words and possible source of misuse	Incorrectly structured sentences and possible source of errors	Incorrect characters, punctuation, format

In addition to linguistic aspects, analysis of organization and content revealed the features of the writing samples at a global level. In terms of organization, I looked at the structure of the writing samples to examine how the students organized their ideas, arguments, facts, etc. In terms of content, I examined the use of claim and evidence in the expository writing samples, as well as general expression of the topics in descriptive essays.

Finally, I would like to state that this analysis aims to provide information regarding the features of the CHL students' essay writing. In other words, it is a description of their written output. Certainly the findings can be compared with research of CFL learners or native speakers,

but the comparison of these learner groups was beyond the scope of this study and thus not considered in the research design.

3.3.4.2 The interviews

The social practice perspective of interviews described earlier attends to both *what* and *how*, and thus focuses the analysis on both the content and the process. However, when I started to transcribe the interview recordings, I found that in these interviews the *how* (process of data co-construction) did not provide significant implications or answers to my research questions. For example, at the beginning of each interview, I gave my interviewee the choice of speaking either English or Chinese (Mandarin). Most of them spoke the language that they are most proficient with, occasionally with words or sentences in another language. However, one interviewee chose to speak Mandarin although it was obviously quite hard for her. She insisted even when I switched to English because she could not get her ideas across. This indicates that as a Cantonese speaker she was taking every opportunity to practice her Mandarin. However, the negotiation of the interview language itself, although interesting, was not directly related to my research questions concerning their literacy practice. Admittedly, there were also occasions that had implications for my research. For example, during the interview with a participant who was more advanced in Mandarin compared with other interviewees, when I asked which language she felt more proficient in regarding reading and writing, I deliberately used a set phrase-“得心应手” that means “proficient”. She was obviously confused about the word, which I could tell from her face and the silence. Before I offered an explanation or a simpler synonym, she ventured her answer: “I think I need both...”, which confirmed my assumption. This may indicate that formal vocabulary such as set phrases was largely beyond the knowledge of even the more advanced CHL learners. Careful examination shows that in my interviews, the *what* (content), on the other

hand, was much more significant than the *how* (process). Therefore, I decided to do a thematic analysis of the interview data, rather than a discourse analysis that is more suitable to reveal the *how*. I acknowledge that by adopting such an approach, the analysis risks being incompatible with the theorizing of the interview. However, considering the significance of content to my research questions, I render thematic analysis would be more suitable in this study.

As Roulston (2010) points out, thematic analysis is “one of the most commonly used” (p. 150) approaches to the analysis of interviews, which generally involves data reduction, categorization, and reorganization according to themes emerging from the analysis. In approaching my analysis, I first transcribed the recording of the interviews, and then I mainly followed an inductive analysis with caution so as not to “force data into pre-formulated coding schemes” (Roulston, 2010, p.152). Since I was doing thematic analysis rather than discourse analysis, my transcription was not as minutely detailed as the kind used for discourse analysis. Still, I tried to be as accurate as possible, including pauses, emphasis and self-corrections in the transcription (see Appendix G for transcription symbols). In representing the data in Chapter 4, I also acknowledge the power I hold as researcher in the process of data decontextualization, entextualization, and recontextualization (Talmy, 2010). Therefore I follow Briggs’s (2007) caution to use the words of my participants properly and respectfully. I was careful when summarizing what my participants said, and at the same time tried to include as much the original data as possible.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study and offer my analysis and interpretation of the collected data. I analyzed the participants' writing samples in terms of vocabulary, syntax, organization, content and mechanics to explore my first research question, which seeks to describe features of the essay writing samples of these intermediate-level CHL students. I then examined the interviews to explore factors within and beyond campus-settings that might have contributed to the features of their essay writing. In the following sections, I first present the findings by the analysis of writing samples; then I present findings of the interviews, which concerns my second research question. I then discuss the findings in relation to my research questions and existing HL and CHL literacy research reviewed in Chapter 2 and finally I discuss the implications of the findings for CHL writing instruction.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Essay writing samples

4.2.1.1 Vocabulary

4.2.1.1.1 Complexity

I first present the findings of the analysis of the words within the HSK guideline. Then I provide the analysis of the words beyond the HSK guideline. There are, in total, 3,319 non-repeated words in the 24 writing samples, of which 97% are within the HSK guideline while 3% are beyond the guideline.

4.2.1.1.1 Words within the HSK guideline

Table 3 shows the HSK level A, B, C and D word ratio in the 24 writing samples.

Table 3: HSK A/B/C/D level word ratio (means) in homework and exam essays

	Homework essays	Exam essays
HSK A level words	71%	79.75%
HSK B level words	19%	12.5%
HSK C level words	6%	4%
HSK D level words	4%	3.75%

The finding is even clearer as shown in Figure1.

Figure 1: Means of HSK A/B/C/D level words in exam and non-exam essays

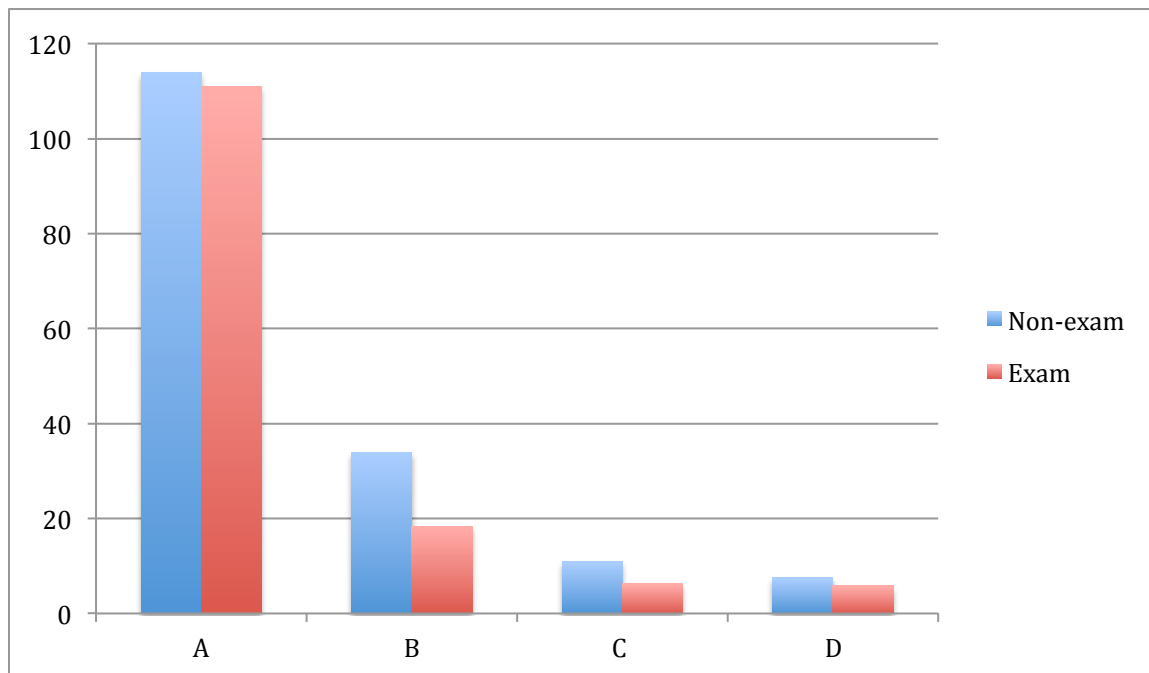


Table 3 and Figure1 show:

- HSK level A words constitute the majority of the vocabulary in the writing samples.
- Vocabulary of these samples takes the form of a pyramid; with level D words the least at the top.
- The proportion of level A words is even greater in exam essays than in non-exam essays and thus forms a sharper curve from level A to Level D in exam essays than in non-exam essays.

4.2.1.1.1.2 Words beyond the HSK guideline

Among the total 3,319 non-repeated words in the writing samples, 101 words are not included in the *HSK Guideline for Vocabulary and Characters* (《汉语水平词汇与汉字等级大纲》, 2001). Considering that some words may have become more frequently used in printings in recent years and thus could possibly be included in the new guideline, I checked the 101 words in the *New HSK Guideline* (《新汉语水平考试大纲》, 2010) and found 12 of these words were actually included in it, all of which were categorized as level 5 and 6, the highest level in the new guideline.

Besides the 12 words included in the new guideline, the other 89 words beyond both guidelines fall into four categories, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Categories of the words beyond the HSK guidelines

Categories	Number	Examples
Oral colloquial words	7	拉扯; 偷懒; (不) 起眼; 摆设; 狗仔队; 老花镜; 擀
Formal sophisticated words	62	表白; 阅历; 再度; 任由; 耗用; 珍视

Categories	Number	Examples
Set phrases	14	容光焕发; 大放异彩; 举手之劳; 历历在目
Common nouns	6	烧烤; 料理; 橱柜; 调味; 保镖; 墨镜

Table 4 shows that besides the oral colloquial words and common nouns, formal sophisticated words and set phrases are quite salient in terms of both the amount and the complexity among the 89 words that are beyond the HSK guidelines.

4.2.1.1.2 Accuracy

My use of the term “accuracy” here actually involves both the accuracy of meanings conveyed and word choice regarding appropriate collocation, as well as register. In general, words used in these writing samples seem to effectively convey the writers’ intended meaning. However, inappropriately used words are scattered throughout the writing samples. Inappropriate word usage falls into three categories.

First, is the use of an everyday colloquial word (underlined) where a formal word (in brackets) is appropriate. Examples are:

1.很快适应了那里的生活，并且找到了一个中国老婆（妻子）。
Soon (he) got used to living there, and found a Chinese wife.
2. 因为每一个人的取向不同，跨族婚姻可以使每一个人满足到他想要的伴(伴侣)。
Since everyone has different taste, through cross-national marriage people can find the person that he/she expects.
3. 我们可以 活（生活）在一个蔚蓝色的地球。
We live on a blue planet.
4. 地球上有美丽的高山，湖（湖泊），河流和草地。
There are beautiful mountains, lakes, rivers and grasslands on the earth.

5. 一讲起我羡慕的人，我脑中就会浮现出我表哥的脸（面孔 / 面容）。

When talking about someone that I admire, my cousin's face appears in my mind.

In these sentences, the underlined words are typically used in oral, not written, language.

Although they have the same meaning as the words in brackets, the latter are of more formal register. The misuse of oral words gives a hybrid tone to these sentences. For instance, in sentence 1, the basic tone is formal, which is appropriate for the topic and is signalled by the formal words “适应” and “并且”. However, the use of the very colloquial version of “wife,” “老婆” instead of “妻子”, suddenly changed the formal flavor. Likewise, in sentence 5, the words “脑中” and “浮现” give an emotional descriptive tone to the sentence, while the appearance of the colloquial word “脸” interrupted the elegant flow of the language.

Secondly, misuse of a formal word (underlined) that has similar or related meaning to the appropriate one (in brackets). Examples are:

6. 大家应该更加爱惜（爱护）地球，同时也维护（保护）地球上的生命。

We should value the earth more and protect the lives on earth.

7. 这样可以满足到每一个人的期望（愿望）。

This way everyone's expectation can be met.

8. 那后代继承（遗传）到带有这种病的基因的（机）率会变少。

Then the possibility of ascendants to inheriting the disease will become less.

9. 无论是幸福、金钱、社会地位，他们都有权利选择并且有责任来面对后果（结果）。

Be it welfare, fortune or social status, they have the right to choose and have the responsibility to face any consequence at the same time.

10. 他不朽（执着）的精神，顽强的意志，和勤劳的精神令我感到非常地羡慕。

His persistence, indomitable willpower, and diligence make me admire him so much.

In these sentences, both the underlined words and the words in brackets are formal. They also have related or similar meanings. However, in sentences 6, 7 and 8, each word of the pair has certain words that should be collocated and this kind of match is usually fixed. For example,

in sentence 6, the correct collocation should be: 爱惜时间; 爱护地球; 维护利益; 保护生命. In sentence 7, it should be 满足愿望; 辜负期望. In sentence 8, the correct match should be 遗传基因; 继承事业(财产). Any mismatch will result in incorrect use, although generally the meaning is clear).

Sentences 9 and 10 demonstrate other kinds of misuse. In sentence 9, both the word “后果” and “结果” mean “result”, but “后果” indicates an undesired, usually bad result while “结果” can be either positive or passive. In sentence 10, “不朽” and “执着” both indicate the attribute of long-lasting, while “不朽” is only used to describe heroic or historical figures rather than ordinary people.

Thirdly, use of a colloquial word (underlined) that has a more general meaning to substitute for a specific meaning of which the corresponding word (in brackets) is beyond the students' knowledge. Examples are:

11. 虽然做医生的竞争很大(激烈),可是我要想(像)我表哥一样,永不放弃,一直努力。
Although the competition is very fierce to be a doctor, I will never give up and always try my best, just like my cousin.

12. 更厉害(难得)的是,他觉得他在我家住了那么多年,所以想好好报答我父母。
What's uncommon and admirable is, he thinks he had stayed with my family for so many years so that he wants to treat my parents well.

Just like the measure word “个” can be applied to many nouns although these nouns have their specific measure words, the underlined words “大” and “厉害” are oral words that have a general meaning and can be used informally to describe a variety of attributes. In these two sentences, the words “大” and “厉害” deliver the basic meaning. However, they failed to express a more precise meaning. In addition, they distorted the formal tone of the sentence with a strong colloquial flavor.

Nevertheless, except for the cases of inappropriate use of words, there are also cases of appropriate and creative use of formal, sophisticated words in the writing samples. For instance, all the 62 formal sophisticated words and the 13 set phrases beyond the HSK guidelines discussed in the previous section were used appropriately. For example,

13. 一个人的外表可以简单表明一个人的喜好和风格品味。
A person's appearance indicates his preferences, his personal style and taste.
14. 施与比接受更快乐。
Giving is more gratifying than receiving.
15. 回收报纸，出门关灯等事对我们来说是举手之劳。
For us, such things as recycling newspapers and turning off lights when going out are as easy as waving hands.
16. (她的) 歌声很悠扬，歌很朗朗上口，在舞台魅力四射。
Her voice is melodious and her songs are easy to follow; she is so charming on the stage that her glamor radiates everywhere.

In the four sentences, all the underlined words are used appropriately. In sentences 13 and 14, the underlined words give a formal and sophisticated tone to the expression. In sentences 15 and 16, the underlined set phrases express the meaning accurately, vividly and efficiently.

In addition, there is creative use of words in the writing samples as shown in the following examples:

17. 于是他在晚上和周末就帮学校一些初中学生补习，赚钱来帮补家里。
Then he made money by tutoring some junior high school students evenings and on weekends to help with everyday spending of the family.
18. 他们帮我表哥取的名字真好：程亮，他的前程真的是非常明亮。
The name they gave my cousin is great: Cheng Liang, his future is truly very bright.

In sentence 17, 帮补 is a word created by the student, which actually combined the meaning of 帮助 (help) and 贴补 (compensate, subsidize) and therefore is both accurate and efficient in terms of expression. In sentence 18, the student creatively related the character 程,

her cousin's family name with the word 前程, which means future, and the character 亮, her cousin's first name with the word 明亮, which means bright, to interpret her cousin's full name as "having a bright future".

4.2.1.2 Syntax

In terms of syntax, I first present the findings of my analysis of syntactic complexity and accuracy. I then present the findings regarding fixed or idiomatic structures.

4.2.1.2.1 Complexity

The syntactic complexity is measured by the complex sentence ratio, types of complex sentences and their respective levels in *the Guideline of the Standard of HSK Level and Grammar Level* (《汉语水平等级标准与语法等级大纲》, 1996). Table 5 shows the complex sentence ratio.

Table 5: Mean complex sentence ratio of the writing samples

	Homework essay	Exam essay
Complex sentence ratio	34%	19%

The total number of complex sentences at HSK level A, B, C and D in all writing samples is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Total number of complex sentences at HSK level A, B, C and D

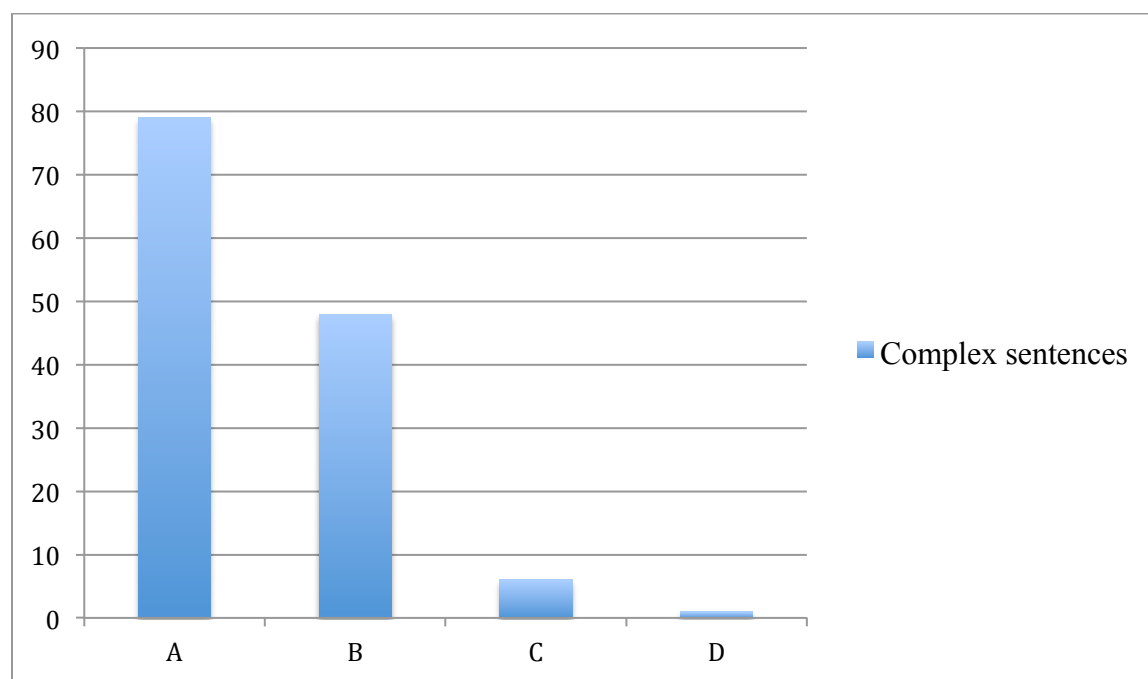


Table 5 and Figure 2 show:

- The students use complex sentences more frequently when writing homework essays than writing under exam conditions.
- Complex sentences at either HSK level A or level B are much more frequent than those at level C or D, while level A complex sentences are even more than those of level B.

Further examination finds that the types of relation between the clauses of these complex sentences include causative (54), adversative (37), suppositional (13), conditional (11), progressive (9), coordinate (3), successive (3), objective (2), and concessive (2).

4.2.1.2.2 Accuracy

In general, the students are able to express themselves clearly through their syntax. However, incorrectly structured sentences are also common in the writing samples. These

sentences fall into three categories.

First, sentences transferred from English structure. Examples are:

19. 她的性格很外向和温柔，使得人喜欢。
Her personality is outgoing and tender, which makes people like her very much.
20. 他的妈妈是中国人和他的爸爸是意大利人。
His mother is Chinese and his father is Italian.
21. 但是当其他人也跟着随地扔垃圾（时），事情的严重性就扩大了。
However, when other people also throw rubbish everywhere, things become serious.
22. 我不认识一个人是不喜欢我的表姐。
I don't know anyone who does not like my (elder female) cousin.
23. 他们已经习惯了融化两个种族的习俗在一起。
They are used to mixing the customs of the two ethnic groups.
24. 虽然我们不能还原地球到以前一样.....
Although we cannot restore the earth to how it was before...

In sentence 19, the word “和” is used to connect two adjectives, while in sentence 20 it connects two simple sentences. Nonetheless, according to Chinese grammar, the rule is that “和” only connect nouns, pronouns or noun phrases. It never connects sentences. These two sentences are structured as they will be in English, when students simply transfer the usage of “and”, which is supposed to be the equivalent of the Chinese word “和”.

Sentence 21 also demonstrates the influence of English. In English, the word “when” itself would be enough to structure the clause, while in Chinese it has to be the phrase “当.....时”. It's very likely that learners inadvertently omitted the word “时”.

Sentence 22 is translated literally from English. The structure is typical English. In Chinese, when using double negation it should be “我认识的人没有 不喜欢我表姐的。” Although the student's sentence can be understood without difficulty, it sounds quite “foreign”.

Likewise, sentences 23 and 24 are also structured in an English way. The word “mix” (融化) and “restore” (还原) would be perfectly correct in the English sentences, but in Chinese, they must be used in the “把” structure to indicate changes resulting from these actions. Therefore, the correct expression should be “他们已经习惯了把两个种族的习俗融化在一起。” (sentence 17) and “虽然我们不能把地球还原到以前一样” (sentence 18). “把” structure is unique and has no equivalence in English. It has long been observed to be difficult for learners.

Secondly, sentences showing apparent interference from Cantonese grammar. Examples are:

25. 但是现在人类并不懂珍惜我们赖以生存的地球令到地球的生态环境越来越恶劣。
However, people do not value the earth that we rely on, thus making the environment worse and worse.
26. 这样可以满足到每一个人的期望。
Thus everyone's expectation can be met.
27. 他家里的摆设也是有融合了两个种族的文化。
Decoration in his house also reflects the mixing of the two different cultures.

In sentences 25 and 26, Mandarin grammar does not require a complement (到) after the verbs 令 and 满足, while in Cantonese such usage is common and appropriate. Sentence 27 also demonstrates Cantonese grammar. In Mandarin, the verb “有” only comes with a noun, indicating “own, possess, or have something”, while in Cantonese the structure “有+ verb” indicates something already happened or existed.

Thirdly, sentences in which an indispensable element is missing. This usually happens in long sentences. Examples are:

28. 我们的周围环境因为受到人类社会的发展（的影响），空气越来越差。
Because of the impact of the development of the society, air condition is becoming worse and worse.

29.这些广告是为了增强人们对环境的保护意识，鼓励（人们）自觉履行保护环境的义务。

These advertisements aim to raise people's awareness of protecting the environment, and encourage them to fulfill their duty of protecting the environment.

These “inter-language” structures are mainly a result of the complex composition of the sentences. In sentence 28, the sentence topic is “我们的周围环境”, while the comment is composed by a complex sentence, which indicates a causal relation. Since the sentence is long and complicated, the student lost control over the structure and omitted the object (影响) of the verb “受到”.

In sentence 29, the preposition “为了” has an object that is composed by a parallel structure. The first part of the structure is relatively simple – verb (增强)+object (意识), while the second part is complex--it is supposed to be a pivotal sentence of which the missing word “人们” is both the object of the first verb “鼓励” and the subject of the second verb “履行”. In both sentences, the missing word is indispensable.

4.2.1.2.3 Fixed or idiomatic structures

Fixed or idiomatic structures usually appear in formal written language and are of typically are part of a sophisticated register. In the CHL learners' writing samples, we find 4 sentences with two fixed or idiomatic structures, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Fixed or idiomatic structures in the writing samples

Structure	Number	Correct use
“所+verb” functions as adjective	2	1
“以” indicates purpose	2	1

These sentences are shown as below:

- 所+verb:

30. 虽然我很羡慕这一位朋友，可是我不会因为她有的事而我没所感到伤心。
Although I envy this friend, I would not be upset just because I do not have those things that she has.

31. 无论是他的事业，他的家庭，或他的我所敬佩的各种精神，都让人羡慕。
Be it his career, his family, or his spirit that I admire, all deserve people's admiration.

The word “所” usually comes with a verb to form a noun phrase which functions as an attributive. It is a classical Chinese usage which is often used in formal or literary settings in modern Mandarin. In sentence 24, the student was obviously aware of the formal flavor of “所” and tried to use it, but regretfully, “所” structure here is unnecessary and incorrect. On the contrary, in sentence 25, the structure 所敬佩的 was used correctly to function as attributive of 各种精神, adding to the sentence a formal sophisticated tone.

- 以

32. 我们要节约用纸以减少对树木的砍伐，我们也不要浪费水和电以大量消耗能源。
We should reduce the use of paper in order to reduce the felling of trees; we also should not waste water and electricity in order (not) to consume lots of energy.

The word “以” is a conjunction with a strong formal flavor. It indicates the purpose of an action. In sentence 26, the student used “以” twice. “以减少对树木的砍伐” indicates the purpose of “节约用纸” correctly, while in “不要浪费水和电以大量消耗能源”, obviously the student was confused and mistook “大量消耗能源” as the purpose of “不要浪费水和电”, which shows her incomplete or still-emerging mastery of the structure.

4.2.1.3 Mechanics

4.2.1.3.1 Characters

Fourteen of the writing samples were handwritten and 10 of them were typed and printed. Examination of the characters in these writing samples finds that incorrect characters resulted

from three kinds of strategies. One is the wrong or incomplete symbol of the intended character. The logographic nature of Chinese characters can very often confuse learners. As a result, it's not uncommon for learners to write wrong symbols by adding, missing or even misplacing strokes or parts. This mistake is usually found in handwritten texts since in typed texts writers have some assistance from word-processing software in choosing correct characters. The other source of error is misuse of another character that has similar pronunciation or shape with the intended one. This happens more frequently in typed texts. The following figures are the screenshots of some examples.

Figure 3: Substituted symbols for the intended characters



Figure 4: Characters that are similar to the intended ones in shape

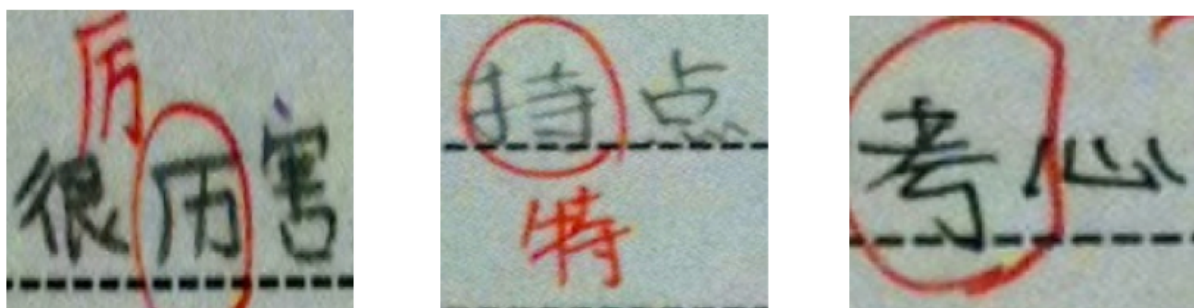
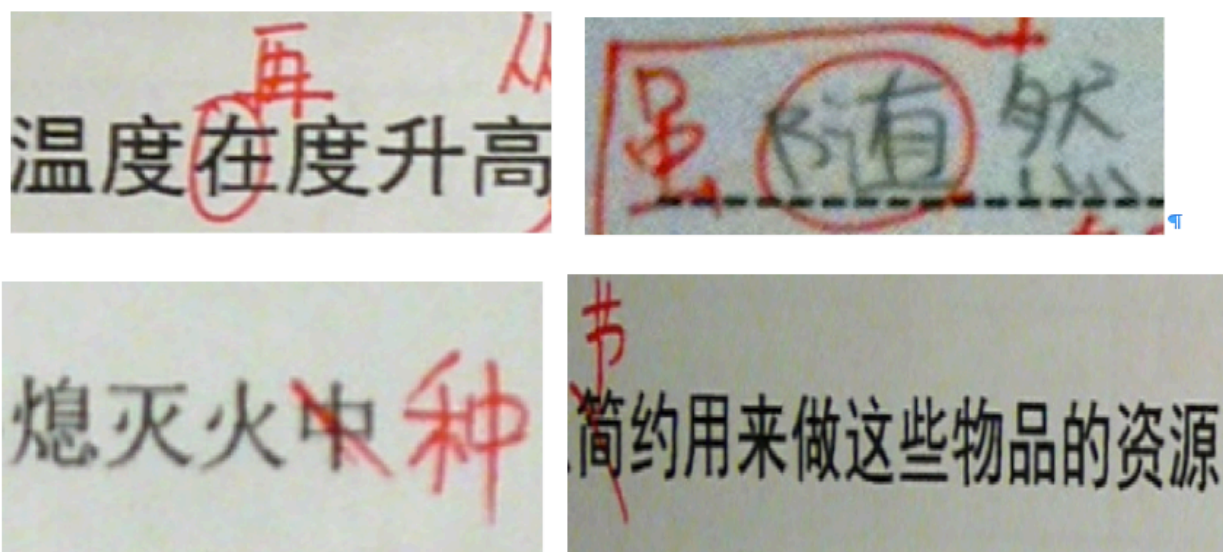


Figure 5: Characters that are similar to the intended ones in pronunciation



4.2.1.3.2 Punctuation

The following sentences show punctuation errors in the writing samples.

33.我觉得这将会是一个成功的跨族类婚姻（，）因为课文里的男生完全融入了中国文化。

I think it will be a successful cross-national marriage because the young man mentioned in the text is fully integrated in Chinese culture.

34.我觉得跨族类婚姻没有问题（，）因为两个人的感情是最重要的。

I don't think there will be any problem in inter-racial marriage because love between two people is the most important factor.

35. 这种羡慕并不是嫉妒（，）因为我懂得她为了这一刻负（付）出的努力。
My envy is not out of jealousy because I know well the efforts she made for the success.
36. 我的表姐比我大两岁（，）所以我们从小就一起玩。
My elder female cousin is two years older than I so we have been spending time together since childhood.
37. 现在人们的生活越来越繁忙（，）所以很少有人有时间在家煮开水喝。
Nowadays people are becoming busier and busier so they seldom have time to boil water to drink at home.
38. 我从小就想当一名音乐家（，）可是父母觉得音乐只能当作一种爱好.....
I was dreaming of becoming a musician when I was a child but my parents thought music can only be a hobby (rather than a career)...

Comparison with the English translation of these sentences shows quite clearly that where there should be a comma in each Chinese sentence is exactly where a clause begins and no punctuation is needed in English.

4.2.1.3.3 Format

Basically, format of Chinese essays, like English ones, requires paragraphing. Only single line spacing is allowed between each paragraph and spaces of two characters (for indenting) is required where each paragraph begins.

All the 24 writing samples include more than two paragraphs. However, three of the essays rigidly follow the English format to allow no space at the beginning of each paragraph and are double-spaced between paragraphs throughout. Four of them are a kind of mixture of Chinese and English formats that allow certain amount of space at the beginning of each paragraph while at the same time keep double-spacing between paragraphs. In addition, it seems that not much attention has been given to the two-character rule at the beginning of each paragraph. In 10 of the 24 essays, including both handwritten and typed ones, indenting with

one-character space, three-character spaces or even four-character spaces either runs through the whole essay or is mixed in one essay.

4.2.1.4 Organization

In general, most of the writing samples have a clear organization, which includes an introduction, body paragraph(s) and a conclusion. Only one essay out of 24 omits the conclusion paragraph. Examination of this essay and the interview with the student writer revealed that the missing conclusion was a result of running out of time under the stressful exam conditions.

Generally, these writing samples are formulated in three to five paragraphs. Take the expository essay as example. , In the introduction part, most students gave a general background of the issues under discussion and then put forth the thesis statement. The introduction part of most of the essays was brief but in some of the writing samples the student writers lingered too long on the general introduction of the issue and thus delayed the thesis statement. As for body paragraphs, most of the writing samples developed at least two paragraphs on different sub-claims to support the thesis statement, although the body paragraphs in some writing samples are unbalanced in length. For example, the body of one writing sample includes two sub-claims, of which one sub-claim is adequately developed with about 200 characters while the other consists of only 54 characters. Regarding the conclusion, most of the student writers restate the thesis statement in light of the evidence and arguments provided in the body paragraphs. Although a bit simple and straightforward, this part shows their understanding of the function of conclusions.

4.2.1.5 Content

4.2.1.5.1 Expository essays

For expository essays, how persuasive the writing can be depends largely on how clearly the claim is presented and what kinds of evidence are provided to support the claim. The findings regarding these two aspects are presented next.

- **Claim**

The claim is the thesis statement that the writer wishes to argue for. It has to be relevant to the task and, at the same time, to be stated specifically and explicitly. It may have several sub-claims as well. Examination of the content of the two expository essays “你对跨族类婚姻的看法” and “环保从我做起” finds that all the writing samples have a relevant thesis statement that appears in the introduction part. The claims are specific and explicit in general. All the writing samples titled “你对跨族类婚姻的看法” have two sub-claims that are tied to the thesis statement. The development of the sub-claims is generally good, although in two writing samples the sub-claims need to be improved. In one writing sample, the second sub-claim was not well developed, with only 54 characters, while by contrast the first sub-claim has about 200 characters. In another writing sample, the two sub-claims are organized in one paragraph, which makes them not as clear as they could have been if arranged as separate paragraphs. As for the writing samples titled “环保从我做起”, most samples introduce the thesis statement by first providing a counter-argument of what would happen if no one cared for the environment. After introducing the thesis statement, all writing samples offer feasible solutions to the issue. The sub-claims vary in mainly two ways. One writing sample includes three sub-claims, which are from the personal level to the public level, while the others make two sub-claims that contrast with each other.

- **Evidence**

Evidence is the experience, facts or statistics that provide support to the claims. Ideally, the evidence should explicitly connect to the claims and be specific and various in types. Examination of the expository essays finds that evidence is explicitly related to the claims. However, in terms of types, the types of evidence used are mainly “everyone knows” kinds of knowledge and personal experience.

In short, the claim and sub-claims in the writing samples are specific and explicit in general. The evidences support the claims, but not varied in terms of types.

4.2.1.5.2 Descriptive essays

“A person that I admire” and “A person that I am impressed with” are descriptive essays. For the former, most writing samples are organized as an expository essay by first introducing the person and briefly stating why he or she is the one that “I” admire. The body paragraphs provide an elaboration of the attributes of the person that has been mentioned in the first paragraph, with some contrast with the writer to highlight why the writer admires him/her. The description is generally clear and relevant. For “A person that I am impressed with”, the writing samples are generally detailed descriptions of the person’s experience or personality, focusing on the points that “impressed” the writer. Because of the topics, the writing samples are quite emotional (e.g., in language terms?). Generally speaking, the topics are effectively elaborated.

So far I have presented the findings of my analysis of the CHL learners’ essay writing samples. Next I present the findings regarding my analysis of the interview data.

4.2.2 Interviews

Through coding and data categorizing, two themes emerged from the data: (1) The ecology of the languages and literacies in the CHL learners’ lives and (2) how the CHL learners

approach Chinese academic writing. I adopt Barton's (1994) metaphor of ecology in presenting the first theme. According to Barton (1994),

Originating in biology, ecology is the study of the interrelationship of an organism and its environment. When applied to humans, it is the interrelationship of an area of human activity and its environment. It is concerned with how the activity - literacy in this case - is part of the environment and at the same time influences and is influenced by the environment. (p. 29)

The metaphor of ecology emphasizes the sociocultural contexts literacies are situated in and the interaction between these contexts and various literacies. Therefore the metaphor of ecology best describes the sociocultural contexts of these CHL learners' bilingual (or multilingual) lives, and their active practice of the languages and literacies within it.

These two themes emerged as a result of coding the interviews. However, I will present them in reverse order to my interview questions. That is, I will first present my analysis of "the ecology of the languages and literacies in the CHL learners' life" and then "how the CHL learners approach Chinese academic writing". Using this order, I hope to first provide a description of the ecology of the languages and literacies in the CHL learners' life, in which their Chinese academic literacy, as well as other literacies, are situated. With the picture of this ecology in mind, the theme "how the CHL learners approach Chinese academic writing" could hopefully be better understood.

4.2.2.1 Theme one: the ecology of the languages and literacies in the CHL learners' lives

The ecology of the languages and literacies in the CHL learners' life mainly involves Mandarin, Cantonese and English.

Four of the CHL learners were born in Canada and six of them settled in Canada or other English-speaking countries between ages 2 to 10. All of them claim English as their dominant language. Six of them report that their home language is Cantonese; the other four are from Mandarin-speaking families, with one of them from Taiwan. Some of them reported that they also learned French in high school, and one learner knows a bit of Korean, but these languages are not significant in their life. Theme one presents how English, Mandarin and Cantonese are situated in the CHL learners' life.

4.2.2.1.1 English

Although some of the CHL learners are quite proficient in oral Mandarin, English is the dominant language for all of them. It permeates everything in their life.

As university students, they take many courses, all of which (apart from Chinese) are taught in English. In classes, they discuss topics in English; they read large amount of course related readings in English; they do assignments, have exams, and write papers in English. Textbooks are the most common reading they do in English, and writing is mostly related to coursework.

In their personal life off campus, it is still English that dominates. Even at home, they don't always speak their heritage language. Maggie told me, "with my parents, I speak Cantonese; but with my brother and sister, I speak English". Sharon reported that she spoke Chinese (Mandarin) with her parents, "可是就是, 象, 我会, 就是会插入英文的 phrases, 'cause it's like, 有的时候中文比较好表达, 有的时候英文比较好表达. [*But like- I will (.) use some English phrases, 'cause it's like- sometimes I can express myself better in Chinese, sometimes better in English*]." Maya said she spoke Cantonese with her mom but English with her dad, because "my mom doesn't understand English so that I have to speak Cantonese, but then my

Cantonese isn't that good either.” As for literacy activities, they read a great variety of things in English online and offline. Maggie commented that her reading was pretty “random”: “Life stories, maybe (.) oh, what’s the nicest thing your friends have ever done for you, and people posted, there is (.) like- most interesting food you’ve had, and then culture= just (.) very random.” Sarah said, “I get my news from online. I read like articles, people’s blogs, reviews (.) movie review, book reviews, a bunch of stuff like that. I do most of my reading online in English.” When I asked Sharon to give some examples of the English readings she did, she said, “like (.) news, like conversations with my friends, emails with my friends, like everything’s in English”. She continued, “然后我有时间看书的时候, 也是 English books [*If I have time for reading, the books I read are English books*].” As busy first or second-year university students, they claimed that course-related writing was mostly what they wrote and they didn't have much time to write for their own pleasure. Rebecca used to write diaries, Amy had an online blog, but they both had stopped because they no longer had time. Sarah still keeps her blog, but noted that “usually those are really simple”.

4.2.2.1.2 Mandarin

When we talk about Chinese language, we must keep in mind that it actually includes many different dialects, among which Mandarin is the “standard” form. Dialects of Northern China are generally more similar to Mandarin, while Cantonese is much more different in terms of pronunciation, some vocabulary and even some grammar rules. According to “Law on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language of the People’s Republic of China” (《中华人民共和国国家通用语言文字法》, 2001), Mandarin is the standard language that should be used in public schools and other educational institutions. While in the private sphere of life, most people speak local dialects. That means, besides the four interviewees who report Mandarin as

their home language, only one of the six Cantonese speakers (Amy) had some education (up to Grade 3 in elementary school) in Mandarin before migrating to Canada. All the Cantonese speakers reported they spoke Cantonese at home. With this in mind, we now look at Mandarin in the ecology of the languages and literacies in the CHL learners' life.

All the CHL learners reported that they had learned Chinese (Mandarin) in weekend school and/or high school where Mandarin courses were offered. Their experiences in weekend school at that time were not very pleasant though. Sarah said, "It was always on Friday night, right? It was just before weekend, and I have to go there after school, so I really hated it actually". Maggie told me, "I actually started when I was really young, but (.) I couldn't learn very much 'cause after like, maybe 2 or 3 years, the teachers didn't know how to speak Cantonese or English any more, so they taught everything in Mandarin and I couldn't understand anything." As for high school Mandarin learning, Rebecca said at first she planned to learn French but finally switched to Mandarin because French was too hard. For Daisy, it was an either/or choice between learning Mandarin in high school and weekend school, for which she preferred the former. Amy chose to learn Mandarin in high school because "既然有基础- 有基础了, 就不要浪费[*Since (I) already have some foundation in Chinese, I don't want to waste it*]."

After they entered university, they decided to take Chinese (Mandarin) courses out of different motivations. They all claimed that they would like to upgrade their existing proficiency in Chinese. While some of them stated they expected to use their Chinese proficiency in their future careers, others admitted that they had not thought about this and they were just interested in learning the language and the culture; still others stated that they wanted to be able to better communicate with their family members and friends.

The Chinese course they took in university usually meets four days per week, for one hour each time. They were encouraged to participate in class in Chinese, and were required to do assignments, exams, etc., mostly in Chinese. For both the Mandarin speakers and the Cantonese speakers, the Chinese courses in university provided them the opportunity to improve their Chinese proficiency, in both oral and written forms. However, unlike the Mandarin speakers who already possess the native pronunciation, the Cantonese speakers also aim to improve their speaking in Mandarin. Amy, whose Mandarin speaking is quite fluent, at times self-corrected her pronunciation during the interview: “因为我觉得既然有基 (jī) 础- 有基(jī) 础了，就不要浪费[*Since (I) already have some foundation in Chinese, I don't want to waste it*]”. She at first pronounced the word 基 as fourth tone, which is incorrect, but immediately realized the mistake and self-corrected it. Such self-correction happened several times during the interview and shows that she was carefully monitoring her pronunciation when speaking Mandarin.

Off campus, Grace and Rebecca reported that they spoke Mandarin at home. However, due to various levels of proficiency, not all the CHL learners from Mandarin speaking family spoke Mandarin at home. Sharon, as mentioned earlier, speaks Mandarin, but sometimes with English phrases to better express herself. Daisy's Mandarin is probably the weakest among them:

At home, I speak English to my parents, and they speak Chinese back to me. They speak Chinese to each other, so they are used to it. And they speak Chinese to me because (.) they are just more used to speak Chinese at home. But they also do want me to (.) still be able to listen to Chinese. They know it is awkward for me to speak Eng- oh, Chinese to them, like sometimes they'll tell me to do it but then I

eventually end up (.) like stopping at a word and I just- I don't know- I just go back to English. It's easier.

The Cantonese speakers speak Cantonese at home, but they read and write in Mandarin in the home domain. Their literacy activities in Mandarin vary greatly in terms of both the amount and the range of content.

Daisy said her mother promised to help her to read Chinese newspapers, but “right now I don't really have time to, like outside of my schoolwork to read- to read anything (in Chinese) actually.” For online reading, she said, “Sometimes like, I have some Chinese friends who post up like statuses on Facebook and I kind of see if I can read it. But other than that I don't visit any Chinese websites.” Sharon, despite her high oral proficiency, stated that she did not read much in Mandarin: “I won't pick up a newspaper (.) or anything (in Chinese) 'cause it's too much of a hassle. 我能看,可是看得很慢[I can read, but my reading is fairly slow].” Grace said she seldom read Chinese books, newspapers or magazines because “这儿的都是简体, 不是, 都是繁体, 看不懂 [Here they are all in simplified- no, traditional characters and I cannot understand].”

By contrast, some of the CHL learners read more. Vanessa stated she did not read a lot in Mandarin, but actually she read quite a bit: “每天读, 就, 我通常是读杂志, 或可能读 newspaper [every day I would read magazines, or perhaps newspaper]”, “(在网上)会读娱乐的新闻, but not actual 新闻[online I would read entertainment news, but not actual news”. For “actual news”, her mother often buys Chinese newspapers such as 星岛日报, 明报, 大纪元时报[Sing Tao Daily, Ming News, Epoch Times] back home--all of which are in traditional characters-- and “我无聊的时候就会读[I would read when I feel bored].” She told me she often browsed Sina, the biggest mainland China based website, or read entertainment news and “好笑的文章[articles that are

really funny]”on 苹果新闻([Apple News], a Taiwan based media source) that her friend shared with her.

Amy reads a lot as well. As the only Cantonese speaker who had three years of Mandarin education before migrating to Canada, she reads Chinese novels in addition to newspapers:

Sometimes I would read Chinese (.) like novels at home, 因为我的姐姐她是比我大九岁, 然后我们是同一个时间来的, 所以来的时候她已经是十八十九岁了, 所以她的中文是很好的。然后她会就是买一些 novel 之类的, 然后 if I have time, I kind of read it. Like, yeah- there're some words that, 如果里面有不懂的字, 我就会查一下, 然后就翻过去了。

Sometimes I would read Chinese (.) like novels at home. My sister is nine years older than I. We came here at the same time, so she was already eighteen or nineteen then, and her Chinese is very good. Then she'll buy some novels, and then if I have time, I kind of read it. Like- yeah- there're some words that- if there are some words that I don't know, I will look up (in a dictionary) and then go ahead.

Certainly, newspapers and novels are relatively hard to understand for most of the CHL learners. What they are more interested in is to read something “small and short” (Daisy), such as Chinese twitters or personal blogs. Grace often reads Chinese twitters: “我记得我中学的时候特别喜欢看那些明星, 就是(他们)写的一些东西, 但是最近发现也有很多别的有趣的.就是有时候我去那些,比较,大家都在看的一些(微博), 然后看看都有什么新鲜的[I remembered back to my high school time I loved to read things that the celebrities wrote. But recently I find there're also many other interesting things, so I sometimes browse those (twitters) that most

people would read, and to see what's going on there].” Sarah also has a Chinese twitter account: “ I follow like, just a bunch of people. Um (.) I usually just read their comments.” The site both of them read is Sina twitter, one of the most popular twitter sites in Mainland China. Besides twitter, Michelle said she sometimes went online to read personal blogs, most of which were “beauty, fashion related”.

In addition, watching Chinese TV shows or Asian dramas is popular among these CHL learners. Most of these programs have Chinese subtitles. Grace and Michelle reported they watched TV and movies with Chinese subtitles daily. Maya said she seldom read anything in Chinese except reading the subtitles on TV. Maggie told me when she watched Chinese dramas with subtitles she was always wondering, “Hey, how many of these do I know?” Sarah usually watches “really simple” dramas such as “teenage dramas, like romance, ‘cause those are relatively simple to understand”. Vanessa watches Hong Kong dramas and Taiwan dramas that friends recommend, and sometimes watches Mainland China dramas that her mother is watching. Daisy told me that she was told to “watch Chinese dramas because they have Chinese subtitles”, “they want me to look at the subtitles in Chinese to recognize characters because I can understand it at the same time= match the words. Um- and it’s interesting. It’s less- It’s not just reading.” She watched one that was “really good” and hoped someone could recommend more.

Compared with reading, they do much less writing in Chinese. Besides schoolwork, they seldom write. Occasionally they write emails to their relatives in China. Grace told me she sometimes wrote emails to her aunt in China. Michelle said she wrote emails “sometimes, like a couple of times a year”, “like to relatives, like new year greetings and stuff like that”. Amy writes Chinese emails “every month or so”: “我的妈妈她比较不会那个，用那个,电脑,所以 um, sometimes 如果我的 relative 或者我妈的朋友，他们要 send 一些东西过来的话，然后

就是我跟他们，就是 communicate [*My mom is not good at using computer, so sometimes if my relatives or her friends want to send us something, it is me that communicate with them*]. ”

Some of them occasionally chat with friends or relatives online using Skype, MSN, QQ, etc. Mostly they chat by typing in both Chinese and English. Michelle chats with friends and her cousin, “once (.) every (.) two (.) weeks, maybe=.” Amy, as well as Vanessa, stated that when they chatted with friends online, they actually often video chatted. When they do type, they frequently type in wrong characters. Amy said, “他们会打得很快...然后有时会打错[*they typed quite fast, then I typed in wrong symbols sometimes*].” She stated she actually knew the right ones. For Vanessa, sometimes it is different: “Sometimes 我那个字, is not the right one because 就是, 就, 拼音的时候我不太清楚是哪一个字, and then, 就, 就猜吧 [*Sometimes the character (.) is not the right one because (.) um- when I use Pinyin I am not sure which one it should be, and then I'll make a guess*].” Unlike the Cantonese speakers whose Mandarin is limited, Rebecca, with very proficient oral Mandarin, reported that she enjoyed chatting with some Chinese international students on MSN or Facebook: “他们刚来这里,所以他们的英文也不是太好,所以他们会跟我 chat, 就是会在 MSN 上, 或者在 Facebook 上 chat,他们都会用中文来给我写, 所以我就有时候会用中文给他们回复[*They just arrived here so their English is not so good. So they'll chat with me on MSN, or Facebook. They type in Chinese, so I sometimes type back in Chinese*]. ” “我觉得比较喜欢。因为他们在中国有时候用一些词语, 是, 就是非常不同的, 就像英文有一些 slang, 就是你如果不在那个地方你不会, 你不知道的一些词语, 所以我觉得特别新鲜[*I feel kind of like (chatting with them) because in China they sometimes use some words that are very different, like slang in English, the words that you won't know if you are not there. So I feel it very refreshing*].”

Text messaging is another kind of writing the CHL learners do in Chinese, although still rare. Maya tried send text messages in Chinese for some time, “Before, I kind of like text my dad in Chinese, yeah (.) for like a short period of time, and then I stopped” because “it’s easier to converse in English, I guess.” Daisy said she did not text in Chinese unless she “got rare occasion”, “like I used to tutor someone in English and he was Chinese and he’ll always have to text me in Chinese so then I text back in Chinese. But then- oh, sometimes in English- but then it’s like rarely.” Grace and Michelle occasionally text message with friends who are also CHL speakers. Amy texts message with her sister, “half Chinese half English”. Sarah sometimes writes in Chinese when she has to leave a note for her parents, and “sometimes I just text for fun with my friends, just text in Chinese”.

4.2.2.1.3 Cantonese

Six of the CHL learners reported Cantonese as their home language. However, they do not always speak Cantonese in the home domain. When asked whether she speaks Cantonese with her parents and relatives, Maggie said, “I don’t have that many relatives here, and with my relatives that are here I speak English with them. The only people I really talk to in Cantonese are my parents ‘cause they don’t know English.” “With my parents, I speak Cantonese; but with my brother and sister, I speak English”. Maya, as mentioned earlier, speaks Cantonese with her mom but English with her dad: “my mom doesn’t understand English so that I have to speak Cantonese, but then my Cantonese isn’t that good either.”

It is obvious that, just like Maggie said, “English is kind of feels more like me and I can express myself more ‘cause I know more words”. By contrast, Cantonese is mainly oriented to the family members who know little English.

4.2.2.1.4 Summary

So far I've described how the three languages and/or literacies (English, Mandarin and Cantonese) co-exist in the CHL learners' life. From the perspective of the ecology of the languages and literacies, English dominates in their life. They not only speak mostly English but also read and write mostly in English. As Daisy said in her interview, English is "a lot, a lot more (than Chinese)...like, my whole life is in English". By contrast, Mandarin and Cantonese are mainly situated in the home domain. Moreover, the CHL learners' practice with Mandarin and Cantonese is more involved with oral than written language. Regarding literacy, the CHL learners' literacy activities are far more common in English than in Chinese, and they engage in reading more than writing in both languages.

4.2.2.2 Theme two: how the CHL learners approach Chinese essay writing

As mentioned earlier, all of the CHL learners had attended weekend Chinese schools or learned Mandarin in high school before taking the university Chinese courses. However, writing in weekend school and high school mainly concerned character practice and writing short paragraphs. When talking about writing back at that time, Maya said, "Technically, I didn't really- like exactly learn essay writing. I was mostly learning characters, like in Chinese school, and we didn't do many essays." When they actually wrote something other than characters, as Sharon and Michelle stated, it was "usually, 就是像考试的时候 [*like for tests*], so it wasn't like (.) anything formal" (Michelle); "it was very rare" (Sharon). Even in university Chinese courses at elementary level, they stated that they did not learn and write "real" essays: "The teacher would like, assign an essay writing, but (.) it was more like a paragraph back then (.) It was not a real essay structure because our vocabulary was limited so (it) was more like a short paragraph" (Sarah). It was in the intermediate-level Chinese course that the CHL learners

actually began to write essays extensively. Therefore when they were required to write “real” essays, most of them expressed such feelings: “I feel really *unprepared* (italics added by the researcher) to write essays because in high school we never wrote any essays” (Daisy); “When he (the instructor) assigned our first essay, I just wrote it normally and then I got it back and then he gave us feedback that we didn’t do so well because he was looking for format, structure and content and everything so I was a bit *shocked* (italics added by the researcher)” (Sarah). Theme two presents how they approached academic writing in the Chinese course with little previous Chinese essay writing experience.

4.2.2.2.1 The CHL learners’ perceptions of Chinese essay writing

For the CHL learners, it was not until they actually began to write “real” essays in the intermediate level Chinese course that they realized it involved a lot more than just “throw these words together” (Maggie). As Sarah said, the instructor was looking for “format, structure and content and everything”. In the interview, the CHL learners described their perceptions of Chinese essay writing regarding vocabulary, grammar, organization and characters.

4.2.2.2.1.1 Vocabulary

When talking about vocabulary, the word the CHL learners mentioned the most is “limited”. Sarah claimed that her vocabulary “is quite limited”; Daisy said, “My vocabulary for Chinese is not developed enough to actually write a whole entire essay”. Both Amy and Grace stated that compared with writing in English, their vocabulary was quite limited when writing in Chinese. Grace said, “每次就是，可能词汇不是很多- 就写得跟英文就是差很多 [*Every time (when I wrote), I didn’t have many (different) words- (my words) are much less (varied) than my writing in English*]”. Likewise, Amy said, “如果用英语写作的时候，我就会用到很多的，例

如 adjectives 呀，或者 adverbs 啊之类的，然后我在写中文的时候我就没办法去区分，就是这些字（词）的用法，或者是，I don't really have that large of a vocabulary base [*If I write in English, I will use many words, like adjectives, or adverbs. And then when I write in Chinese I don't know the differences of such words- or, I don't really have that large of a vocabulary base*]. Furthermore, their perceptions of vocabulary differed as their Chinese proficiency varied. For those who were less proficient, they felt the problem mainly was in finding the words to express themselves. Vanessa said, “好像 vocabulary, 我就要去问人, 去, 去翻译[*like vocabulary, I have to ask someone to- to translate*]”. Michelle also stated that she had “to use dictionary to translate (.) English to Chinese”. For those who were more proficient, they reported that they felt that they lacked more complicated (academic or literary) words. Grace said, compared with words people use in daily life, “可能写的比较严肃一点[*probably the words used in writing are more formal*]” and for these “formal” words she stated that she didn't know well: “(掌握得)不是很好，而且常常就会想不出来[*I don't know those words well, and usually I just cannot get them out of my mind*].” Likewise, Amy stated that at her level, the words she used in writing and those in daily life “are kind of the same”. She further stated,

“我希望以后就会用到比较多的，like idioms, and you know, 成语啊，或者是有一些 like metaphors and stuff like that, 就是，因为我平常看书或者看杂志的时候，他们就会用到这些词，然后，如果 compared 到我的 writing, 然后我的会觉得比较 simple.”

I wish I could be able to use more (.) like idioms- and you know, set phrases, or some- like metaphors and stuff 'cause when I read books or magazines, they will use such words and then if compared with my writing, mine is kind of simple.

They felt even more limited in vocabulary when they did in-class essays. Sarah said, “When we have to do in-class essays and we don’t get like a dictionary, or online source, I feel like, I’m limited in vocabulary because- um, I would think about a word and I don’t know how to write it. I can just rely- um, I usually use most of my vocabulary back to the first year, like, for 100-level Chinese course, and it’s just simple ones like the one(s) that we use daily, not the really complicated ones.”

As a result, they frequently felt that they were repeating themselves when writing Chinese essays. Grace said, “我就觉得我写作文, 可能老是重复一些, 就是 idea, 因为想不出新的字(词) [*I feel like, when I write (Chinese) essays, I always repeat like (.) the idea, ‘cause I cannot think of new words*]”; “可能也是词汇的问题, 比如同一句话, 象英文我可以用好多不同方式来说, 但是中文就, 同样一直在用那一句话[*Probably it’s still the vocabulary. Like the same meaning, I can express in different ways if write in English; but when writing in Chinese, I feel I’m repeating the same expression all the time*]. ” Rebecca reported the same problem by saying:

词汇还够用, 但是有时候可能会有一些重复的, 就是反复重复的几点, 就是觉得, 就是自己写完以后读起来就觉得特别别扭, 就想看那个词能不能自己换一下. 有些时候就是想不起来词, 就觉得这个写作, 这个东西重复了很多, 所以就觉得读起来不太舒服.

My vocabulary is okay, but sometimes I may repeat myself here and there (.) and I feel uncomfortable when reading my essay after it’s done (.) and I would try to replace those words that were repeated a lot. Sometimes the words just do not

come to my mind, and I feel I'm repeating myself all the time and the essay was just not so good to read.

4.2.2.2.1.2 Grammar

Most of the Mandarin speakers claimed that they did not have big problems with grammar. As for the Cantonese speakers, they still need a bit effort to ensure grammatical accuracy. However, most of the time, they would translate their ideas from English or Cantonese to Chinese (Mandarin). While doing so, they encountered difficulties. Michelle said, “有时候想到的英文很难翻译成中文[*Sometimes it was really hard to translate my ideas (from English) to Chinese*].” Amy said, “I tried thinking in English and writing in Chinese, 只是我觉得比较难[*but I felt it was hard*], 然后[*then*] I kind of confuse myself”. Sarah said in more details,

When I write, I usually (.) um think about what I'm writing in English first- usually in English first, and then I translate it. But the translation is not smooth because um- because I'm translating directly- I'm not supposed to, but directly from English to Chinese, so there's a bit of difficulty there.

Finding it hard to think in English, they then resorted to Cantonese. Sarah said, “Sometimes I think about it in Cantonese ‘cause it's much more similar to Mandarin, but usually I do in English first, and then if it sounds really funny I try to think about it in Cantonese, then translate it to Mandarin.” However, Cantonese is not exactly the same as Mandarin. Sarah told me, “A lot of times I would write a phrase and the teacher, a bit like, ‘this is not grammatically correct, no such thing, this phrase in Mandarin’”; “I encounter that quite a bit.” Amy also reported, “我想的时候, sometimes it's in Cantonese, sometimes it's in Mandarin. 然后因为有些字或者 like phrases, doesn't really, 就是不是 parallel 的, Cantonese 跟 Mandarin, 就是, 也比

较的难[*When I think, sometimes it's in Cantonese, sometimes it's in Mandarin. And because some words or phrases don't really- um, they are not parallel, Cantonese and Mandarin. So it was still hard*].”

4.2.2.2.1.3 Organization

All the CHL learners claimed that organization was what they felt the most confident about when writing Chinese essays. Meanwhile, they all stated that they did not know how to organize Chinese essays and they actually followed the English format when writing in Chinese. Sarah said, “I usually follow the format how I would construct an English essay. I’m not- I’m not sure if it’s how you do in Chinese but that’s how I do it. I usually just have like a topic, and then you have your body paragraphs and a conclusion, something simple (.) like that.” Daisy told me that she followed the English way too, because “I was never taught how to write an essay in any Chinese class, um, so I- that’s (English is) the only way I know how to write an essay so I follow that.” Maggie stated that she felt there’s not much difference between Chinese essays and English essays, “there’s like intro, what you gonna talk about, middle, ending= Yeah, it’s quite (.) similar, from what I know, from what I know.” Her emphasis on “from what I know” indicated that like Sarah and Daisy, she was also not sure about the Chinese way to organize an essay. She further stated, “I really haven’t learned Chinese essay writing, so most of the time I just do it the way I do it in English.” Grace told me she thought the organization of Chinese essays was just the same as that of English essays since the English format was what the instructor expected. She said, “其实我的老师让我们写中文 essay, 他期望是英文的 style, 就是一个 thesis, 然后就是中间的, 然后, 最后一个 ending [*Actually when my teacher assigned us a Chinese essay, he expected it in English style. That is, thesis, then the middle, and then the ending*].” When I asked whether the instructor said so explicitly, she said, “因为有一次我的

thesis 没有写得很，太明确，然后他就说，需要再(清楚)一些。 [*I think so) because in one of my essays, I didn't state the thesis quite clearly, and then the teacher said, I needed to make it more explicit*].”

4.2.2.2.1.4 Characters

Unlike the alphabetic languages, Chinese has a logographic orthography. There is little connection between the written symbols and their pronunciation. Chinese characters, not only for foreign language learners, but also for the CHL learners, pose a big obstacle towards being literate in the language. The CHL learners reported that reading characters was relatively easier, whereas writing characters was much harder. For homework essays, they had the choice of either hand writing or typing in computer. For in-class essays such as those they did for the examination, the only choice was to handwrite. Vanessa said, “我手写的话，要查，要查 the, the 字典，’cause 我手写就不会很多字 [*If I hand write, I have to look up the (.) the dictionary ‘cause there are many characters that I don't know how to write*].” Comparatively, typing is much easier. They claimed that typing characters on the computer helped them to save time: “电脑打比较快 [*typing on computer is faster*]” (Grace). Furthermore, typing allows them to use more different and sophisticated words. Amy said, “作文的时候, 因为我想要用多一些 different vocabulary 跟成语之类的, 然后有些字会很难, 然后我就会在电脑上做, 因为那个, type 出来的时候它可以很快地去, show you like, the Chinese writing [*When writing an essay, because I want to use more different vocabulary (.) and set phrases- some characters might be too hard, I will type on the computer ‘cause when you type it will show you, like the Chinese (character) writing right away*].” Generally, typing characters by inputting pinyin was not a

problem for them. Grace stated she could differentiate the homophones that the pinyin suggested, while Amy usually typed by words instead of single character to help choose the right characters.

Although typing has many advantages, many of the CHL learners expressed their preference for handwriting when there was no time constraint. Amy told me her mother had encouraged her to handwrite characters because “手写可以练字, 然后练多几次就能记住怎么写[*handwriting can help me to write better and I can remember how to write those characters through such practice*]”. Grace thought handwriting was better “因为真的每个(字)写下来你会想得更多[*because when you actually hand write a character, you have to think more*].” Rebecca said in more details:

type 相对来说, 因为它有 auto correct, 可以自己给你调过来, 但是我觉得这样的话, 就是对自己, 就是, 因为我本来就是不知道这个字怎么写嘛, 如果 typing 的话, 就是直接, 脑子不用想, 太容易了, 所以也记不住. 所以如果手写的话, 自己查一查的话, 这样比较能够巩固自己的(汉字)。

Relatively speaking, typing- because it has auto correct, it can make correction automatically, but I think this way (.) for me- um, 'cause I don't know how to write the character, if typing, then I don't need to think- it's just too easy so I don't have to memorize. So if I handwrite, I have to look up (a dictionary) and then I can better memorize the characters.

4.2.2.2.2 Resources the CHL learners accessed to when approaching Chinese essay writing

As revealed earlier, the CHL learners had no instruction on and experience in Chinese essay writing until they took the intermediated-level Chinese courses in university. To approach Chinese essay writing tasks, they utilized every resource that was available to them.

The previous section showed how the CHL learners resorted to their heritage language (Mandarin or Cantonese) for vocabulary, although what they retrieved was mostly oral colloquial words that might not be “formal” enough for the essay writing tasks; they also relied on their heritage language repertoire to ensure grammatical accuracy, therefore the sentence structures in their essays tended to be relatively simple with traces of Cantonese and even English grammar when they translated from these languages. On a more global level, such as organization, they referred to English essay format, since it was the only way they knew how to construct an essay, and they referred to the rhetorical strategies of English academic writing to organize their arguments.

They also made use of dictionary or online translation tools to help with Chinese essay writing. Daisy said, “I kind of think about what I wanna say each sentence in English and then I translate each sentence, try to make it sound right in Chinese like grammatically. And vocabulary- I’ve to search of new words if I (.) um (.) don’t know those words”. She stated some of the times the translation was hard, “some other time I can kind of just think of my head what I’ve heard before like, it probably sounds like this in Chinese (.) um, or it would sound like- I’m not exactly sure.” They usually use online translation tools such as Google translator, but in a very careful way. Daisy said,

I use a translator online, like Google Translator but then I know it’s very wrong.

But like, it still helps me gain a few- like be familiar with the- what I want to say, because sometimes I’ll be like- I’ll read the translation and I’ll think, Oh, these are the right vocabulary words, it’s just backwards, or something like that because translator is usually wrong, but it still helps me.

Sarah also reported her cautious use of such tools:

I use an online source called Yellow Bridge. It's like a dictionary. It's really helpful 'cause it gives you example sentences as well so that's really helpful. I use Google Translator as well but the thing with Google Translator- it's very choppy, so I just use it as a guideline to like, to get better understanding, but I usually don't like, just follow (it) directly 'cause it's just too choppy so I (.) just to gain a better sense and then I'll reword it in my own words.

In addition to dictionary and translation tools, they resorted to more experienced peers or their Mandarin-speaking parents, as well as the teachers of their Chinese courses when writing Chinese academic essays. Vanessa said she would ask her mother when she was not sure about the grammar or vocabulary. Rebecca reported that she got a lot of help on essay writing from her mother and grandma who was an elementary school Chinese teacher. Daisy said her mother's Mandarin was informal and had a dialect sense but fortunately she had some Chinese friends who were "really helpful" to her essay writing:

They are from China or Hong Kong or something= Sometimes I ask my mom and then I ask them. Their help is definitely really helpful. It's just because, um, because I'm not- like, I- I usually sit down with them and they help me and then it's very very time consuming because like- they (.) um- I have to go through everything with them but then that's good, um, I just feel bad for taking so much of their time. They read it with me and then they say oh this is- um, this isn't the right way to say what you wanna say. Usually (for) grammar because for vocabulary I'll like search online but if they say 'oh this is the wrong word' they gave me suggestions."

Admittedly, such resources are not accessible to everyone. Therefore all the CHL learners stated that they expected to get more formal instruction on essay writing from their Chinese courses. However, although in the Chinese courses they wrote essays extensively, they felt the focus of the course was not on essay writing and there was not much instruction on how to write Chinese essays. Therefore, feedback from the teaching assistant or the instructor became very important for them since it was from the feedback that they got most of their knowledge of essay writing. According to them, the feedback usually involved content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, characters and punctuation. Since the feedback on organization and content was generally good, most of them stated that they especially attended to feedback on grammar and/or vocabulary. Regarding vocabulary, many of them stated that they learned from the feedback the more appropriate and complicated words that the TA or instructor suggested. Maya said feedback on vocabulary was definitely helpful, “because when I look back, I see like, the word they choose and I see mine and I see, oh, theirs is (better) (.) yeah=”. Sarah said, “They (the TAs) would like, circle such words like, ‘you are not supposed to use this word, you are=’ - they usually gave an alternative. Word choice and correction I would carefully review so, um- and I try to like, remember that and use it for (.) for future essay or future exams ‘cause (.) yeah=”. Compared with vocabulary, Amy said she would pay even more attention to the feedback on grammar: “因为我觉得 vocabulary 或者写错字这些都是小差错或者, um, can be fixed by- I guess relooking at my work or 查字典就会写, 用到对的 vocabulary, 可是 grammar 的话, 就是要比较, 就是会练习或者去, 就是自己要去练习才能 improve 的东西[*because I think that vocabulary (mistake) or wrong characters are minor mistakes, um, can be fixed by- I guess relooking at my work or looking up in a dictionary and then you can get the right vocabulary. But for grammar, you need to practice more. Only by practice can you improve*].”

Feedback was thus an important resource for the CHL learners. However, sometimes the feedback was not very comprehensible. Daisy said since the feedback was in Chinese, she sometimes needed to ask someone to read for her because “you know how some people- they just write- they are so used to write Chinese, (so) it’s kind of sloppy. It’s also- it’s hard to recognize but for people who’ve been reading Chinese in their whole life it’s like- it’s easy to look at and just know what they’re trying to say”. Sarah encountered the same problem and she said, “Usually in that case I would take it up to the professor and ask him what did the TA write and then he would explain it to me.” Maya stated such problem was caused by either the handwriting or the vocabulary the TA used: “Some of the words I don’t recognize it and I never seen before” and “mostly it’s that (handwriting) but sometimes it’s also like the vocabulary- like I haven’t learned that word (.) yeah, yeah”. Like Daisy, Maya said she usually asked someone to read the feedback to her in such case.

Since the feedback on their essays is an important resource from which they learn how to write Chinese academic essays, the CHL learners all wished that they could receive more and detailed feedback. Daisy said she expected explanations and more examples in addition to corrections. Grace and Michelle wanted the feedback to be more specific, especially on the aspects that they did not do well so that they would know what and how to improve.

4.2.2.2.3 Summary

From the analysis of theme two we see in detail how the CHL learners view Chinese essay writing and how they approach it. For them, writing essays in Chinese is something that they do not have much instruction on and experience in. They realize that the vocabulary for essays should be formal and sophisticated, while acknowledging that theirs was both limited and informal; they perceive minimal problems with grammar while sometimes had to refer to

Cantonese or English grammar; they assumed the organization of Chinese essays was the same as English essays since the English format was the only way they knew to construct an essay; they acknowledged the advantage of typing characters while stated their preference for handwriting because it could help them memorize the characters. In approaching Chinese essay writing tasks, they resorted to their oral Mandarin or Cantonese repertoire, as well as words learned in former Chinese classes. To make the vocabulary more varied and richer, they used dictionary and/or online translation tools with caution. They resorted to their repertoire of Mandarin, sometimes Cantonese for grammar and if not available, they translated from English and then modified the translation. They referred to the English essay format to organize their ideas since they had no knowledge of how to organize Chinese essays. They took advantage of inputting characters by typing while at the same time tried to handwrite more when time allowed because handwriting helped them memorize characters. They paid much attention to the feedback provided by the teacher and tried to learn as much as possible and then apply to future writing. They also looked for help from more experienced/proficient peers, parents, friends and instructors.

4.3 Discussion

Thus far, I have presented the findings of my analysis to two sets of data: 24 Chinese academic writing samples written by 10 intermediate level CHL learners and 10 one on one interviews about their daily language and literacy activities. I now discuss the findings in relation to my research questions and existing HL and CHL writing research reviewed in Chapter 2.

4.3.1 Research question one

My first research question is: What are the features of these intermediate level CHL learners' academic writing in terms of complexity and accuracy both at the local (e.g.,

vocabulary, syntax, mechanics) and global level (e.g., organization, content)?

This question was answered by the analysis of the CHL learners' Chinese academic writing samples. The features regarding vocabulary, syntax, organization, content and mechanics are discussed below.

- Vocabulary

The majority of the vocabulary used in the writing samples comprised HSK level A words, with level B, C and D words decreasing by degrees. In the homework essays, level A words constitute 71% of the vocabulary while in exam essays the ratio is 79.75%. According to the *HSK Guideline for Vocabulary and Characters* (《汉语水平词汇与汉字等级大纲》, 2001), 1000 words is a bench mark of the beginning level vocabulary that foreign language learners should master. The 1000 level A words are selected according to the frequency of word usage in modern Mandarin. In other words, HSK level A words are the most commonly used words in daily life. The high ratio of HSK level A words in the CHL learners' writing samples indicates that the majority of the words they know are the most common ones used in daily life and publications. The even higher ratio of HSK level A words in exam essays further confirmed such vocabulary constitution of their Chinese language repertoire since under exam conditions they have to rely mostly on their own vocabulary bank. In addition, in the writing samples, everyday colloquial words were often used as substitutes for the formal equivalents, which further supports the claim made by Li and Duff (2008) that "CHL learners may need to expand the domains or repertoire of their language use from that of the family (e.g., Taiwanese, Cantonese) and community to those of the academic institution and, later, work" (p. 22).

On the other hand, what was surprising, was the complicated words beyond HSK guidelines which appeared in the writing samples. The 62 formal words and the 13 set phrases

were used appropriately, which were sophisticated, effective and efficient in terms of expression. No matter how the CHL learners learned these words, it is safe to say that these words were part of their language repertoire, compared with those incorrectly used formal words. Furthermore, there were impressive examples of creative use of words and expressions in the writing samples. All these demonstrate the valuable assets that the CHL learners brought to their language classes and learning experiences.

- Syntax

The syntax in the CHL learners' writing samples is relatively simple. The complex sentence ratio is 34% in their homework essays and 19% in exam essays due to the stressful exam condition. The complex sentences in the writing samples mainly fall into HSK level A and B, which indicate the CHL learners' mastery of less complicated types of sentence structure. Furthermore, some sentences show the impact of English syntax and Cantonese grammar. In addition, a couple of complicated fixed and special structures were ventured in the writing samples, indicating the CHL learners' efforts for more sophisticated expression in terms of sentence structure.

- Organization and Content

All the writing samples strictly followed the "introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion" formula except one essay missing the conclusion part, which was explained later in the interview to be a result of the limited time during the exam. The organization of the writing samples is quite clear in general although the length of each part in some essays is somewhat unbalanced. Regarding content, the writing samples show the general strategies of English argumentative essays that use claim and relevant data to support the thesis, and for descriptive essays to use relevant examples to elaborate the topic.

- Mechanics

Mechanics involves character writing, punctuation and format. With character writing, the main problem in typed texts is misuse of characters that have the same or similar pronunciation, which happened probably because the CHL learners input pinyin but could not identify the right character from the many choices with same or similar pronunciation. In handwritten texts, the problem is basically caused by the shape or the pronunciation of the characters. Missing or adding strokes, and misuse of another character that has the same/similar pronunciation or shape are the main types of error. Regarding punctuation, we see the impact of English. Specifically, where a comma is missed in the Chinese sentences is exactly where a clause begins and no punctuation is needed in English. As for format, three of the essays rigidly follow the English format while the others mixed English and Chinese formats to various degrees, which indicate the CHL learners' lack of knowledge regarding Chinese essay formats.

Thus far we discussed the features of the CHL learners' Chinese essay writing samples. The vocabulary of these writing samples is composed mainly of words that are relatively simple and shows colloquial flavor that corresponds with the CHL learners' oral proficiency in the heritage language. Complex sentences in the writing samples are relatively simple in terms of the relations between clauses. Meanwhile, the syntax shows the impact of English sentence structure and Cantonese grammar in some cases. Organization and rhetorical strategies indicate the impact of English academic writing, which the CHL learners had extensive instruction on and experience in. The format of their essays was therefore somewhat hybrid, indicating the CHL learners' transfer of English format and their venture to use the English format with Chinese essays. All of these indicate the CHL learners' immaturity as novice Chinese writers. However, despite the immaturity, we also see these learners' heritage language assets demonstrated by their

mastery of certain formal and sophisticated words and set phrases beyond the HSK guidelines, their creative use of the language, and their efforts toward formal and sophisticated registers in terms of vocabulary, syntax and expression.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, there is little research on Chinese heritage language essay writing except for Liu's (2009) study on the characteristics of 320 expository essays written by advanced level Chinese heritage students. The findings of this study confirmed Liu's (2009) observation on the CHL learners' lack of formal written lexicon and transfer of English in syntax. Moreover, in addition to Liu's (2009) findings, this study revealed the complicated situation regarding the vocabulary and syntax in the CHL learners' writing samples. Specifically, this study also found successful use of formal and sophisticated words and set phrases that were beyond the HSK guidelines, as well as transfer of Cantonese grammar and experiments with complicated fixed and special structures in terms of syntax.

Secondly, unlike the essays in Liu's (2009) study that shows "disorganization in textual structuring", most of the writing samples in this study were organized clearly using the English formula that includes an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion. Liu (2009) claimed "CHLLs tended to ignore the structuring of an expository essay while concentrating only on the accuracy of grammar and character-writing" (p. 69) and he did not "see style transfer in organization". I argue that the reason may exactly be that "the students were more concerned with *using the required vocabulary* (italics added) than with paragraph structuring" (Liu, 2009, p. 69). Using required vocabulary to construct paragraph(s) is a popular form of textbook exercises. While this kind of exercise is good to practice certain vocabulary, at the same time unavoidably restricts the natural flow of language and distracts writers from organizing the content when writing an essay rather than just a paragraph. Actually, for the writing samples in this study the

CHL learners were not required to use certain vocabulary, which allowed them more freedom so they could focus on constructing the essays per se.

Placed in the broader literature of heritage language (HL) writing, this study adds to the knowledge of literacy transfer. According to Cummins (1981), a Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) exists across bilingual and multilingual repertoires. For bilingual and multilingual people, the languages they know are interdependent and therefore cognitive and academic proficiency in one language can transfer to that in other language(s) and vice versa. As reviewed in Chapter 2, literacy transfer has so far only been explored in Spanish HL writing. García (2002) proposes a “backward bi-literacy” based on the finding that the Spanish HL speakers often “write backwards” towards the dominant language. By “backward bi-literacy” the researcher refers to the transfer of English orthography, structure patterns, high frequency of passive voice, as well as English rhetorical tradition, which is viewed as negatively interfering with the heritage language writing. Likewise, transfer of English syntax, organization and rhetorical strategies was also found in the CHL learners’ writing samples in this study. However, I argue that the transfer is not necessarily negative. Admittedly the transfer of English syntax has resulted in incorrect sentence structures, while the transfer of organization and rhetorical strategies actually helped the CHL learners to organize their ideas and support their viewpoints. As a matter of fact, one of the most common ways to organize argumentative essays in Chinese is also to include an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion, which is the same as typical English argumentative essay. In terms of rhetorical strategies, although transferred from English, the claim(s) is explicit, and the evidence logically supports the claim(s). Therefore, I argue that the transfer of organization and rhetorical strategies is positive and should be credited. Furthermore, writing “backwards” is only part of the whole picture. This study finds the CHL

learners not only “write backwards”, more importantly, they also “write forwards”, which is demonstrated in their exploitation of oral Mandarin and Cantonese, as well as their successful use of some formal vocabulary, their creative expression and venture of complicated sentence structures. In this regard, I agree with Spicer-Escalante (2005) more in acknowledging that the HL learners’ writing is a “unique mode of written expression”, although her study focuses on a rhetorical comparison of the writings of Spanish HL learners, Spanish second language learners and Spanish native speakers, which is different from this study. We see clearly in this study that the CHL learners’ Chinese academic writing bears unique features. The vocabulary consists of mainly less complicated or technically and semantically precise words, which differs from those of Chinese native speakers who possess a more formal and elaborated lexicon. Meanwhile, the CHL learners’ mastery of some formal sophisticated words and set phrases is beyond the knowledge of Chinese foreign language learners. Moreover, although the complex sentences in the CHL learners’ writing samples are relatively simple, their mastery of various relations between clauses is impressive. Therefore, although the comparison of CHL learners, Chinese foreign language learners and Chinese native speakers is not the purview of this study, we can still safely say that the CHL learners’ Chinese academic writing differs from both of the other two groups and is unique.

4.3.2 Research question two

The analysis of interview data answered my second research question: What factors account for the features of these intermediate level CHL learners’ essay writing?

To approach this question, I adopted a sociocultural view of literacy that sees literacy as socio-culturally, historically, and politically situated practice. The key of this approach of literacy study is to examine literacy in its social contexts. I further adopt Barton’s (1994)

metaphor of ecology to describe the sociocultural contexts that languages and literacies are situated in. Chinese heritage language literacy, which is the focus of this study, is situated in the ecology of these students' languages and literacies of English, Mandarin and Cantonese. Therefore, to search for factors that contribute to the features of their literacy, we must examine this ecology in the CHL learners' life. The interview data reveals that English, Mandarin and Cantonese are practiced in different domains of the CHL learners' life with English as the dominant language. The CHL learners speak mostly English, even in home settings, which are the traditional domain of heritage language. Mandarin or Cantonese is not always spoken. With family members who understand English, they would rather speak English. English literacy is also the dominant literacy that the CHL learners practice. They read and write mostly in English, not only for schoolwork, but also for pleasure. By contrast, heritage language reading and writing is hard for most of them and thus much less practiced. Furthermore, for the limited Chinese literacy activities, entertainment news, beauty, fashion, subtitles of Chinese operas, emails with family members, online chatting with Chinese speaking peers constitute the main content, which is more related to casual and colloquial register rather than formal and literary register. Since they seldom have input of formal vocabulary from literacy practices in their daily life, the main source of such input is restricted to the limited in-class instruction. Therefore, in order to fulfill essay writing tasks, as the CHL learners stated in the interviews, they had to resort to oral Mandarin, and what they learned in Chinese classes before, occasionally words learned from other sources in daily reading, for vocabulary. Regarding syntax, most of the time they would rely on their repertoire of the heritage language, which was mainly of colloquial register and thus relatively simple. As for the Cantonese speakers, sometimes their writing showed the impact of Cantonese grammar as they resorted to Cantonese. If the task was beyond their

knowledge of the heritage language, they turned to English, which may have resulted in transfer of English syntax. As for organization, they had no knowledge regarding Chinese academic essay structure. Naturally, they turned to the familiar English format that they had sufficient training and experience in. To organize their arguments, they drew upon their prior knowledge of English academic writing for rhetorical strategies.

The CHL learners were apparently aware of the gap between their informal language and the formal register that essay writing requires. Therefore they were making every effort to use as many formal expressions as possible, which was demonstrated in their experimental (although sometimes unsuccessful) use of some complicated vocabulary, idiomatic expressions or special sentence structures which they bring into the learning context as their heritage language assets.

In short, the ecology of languages and literacies involving English, Mandarin and Cantonese in the CHL learners' lives influenced the way they approached Chinese essay writing. Specifically, insufficient input of formal Mandarin from both on campus instruction and off campus literacy activities, limited knowledge of Chinese essay writing, sufficient prior training and comprehensive practice in English language and literacy, as well as the CHL learners' heritage language assets and their efforts towards formal literacy, have contributed to the existing features of the intermediate level CHL learners' Chinese essay writing.

In addition to the findings regarding my second research question, this study also provides knowledge about CHL learners' literacy practice in and out of classrooms. As reviewed in Chapter 2, there has been an increase in out-of-school literacy research. For example, several studies have been conducted focusing on Korean HL learners' out-of-school literacy activities. The findings of this study are in accordance with observations in these studies. Like the Korean HL learners in Joo's (2009) and Yi's (2008) study, the CHL learners in this study engaged in a

large variety of literacy activities in both English and the heritage language. However, for these HL learners, their literacy activities were mostly in English rather than in the heritage language, and reading occurred more often than writing in both languages.

In addition, although the target groups are quite different, the findings of this study support the findings presented in Li (2006) and Li (2009) that home literacy environment is important for CHL learners' heritage literacy development. A favorable home literacy environment can provide exposure to literacy, which is crucial to literacy development, while an unfavorable literacy environment usually hinders the development of literacy. As shown in this study, Amy and Vanessa benefitted from reading Chinese newspapers and magazines that were available at home, whereas Grace was disadvantaged since “这儿的都是简体, 不是, 都是繁体, 看不懂 [*Here they are all in simplified- no, traditional characters and I cannot understand*]” and “家里都是我小学的那些书[*The Chinese books I can find in my home are those from my elementary school time*].”

Moreover, this study found that Chinese-speaking peers play an important role in maintaining and developing heritage language and literacy. Amy had a group of friends who were still in China to frequently chat with; Rebecca knew some Chinese international students whom she felt were very helpful in keeping her Chinese up-to-date; and Daisy received a lot of help with her Chinese academic essay writing from the Chinese friends living in the same campus housing. Peer group provided the CHL learners opportunities to practice the language, as well as means to improve through scaffolding.

In short, the findings discussed above foreground the fact that the CHL learners practice multiple languages and literacies in their off campus life, and they bring to Chinese class the proficiency of all these languages and literacies, which discursively impacts their Chinese

academic writing. In addition, the findings bring to our attention the importance of home literacy environment and peer group in heritage language maintenance and development.

4.3.3 Implications for Chinese heritage language writing instruction

In the previous section, we discussed the features of the CHL learners' Chinese essay writing at both the local (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, mechanics) and global level (e.g., organization, content), as well as the factors in their daily language and literacy activities that contributed to these features. We also briefly discussed the findings regarding the role of home literacy environment and peer group in heritage language maintenance and development. Next I discuss implications of the findings for Chinese heritage language writing instruction.

First, the findings indicate that formal literacy could be cultivated through multiple paths. The study finds that the main source of input of formal language is restricted to in-class instruction, which is undoubtedly not adequate. Since the CHL learners practice multiple languages and literacies off campus, ways of cultivating the formal register through off campus literacy activities could be explored. However, limited by their language proficiency and knowledge, the CHL learners stated that it was very hard for them to find appropriate materials to read besides course related readings. Therefore, instructors could recommend appropriate reading materials, such as online resources for them. These kinds of resources could supplement CHL learners' off campus Chinese reading and provide them exposure to formal registers of the language.

Secondly, instruction on essay writing should be more explicit. When talking about the organization of their essays, most of the CHL learners claimed they had never been taught on how to construct a Chinese essay so they organized their Chinese essays the way they did in English. Some of the CHL learners stated that they felt an English format was expected for their

Chinese essays. Although the transfer of English format in argumentative essays is positive, it is necessary to explicitly compare the common ways of constructing essays on certain genres in the two languages.

Thirdly, instructors' feedback should be given more effectively. Generally speaking, the feedback on the CHL learners' essays was both on local and global levels, which was comprehensive. However, some of the CHL learners stated that sometimes they only got feedback on the aspects that they did well rather than on what they should improve. Some of them also stated that it would be more helpful if explanations were provided in addition to corrections. In addition to the content of feedback, the CHL learners mentioned the comprehensibility of feedback posed a problem. This problem is mainly caused by both illegible handwriting and expression that went beyond the CHL learners' language proficiency, which cautions us to be more reader sensitive when giving feedback to learners at lower levels.

Finally, the role of peer group in maintaining and developing heritage language and literacy could be further explored. Peer groups provide real life experiences to use the language, which is crucial for language maintenance and development. However, not all CHL learners have Chinese-speaking peers to interact with. A simple and feasible way of organizing a peer group and keep it function might be building online community among the students in their Chinese class. The Chinese WebCT discussion board examined in Zhang's (2009) study shows a good model. Although the discussion board in Zhang's (2009) study aims at "creating community bonds among the heritage and non-heritage learners" in her class, it is also a good way for CHL learners in Chinese class to interact with each other in a familiar and secure environment. It could be used in many different ways. For writing instruction, instructors may encourage students to post their essays there; instructors can also require students to provide

feedback to each other in smaller groups; instructors may give feedback to either students' essays or the feedback they give to each other. Such activities within peer groups provide CHL learners opportunities to read each other's writing and reflect on their own writing, and at the same time learn from the instructor and each other more efficiently.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings of my analysis to the CHL learners' Chinese essay writing samples and the interview data. I then briefly discussed the findings in relation to my two research questions as well as existing HL and CHL literacy and writing research. I have also discussed implications of the findings for Chinese heritage language writing instruction. In the next chapter I provide a summary of the thesis, suggestions for future research, and my personal reflections.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings discussed in Chapter 4. I then offer my suggestions for future research regarding the issue of Chinese heritage language writing. Finally, I reflect on how the research affected me as a Chinese language teacher, an immigrant parent and novice researcher.

5.2 Summary of findings

The first research question addressed in this study examined the features of the intermediate level CHL learners' Chinese essays. Detailed analysis reveals the features of the 24 essay writing samples both at local and global level. Specifically, the vocabulary is simple, of which the majority is constituted by most commonly used words in daily life. Meanwhile, use of certain sophisticated words and set phrases beyond the HSK guidelines suggests the learners' heritage language assets. The sentence structures in the writing samples are less complicated, which is demonstrated in the complex sentence ratio, and the relatively simple relations between the clauses in complex sentences. Some sentences show the impact of English syntax and Cantonese grammar. As for organization, the writing samples demonstrate a strict English format that includes introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion. In terms of content, the writing samples show the rhetorical strategies common to English argumentative and descriptive essays with some hybrid features that mix English and Chinese styles.

The second research question addressed in this study aims to explore the factors that have contributed to the existing features of the CHL learners' Chinese essay writing. From a sociocultural perspective of literacy that views literacy as socio-culturally, historically, and politically situated practice, I explored the factors within the ecology of the languages and

literacies of the CHL learners' on and off campus life. Interviews with the CHL learners revealed that English dominates the ecology. The CHL learners mostly speak English, and English literacy is also the dominant literacy that they practice. By contrast, their heritage language is mostly oriented to family members, and heritage language literacy is much less practiced compared with English literacy. Moreover, the limited heritage language literacy practice mainly involves informal register. In fact, the CHL learners barely have exposure to formal Chinese except for the instruction within the limited in-class settings. In order to fulfill essay writing tasks, the CHL learners resorted to all the languages and literacies in their language repertoire. They made use of their oral proficiency in Mandarin for vocabulary, which contained mainly simple everyday words; they referred to Mandarin and/or Cantonese to structure their sentences, and if not available, they turned to English; they had no knowledge on structuring Chinese essays so they referred to English academic writing to organize their Chinese ideas; they also drew upon their knowledge of English academic writing for rhetorical strategies and formatting. Meanwhile, the CHL learners were aware of the gap between their informal register and the formal sophisticated register of written language, therefore they tried to make their Chinese essays more "academic" by using as many sophisticated words in their language assets as possible and experimenting with fixed or idiomatic sentence structures that were of typical formal register. In short, it is the ecology of languages and literacies involving English, Mandarin and Cantonese in the CHL learners' life that influenced the unique features of the intermediate level CHL learners' essay writing.

5.3 Suggestions for future research

Regarding the issue of Chinese heritage language writing, this study, together with a few of studies reviewed in this study, are undoubtedly far from adequate. Future research may further

explore the following directions.

First, more studies with advanced level CHL learners are needed. With intermediate level CHL learners as the target group, this study explored the features of the Chinese essays written by those who are just starting to learn to compose essays. With expanded vocabulary, more complicated syntax, as well as more knowledge and experience in Chinese essay writing, advanced level CHL learners' essay writing poses an important topic of inquiry. This could be explored either by carrying studies on advanced level CHL learners' essay writing or ideally by launching longitudinal multiple case studies on CHL learners' essay writing progress from the intermediate level to advanced level. Through comparison of the two groups or stages, understanding of the development of CHL learners' Chinese essay writing proficiency could be deepened and more effective instruction could consequently be explored.

Another potential direction of future studies may compare the academic writing of Chinese heritage learners (CHLLs), Chinese foreign language learners (CFLLs) and Chinese native speakers (CNSs). Rendering CHL learners as the focal group, this kind of study could compare their complexity, accuracy and fluency at local and/or global level to explore the uniqueness of CHL learners' academic writing in contrast with the other two groups. However, the purpose of this kind of comparison should be carefully considered. There have been debates regarding the taking-for-granted status of "Standard English". Likewise, I propose that the goal of developing Chinese (academic) writing proficiency is not necessarily for the CHL learners to gain native like (Chinese writers') competence. Therefore, the comparison of the three groups (CHLLs, CFLLs and CNSs) may aim at identifying the uniqueness of CHL learners' essay writing and thus help them to express more accurately, appropriately and sophisticatedly without sacrificing their unique characteristics.

Furthermore, CHL learners' off campus literacy activities could be explored in more detail. As shown in this study, CHL learners practice multiple literacies across various contexts including on and off campus. Off campus literacy practice, both in their heritage language and English, contributes to their literacy development. Therefore, heritage language instruction might be more efficient if we take into account and make the most of CHL learners' off campus literacy activities. Due to the limited time available for this research and its scope, this study has not sufficiently explored the CHL learners' off campus literacy practice. Future research may be conducted in a more detailed manner. For example, case studies from a more anthropological (ethnographic) approach, drawing on multiple data source rather than just interviews, could definitely further our knowledge on the issue and provide valuable information with regard to CHL literacy practice and education.

5.4 Personal reflection

I encountered Chinese heritage language learners for the first time in 2003 when I helped with Chinese teaching in Sydney (Australia) public high schools. Back then, I did not fully realize the uniqueness of this learner group. Ten years later, when I was carrying out my MA project on CHL learners' essay writing, close examination of their writing samples and especially one on one interviews brought to me all their uniqueness vividly.

Honestly, as a Chinese language teacher, my full attention had been on classroom instruction. Although I assumed that the CHL learners practiced heritage language and literacy use in their off campus life, I had no idea about what kinds of multiple literacies they practiced and how they practiced them until I conducted this study. The interviews with my participants opened the door for me to their off-campus life, where they engaged in rich language and literacy activities. The finding of this "secret back yard" revealed "multiple path of literacy development"

(Yi & Hirvela, 2009), which prompted me to think more about how to take advantage of and make the most out of their off-campus literacy activities to help them develop HL academic literacy more effectively and efficiently.

In addition, what surprised me in this study was the disadvantaged status of heritage languages, especially HL literacy, in the home domain. The interviews discovered that Chinese is not always spoken at home; due to their limited proficiency in the heritage language and especially literacy, reading and writing for many of the CHL learners is something that needs extra effort on their part rather than being a source of pleasure. This situation is partially due to home language policy at the early stage of the CHL learners' language development. Daisy told me when she first moved with her parents to Canada, "they wanted me to learn English fast" and "to learn like, all the English, and live in like the English language and stuff". Then she began to speak English to her parents everyday and "just got really used to it." When her parents realized that they still wanted her to keep Chinese and began to push her to speak Chinese at home, her Chinese had become so poor that she had to constantly stop and "just go back to English". As an immigrant parent, I myself sometimes push my son too much to speak and read English at home. I am now more alerted to my role in keeping and developing my son's Chinese language and literacy along with the mainstream language, English. And I hope immigrant parents would be more aware of the importance of heritage language maintenance, in order to help their children to be able to enjoy full advantage of being bilingual and bi-literate.

Finally, this is the first time that I conducted a qualitative study in applied linguistics. As a novice researcher, I learned valuable lessons, which will undoubtedly benefit me in my future research. The most valuable lesson for me was that my lack of awareness of the complicated procedures for doing qualitative research resulted in a huge delay in the study. I initially

recruited eight CHL learners, which I thought would be enough for my study. However, when I began to interview them, only four of them were actually able to participate! Even for those who finally made the interviews, there were unexpected situations so that we had to constantly change our meeting times. As a result, in order to recruit more participants, I had to wait for another semester (nearly six months later) to be able to collect both writing samples and interview data. In addition, although I had prepared for an English interview, I assumed my participants as Chinese heritage learners would speak mainly Chinese in the interview, which finally proved not to be the case. Most of them mixed Chinese and English, and four of them almost exclusively spoke English. As a second language speaker of English, I felt challenged during the interviews in my efforts to explore as much as possible and as accurately as possible my participants' experience of language and literacy practice. I unavoidably missed some opportunities to explore further and was not able to make the most out of the limited interview time. All in all, in my future research, I would carefully consider any possible situations, scenarios, and constraints involved in qualitative research and try to be more prepared accordingly. Meanwhile, I would consistently improve my English proficiency and interview techniques in order to be more competent to conduct interviews in English in my future research.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Asian Studies

1871 West Mall, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2

Tel: (604) 822-5186; Fax: (604) 822-8937

Recruitment Letter

Negotiating languages and literacies:

Intermediate level Chinese heritage learners' essay writing

Dear student,

My name is Bin Zheng and I am a graduate student in the Department of Asian Studies. As part of my MA thesis, I am conducting a study that will investigate intermediate level Chinese heritage language (CHL) students' literacy development, especially in academic writing. The study will be supervised by the Principal Investigator, Dr. Duanduan Li, Department of Asian Studies (604-822-5186) and Dr. Patricia Duff, Department of Language and Literacy Education (604-822-9693).

Participants in this study are Chinese heritage language learners who are attending Intermediate Chinese heritage language courses (200 level) with a focus on reading and writing skills.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to contribute two of your Chinese essay writing assignments (by allowing me to photocopy them) for analysis, and take part in an interview which lasts about 40 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

To thank you for your time, you will be offered a \$15 gift card to the UBC Bookstore. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this study and feel that you meet the criteria outlined above, please contact Bin Zheng at xxxxxxxxxx.

Sincerely,

Bin Zheng

Appendix B: Letter to Potential Participants not Recruited



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Asian Studies

1871 West Mall, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2

Tel: (604) 822-5186; Fax: (604) 822-8937

Dear XXXX,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. However, due to the limited number of participants we can accommodate in the study and the number of people who responded to our recruitment notice, we are sorry that we are not able to include you as a participant. We really appreciate your willingness to be considered for the study regardless, and wish you well with your Chinese studies.

Sincerely yours,

Bin Zheng

Appendix C: Consent Form



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Asian Studies

1871 West Mall, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2

Tel: (604) 822-5186; Fax: (604) 822-8937

Consent Form

Title of Study: Negotiating languages and literacies:

Intermediate level Chinese heritage learners' essay writing

Principal Investigator: Dr. Duanduan Li
Department of Asian Studies
University of British Columbia
1871, West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: 604-822-5186; Fax: 604-822-8937

Co-Investigator: Dr. Patricia A. Duff
Department of Language & Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: 604-822-9639; Fax: 604-822-3154

Co-Investigator: Bin Zheng, MA student
Department of Asian Studies
University of British Columbia
1871, West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: xxxxxxxxxx

Purpose:

The purpose of this research is to investigate intermediate level Chinese heritage language students' Chinese academic writing through an analysis of the features of their writing assignments and their daily Chinese reading/writing activities.

Participation and Procedures:

As a heritage language learner of Chinese, you are invited to participate in this research by sharing two of your Chinese writing assignments (the first two compositions this term) for your intermediate level Chinese courses with the researchers, and taking part in a 40-minute follow-up interview with Bin Zheng, a graduate student of Dr. Li and Dr. Duff. Your writing assignments will be collected for analysis (the original copies will be returned to you after being photocopied). Follow-up interviews will be digitally recorded by the researcher and then be transcribed for data analysis purposes to understand better your experiences and perceptions of yourselves as Chinese language writers. The interviews will be conducted in either Mandarin or English (as you wish). The research is part of Bin Zheng's MA thesis in Asian Studies (Chinese language education), under the supervision of Drs. Duanduan Li and Patricia Duff, co-directors of the UBC Centre for Research in Chinese Language and Literacy Education. The data may also be used for future academic publications by the above investigators.

Potential Risks:

There are no known risks to participation in this study although there may be some initial awkwardness during the interview as you describe and reflect on your experiences learning to write in Chinese.

Potential Benefits:

The possible benefit is that you will have the opportunity to contribute to a research that aims to help Chinese heritage learners to improve their Chinese academic essay writing and to think about the relationship between (1) your English and Chinese writing; and (2) your academic writing in Chinese and other ways you engage in Chinese literacy outside of university. You may also find the study interesting to read about when it is completed. You can find the result of the study (the MA thesis) on UBC digital repository site (<https://circle.ubc.ca>) after it's completed.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet and a password-protected laptop file. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study and pseudonyms will be used for all participants and for the university. Digital audio files will be used for research/education purposes only.

Remuneration/Compensation:

To thank you for your participation, you will be offered a \$15 UBC Bookstore gift card.

Contact for information about the study:

Our contact information is provided at the top of this form. You may contact any one of the researchers (Zheng, Li or Duff) if you have questions about the study or our procedures. You may also contact us by email: duanli@interchange.ubc.ca, patricia.duff@ubc.ca. If you would like to have copies of publications based on this study, we would be happy to send them to you. The MA thesis that results from this study by Bin Zheng will be available through UBC's digital

repository one or two months after it has been approved and submitted to the university (<https://circle.ubc.ca/>).

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of British Columbia Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services by e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call: 604-822-8598.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your status at your school or community. Your participation or non-participation in this study has no bearing on your course grades. If following the completion of the data collection and before the thesis is submitted, you no longer wish to participate or have any of your data used, please let the researchers know. In such cases, your data will be deleted from the study and from storage files.

Your signature indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

FOR PARTICIPANTS TO COMPLETE

- _____ I consent to share two of my Chinese writing assignments with the researchers of this study and take part in one interview about my daily Chinese reading/writing activities both inside and outside of university courses.

Please provide your email OR telephone number if you consent to participate in this study: _____

Your Printed Name

Your Signature

Date

(PLEASE KEEP THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS)

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of British Columbia Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services by e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call: 604-822-8598.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your status at your school or community. Your participation or non-participation in this study has no bearing on your course grades. If following the completion of the data collection and before the thesis is submitted, you no longer wish to participate or have any of your data used, please let the researchers know. In such cases, your data will be deleted from the study and from storage files.

Your signature indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

FOR PARTICIPANTS TO COMPLETE

- _____ I consent to share two of my Chinese writing assignments with the researchers of this study and take part in one interview about my daily Chinese reading/writing activities both inside and outside of university courses.

Please provide your email OR telephone number if you consent to participate in this study: _____

Your Printed Name

Your Signature

Date

Appendix D: Interview Questions (English)



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Asian Studies

1871 West Mall, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2

Tel: (604) 822-5186; Fax: (604) 822-8937

Interview Questions (English Version)

Title of Study: Negotiating languages and literacies:

Intermediate level Chinese heritage learners' essay writing

Principal Investigator: Dr. Duanduan Li
Department of Asian Studies
University of British Columbia
1871, West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: 604-822-5186; Fax: 604-822-8937

Co-Investigator: Dr. Patricia A. Duff
Department of Language & Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: 604-822-9693; Fax: 604-822-3154

Co-Investigator: Bin Zheng, MA student
Department of Asian Studies
University of British Columbia
1871, West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: xxxxxxxxxx

Interviews will be conducted by Bin Zheng, following a semi-structured format. Interviews will be in English or Mandarin according to interviewees' choice (this is the English version, a Chinese version will be provided as well), because all participants are English and Mandarin bilingual speakers.

1. Could you please introduce yourself first? For example, where were you born? If you were not born in Canada when did you come to Canada? What dialects of Chinese do you

speak (e.g., Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese or other dialects)? Do you speak any other languages besides these and English? When did you start learning Chinese? When and how did you first learn to write in Chinese?

2. Questions about Chinese academic essay writing:

- a. What are the most important language skills (speaking, listening, reading or writing) for you in your learning of Chinese? Why? Which do you feel are considered most important or emphasized the most in the Chinese courses you are enrolled in?
- b. How do you feel when writing in Chinese? What aspects of Chinese academic essay writing are relatively easy for you and which are relatively difficult?
- c. What aspects of writing in Chinese, (for example, vocabulary, grammar, organizing ideas, characters, etc.) do you feel most confident about? Why do you feel confident about those skills?
- d. What aspects do you feel are the most challenging when writing in Chinese?
- e. Please describe your most memorable Chinese essay writing experience in this course.
- f. What is your goal for learning to write in Chinese? How proficient do you want to become? Why?
- g. What do you plan to do in the future with your Chinese writing skills?

3. Questions about formal writing instruction:

- a. Have you received instruction on Chinese writing other than in this course? Where and when?
- b. In your current Chinese course you write essays. What aspects of essay writing does the instructor emphasize the most? Why?
- c. Do you always read carefully the written feedback provided by instructors on your essays? Why or why not?
- d. What feedback do you think is the most helpful? For example, on vocabulary, grammar, organizing ideas, content, characters, etc.? What and how much do you learn from these corrections?
- e. What aspects of writing do you think you still need to improve in?
- f. Please describe ideal Chinese writing instruction (ways of teaching it, topics, etc.) in your opinion.

4. Questions about students' daily literacy activities (in Chinese and English)

- a. Do you read and/or write in Chinese on a daily basis?
How much time approximately do you spend on course related reading and/or writing?
How about other Chinese reading and/or writing at your own choice?
- b. What kinds of Chinese reading do you involve in, for example, fictions, news, or websites? What reading you enjoy the most and why?
- c. What kinds of Chinese writing do you involve in, for example, blogs, email exchanges, online-chatting, etc.? Which you enjoy the most and why?

- d. Do you think these reading and writing activities are helpful to your Chinese essay writing assignments? If yes, please specify why.
- e. What resources do you think are most helpful to your Chinese writing assignments?
- f. What kinds of reading and writing in English do you involve in, for example, fictions, news, or websites? Do you think these English reading and writing activities have influence on your Chinese reading and writing? If yes, please specify why.
- g. Do you feel more confident when writing in English than writing in Chinese? Why? What do you think are the differences between English writing and Chinese writing?

Appendix E: Interview Questions (Chinese)



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Asian Studies

1871 West Mall, Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z2

Tel: (604) 822-5186; Fax: (604) 822-8937

Interview Questions (Chinese Version)

Title of Study: Negotiating languages and literacies:

Intermediate level Chinese heritage learners' essay writing

Principal Investigator: Dr. Duanduan Li
Department of Asian Studies
University of British Columbia
1871, West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: 604-822-5186; Fax: 604-822-8937

Co-Investigator: Dr. Patricia A. Duff
Department of Language & Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: 604-822-9693; Fax: 604-822-3154

Co-Investigator: Bin Zheng, MA student
Department of Asian Studies
University of British Columbia
1871, West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: xxxxxxxxxx

Interviews will be conducted by Bin Zheng, following a semi-structured format. Interviews will be in English or Mandarin according to interviewees' choice (this is the Chinese version, an English version is provided as well), because all participants are English and Mandarin bilingual speakers.

Interview Questions (Chinese Version)

1. 请你介绍一下自己好吗？比如，你是在哪里出生的？如果你不是在加拿大出生，那么你是什么时候来加拿大的？你说普通话？还是广东话或者台湾话？除了这些和英语以外，你还说别的语言吗？你是什么时候开始学习中文的？你是什么时候开始学习中文写作的？怎么学的？
2. 关于中文课程写作的问题：
 - a. 在你学习中文的过程中，听说读写这四个方面对你来说最重要的是什么？为什么？你觉得你所上的中文课程最注重或者最强调的是哪个方面？
 - b. 你用中文写课程作文的时候有什么感受？对你来说，哪些方面比较容易？哪些方面你觉得有困难？你觉得在词汇运用，语法，组织文章，写汉字等等这些方面，你最有自信的是哪方面？为什么？
 - c. 中文写作中你觉得最难的是哪些方面？
 - d. 你可以描述一下这门课程里你感受最深的一次写作经历吗？
 - e. 在中文写作方面，你的目标是什么？你希望达到什么样的水平？为什么？
 - f. 你希望将来能在哪些方面运用你的中文写作能力？
3. 关于正式的中文写作指导的问题：
 - a. 除了这门课程以外，你还接受过别的中文写作指导吗？如果有，是在哪里？什么时候？
 - b. 这门中文课程要求你写作文。老师在中文写作上最强调的是哪些方面？你觉得是为什么？
 - c. 老师给你作文的评语你都会认真看吗？为什么？
 - d. 对你来说哪些方面的评语最有帮助，比如词汇运用，语法，文章组织，还有内容，汉字等方面？你从这些评语中学到了多少？学到了什么？
 - e. 哪些方面你觉得你还需要进一步提高？
 - f. 可以说一说你认为最理想的写作指导是什么样的吗？比如教什么题材，怎么教等等？
4. 关于学生的日常读写活动(包括中文和英文)的问题：
 - a. 你每天都读中文的内容或者用中文写东西吗？如果不是每天，那么你一星期里大概有多少时间用中文读或者写？你一天或一星期里大概用多少时间读写跟中文课有关的内容？除了和中文课有关的内容以外，你自己也读中文的内容吗？也用中文写吗？
 - b. 你通常读哪些中文的东西？比如，中餐馆的菜单，中文的报纸，杂志，中文网站，中文博客，或者中文书？你最喜欢阅读哪一类中文内容？为什么？
 - c. 你通常用中文写些什么？比如说，博客，电子邮件，网上聊天，中文短信等等？哪一类你最喜欢？为什么？你希望多写些什么？

- d. 你觉得生活中这些中文读写对你中文课上的写作有帮助吗？如果有，能详细说说吗？
- e. 还有哪些你认为对你的中文课程写作有帮助，比如说，字典，辞典，写作辅导等等？
- f. 你常常读或者写什么英文的内容，比如小说，新闻，网站等等？你觉得这些英文的读写对你的中文读写有影响吗？如果有，能详细说说吗？
- g. 对你来说，用英文写作是不是比用中文写作有自信？为什么？你觉得中文写作跟英文写作有什么不同的地方？

Appendix F: Transcription Symbols

Transcription Symbols¹

Symbol	Meaning
(.)	indicates a short pause
-	indicates a false start or a self-correction
<u>under</u>	indicates emphasis placed on a word
“ ”	indicates reported speech
=	indicates a continuous utterance

¹ Adapted from Jefferson, 2004