

CHALLENGES, NEEDS, AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE  
STUDENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

by

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, heritage language education has been receiving renewed interest by policy makers, applied linguists, and language educators in the United States, Canada, and many other countries all over the world. The number of publications and heritage language (HL) education initiatives are gradually increasing, as more universities start offering special language track courses designed for heritage language students (HLSs). However, there has been little research exploring how those students perceive their experiences learning their own HL in foreign language (FL) classrooms. This study attempted to better understand HLSs' experiences in FL classrooms in relation to those of instructors and non-heritage language students (non-HLSs). It examined heritage language students' weaknesses and needs, strengths, challenges, and ways of using them as a resource. The data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and e-mails and were analyzed by emerging themes guided by research questions. The data showed the HLSs strongly felt that they need to improve reading, writing, and oral skills so as to become proficient enough to be employed at the professional level. Also, HLSs considered kanji as one of the major problems while instructors did not perceive this difficulty. Instructors' challenges were identified to be related to affective factors, inappropriate placement, and the lack of resources, whereas HLSs' challenges were associated with the unfamiliarity of FL pedagogy, mismatch of their linguistic skills with available courses, and psychological factors such as peers' negative perception and the level of support received by instructors. Although HLSs appeared to be a great resource in FL classrooms, instructors found it difficult to integrate their abilities into classroom activities due to affective factors.

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I set forth my journey to explore some questions that occurred to me while I was teaching a mixed class with heritage language students (HLSs) and non-heritage language students (non-HLSs). Until then, I have never thought that Japanese HLSs need to study their own heritage language at the college level. By pursuing this research, I felt that I could touch an aspect of heritage language students' learning experiences in university foreign language classrooms. As I was meeting and interviewing HL students, instructors, and non-HL students and listening to their stories, I felt more and more convinced that I was fortunate to get an opportunity to explore various issues evolving around HL education. It was an important learning opportunity for me, which enriched my life. It was also a rewarding experience as a person, language teacher, and mother of a heritage language student. This was not possible without the participants of my study.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1. Demographic changes**

The cultural diversity of Canada is ever increasing, as evident from the 2001 census. About 5.6 million people reported a mother tongue other than English or French (Statistics Canada, 2004), which is approximately 19 % of the total population, whereas in 1951, only 12 % (1.7 million) reported a mother tongue other than English or French (Canadian Global Almanac, 2001). With the dramatic demographic changes, schools face a continued growth in the number of heritage language speakers. Similarly, the same phenomenon is observed in the United States where 1999 census statistics reported that 10 % of the American population was foreign-born (The UCLA Steering Committee, 2000). However, minority languages, until recently, have been exclusively taught as foreign/second languages, and not much attention was paid to this population shift.

According to Valdés (2000), “heritage speaker” is a relatively new term. Among the foreign language professionals in the States, “heritage speaker” is used to describe “a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (Valdés, 2000, p. 1). Recently, there is a tendency to call these students “home background speakers” as in the case of Australia and “heritage language speakers” as in the case of Canada. Experiences of these heritage speakers are comparable; although they are exposed in their heritage languages at home, they are instructed in the official or majority language of the countries where they live and become literate only in that language.

To accommodate this new population, the Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference Report (2000) articulates the need for considering a wide range of settings “where heritage language learning occurs, including the interface between heritage and formal

education; issues of availabilities and quality of program...curriculum, materials, and methodologies” (p. 4).

In Canada, a heritage language is defined as a language other than the two official languages or aboriginal languages (Cummins, 1992).

In the present study, heritage language students are those who have some knowledge of Japanese language through exposure to the language at home or/and at Saturday school (while they have been receiving education in the official language) or those who have lived in Japan for part of their life and acquired it as their first language. They are not “balanced bilinguals” (see Baker, 2001, p. 7) who are equally competent in two languages across a variety of settings, although they may have acquired some literacy skills.

## **1.2. Identification of the problem**

Heritage language education has been considered by society as the responsibility of the ethnic community and a choice of individuals for their own benefit. Assimilating into a new country is considered by many members of the dominant-language society more important than maintaining their Heritage Language (HL) and cultures (Baker & Jones, 1998; Campbell, 2000; Kondo, 1998); consequently, some immigrants believed that acquiring society’s dominant language is integral to their children’s success in the new country (Fillmore, 1991; Swain & Lapkin, 1991). Baker and Jones explain that “[e]ven when the host country actively calls for more immigration (e.g., Canada which between 1992 and 1995 wanted 250,000 in-migrants per year to [compensate] for an aging population and needed extra labour in its workplace), the pressure is still for in-migrants to lose their languages. Assimilation is a common political demand...” (Baker & Jones, 1998, p. 105). While many scholars (Bayley, Schecter & Torres-Ayala, 1996; Fishman, 1991, 1999; Hakuta & D’Andrea, 1993; Kondo, 1998b) have been exploring how heritage languages are maintained, until recently, there is very little attention paid

to heritage language education in academic settings, specifically in foreign language classrooms at the university level.

Valdés (1995) depicts how languages are currently taught and illustrates problems when those heritage/home languages are taught as “academic subjects” (p. 300) in multilingual settings through vignettes such as: 1) an elementary Francophone student who gets bored in a French immersion program, 2) a high school Spanish class where teachers have to separate Anglophone students studying Spanish as a foreign language from Mexican-background students who already speak/understand Spanish, and 3) teachers trying to find out how to teach bilingual Chinese students at the university level where two tracks are offered so that those bilingual students do not intimidate “the true learners” (p. 300). Through these vignettes, she underscores the problem that teaching approaches that have been employed in a foreign language (FL) classroom for many years are no longer appropriate for this new body of students and articulates the need to expand the horizon of the applied linguistic research beyond second language learning and build on adequate learning theories to respond to these problems and challenges.

However, while this is a frustrating experience for both teachers and students, not many language departments can offer a heritage language track due to various reasons, the main one being the lack of resources to offer duplicate sections, especially when enrolments are relatively low. Consequently, when those HLSs choose to continue to study their HL, they are often put in a foreign language classroom since there is no separate track course available. Although language instructors around the world are facing the similar problems in teaching heritage and aboriginal languages, few studies have been conducted in order “to examine such practices and to develop coherent theories about language learning and development that can guide instruction” (Valdés, 1995, p. 303).

When I taught an integrated heritage language students (HLSs) and non-heritage language students (non-HLSs) at college, the first thing that I found was that the level differences

adversely affected both groups of students. Since three of the bilingual students were very fluent in the HL, they inhibited the “true learners” and had an influence on their classroom participation, which in turn influenced non-HLSs’ behaviour. Not only did the HLSs feel guilty, but they also became silent. The second thing that I had to deal with was the fact that those heritage students’ language proficiency varied widely; I strongly felt that they needed to expand their “bilingual range” (Valdés, 1995, p. 307). Two of them spoke informal and fragmental Japanese and wrote poorly, which may have resulted from the lack of opportunities to speak the language or disorganized grammar that they perhaps picked up and internalized as they grew up. Moreover, there was one who spoke very fluently but was weaker in writing skills. Two others wrote well though they needed to improve their literacy skills in order to function at professional levels. In that class, students generally preferred to pair up with other students of the same level, HL students with other HL students and non-HL students with non-HL students. In the end of the semester, I attempted to have the two groups mingle with each other. Giving students tasks promoting interactions among them helped to create a more “affective” classroom and seemed to be beneficial for non-HLSs since they were given assistance by HLSs. This, in return, gave confidence to HLSs. However, I wondered how much HLSs improved linguistically, whether their needs were met, and whether their goals were attained. I wondered how we could help these two different types of students to each benefit from the class and from each other. These questions, in part, motivated the present study.

### **1.3. The Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to examine the challenges and needs of students in a Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) classroom at university studying their heritage language, which they have acquired naturally at home or HL school, as well as the challenges of instructors who have to teach both HLSs and non-HLSs in the same classroom. I am particularly interested in how HLSs perceive their learning experiences in JFL classrooms, how they can further improve their language skills, and how they can fit into and learn in such classrooms and contribute to classroom activities. I will also explore how their instructors can accommodate both groups in the same classroom.

### **1.4. Research questions**

In the study, four major questions are pursued:

1. From both teachers' and students' perspectives, what are the areas of greatest needs (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of Japanese HLSs? How can they improve their areas of weakness?
2. What kind of strengths do the instructors think HLSs bring to the classroom? How is it possible to develop these strengths?
3. What are the challenges faced by HLSs and their instructors when trying to help them improve their weaker skills in a foreign language program?
4. In what ways can HLSs contribute to a foreign language classroom from the perspectives of instructors, HL students, and non-HLSs?

### **1.5. Significance of the study**

In recent years, HL education is drawing considerable attention; however, there is little research, if any, attempting to explore experiences of HLSs who are placed in a FL classroom at the university level. This study not only examines how HLSs perceive learning their HL in FL classrooms but also attempts to understand HLSs' learning experiences and issues arising from such mixed classrooms from different perspectives: those of instructors, HLSs, and non-HLSs.

By being asked about their challenges and needs, HLSs can identify their problematic areas and focus on strengthening those areas. Also, this allows instructors to see the difficulties and needs from HLSs' perspectives, which may give the instructors new insight. The results of this study could be useful to teach HLSs effectively and motivate them further. Moreover, bringing awareness to HLSs helps them to set their own goals and work towards achieving them.

Equally, capturing non-HLSs' voices is important to understand learning experiences in a classroom where students bring different strengths, given that classroom dynamic is likely to influence students' behaviours and interactions and consequently the outcomes of learning. Giving non-HLSs opportunities to voice their opinions about HLSs makes them feel that their anxiety and concerns are heard, which helps to alleviate the sense of unfairness. Furthermore, it is useful for teachers to understand why students interact with one another in that way and to plan various classroom activities accordingly.

Exploring how HLSs can contribute to classroom activities is beneficial for all, instructors, HLSs, and non-HLSs. Exposure to the target language in a FL classroom is limited; thus, examining the ways to utilize HLSs' native-like language skills is valuable for instructors and non-HLSs. Moreover, using their linguistic skills as a resource is beneficial for HLSs to strengthen their ethnic identity, build their self-confidence, and motivate them to study more. Voicing opinions of both non-HLSs and HLSs is integral to bringing all the benefits mentioned above and to better serving all of the students since decisions are often made solely by instructors.



Exploring this question can be useful as well for a multi-level classroom where students' linguistic abilities vary.

Investigating various issues in a Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) classroom with HLSs will enhance their learning experiences, since many of them have no choice but to enrol in a FL. It will also enhance understanding of not only the Japanese as foreign language classes that I explore but also many other language programs that cannot offer a special track for HLSs.

#### **1.6. Organization of the thesis**

The thesis is organized in the following order. In Chapter 2, I will present a review of literature related to heritage language education. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology employed in the study, and Chapter 4 will report the results. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the results in relation to the past research. Finally, Chapter 6 will present the conclusion and pedagogical implications as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. The pedagogical implications could be used to better understand and enhance learning experiences of HLSs whose needs tended to be overlooked.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

This chapter reviews the research literature for this thesis. I first review research on bilingual/transitional programs and research that has focused on HL education and maintenance, focusing on issues such as the change of the views on HL and globally renewed interests in HL education (Section 2.2), various types of HL education (Section 2.3), the present situation of HL education in BC and the need to integrate HL education into the public school system (Section 2.4). After examining different needs and goals of HLSs in Section 2.5, I review HLSs' experiences through the past studies (Section 2.6) and the present problems and difficulties that HLSs face in both foreign language classrooms and special track courses (Section 2.7). Finally, in Section 2.8, I argue for the need to explore FL classrooms to provide better learning experiences for HLSs.

### **2.1. Brief review of various research on heritage language education**

#### **2.1.1. History of bilingual/transitional programs**

Since the early 1970s, various heritage language programs<sup>1</sup> have been implemented: an Italian Kindergarten transition program in Toronto, Italian and Portuguese programs, English-Ukrainian K-elementary programs in Edmonton and Manitoba, and Hebrew-French-English elementary programs in Montreal (Cummins, 1993). In the urban centres of eastern Canada, some people are concerned that promoting HL programs was not desirable for the solidarity of the society and that providing instruction in the HL was an obstacle to acquiring English; moreover, they did not consider promoting heritage language education as conducive to

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<sup>1</sup> Transitional/bilingual programs in the United States, according to Cummins (1993), aimed to help minority children to acquire English and promote monolingualism. In contrast, most of the programs implemented in Canada during the 1970s were enrichment programs that utilized the minority languages as a medium of instruction or taught the languages as a subject to develop proficiency in both their heritage languages and the majority language although there were some transitional heritage language programs offered.

acculturation but rather perceived it as “self-interest of different sectors of Canadian society” (Cummins & Danesi, 1990, p. 5).

Cummins (1993) summarized heritage language studies conducted in Canada in the 70s and 80s by many researchers (i.e., Bhatnagar, 1980; Cummins & Mulcahy 1978; Cummins, Ramos, & Lopes, 1989; Egyed, 1973; Ewanyshyn, 1979, 1980; Henderson, 1977; MacNamee & White, 1985; Moddy, 1974; Shapson & Purbhoo, 1977; Swain, Lapkin, Rowen, & Hart, 1988). These studies had been focusing on how the bilingual/trilingual/transitional programs and language use and development at home affect overall academic performance and cognitive development of school-aged children. Cummins (1993) found that although “multicultural education” (p. 5) in the public school system across Canada had been endorsed in the past two decades, parents had been reporting that they were advised to use English at home.<sup>2</sup> In his review of heritage language research, Cummins (1993) reported that the development of HL, in fact, enhances children’s knowledge of language and literacy, which in turn benefits them in the other academic areas, and this is well documented and supported by numerous studies on HLs’ use at home and school.

In conclusion, Cummins asserted that “educators should encourage parents to strongly promote children’s conceptual development in their mother tongue by reading to them, telling stories, singing son [sic], and so on” (1993, p. 5). Swain and Lapkin (1991) also reported that children from minority linguistic backgrounds who retained their heritage languages with literacy skills can be expected to show superior performance learning French as an additional language compared with minority language students who have no reading and writing skills in their HL and monolingual Anglophones.

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<sup>2</sup> The tendency still holds true at least in the States as it is indicated by Hinton’s (1999) article.

### **2.1.2. Other studies related to heritage language education and maintenance**

More recent studies on HL education include the role of family/community or the contact with the HL on language maintenance and attitudes towards language learning (Fishman, 1991; Guardado, 2002; Hinton, 1999; Kondo, 1998a; Pendakur, 1990; Shibata, 2000; Tse, 2001; Wong-Fillmore, 1991), the relationships between HL learning and socio-cultural factors such as ethnic identity formation (Feuerverger, 1991; Oketani, 1997a, 1997b; Syed, 2001; Tse, 1998, 1999), motivation associated with socio-psychological factors (Kondo-Brown, 1999, 2001), and influence of the language policy on language maintenance (Kondo, 1998b). Those research questions mainly concerned language maintenance or loss and revealed how factors such as the age of the introduction of the second language, parental attitudes and involvement, status/value of the given language, language contact, and societal climate towards minorities, the age of linguistic group and the proportion of immigrants had influences on language maintenance, shift, and loss, identity formation, and motivation.

Supporting Fishman (1991), many studies showed the importance of the role of family and activities based at home and in the community (Bayley, Schechter, & Torres-Ayala, 1996; Hakuta & D'Andrea, 1992; Tse, 2001). Fishman (1991) emphasizes "it is in the family that a particular bond with language and language activities... is fostered, shared and fashioned into personal and social identity" (p. 409). Kondo (1998a) states: "efforts for language maintenance in other domains such as school or church may serve only as symbols without strong family commitment" (p. 372). Recent studies obtained similar findings stating that parental attitudes and involvement play an important role in language maintenance (Guardado, 2001; Kondo, 1997, 1998a; Natsu, 1997; Shibata, 2000).

By reading Cummins' (1993) summary of research, one can see that there have been many studies investigating a variety of effects of bilingual/transitional programs in the primary school years, yet in recent years there have been few studies on HL education in the public

school system. This suggests that heritage language education among most of the linguistic minorities still relies on the efforts of families and ethnic communities and is not well integrated into the public education system.

## **2.2. Renewed global interests in heritage language education**

“Canadian political, social, and educational initiatives have emphasized the value of having heritage language for a variety of reasons...” (Duff, in press, p. 1). While heritage language maintenance is not a new phenomenon in Canada, “international languages,” as indicated in Tavares (2000), is a new term proposed by the Alberta government and subsequently the B.C. government as well to refer to languages other than English, French, or Canada’s aboriginal languages during the process leading to the agreement of the Western Canadian Protocol.<sup>3</sup> The new term replaced “heritage languages,”<sup>4</sup> which was perceived as more past-oriented rather than future-oriented and bearing a “pejorative” (Baker & Jones, 1998, p. 509) tone.

As clearly stated in the Federal Government Canadian Heritage website, the importance of international communication is now evident with rapidly advancing technology; it urges the needs of raising Canadians who not only possess superior linguistic skills but also have an understanding of many cultures, which enables Canada to participate in global communication in all areas (Canada Heritage, 2003).

Tavares (2000) observes that the grounds and focus of language education changed considerably in the 1990s in Canada: “the rationale for heritage language education or learning

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<sup>3</sup> In 1993, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba agreed to collaborate and develop common curriculum under the project called Western Canadian Protocol, and in 1996, a proposal for collaboration in international languages was approved.

<sup>4</sup> From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, where the number of HL programs being offered significantly increased in Winnipeg and Manitoba, “heritage language” was the preferable term by the ethnolinguistic communities and multicultural education activists since it strengthened the notion that languages other than English or French were not ‘foreign’ languages, as they were spoken by many Canadians and were part of their Canadian heritage (Tavares, 2000, p.2)

another language was based on international communication, career application, and participation in the global workplace and marketplace” (p. 4). Cummins and Danesi (1990) stated that “linguistic resources are economic resources just as surely as Canada’s oil or forests are” (p. 77).

The shift is apparent as indicated in the B.C. Policy and Guidelines (1996): “In view of the importance of changing economic relationships, such as the developing links with Pacific Rim countries, opportunities should be available for students to learn languages that will prepare them to take a role in future economic development” (p. 3). In contrast, in 1970s and 1980s, heritage language education had been supported more as a means of verifying the Canadian spirit of multiculturalism reflected in the idea of “mosaic,” as opposed to the “melting-pot” in the United States, rather than economically motivated reasons (Cummins, 1992). Heritage language maintenance now comes to bear great importance not only to individuals but also to Canada as a nation: “The ethnocultural diversity of Canada’s population is a major advantage when access to global markets is more important than ever to our economic prosperity... Canada cannot afford to have any of its citizens marginalized.... All Canadians must have the opportunity to develop and contribute to their full potential” (Canada Heritage, 2003).

Similarly, this trend is observed in the United States and many other countries all over the world in recent years (Campbell, 2000, p. 166). For example, in the United States, heritage language education is drawing great attention (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003), as scholars and policymakers come to recognize the importance of heritage languages as a resource for the nation. Krashen (1998) states that “[h]eritage language speakers could thus be an important natural resource: Nurturing and developing heritage languages may be a good thing for the economy and the balance of trade” (p. 7). Heritage language special track courses are increasing at the tertiary level, so the number of publications about these HL courses is on the rise (Campbell, 2000; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Also, there are many professional development

initiatives in heritage language education (Marcos, 1999). In "Tapping a National Resource: Heritage Languages in the United States," Brecht and Ingold (1998) articulate the increasing need of individuals who are competent in one or more languages at the professional-level in addition to English. They emphasize that heritage language students are a valuable resource<sup>5</sup> with cultural and linguistics skills for the nation, given that typical foreign language students, even after completing the university language program, can rarely achieve the level of competence sufficient to work in professional fields. With this heightened awareness, the first National Heritage Languages in America conference was held in Long Beach in 1999 followed by the Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference at ULCA in 2000 and the second National Heritage Language Conference in Washington D.C. in 2002. In the spring of 2003, a new journal, *Heritage Language Journal*, was established. However, the view that heritage language maintenance is important to preserve as a resource is not so evident in Canada with respect to the number of conferences and publications locally.

## **2.3. Heritage language students in the formal educational institutions**

### **2.3.1. Types of heritage language education in Canada**

In Canada, a heritage language (now replaced by *international* languages in official documents) refers to a language other than the two official languages or aboriginal languages (Cummins, 1992a).

Baker (2001) noted that heritage language education has been traditionally handled in two ways in Canada: 1. a HL program, which is called "Saturday school" or after-school program, run by the ethnic community; 2. a HL bilingual education program, which is a part of the formal educational system, where children are given 50 % of instruction in their HL. While

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<sup>5</sup> Marcos (1999) also pointed out that the United States falls short of language expertise essential for national defence, international business, and government services while many immigrants who are proficient in languages other than English and emphasized that they cannot "afford to let slip away the linguistics resources" (¶1).

the former is taught by volunteers or teachers paid at minimum, the latter is taught by professional teachers. Heritage language bilingual programs are run in the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, and British Columbia<sup>6</sup> (Beynon & Toohey, 1991).

### **2.3.2. Foreign language education in B.C. schools**

Canada appears to enjoy the spirit of multiculturalism as this citation from the 1994 Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, Multicultural Education and Heritage Language Education Policies (Tavares, 2000) indicates: "Inherent in federal and provincial legislation and policies is a recognition that heritage languages are fundamental to the multicultural nature of our province and our country" (§10). However, there seems to be little consideration given to develop or maintain heritage languages in the public education system. According to Feuerverger (1997), "current researchers point to the reality that the educational system rarely incorporates the languages and cultures of its students within the mainstream curriculum" (p. 42). In their review of the policies and programs of heritage language education, Beynon and Toohey (1991) did not include German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, and Mandarin classes in high school since they are considered and taught as "modern language" classes, not as HL classes.<sup>7</sup> A more recent review of the language education policy in British Columbia (Reeder, Hasebe-Ludt, & Thomas, 1997) also reveals that HL education is not a part of the agenda. Although languages such as Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish, German, and Punjabi are taught in high school, the relevant policy states that these are courses intended for students who just start to learn the basic vocabulary and grammar and do not speak the language: "A student

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<sup>6</sup> According to Beynon and Toohey (1991), in British Columbia, there has been a Russian-English bilingual programs in a public school in Castlegar school district since 1983, and a few other Russian programs that are offered as alternatives to French language programs, run from the elementary to the secondary level. See [www.sd20.bc.ca/dist-progs/prog\\_index.shtml](http://www.sd20.bc.ca/dist-progs/prog_index.shtml).

<sup>7</sup> According to Beynon and Toohey (1991), there are very few public and private schools that offer HL classes for small numbers of students. Some Sikh schools and Hebrew-English bilingual programs receive "partial provincial funding under the independent schools formula" (p. 608).



who can already speak the language fluently would know these things well, and not need to learn them in school” (Language Education in B.C. Schools, 1996, pp.7-8). The guideline fails to recognize the fact that there are HLSs who can speak the language fluently but in a limited context or HLSs who can speak but cannot write. While the government policies recognize and emphasize the importance of mutual understandings of all cultures and the value of international languages to the nation, heritage language education<sup>8</sup> is, in fact, left outside the public education system and not well supported: “The second language requirement doesn’t replace these language programs. Many students will continue to learn a heritage language outside of school” (p. 8). While promoting the learning of foreign languages, maintaining one’s minority first language does not seem to be valued. This idea<sup>9</sup> is similar to that of the United States, namely, “the subtractive policy of language assimilation for language minorities” (Kondo-Brown, 2001, p. 157) which creates a situation where “the learning of a majority second language may undermine a person’s minority first language and culture” (Baker, 2001, p. 58).

### **2.3.3. The provision of challenge examination**

While it is a great acknowledgement for HL teachers and students that since 1996, HLSs can challenge provincial examination to earn credits for their study outside regular schools (BC Heritage Language Association, 2002), the provision of the examinations suggests that foreign language classes are not for HL speakers and endorses the fact that HL education is not well linked to language education in formal educational settings. Without offering a place for HLSs to continue their language learning, it is not possible for them to build on their existing skills and achieve higher proficiency.

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<sup>8</sup> The parental handbook states that “[l]anguages learned outside of school are referred to as heritage languages in the Language Education Policy.” (p. 8)

<sup>9</sup> “English and French will be taught as first language, all other languages will be taught as second languages.” (Ministry Policy Site, 2003); moreover, if students attend ESL courses, they do not need to take a second language course.

#### **2.3.4. Integration of heritage language students into the higher education**

As discussed in the previous section, those who have acquired their HLs seem to have no place to develop their linguistic skills further at high school in British Columbia. Lambert (2001) identifies disintegration as a problem and urges us to create continuity in language education. Similarly, Kondo (1998a) criticizes language waivers<sup>10</sup> as simply being given to bilingual students and argues for the need to develop a policy that allows “bilingual students not only to build on their rich linguistic and cultural resources but also to contribute their resources to peer monolingual students” (p. 396).

HLSs’ linguistic abilities would benefit non-HLSs in foreign language classrooms where there is a limited amount of exposure in the target language and culture, and it is a shame not to utilize their abilities. According to Krashen (1982), even after studying a foreign language for four years, it is often the case that students have little ability to speak. Given that it takes many years to attain native-like proficiency and that very few reach that level (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Hadley, 2001; Valdés, 1995), not integrating HLS’s cultural and linguistic skills into our education system results in the failure not only to utilize this potentially rich resource but also to disservice the well-being of HLSs. Therefore, HLSs should be included in FL classrooms so that they can help others and continue to develop their existing linguistic skills acquired at home or at the heritage language schools. However, it may not be easy to conduct such classes since it requires answering the needs of HLSs with varied abilities where the majority of students are non-HLSs who learn the target language as a foreign language.

#### **2.4. A variety of needs and goals of heritage language students**

It is necessary to recognize that HLSs are fundamentally different from foreign language learners (King, 1998; Kondo-Brown, 2001; Syed, 2001; Valdés 1995), and characteristics of

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<sup>10</sup> Language waiver refers to language requirement that is regarded as fulfilled and granted exemption.

HLSs and their needs and goals are different from those of non-HLSs. While the primary goal of learning for non-HLSs is to acquire functional proficiency in a FL, goals of HLSs vary widely such as maintaining or retrieving functional abilities, transferring literacy skills, expanding their bilingual range, or acquiring a prestigious language variety<sup>11</sup> (Valdés, 1995). Moreover, compared with non-HLSs, HL students generally have acquired the target language better in terms of phonology, syntax, and lexicon, in addition to sociolinguistic rules and cultural knowledge (Campbell, 2000). Various scholars (Kondo-Brown, 2001; Kono & McGinnis, 2002; Syed, 2001) mention that HLSs have different motivation and needs. Syed (2001) points out that traditional language courses at the university are principally intended for foreign language students, i.e., non-HLS. The needs of HLSs call for different solutions. For example, HLSs who come to a FL classroom may understand or speak the language already, yet they may not be able to write or do not know the rules for conjugating verbs. Furthermore, the reasons that they choose to study their heritage languages vary: in order to understand their ancestral culture, connect to their ethnic communities, strengthen their ethnic identities, improve their linguistics skills for pursuing careers or simply fulfill the language requirement. However, current FL instructions are geared for non-HLSs and concentrate on the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary building with some emphasis on developing oral competence, which may not be compatible with HLSs' needs and interests. Therefore, we need to determine their needs and interests and to explore how to better teach such mixed classes.

## **2.5. Students' perception about heritage language schools**

While there is little research that has examined FL classrooms with HLSs, there are quite a few studies that focused on HLSs' experiences in HL schools and HL special track courses.

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<sup>11</sup> In the case of Japanese as a heritage language, expanding bilingual range, transferring literacy skills between Japanese and the majority language, and language maintenance apply among the goals identified by Valdés (see O. Douglas, 2002).

How do HLSs perceive their experiences in HL schools? Feuerverger (1991) conducted a study that employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. She examined university students' retrospective views of HL learning experiences in terms of socio-economics, ethno-linguistics, language studies, and ethnic identity components to find out how they affected the maintenance of their ethnic identities. The questionnaire items in language studies included "perception of their relative importance for individual, interest in inter-group contact, anxiety/self-confidence in learning the language, self-related proficiency...attitudes towards language classes, etc." (p. 661). Through interviews, she found that students felt the lack of authenticity and cohesion in the program, commenting that all programs need to be organized and utilize more suitable materials, as well as the necessity for improving quality of language instruction. This earlier study is insightful to understand the history of HLSs' learning their languages; however, it did not give us much "information about the students' current university-level experiences learning their HL or about the levels of proficiency and cultural or personal insights they had achieved" (Duff, in press). Therefore, it is important to explore why HLSs study their HL and how they perceive their learning experiences in university-level foreign language classrooms in order to better understand their needs.

### **2.5.1. Heritage language teachers' experiences and their concerns**

In a more recent study, Feuerverger (1997) explored heritage language teachers'<sup>12</sup> perceptions in terms of their status as teachers and their languages in public schools<sup>13</sup> and documented their challenges. The teachers raised issues such as "lack of formal accreditation of the program" (p.45), scarce materials, multi-level class in regard to age and proficiency, and

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<sup>12</sup> Most of those teachers are immigrants or children of parents, "working in a non-mainstream, 'border' educational program" (p.40).

<sup>13</sup> Two types of HL programs are offered in Ontario: the integrated class within the regular curriculum and the non-integrated class outside the school day, and most of the programs are taught either after school hours or on Saturday mornings.

differences in students' motivation between in and outside school programs. While the teachers are placed in the marginalized position in school due to the lack of professionalism, certification, and integration of the program into the mainstream school, they expressed concerns about the communication gap between children and parents and the necessity of creating an inclusive environment at school (p.45). It appears that the perceived status of the language affects teachers' morale and thus children's motivation. Most of the HL teachers in her study were professional teachers in their own countries and were enthusiastic about educating children; it is discouraging that they did not receive any recognition nor any support from the schools and colleagues who teach mainstream curriculum. Also, they commented on the importance of 'process' not only 'product' (p. 50) and on the need of incorporating a student-centred teaching method. Exploring HLSs' learning experiences in foreign language classrooms enables foreign language teachers to be aware of HLSs' difficulties and needs that are different from those of non-HLSs, which will allow the teachers to modify their current instruction and provide better language learning experiences.

### **2.5.2. Heritage language students' experiences in Saturday and Secondary schools**

Kondo (1998a) conducted case studies of second-generation Japanese American university students on their language learning experiences in high school and heritage language schools. She collected the data through diaries, informal talks, and interviews to reflect on their language contact and use in addition to language learning motivation. Through narratives by focal students, she depicted their unsatisfactory experiences in their childhood and adolescence. They commented that classes were not challenging enough and that students, including themselves, spoke English in class. The focal students also commented that peers' negative attitudes discouraged them. Most importantly, a very crucial observation about high school language classrooms was made by some of her key participants, semi-bilingual students: FL

classrooms were not helpful in transforming “their passive bilingualism to an active one” (p. 391). Students were frustrated by not being able to improve their linguistic abilities to attain their goals.

Chow (2001) is also one of the few researchers who looked at university students’ perceptions about the experiences in heritage language schools. By utilizing a questionnaire, he investigated to what extent Chinese Canadian students were contended with a variety of aspects of their heritage language schools and attempted to locate the factors that influenced their school experience. He found that age and early arrival of immigration were negatively correlated with the satisfaction of HL school experiences; that is, the younger when they immigrated to Canada, the less they were satisfied with their HL school. Also, substantiating earlier findings (Heller, 1982; Koenig, 1980; Lambert, Giles, & Picard, 1975; Lan, 1992; Landry & Allard, 1991 as cited in Chow, 2001), language maintenance is associated with having a positive attitude to multiculturalism and a strong sense of affiliation towards their own ethnic group. Chow (2001) carefully mentioned Xiao’s (1998) observational study that found that the HL schools did not help HLSs to develop “functional proficiency in Chinese” (p.372) and cited his own earlier study that Chinese language schools did not successfully teach literacy skills.

Tse (2001) also reported that her subjects expressed that Saturday school and after-school HL programs utilizing traditional methods such as dictation, grammar worksheets, and reading-aloud did not facilitate their language development.

These findings illustrate the need to explore ways to modify teaching strategies and motivate HLSs. HLSs should be given the opportunity to further develop their linguistic skills that they want to improve, whether it is a literacy skill or academic-level oral skill, when they choose to continue studying their heritage languages at the university level.

## 2.6. Heritage language students' challenges in foreign language classrooms

Although a second/foreign language class is not designed for HLSs, in many cases, HLSs enrol in a regular foreign language class when there is no special track course available. As a result, various problems arise. While HLSs have already acquired intuitive knowledge of syntax, lexicon, and phonological rules to some degrees of their first language, they may not possess an extensive vocabulary and be exposed to the formal register styles. In my class, I have observed that some students are not aware of which register they are using and they mix the formal style with the informal style. Some of them are fluent colloquially but lack literacy skills while others are able to speak but not comfortably. Yet, the presence of HLSs in a FL classroom makes non-HLSs feel intimidated. They feel that HLSs have an advantage over them and that it is unfair to them. Some HLSs may have acquired literacy skills to some extent. That compounds problems when there is no adequate course for the HLSs, as the following student in Romero's (2000) study states:

When in junior high school, I was enrolled in a Spanish course that was absolutely easy! I was bored to death. They were learning "casa" and "perro" when I was reading Latin American Literature. (p. 135)

The above comment suggests that HLSs are not able to improve their proficiency in foreign language courses as their needs are not addressed. Marcos (1999) is concerned that "heritage language students may waste many hours enduring lessons in basic listening skills, syntax, and culture that they do not need (§4). This was demonstrated by Kondo-Brown (2001b). She investigated the relationship between the number of years that HLSs and non-HLSs studied Japanese in high school and their "receptive and written-productive skills" (p. 159). She found that that the level of receptive and written-productive skills of HLSs was not correlated with the length of study, whereas, the level of non-HLSs' receptive and written-productive skills was positively correlated with the number of years that they studied. Kondo-Brown's finding showed

that despite their years of language instruction, HLSs did not improve their fluency level in a foreign language classroom, as instruction was not geared for HLSs and thus not appropriate. Many scholars (Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego, 1993; Valdés, 1995; Valdés & Figueroa, 1994) proposed the need for developing theoretical frameworks for “ways to conceptualize heritage language students’ language abilities and ways to best approach heritage language instruction” (Kondo-Brown, 2001a, p. 154) for mapping HLSs’ linguistic abilities and devising language instruction tailored for HLSs.

### **2.6.1. Emergence of heritage language special track courses**

A growing number of US universities are now offering special-track courses tailored for heritage language students (Campbell, 2000; Kondo-Brown, 2003). Table 1 summarizes some of heritage language courses other than Spanish offered at universities, mentioned in Campbell (2000).

Table 1 Heritage language course(s) offered at various institutions

Heritage language course	Institution
Chinese	Rutger University
	University of California at Berkeley/Los Angeles
Tagalog	University of California at Los Angeles
	University of Hawaii
Korean	Temple University
	University of California at Los Angeles
Persian	University of Maryland
	University of California at Berkeley/Los Angeles



Kondo-Brown (2001a) also reports that since 1977, special track of courses have been offered for HLSs who have high levels of oral proficiency but do not possess literacy skills to study in advanced Japanese courses at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Douglas (2002) also reports that since 1998, the University of California offers a special course for Japanese HLS because most of them cannot pass a placement test to be exempt from the two-year foreign language requirement. Also, although they are not typical classroom courses, there are some self-instructional heritage language courses such as those offered by the Five College Self-Instructional Language Program (Mazzocco, 1996) and Self-Instructional Language Programs at Simon Fraser University (<http://www.sfu.ca/cstudies/lang.htm>, August 14, 2002). University of British Columbia offers many Chinese HL track courses-eight language courses and six literature courses- (D. Li, personal communication, October 1, 2004) and Korean HL track courses (R. King, personal communication, September 8, 2003) that help students to prepare for the fourth-year literature course. However, HL special track courses appear to be mostly offered in the United States.

#### **2.6.2. A heritage language special course tailored for individual needs**

HLSs demonstrate a wide range of proficiencies even within the same generation (Kondo-Brown, 2001a; McGinnis, 1996), and this poses pedagogical challenges since it is difficult to design a course that matches individual HLSs' needs. However, Douglas (2001) implemented a special course, using computer technology, attempting to meet HLSs' individual needs. She gave a variety of assignments through which HLSs learned how to use different strategies appropriately, in particular, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. For example, she assigned them to search for their own reading materials using the Internet; she had them plan when, how much, how long, and how to study and had them keep record of their progress. By administering a kanji diagnosis test and a test for strategies of using kanji, she made students

aware of their strengths and weaknesses. When they read the materials, HLSs made a glossary and filled out a checklist asking them which strategies they use from a list of strategies in order to learn kanji. While noting that the duration of the study was short, only ten weeks, Douglas (2001) reported that HLSs could enhance their reading skills, the knowledge of kanji/*kango*, and vocabulary by using strategies. While Douglas implemented a successful course for HLSs, there are remaining challenges even in courses specifically targeted for HLSs.

### **2.6.3. Remaining challenges in heritage language track courses**

Valdés (1995) cites an example where the department of Chinese at “an elite institution” offers Chinese to bilingual students. She points out that the department focuses on literature study and that the curriculum is designed to quickly move on to written language; as a result, little effort is made to “developing the strength of Chinese American bilinguals who want to retrieve their Chinese to use it professionally in both their communities and in international business” (p. 300). In another case, students are required to complete the same amount of course material at a much faster pace than non-HL students. Also, Scalera (2000) raises an issue that tends to be overlooked. She pointed out that although there are textbooks for teaching Chinese as a HL, they follow pedagogical practices that are employed in China. She also revealed that those US born or educated in America who attended HL schools found classes boring or difficult.

Feuerverger (1997) reported similar findings: “those teachers who adhered rigidly to a content-driven curriculum that was in many cases out-moded, suited to the home country rather than to the Canadian setting, found great difficulties...” (p. 45). The above examples illustrate challenges even in HL classrooms and urge educators to take into account students’ interests, needs, and goals. The mere existence of a heritage language program is not enough to motivate them to build their “functional reading and writing skills” (Feuerverger, 1991, p. 674). Even

those who are fortunate enough to enrol in a HL special course face difficulties, and it makes us wonder how we can accommodate students' various needs and goals.

#### **2.6.4. The benefits of maintaining and improving heritage languages**

Benefits for maintaining/developing heritage languages such as cognitive and academic development (Cummins, 1992, 1993; Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Danesi, 1991), higher self-esteem (Cho, 2000), and various other advantages such as learning an additional language (Baker and Jones, 1998; Swain et al., 1988; Swain & Lapkin, 1991) have been mentioned in the literature and widely acknowledged. Advantages of heritage language programs include: "positive self-concept and pride in one's background; better integration of child into school and society, more tolerance of other people and different cultures; increased cognitive, social and emotional development, ease in learning new languages, increased probabilities of employment; fostering stronger relationships between home and school; responding to the needs and wishes of community" (p.516). In addition, as the attrition/loss of the first language affects communication among the family negatively (Cho, 2000; Cho & Krashen, 1998; Hinton, 1999; Wong-Fillmore, 1991), maintaining the HL is expected to be beneficial for children to have better intergenerational communication and relationships as parents can "easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences" (Wong-Fillmore, p.343).

Furthermore, a recent study (Cho, 2000) found that a high level of one's linguistic competence, not only retaining one's HL, is a strong indicator for a positive self-image. Reflecting on students' voices through in-depth interviews, Cho (2000) convinces us that competence in one's HL has an effect on social interactions, relationships with other HL speakers of their ethnic minority group and the individual HLSs themselves. She reassures us that developing one's HL, in addition to English, has a number of cultural advantages as well as

personal and societal benefits. The finding raises an important question: how can we, as language instructors, help HLSs reach their potential in regards to linguistic skills even in a limited environment such as a FL classroom?

#### **2.6.5. Student-centred classroom and motivation**

“Instruction for heritage language learners must be connected to the students” (Draper & Hicks, 2000, p.27). If students’ voices were reflected in a curriculum, students would feel more motivated; therefore, it is important that teachers grasp their needs, interests, and goals. Motivation is known as one of the most important factors to influence language learning (Dörnyei, 1994; Gardner & Tremblay, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994 as cited in Scarela, 2000). Motivation is not something static; it can change in different contexts. Students can be discouraged by their peers’ negative attitudes, lack of support from teachers or dissatisfaction with contents or methodologies that teachers employ in a HL or a FL classroom. HLSs can be motivated to study more with appropriate materials that reflect their interests as well as with instructors’ understanding of their difficulties and needs, which will enable them to improve their language skills and reach their goals.

#### **2.6.6. Creating an affective classroom**

It is likely to be difficult to teach a class with HL students with varied abilities and non-HLSs than a more homogeneous classroom with only either non-HLSs or HLSs. However, rather than separating the two groups, it is beneficial to consider how students with varied abilities could learn from each other.

One way to cope with a multi-level classroom composing of HLSs with different proficiencies is employing collaborative and cooperative learning activities. According to Oxford (1997), cooperative learning is a set of pedagogical techniques that promote learners

interdependence in order to gain cognitive and social skills, whereas collaborative learning is grounded in the ‘social constructivist’ view that knowledge building takes place in a social context where learners participate in activities in “a learning community” (Oxford, 1997, p.443). While cooperative learning is associated with “more structured pedagogical and sociologically based techniques” by which teachers help learners to cooperate with each other, collaborative communication learning is associated with the idea that learning is an acculturation process where a learner engages in social practice and gains new knowledge.

Employing these two types of activities is recommended in HL classrooms (Duran, 1994; Rodriguez Pino, 1997; BC Heritage Language Association, Teacher Center, 2002). For example, the BC Heritage Language Association website (2002) recommends cooperative learning activities such as general discussion of a topic, generating group responses to questions, group presentation, etc. For collaborative activities, Matsunaga (2003) suggests a group report on an oral interview, or written survey conducted by a group followed by a presentation about the survey.

Although these activities are suggested for HL classrooms, students in a FL class, too, perceive the value of cooperative learning activities (Tse, 2000). Using HLSs as a resource is not only beneficial for fellow classmates but also give HLSs confidence and helps them to have a positive attitude towards HL learning. Moreover, peer collaboration may help build a non-threatening learning environment and strengthen their identity by helping their non-HL counterpart. The document published by the Russian Standard (National Standards, 1999 as cited in Draper et al., 2000) points out that HLSs and non-HLSs can come to work together on cultural topics, though their needs may differ in terms of grammar and lexicon. To keep this in mind, in order to find out how we can create an affective learning environment as well as how HLSs and non-HLSs can collaborate with each other, it is important to reflect voices from everyone, including teachers, HLSs, and non-HLSs involved in a FL classroom.

### **2.6.6.1. Cooperative and collaborative learning**

Oxford (1997) mentioned two types of important communication taking place in a foreign language or second language classroom: cooperative communication and collaborative communication. According to Oxford (1997), cooperative learning is a set of pedagogical techniques that promote learners interdependence in order to gain cognitive and social skills, whereas collaborative learning is grounded in the ‘social constructivist’ view that knowledge building takes place in a social context where learners participate in activities in “a learning community” (Oxford, 1997, p.443). While cooperative learning is associated with “more structured pedagogical and sociologically based techniques” by which teachers help learners to cooperate with each other, collaborative communication learning is associated with the idea that learning is an acculturation process where a learner engages in social practice and gains new knowledge.

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## **2.7. Exploring heritage language students’ experiences in foreign language classrooms**

The most fundamentally important question is “how best to encourage and provide effective and efficient language learning” (The UCLA Steering Committee, 2000, p.4). Now researchers have provided strong evidence to support the notion that language maintenance is beneficial for an individual, his/her family, and society as a whole. Society has been long relying on families and ethnic communities for HL education. What previous research seems to be

missing is to find out how to enhance HL development at the higher-level education and help them to maximize their knowledge, which is an important part of who they are.

There is a great wealth of research on bilingual/transitional education, identity and motivation, and the relationship between language maintenance and the role of family, community, and religious activities; however, “there is little mention in the literature of situations where there are both heritage and traditional foreign language students in the same class” (Draper & Hicks, 2000, p.27; Valdés, 1995). Lambert (2000) points out that there is little concern on articulating problems of HLSs in a FL class at secondary or post-secondary institutions. Indeed, there are very few studies that explored the experiences of HLSs at the university level and their teachers. In order to better serve this increasing number of students, we need to explore these issues in depth and reflect HLSs’ voices as well as those of their teachers and their fellow classmates. Therefore, I would like to argue for the need to explore how students perceive such experiences in a FL classroom and what they seek in class to attain their goals and fulfill their needs.

### **Chapter 3: Methods of Inquiry**

The main goal of the research was to explore HLSs' experiences learning their HL through the perspectives of HLSs, non-HLSs and instructors who are all involved and together create a classroom culture: "social reality is the product of meaningful social interaction as perceived from the perspectives of those involved..." (Burns, 2000, p. 388). Therefore, methodologies employed in this study were selected to fulfill the purposes of reflecting HLSs' voices and of understanding of HLSs' experiences as they are intertwined with interactions in a FL classroom. HLSs' perceptions, beliefs, actions, and goals were considered in relation to those of instructors and non-HLSs.

#### **3.1. Qualitative approach**

According to Kerlin (1999), "[q]ualitative research is a process we can use to deepen our understanding of complex social and human factors in ways that cannot be understood with numbers" (<http://kerlins.net/bobbi/research/myresearch/chifoo/>). I view experiences of human beings as being embedded in socially constructed contexts and as best understood through their behaviours, which reflect their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions: "since humans are conscious of their own behaviour, the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their informants are vital....The qualitative researcher is not concerned with objective truth, but rather with the truth as the informant perceives it" (Burns, 2000, p.388). The goal of qualitative research is to "[understand] experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it" (Sherman & Web, 1988, p.7). Therefore, this research employed a qualitative approach since I wanted those who were involved in my study "to speak for themselves" (Sherman & Web, 1998, p.5) and "to provide their perspectives in words and other actions" (Ely, 1991, p.4). In the present study, a case study was conducted, using interviews and observations. Although the qualitative approach



was the primary inquiry method, a quantitative approach was also employed to grasp the general perceptions of those who participated in classroom activities through the use of questionnaires.

### **3.1.1. Subjectivity**

Since researchers themselves are a part of the method of inquiry in qualitative research, there is a possibility that the subjectivity may influence the research process. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note that data analysis does not just rise from the data but can be influenced by the views that the researcher has as “it is social values and ways of making sense of the world that can influence which processes, activities, events, and perspectives researchers consider important to code” (p.172). I strived to present “subjects’ ways of thinking about people and objects” (Bogdan & Biklen, p.169) as they behaved and spoke, trying not to be influenced by my own experiences and views. However, my sociocultural backgrounds as a Japanese language teacher, an immigrant to Canada from Japan, mother who sends her child to a HL school may have influenced what my participating students and instructors said and how they acted in class and during the interviews as well as my data analysis. However, I view this as my strength. The research questions arose from my own experience in which I first questioned the presence of seemingly proficient/fluent HL students in my own class, and in order to pursue my questions from the etic perspective, my previous experiences helped me to better understand the participants and contexts where the interactions of instructors, HLSs, and non-HLSs were embedded. While self-monitoring is limited and may be a problem, it can be a resource (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) put it: “[m]y subjectivity is the basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person and as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as researcher” (p.104).

### **3.1.2. Research site and courses**

This study was conducted in Japanese-as-a-foreign-language classrooms at a university in Western Canada. The Japanese language program at this university is the largest in Canada and offers a Japanese major and minor program. It offers a number of Japanese-as-a-foreign language courses, ranging from 100-level (1<sup>st</sup> year) to 400-level (4<sup>th</sup> year), as well as Modern Japanese and Classic literature courses in the upper levels. The program is unique in demographic composition in that the majority of the students have Chinese background. In the 2003-2004 academic year, 60 to 70 percent of students were of Chinese origin. The research objective was to identify and explore the challenges and needs of the HLSs with prior knowledge of their HL in a traditional FL classroom; consequently, purposive sampling was employed where “people or locations are intentionally sought because they meet some criterion for inclusion in the study” (Palys, 1997, p.137).

For this study, I selected courses at the 300- and 400- level (two composition and conversation classes and two reading and writing classes). Courses at the 100-level were excluded since they are designed for those who have little or no prior knowledge of language. Courses at the 200 level were also excluded since there are usually very few HLSs enrolled in those courses. The reason that I chose these levels was that HLSs who are in 300/400 level courses have to relearn Japanese that they have already acquired as their first language as if it were a foreign language, and it was expected that HLSs would have some difficulties. In addition, the content of those higher-level courses is more difficult for both HLSs and non-HLSs, compared to the 200 level courses, which cover only basic grammar structures to build a foundation of the language. Since these courses (300 and 400) are also challenging for instructors to teach because the texts are authentic and difficult for students who are not accustomed to read such difficult materials, one of my interests was to know how the instructors dealt with HLSs in FL classrooms.

Among the 300/400 level courses I chose to study, two were selected for the questionnaire survey, classroom observations, and interviews: Japanese 418<sup>14</sup> (a reading course) and Japanese 430 (an advanced oral communication course). The reason for choosing two types of courses was to find out what HLSs find difficult in the courses and which skills they feel that they need to improve to attain their goals. It is generally considered that HLSs have weaker literacy skills than oral ones (Matsunaga, 2003) and need to develop them. However, it has not been demonstrated if such perception coincides with HLSs' needs and goals or why it is the case, which in turn helps the language educators to better understand and to help them to develop on their existing skills.

The other two courses, 310 (a reading & writing course) and 312 (a conversation & composition course), were selected only to administer the questionnaires and interviews since there was only one HLS in 312. Although I decided initially only to administer the questionnaires in 310, I decided to observe this course in the middle of the semester after the instructor commented that HLSs in general appeared to find this level difficult. In 310, students have to engage in more precise structural analysis to translate and understand reading materials. Unlike in the upper reading course (418), students in 310 have to engage in literal translation that emphasizes grammar structures in detail.

### **3.2. The summary of the participants**

The participants consisted of three groups: heritage language students of Japanese, non-heritage language students, and instructors, who all constituted the classrooms where learning took place through the interactions.

Eight instructors, including those who were teaching the above four courses, filled out the questionnaires and were interviewed. Table 2 is the summary of student participants. There were

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<sup>14</sup> All the course numbers are pseudonyms.

60 students who participated in the study. Among these students, 16 HLSs and 44 non-HLSs participated in the survey; 17 HLSs and 44 non-HLSs in the three courses participated in the observations; and 14 HLSs and 9 non-HLSs participated in the interviews. Student participants were enrolled in one or two of the four courses: 310, 312, 418, and 430. It is often the case that students take both a reading/writing course and a conversation course at the same level simultaneously. In the upper level courses such as 310, 312, 418, and 430, some HLSs and non-HLSs took both reading/writing and conversation classes. For example, in 430, two of the five HLSs took both reading/writing and conversation classes. For example, in 430, two of the five HLSs were also taking 418. Students taking both courses only participated in the study once. They answered the questionnaires once and participated in the interviews as students of one of the courses. Therefore, even if there were only three of the five HLSs who took part in the study in 430, the other two HLSs actually did participate in the study as students in 418.

Table 2 Number of participants by data collection method

Course	Questionnaires		Observations		Interviews	
	HL	Non-HL	HL	Non-HL	HL	Non-HL
310 (R&W)	6	7	6	0	4	1
312 (C&C)	1	6	0	0	1	0
418 (R)	6	23	6	27	6	5
430 (C)	3	8	5	24	3	3
Total	16	44	17	47	14	9

*Note: R & W = Reading and Writing; C & C = Composition and Conversation; C = Conversation; R = Modern essay reading*

Table 3 below indicates the percentage of students in each class who participated in the questionnaires.

Table 3 Percentage of participation by courses and type of students

Course	Total number of students	The number of HL students	The percentage of HLSs' participation	The number of non-HL students	The percentage of non-HLSs' participation
310 (R&W)	23	6	83%	17	41%
312 (C & C)	18	1	100%	17	35%
418 (R)	33	6	100%	27	85%
430 (C)	29	5	60%	24	33%

*Note: R & W = Reading and Writing; C & C = Composition and Conversation; C = Conversation; R = Modern essay reading*

### 3.3. Background information for heritage language students

I would like to introduce the profiles of the 14 HLSs whom I interviewed, which is important for understanding their needs, difficulties, and challenges in relation to their career aspirations. Table 4 includes their school years, the course(s) that they were taking during the study, the reason why they were taking the course(s), and future goals. All the participants' names and course numbers have been changed to pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

### 3.3.1. Individual profiles of the heritage language students

Table 4 Heritage language students' background information

Participants	Year	Course number(s)	Reasons for taking the present course	Future goals
Sumiyo	4	418	To improve her overall proficiency Double majoring in Japanese and Asian Studies	May want to teach Japanese Has been wanting to become a nurse
Alison	1	310	Being able to read better To learn grammar and kanji	N/A
John	Graduate student	310	To strengthen his identity as Japanese-Chinese American To improve accuracy To be able to speak like a native Japanese person	To be able to utilize Japanese at work
Yuichi	4	418 430	To fulfill the literature requirement	Wants to work in Japan
Yuki	4	430	To strengthen her identity as Japanese Canadian Wants to be able to speak fluently	Wants to be a Mathematics teacher
Ken	2	418	Started to forget reading & writing Wants to retain his existing skills	Wants to use Japanese in his work
Yuko	4	430	Majoring in Japanese Realized that her Japanese is too casual when she went to Japan.	Wants to teach Japanese at the university level
Akira	3	310	Majoring in Japanese to increase a career opportunities in Japan	Wants to have his own business in Japan
Jane	1	312	Majoring in Japanese Wants to go to B.Ed. program	Wants to be a high school teacher
Takuya	4	418 430	Wants to go to the B.Ed. program next year Major in Japanese	Wants to be a teacher
Tomoko	1	418	Wants to continue studying to retain existing skills and improve them to the level of a native speaker	N/A
Miki	3	310	Double majoring in Japanese and Political Science	Wants to pursue a career in International Relations
Steve	4	430	Majoring in Family Science and minoring in Japanese	Wants to use Japanese for his work in the future
Karen	4	418	Wants to practice reading more	Wants to be a dentist

### 3.3.2. First/Mother language

Table 5 shows which language HLSs perceived as their mother tongue in oral and written skills. Fewer students claimed Japanese as their mother tongue/first language than they did English, even though Japanese was the first acquired language. They indicated the English-speaking environment as the reason for this. Eight of the sixteen students regarded English as their mother tongue in oral skills, and twelve, in written skills. In comparison, there were only six students who answered Japanese as their mother tongue in oral skills and four, in written skills. The students who answered Japanese as mother tongue told me that it was the language their parents spoke to them first, but they added that it is not necessarily their dominant language. There were two students who considered both English and Japanese as mother tongue in oral skills. However, when it came to literacy skills, there was no one who considered both Japanese and English as mother tongue. One student sent me an e-mail asking me to change her mother tongue from Japanese to English because, although Japanese was the first language that she had ever heard, she was surrounded by English speaking people, i.e., her godparents, and was always told to speak in Japanese by her father.

Table 5 Heritage language students' mother/first language

	Oral		Written	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
English	8	50.0	12	75
Japanese	6	37.5	4	25
Both of E & J	2	12.5	0	0
Total	16	100.0	16	100

*Note: E refers to English; J refers to Japanese.*

### 3.3.3. Heritage language school experiences and language contact

The average length of attendance at HL schools was 4.3 years although three students have never attended HL school. Those three students spent their early childhood in Japan; however, the majority were second or third generation Japanese Canadians and have been

exclusively instructed in the societal language, English. The questionnaire item regarding language contact asked with whom HLSs speak or spoke in Japanese. Table 6 summarizes HLSs' language contact. The data revealed that they speak/spoke Japanese with multiple interlocutors,<sup>15</sup> i.e., parents and siblings, parents and Japanese friends, etc. On the other hand, there were three students who do/did not speak Japanese outside the classroom. However, the interview data showed that although they speak/spoke Japanese with parents, siblings, and/or Japanese friends, they mixed Japanese with English. According to the students who answered that they speak Japanese with their parents, even when their parents speak to them in Japanese, they sometimes answer to their parents in English.<sup>16</sup> They only speak Japanese when the message is very simple. This suggests that although HLSs have more opportunities to listen to and speak in Japanese than non-HLSs do, they do not necessarily use Japanese all the time. In general, their range of language use is limited to their immediate contexts, i.e., at home or in the community where they only have to speak in the vernacular.

Table 6 Heritage language students' language contact

With whom	Frequency	Percentage
Nobody	3	18.8
Parents	2	12.5
Grandparents	1	6.3
Japanese Friends	2	12.5
More than two of the above	6	37.5
All of the above contacts	2	12.5
Total	16	100.0

*Note: All of the above contacts include parents, grandparents, siblings, Japanese Canadian and Japanese friends. Nobody answered that they only talked with Japanese Canadian friends or siblings in Japanese; thus, there are no categories for those. More than two of the above may include Japanese Canadian friend and siblings.*

<sup>15</sup> The frequency of contacts was not investigated.

<sup>16</sup> HLSs said that when the topic was complex, it was easier to answer them in English than in Japanese.



### **3.4. Data collection procedures**

I collected the data during the 2003 fall term. For the data collection, triangulation was employed “to improve the internal validity” (Burns, p. 419, 2000). Convergence of two or three pieces of data (questionnaires, interviews, and observations) allows the researcher to examine if the findings yielded by different methods are consistent and if different data sources within the same method are consistent. Furthermore, the area that one method does not address in depth can be complemented by another method. Therefore, three different methods were utilized, and the data were obtained from three different groups of participants, HLSs, non-HLSs, and instructors (seven of eight participating instructors were native speakers of Japanese from Japan).

#### **3.4.1. Data collection from participating instructors**

Prior to the fall semester I contacted all the eleven instructors who have taught Japanese courses with HLSs at the 200 level and up and who were also scheduled to teach this year. During the second week, I asked the instructors who responded to my e-mail whether or not they had HLSs in their classes. For interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations, I selected the two teachers who were teaching 300 and 400 level courses with HLSs during the 2003 winter session and got their permission to observe their classes. The two instructors were given the questionnaires and consent forms before I visited their classrooms to distribute to their students. Also, I handed the questionnaires and consent forms (see Appendix 4) to the other instructors and then made arrangements for the interviews.

### **3.4.2. Data collection procedure from participating students**

After explaining the purpose of the study, I distributed the questionnaires to the students of four courses: 310, 312, 418, and 430 and collected them the following week. I also handed the consent forms (see Appendix 4) to all the students in 418 and 430 and all the HLSs in 310 and 312. These were returned to me during the following weeks.

As for observations, I focused on one reading (418) and one conversation class (430), each of which had more than five HLSs, to examine whether there were any differences in literacy skills and oral skills between HLSs and non-HLSs. The additional classroom observation in 310 was only limited to HLSs since the consent forms were only given to HLSs. For interviews, I interviewed HLSs and non-HLSs from the above courses who agreed to participate in the interviews.

In 310, I took notes whenever HLSs appeared to have difficulty, for example, being unable to answer the instructors' questions, read passages, etc. The fourth-year conversation class, 430, basically had two formats: a lecture led by the instructor and the teacher's assistant or a class divided into smaller discussion groups, which did not allow me to see their interactions as a whole class. Therefore, I took notes while walking around the class observing small discussion groups in which HLSs were present. In 418, I observed nine classes during the term, and recorded the interactions among the instructors, HLSs, and non-HLSs in class, following the chart that I had created (see Appendix 3).

### **3.4.3. Questionnaires**

The purpose of the questionnaires was to find out: 1) how non-HL Ss and instructors perceive the fact that there are some HLSs studying their HL in a foreign language classroom; 2) how comfortable HLSs feel about studying their HL in a foreign language classroom; 3) to what degree HLSs, non-HLSs, and instructors think that HLSs have advantages over non-HLSs; 4)

from the perspective of HLSs, non-HLSs, and instructors, what strong language skills HLSs possess generally; 5) to what degree HLSs, non-HLSs, and instructors think that HLSs and non-HLSs can help each other in the same language course.

Three different questionnaires (one for HLSs, one for non-HLSs, and one for instructors) were designed. While some questions are common to the three questionnaires to compare the perceptions of HLSs with those of non-HLSs and instructors, other questions are only asked to HLSs. Although the questionnaire could not yield in-depth information, it allowed me to find out about the perceptions of a larger number of people than interviews would allow (see questionnaires in Appendix 1).

#### **3.4.4. Interviews**

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the following in depth: 1) how HLSs perceive their learning experiences in a FL classroom; 2) how non-HLSs perceive the presence of HLSs in a foreign language classroom; 3) how instructors perceive HLSs' strengths and weaknesses; 4) what the challenges of instructors are in order to integrate HLSs who bring different strengths in a FL classroom; and 5) how HLSs and non-HLSs think HLSs can contribute to a foreign language classroom (see interview questions in Appendix 2). The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit answers to the research questions. Unlike structured interviews, participants can answer in their own words, and the conversation is interactive.

Interviews were conducted in quiet classrooms with the student participants and in offices with the instructors. In either case, there were only the interviewee and the researcher in the room. I took some notes while audio-recording the interviews in the event of poor recording quality. Four instructors and one of the students did not wish their interviews to be audio-taped; in such cases, I took extensive notes and wrote up the interviews immediately. The student who did not wish his interview to be audio-taped typed his answers to the prepared questions and

handed them to me before the interview. Some students sent the researcher e-mails to add more thoughts and reflections after their interviews. In addition to the correspondence, the researcher had informal conversation with HLSs that occurred in a variety of sites on campus. They were typed immediately and included as additional data. McMillan & Schumacher (2001) noted, “[i]nterviewing may be in the form of casual conversations after an event with others, or a more formal interview with one person” (p. 437).

### **3.4.5. Observations**

The purpose of classroom observation was to examine: 1) whether the perception of HLSs is reflected in their classroom behaviour (i.e., whether what they perceive as their strong skills are in fact strong, and whether they remain quiet in a classroom so as not to threaten non-HLSs nor to take away their learning opportunities); 2) whether HLSs have advantages over non-HLSs (i.e., how often HLSs are able to answer instructors’ questions in class compared to non-HLSs and whether HLSs are actually able to answer the questions using the target structure that they are expected to use); 3) whether HLSs do code-switching from Japanese to English and mix register styles (i.e., from the formal to informal style and vice versa; 4) what challenges HLSs and their instructors have in a foreign language classroom. I observed classes only where the instructors and students consented to classroom observation. (Although I took observation notes as the consent form indicated, I did not audio-record classrooms since I did not wish instructors and students to think that I was evaluating their teaching or performance in class.) While observing the classes, I filled in the chart (see Appendix 3) and took memos.

I sat alone in the classrooms as an observer; however, I was often asked by the instructors about cultural and linguistic questions and my opinions and participated in group discussions. In 430, in particular, I was asked to be a judge for a speech contest held in class. Palys (1997) says that a participant observer can integrate into the group naturally and quickly. By participating in

class activities, I could become familiar to the students, which made interviews easier. It also allowed me to have both etic and emic views, and “mixing the participant and observer roles surmounts the problems of each role in isolation” (p. 202). As I built a rapport with students, some students, both HLSs and non-HLSs, came to me to ask a variety of questions regarding the language and culture as well as about careers that utilize Japanese.

### **3.5. Summary of data collection methods and research questions**

Each research question was answered by the data obtained from more than one of the following data collection methods (i.e., interviews, observation, and questionnaires) and from more than one of the following sources (i.e., HLSs, non-HLSs, and instructors). In Table 7, HL refers to heritage language students, NHL, non-heritage language students, and INST, instructors. Table 7 summarizes how different data collection methods are designed to respond to research questions. For example, data derived from the HLS Questionnaire part B, question 9, 10, 11, and 12 (see Appendix 1 to see the questions) are designed to show how HLSs perceive their various linguistic abilities; the Instructor Questionnaire part B, 11, 12, 13, and 14 are designed to show what instructors think of HLSs’ linguistic abilities. Data derived from HLS interview questions Q 5.2, 6.2, and 6.3 (see Appendix 2) are designed to answer what ability HLSs feel that they need to improve; Q 6.2. answers what ability instructors think that HLSs should improve. Data sources are HLSs, non-HLSs, and instructors.

**Table 7** Data collection methods corresponding to research questions

	Questionnaire			Observation	Interviews		
Question 1: (a) What are the areas of greatest need of HL students?							
SP (speaking) LC (listening comprehension) RE (reading) W (writing)	HL B.9 (LC) * 10 (S) 11 (R) 12 (W)	INST B11 (LC) 12 (S) 13 (R) 14 (W)	Take notes according to the chart. (See Appendix 3.)		HL Q5.2 6.2 6.3	INST Q6.2	
Question 1 (b): What material interests them?							
	HL N/A	INST N/A	Take general notes.		HL Q8.2.3	INST Q7	
Question 2: What kinds of strength do instructors think that students bring to classroom?							
Adv (advantage) SP (speaking) LC (listening comprehension) RE (reading) W (writing)	HL B4(Adv) 5(SP) 6(LC) 7(RE) 8 (W)	INST 6(Adv) 7(SP) 8(LC) 9(RE) 10(W)	N-HL 3(Adv) 4(SP) 5(LC) 6(RE) 7(W)	N/A	HL Q5	INST Q6	
2(a) How is it possible to improve their strengths?							
	N/A		N/A		HL Q8.2.2	INST Q6.3	
2(b) How is it possible to improve their weak skills?							
	N/A		N/A		HL Q8.2.2	INST Q6.3	
2(c) What are the challenges of the instructors?							
	N/A		N/A		INST Q 7 &12		
2(d) What are the challenges of HL students?							
	Comfort level			Take notes.	Comfort Level		
	HL B1, 2 & 3	INST B1	N-HL B1		HL Q9	INST Q5	N-HL Q1
	Academic level				Academic Level		
	HL Q9(LC) 10(SP) 11(RE) 12 (W)	INST N/A	N-HL N/A		HL Q6 Q6.2 Q6.3	INST Q4	N-HL Q3
Question 3 In what ways can HL students contribute to FL classrooms? (HLSs/non-HLSs, and instructors' perspectives)							
	N/A		Take notes.		HL Q9.1 Q10	INST Q8.2 Q8.3	N-HL Q5 Q4

*Note \*: The number indicates the order of questions in the questionnaire sheet or interview sheet, and Q stands for question. For example, B9 indicates that the question is in the section B and 9<sup>th</sup> question in the questionnaire.*

### **3.6. Data analysis**

The following section explains in what ways and for what purposes data obtained through the questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews were analyzed. The purpose of the data analysis was threefold; the questionnaires were to find out how instructors and both HLSs and non-HLSs perceive HLSs' language learning; classroom observations were to see whether or not those perceptions are reflected in the participants' behaviour; and the interviews were to explore in more depth the feelings, views, and beliefs of the participants.

#### **3.6.1. Analysis for the questionnaires**

The questionnaires were divided into two parts: background information and perceptions of participants with respect to a range of issues on HLSs' learning. I coded responses to each question and entered the coded data into an Excel spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics were calculated using an SPSS program (SPSS Windows Version 11.0).

#### **3.6.2. Analysis for the observations**

I created a chart (see Appendix 3) to examine classroom interactions of the instructors, HLSs and non-HLSs. The chart allowed me to record the number of questions asked by the instructors to HLSs and non-HLSs and the number of questions that students could answer as well as the number of students' voluntary production, i.e., any kind of utterances such as asking questions, stating opinions, etc. The instructors' questions were categorized into: cultural questions, linguistic questions, asking a student to read a text, or asking a student to translate into English. Cultural questions refer to questions about Japanese culture and customs. Linguistic questions refer to questions regarding structures; for example, what is the predicate of this sentence and which clause is the relative clause?

In 418, I observed nine classes during the term, and following the chart that I had created, I recorded the interactions among the instructors, HLSs, and non-HLSs in those classes. Four out of nine classes the instructor employed the same teaching procedure except one class that used a discussion. The four classes engaged in structural analysis looking at sentences at the word level followed by translation – first literal translation and then free translation. In the other four classes, students had quizzes, wrote translations, brainstormed, and learned about the background information connected with new topics. While four classes involved typical activities (structural analysis and translation) and thus interactions occurring in reading class, the other four classes did not involve interactions. Therefore, I summarized and analyzed the four classes that had the same activities and interactions in class, namely, structural analyses and translation. Those observations were presented in the discussion of relevant research questions.

### **3.6.3. Analysis for the interviews**

All the interview tapes were transcribed. While all the utterances of the interviewees were transcribed, my questions were not transcribed since a list of questions was already prepared. However, my spontaneous questions that were not part of the prepared questions were transcribed.

The open-ended interview questions, along with emerging themes, have guided the analysis of the transcribed interview data. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), I first summarized the data under each question and then did “pattern coding, explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (p.69). “Pattern coding is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs” (Miles & Huberman, p.69). Then all the answers under each question were further coded by the patterns that emerged from those data. After coding the data, I looked for “recurring phrases or common threads in informants’ accounts or, alternatively, for internal difference”



(Miles & Huberman, p.70). Then the data were re-read and re-analyzed, and categories for coding were re-examined and revised/subcategorized where necessary. Table 8 is an example showing how data were coded and analyzed.

Table 8 Example of interview data analysis

What language skills do you think that you need to improve the most and why?		
Reading	Improve reading ability	If I cannot read newspaper, I cannot work in Japan. I can only get the gist of the text but want to be able to understand completely
	Knowledge of Kanji	I cannot read kanji. Kanji is most difficult Usually kanjis are difficult (when reading newspaper) The amount of kanji is too high
	Maintaining the ability	I want to maintain my reading and writing
Speaking	Clarity	I want to be able to speak clearly as well as I can do in English
	Fluency	I want to be able to speak fluently
	Formal register	Keigo
	Vocabulary	More vocabulary
Writing	Improve writing skills	I want my Japanese to be good enough at the professional level, i.e., writing letters. I believe I will really have to sharpen my writing ability because I am going to open business in Japan, I will need to be able to write Japanese fluently. Writing, because that's going to be huge for me if I teach any Japanese. When I show my writing to my parents, they often say that they do not say things like this in Japanese I think I have to improve writing the most because my level right now is not proficient enough to work in Japan, or something like that.
	Vocabulary	I have very small vocabulary and can only write the elementary school level.
	Kanji	But in this class, there is not much writing. I cannot remember kanji. I guess a lot of kanji study is quite important for me, especially the vocabulary is the most difficult I think.
Grammar	Clear understanding of grammar	Perfect use of joshi and grammar! Also my grammar isn't that well. Sometimes I realize that my grammar is strange but don't know how to correct them. I need to really brush up on grammar.
	Particles (joshi)	My particle, because I think that speaking and writing are a little bit difficult. Grammar notes are nice to have; I actually don't follow "joshi."

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

In the present study, both quantitative and qualitative methods are utilized to answer the research questions. In this chapter, the data obtained by interviews, the questionnaires, and classroom observation will be presented, to answer the questions of this thesis in the following order: 1) HLSs' areas of greatest needs, 2) HLSs' advantages and strengths, 3) the challenges faced by instructors and HLSs in FL classrooms, and 4) HLSs as a potential classroom resource.

### **4.1. What are the areas of greatest need for heritage language students?**

#### **4.1.1. The questionnaire results**

In the questionnaires, I asked HLSs and instructors if they thought that HLSs needed to improve each of the four skills. Both groups of participants were asked to rate on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) whether they needed to improve a certain skill. Table 9 shows means and standard deviations for each item, calculated by the aggregated data. According to the aggregated data, HLSs felt that they need to improve their writing skill most, reading second, speaking third, and listening and comprehension the least. HLSs themselves felt more strongly that they need to improve their reading and writing skills than instructors did. Five out of the eight<sup>17</sup> instructors who participated were teaching only 100- or 200- level courses while all the HLSs who participated in the survey were enrolled in 300-and 400-level courses. Those junior level instructors may have compared HLSs and non-HLSs who were enrolled in lower-level courses and perceived the need for improving a specific skill less strongly. However, despite differences in degree, both parties felt that HLSs need to improve their literacy skills, i.e., reading and writing skills.

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<sup>17</sup> Only three instructors were teaching upper-level courses.

Table 9 To what degree do HLSs need to improve the skill?

Skills to be improved	Mean		Std. Deviation	
	Inst	HL	Inst	HL
Listening & Comprehension	2.00	2.50	0.535	1.211
Speaking	2.38	3.19	0.744	1.109
Reading	3.50	3.88	1.069	0.806
Writing	3.25	4.31	1.035	0.873

*Note 1: HL students (n=16) and Instructors (n=8)*

*Note 2: Inst refers to instructors; HL refers to HL students.*

#### 4.1.2. The interview results

##### 4.1.2.1. Heritage language students' perception on their own needs

Ten out of 14 HLSs who participated in the interviews ranked their listening skill as their most proficient; they attributed this to their exposure to the language. Their next highest ranked skill was speaking; however, only five of 14 chose to speak in Japanese during the interviews, with sporadic English sentences or English words when they had difficulties expressing their ideas or remembering the correct word, while the rest of the participants preferred to be interviewed in English. Twelve participants answered that they speak Japanese only with family members and friends, whereas only two mentioned that they also speak Japanese at work. They acknowledged their advantage in having the opportunity to use Japanese although they do not always talk with their parents or siblings in Japanese. Also, all of them reported that they began to actively try speaking more Japanese at home or with their friends after having started to take Japanese at the university.

Ten out of 14 students ranked reading abilities as their third most proficient skill, and 12 students ranked writing abilities as their fourth or least proficient skill. The majority of the participants reported that they do not read nor write outside the classroom. Only two students answered that they have read Japanese short novels outside their classes, and two others commented that they sometimes read celebrity magazines or comics. Several of them, including

Ken, who appeared to be the most proficient in reading, commented that it is hard to study reading or writing by oneself, so it is helpful to take courses that force them to read or write in Japanese.

HLSs expressed the greatest need to improve their writing skills, often citing the rationale that proficiency in writing is essential at work. Akira said, "Not only because I lack in confidence the most (in this area), but also because I am going to open a business in Japan, I will need to be able to write Japanese fluently." When I asked Jane which skill she needed to improve the most, she answered, "Writing, because that's going to be huge for me if I teach any Japanese. If I am able not to write grammatically on my own or [*sic*] I need help from my teacher or mom." She added that sometimes she was not sure which particle she should use when writing. In addition, two others also expressed their desire to teach Japanese at high school or university while three others expressed their desire to work for a company where they could use their Japanese language skills or to work in Japan.

They commented on expanding vocabulary and expressions and on improving depth of content and naturalness. For example, Alison mentioned, "My vocabulary is limited. I can only write at the elementary school level in Japanese although there are many things that I want to say, and I know how to say it in English. I don't know how to say those things in Japanese." When I asked her if she wrote many short compositions in HL school, she said that she did not write everything by herself and often got help from her mother. While Jane reported being able to write by herself more easily now,<sup>18</sup> she also mentioned, "I still got my mother to proofread them (composition) or help me out with certain vocabulary words or difficult sentences/ideas." English being their dominant language in literacy, their writing seems to be influenced by English. According to Takuya, "When I think of writing an essay, I usually think about it and

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<sup>18</sup> The course Jane was taking was the very first Japanese course she had taken at the university when I interviewed her in October. Therefore, it is not likely that her writing improved after one month of study.

write it in English essay and then I try to change it into Japanese and it doesn't work. So, in terms of writing essays, I think it's really difficult, especially in Japanese." Yuko's comment echoes Takuya's: "I understand the content of the reading and can translate it into English, but when I write something and show it to my parents, they say that they do understand what I meant to write but often tell me that Japanese people do not express that way. I need to read more to learn how to use words and express things like more Japanese."

They seem to perceive that reading is beneficial for improving other skills as indicated in other comments: "Reading helps acquiring more vocabulary and improving speech." Also, John mentioned the importance of accuracy in reading, pointing out that his reading comprehension involved grasping the gist with some guessing. The tendency of HLSs to do this was also pointed out by some instructors and other HLSs. Although the majority do not read voluntarily outside classes, they felt reading was quite important in improving their Japanese as reflected in this comment: "Reading everyday newsletters or newspapers is a little past my stage, so I have to improve on both of those." Many of them commented that they want to be able to read newspapers.

Although half of the HLSs reported that they needed to improve reading and writing more than other skills, many also reported wanting to be able to express their ideas clearly and fluently without making grammatical mistakes. Alison commented that she does not know how to correct mistakes even when she knows that she has made a mistake when speaking. Sumiyo, implicitly mentioned that she needed to improve her oracy: "If I read more articles and newspapers, I will be able to improve speaking ability by increasing vocabulary." Yuki, who expressed the need to enhance her knowledge of kanji, also commented that she wants to be able to speak Japanese fluently. Many students remarked on the importance of speech sophisticated enough in formal settings as reflected in the voice by students taking the 400-level conversation

course: "I am able to converse freely, but making a speech or doing presentations in Japanese is not easy for me."

Learning and remembering kanji is a recurring issue as well. They identified kanji as the cause of difficulties in reading and writing. Jane, who regularly reads popular magazines and rents Japanese videos, is the only student who mentioned that she likes kanji: "I personally like using kanji because it makes the meaning of the word easier to understand." However, being born in Canada and not exposed to kanji, it is very hard for HLSs to remember the ones that they have learned. Sumiyo, who studied Japanese language courses at a university in Japan for one year, wrote to me the following e-mail:

I think kanji is hard for anyone to learn if they did not grow up with it...in our Japanese classes...we have more trouble with it than the Chinese background students, but not as much as the non-kanji background students. Another point is that HL children grow up hating kanji because we find no use in it growing up in Canada.

During the interview, Sumiyo emphasized: "Kanji is the most difficult; I still cannot read official documents. When I realize that I still cannot read a newspaper, I do feel that my Japanese is not good enough." Ken passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test Level 1,<sup>19</sup> but even he commented that he forgets kanji because he always uses the computer to write Japanese so that he only has to write a word phonetically and then choose the right kanji from those suggested by the program. Yuichi was also told by his Japanese friends that he sometimes uses the wrong kanji in his e-mails. Alison attended HL school for eleven years: "I studied kanji before the quizzes, but I forgot them very quickly." Likewise, Sumiyo said that she often studied for kanji quizzes and did homework in the car on the way to school when she became busier at high school. Takuya and Miki commented that they did not take HL school seriously and did not

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<sup>19</sup> The Japanese Language Proficiency Test is implemented by the Japan Foundation and administered worldwide each December. There are four levels, with the Level 1 being the most difficult, and passing the Level 1 test is one of the prerequisites for admission to post-secondary institutions in Japan. The kanji section only requires the recognition of kanji and involves no writing.

study much; many of the HLSs commented on a lack of motivation during the years they studied at HL school. According to Takuya, they were not really serious about their class; they just went there and talked. In summary, many of them reported that reading and writing are hard because there are many kanji that they cannot read and do not know the meanings of.

Four students also indicated that they needed to understand and master grammar rules for a variety of reasons. John, like Alison, indicated: "I always have wanted perfect grammar and use of particles<sup>20</sup> because I know that I do make mistakes when talking." John noted the omission of particles in colloquial conversation, which may be the reason that particles are easily missed. Jane, who is thinking of teaching English and Japanese as a profession, also noted: "I need to learn my grammar rules properly. If I don't know how they teach it in an English environment, then I won't be able to teach it.... If you are a native speaker it's pretty hard because you just think it's, oh well, it's just like that, because that's the way it is. You don't know the reasons for why."

Table 10 summarizes the participants' responses regarding areas that they want to improve. In the table, L refers to listening skills; S refers to speaking skills; R refers to reading skills; and W refers to writing skills. The table includes information on the years that they attended HL schools, language contact in the past and present, their own assessment of the four skills, and which skills they want to improve. I included students' HL school experiences and language contact to see the relationship between their own assessment of each of the four skills and the skills that they feel that they need to improve. The skills are ranked in order of their strengths; for example, L>S>R>W means that listening skills are the strongest and that writing skills are the weakest.

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<sup>20</sup> Particles are functional words placed after nouns, phrases, clauses, and they indicate a relationship between the word and the following word. There are case particles, compound particles, double particles, and sentence-final particles.



To sum up, the data<sup>21</sup> obtained through the interviews revealed that 7 out of 14 students wanted to improve their writing; six students wanted to improve reading skills; three students wanted to improve kanji; three students wanted to improve speaking skills, specifically, the formal register; three students wanted to understand the grammar better, two students wanted to expand their vocabulary.

Table 10 The skill(s) to be improved: Students' perspectives

Participants	HL School	Language Contact	Their own assessment of four skills	Skill(s) to be improved
Sumiyo	12 years	Parents, Japanese and non-Japanese friends	L>S>R>W	Reading
Alison	11 years	Mother, mother's friends	L>S>R>W	Writing, speaking (formal register), vocabulary & grammar
John	6 weeks	Mother, at Japanese stores	R>S>W>L	Grammar, speaking (formal register), kanji
Yuichi	Elementary School in Japan	Parents, co-workers, Japanese Canadian, friends in Japan	L>S>R>W	Reading & writing
Yuki	6 years Hoshiuuko <sup>22</sup>	Parents (now), Japanese Canadian	L>S>R & W	Kanji & grammar (wanting to be able to speak ,too)
Ken	7 years	Parents, Japanese Canadian, co-workers	S>L>R>W	Writing & reading
Yuko	1 year	Parents	S>R>L>W*	Writing
Akira	N/A	Watching anime, parents, brother (mixed with English)	S>L>R>W	Kanji
Jane	12 years	Parents, video & magazines, HL school	L>R>S>W**	Writing, grammar
Takuya	6 years	Mother, students from Japan, magazine	L>S>R>W	Writing
Tomoko	Elementary School	Japanese Friends, book	L>S>R>W	Writing & kanji
Miki	5 years (on and off)	Japanese Canadian, international students	L>S>R>W	Speaking (vocabulary & formal register), reading (kanji & grammar)
Steve	N/A	Mother (childhood), Japanese friends, wife	L>S>W>R	Writing & kanji
Karen	Elementary School in Japan	Japanese friends	L>S>R>W	Speaking (formal register)

\*Before Yuko took the Newspaper Reading Course, she ranked four skills S>L>R>W

\*\* Jane ranked her speaking as the third; she mentioned that even in English, she does not talk much and that is the reason that she ranked her reading ability higher than speaking ability.

<sup>21</sup> Some students mentioned that they want to improve more than one skill, so, in that case, I included that information as well.

<sup>22</sup> Hoshiuuko is a school exclusively for children whose parents are temporarily assigned to work in Canada and must return to Japan after the term is over. The curricula follow exactly as those in Japan; therefore, the level is much higher than HL school. All subjects (Japanese, Mathematics, Science, and Social studies) are instructed in Japanese.

#### **4.1.2.2. Heritage language students' needs from instructors' perspective**

All instructors expressed concerns regarding the gap between the HLSs' cognitive level and the content of their writing, lack of awareness of the differences between spoken and written texts, the latter of which requires them to consistently employ a certain style, and limited use of sophisticated vocabulary and complex structures: "They speak fluently about their families and things like that, but when it comes to writing, their writing is childish."

Instructors perceived HLSs' skills and needs in much the same way as HLSs themselves did. Instructors all agreed that HLSs who were exposed to the language are more like Japanese people than non-HLSs in terms of pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. As a whole, they consider HLSs' oral and aural abilities to be stronger than their written and reading abilities. However, they were careful to mention that HLSs' abilities and needs vary across individuals. One instructor said, "I have never taught the 200 - level reading course, so I don't know. And I cannot generally say which skills HLSs need to improve as their levels are all different." Also, another instructor commented:

It appears speaking is generally HLSs' stronger skill, but I wonder if that is really the case. I don't know. It depends on the difficulty of the topic (that they discuss). HLSs can talk fluently about what they watched on TV yesterday, but understanding and talking about something complicated are different. This can be also said for reading and writing. For example, if I ask them to talk about the legalization of marijuana, they can only talk within their proficiency... When I hear them talking, their discussion is not intriguing. Similarly, a senior instructor that has been teaching in the upper level courses for many years commented that HLSs cannot improve their oral skills just by speaking freely, but that they have to read materials such as newspaper articles and discuss the topics. If not, they will not be able to employ complex language structures, nor can they expand their vocabulary. She pointed out:

The vocabulary, content, and sentence structures that HLSs feel comfortable using to express themselves tend not to go beyond those encountered frequently in concrete situations in daily life.

In addition to the content of their speech, several instructors commented they cannot use *keigo* (honorific, humble, and polite forms) appropriately: “Although they understand that they are supposed to use those forms when talking to superiors or elder people, they cannot employ these forms correctly as they generally do not use those forms. So even when they talk to their teacher, they use the plain form.”<sup>23</sup> One instructor who had taught up to grade 12 at a HL school for many years stated that, “I think that heritage language students need a training as they cannot talk appropriately in formal settings.” When she was teaching at the HL school, she had her high school students practise for job interviews in Japanese. Since high school is the time during which students begin working at part-time jobs, she felt it was important for them to get used to the formal language appropriate for that context. She also believed that being able to speak fluently improves HLSs’ confidence while acknowledging the need to be able to write properly at the level expected to achieve at the university level. Another instructor teaching 200-level courses stated: “They are weaker in writing skills, considering how fluently they talk. Their compositions are like the ones written by elementary school students.” Confirming this perception, two other instructors also noted that HLSs’ compositions are weak in terms of cohesion and logic compared to non-HLSs’.

Furthermore, one of the senior instructors mentioned that although HLSs manage to write logically, they write many short sentences. She explained, “This is only my speculation, but there seems to be something lacking in their grammatical knowledge that enables them to write long sentences that include relative clauses or complex sentence structures...something.” She

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<sup>23</sup> The plain form is the form that is employed to talk among family members and close friends. HLSs tend to mix *keigo*, especially the polite form with the plain form.

also pointed out that when HLSs do write complex sentences, they tend to leave a dangling participle and mix up subjects and predicates of different clauses (i.e., a subject in a relative clause matches with a main verb). They sometimes do not write in complete sentences. Also, according to her, HLSs do not remember verb conjugation rules properly.

A junior instructor mentioned: “When they use commonly used words such as ‘eat’ and ‘sleep’, they can conjugate correctly but cannot conjugate newly learned verbs that are not used in everyday conversation.” All the instructors observed that HLSs are weak in kanji. However, one instructor told me that this university do not teach kanji in particular, apart from giving a brief introduction. Another instructor told me that kanji is something that each student should learn by him/herself. Table 11 summarizes instructors’ comments to the question regarding HLSs’ needs.

Table 11 HLSs' needs from instructors' perceptive

	Teachers' general concerns/perceptions	Areas that HLSs need to improve
T1	Weak in kanji Relying on existing knowledge Their compositions are like those of elementary school children	Reading, writing (content), and speaking abilities in order to function at the professional level (to be able to use honorific and humble forms and formal language)
T2	They cannot use formal language and mix it with plain forms	Formal speech, writing (logic/coherence & content), and vocabulary expansion
T3	4 skills tend to be unbalanced Rely on existing skills so development has reached a plateau	Reading, writing, and speaking
T4	HLSs tend to rely on the hearing and write the way they talk Lack of awareness of the differences between written and spoken language	Reading and writing skills
T5	They tend to write short and choppy sentences, so they need to understand grammar to be able to read difficult text and construct complex sentences.	Writing (content & grammar)
T6	They hardly make grammatical mistakes but lack the quality - expressiveness - of a native Japanese speaker. They write compositions within their abilities	Writing (coherence and content)
T7	They can talk fluently what they watched on TV but cannot discuss complex topics such as the legalization of marijuana	Content (both in writing and speaking) Sociolinguistic awareness
T8	They should work on skills so that they are able to state their opinions in appropriate language in the academic settings or to speak formally.	The level of formality and politeness utilized in speech

#### 4.1.2.3. Insights gained from classroom observations

Table 12 summarizes the interactions in 418 and shows how many linguistic and other types of questions were asked to HLSs and non-HLSs and how many questions each group of students could answer correctly. A total of 29 linguistic questions were asked of HLSs, 20 of which were answered correctly, whereas 64 linguistic questions were asked of non-HLSs, 45 of which were answered correctly. In a class comprised of 6 HLSs and 27 non-HLSs, 4.8 questions

per HLS and 2.4 questions per non-HLS were asked respectively. It appears that twice as many linguistic questions per person were asked to HLSs, and their answers were no better than non-HLSs.

Table 12 The percentage of questions answered by HLSs and non-HLSs

Types of questions	HL students' production		Non-HL students' production	
	Total number of questions asked and answered	Percentage answered correctly	Total number of questions asked and answered	Percentage answered correctly
Linguistic	20/29	68%	45/64	70%
Translation	1/1	100	2/2	100
Summary	2/2	100	2/2	100

*Note: HL students (n=6); Non-HL students (n=27)*

In this fourth-year reading class, students had to engage in detailed linguistic/structural analyses when translating the many, long complex sentences that appeared in the reading materials. As some HLSs acknowledged in the interviews, they often tended to get the gist of the meaning rather than reading each sentence carefully. For example, Sumiyo said, "When we (in 418) engage in translation in class, I sometimes find my translation not exactly accurate. But I am getting accustomed to skip a part when I do not understand and keep on reading." The instructor commented that HLSs sometimes misunderstand passages because they do not understand the structures very well and attempt to guess the meanings. She observed that this resulted in misunderstanding of the passage and serious translation mistakes. Perhaps she asked more linguistics questions to HLSs in order to encourage them to pay more attention to structures so that they would understand the materials more accurately. The fact that the fourth-year HLSs did not outperform non-HLSs in answering linguistic questions may imply that both may benefit from focusing on sentence structures. The general perception that HLSs are better than non-HLSs was not borne out in terms of structure analysis.

Table 13 shows the number of opinions stated by HLSs and non-HLSs in a discussion that took place after the usual translating activities in the same class, 418. Before engaging students in the classroom discussion, the instructor divided the class into small groups of four to five and had them talk about a series of questions that she provided. When grouping, she used a ratio of one HLS to about three non-HLSs, and I also joined one of the groups.

Table 13 The number of opinions stated and percentage in Japanese and English

Language	HL students		Non-HL students	
	The number of opinions stated	Overall percentage	The number of opinions stated	Overall percentage
English	7	37	9	69
Japanese	12	63	4	31
Total	19	100	13	100

*Note: HLS (n=6); non-HLS (n=27)*

When students stated their opinions, they spoke in either Japanese or English; the instructor did not give any restrictions<sup>24</sup> that they use the target language. There were 32 opinions stated in total, and 59 percent of the discussion (19 out of 32 utterances) was led by HLSs while 41 percent of the discussion (13 out of 32 utterances) was led by non-HLSs. Though it is not possible to generalize just from observing one discussion, the trend is that HLSs stated more opinions than non-HLSs. According to Sumiyo, when the questions being asked are about translation or the meaning of a word in the context, she feels she cannot voluntarily answer as everybody tends to accept her answer as correct. When it comes to stating opinions, however, she finds it easier to speak up as there are no right or wrong answers. There were 3.2 opinions (19 utterances by 6 HLSs) stated per HL as opposed to 0.48 opinions (13 utterances by 27 non-

<sup>24</sup> When the instructor gave a written assignment related to the material, students could choose whether they wrote in English or Japanese.

HLSs) stated per non-HLS. Unlike during the interviews, I did not observe any code switching<sup>25</sup> from one language to the other; however, HLSs spoke in English 37 per cent of the time. Perhaps they chose to speak in English when they thought that it would be too difficult to express their ideas in Japanese. In spite of there being a much smaller number of HLSs, they spoke out more than non-HLSs did, yet they did not always speak in Japanese. According to some of the HLSs, it is easier to speak up during a discussion than when the teacher asks a question to the whole class. During the interviews, all HLSs except one commented that they found this class intellectually stimulating and interesting, which may have led to their greater participation in the discussion. However, many HLSs commented that they usually tend to hold back in class so as not to intimidate non-HLSs and so as not to deprive their opportunities to speak up.

#### **4.1.2.4. Comparisons of instructors' and heritage language students' perception**

Table 14 below shows HLSs' perceptions of their needs in comparison with their instructors' perceptions. Congruent with HLSs' perceptions, instructors, too, felt that HLSs need to improve literacy skills. Although some HLSs mentioned the need to improve their speech, more instructors felt that HLSs need to develop sophisticated oral skills with respect to register style, vocabulary, and content.

Instructors stated repeatedly that HLSs need to raise their writing and speaking skills to match their cognitive level, pointing out poor contents of compositions and speech/discussions. In contrast, only one HLS talked about the gap between English and Japanese. Another striking difference was that while even the more proficient HLSs see kanji as an obstacle when engaging in reading and writing tasks, instructors did not perceive this as strongly as HLSs did. Instructors view kanji as something that they should study by themselves outside of class, not during class. The fact that the majority of students have Chinese background may have influenced their

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<sup>25</sup> Code switching refers to "the alternate use of two languages in the same discourse" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 49)



perception. To my surprise, only one instructor mentioned a need for vocabulary expansion and the enhancement of kanji knowledge.

Table 14 The areas that HLSs need to improve

Areas needing improvement	The number of HL students (n=14)	The number of instructors (n=8)
Writing	7	7
Speaking (formal register)	3	6
Reading	3	3
Kanji	3	1
Grammar	2	1
Vocabulary	3	1

#### 4.1.3. What material/activity interests heritage language students?

When questioned as to what kind of material interests them, all of HLSs commented on reading materials. Perhaps this reflects their desire to read a variety of reading materials. Nobody except one student mentioned that they want to watch or listen to news. They cited the Internet, newspapers, academic journals,<sup>26</sup> and stories/novels as possible sources of reading materials. The majority answered that they would like to read articles dealing with current issues and modern literature though some answered that they do not mind reading about history unless it is too dry. They would like to read something modern as opposed to classic. The topics they chose varied: news, currently debated issues, economics, sciences, etc., and three of them also showed an interest in reading materials pertaining to their own specialized areas.

Many of them mentioned content reading. They want to read in order to learn about the content and discuss it, rather than looking at each sentence and translating it word by word. Alison said, "I think it (content reading) is good because that is what we have been doing at HL

<sup>26</sup> They would like to read something intellectually stimulating but commented that they need academic reading materials with modification, specifically, furigana, which provides phonetic reading for difficult kanji.

school.” Ken enthusiastically said, “If the reading materials are good for language learning and at the same time, if the materials make me think about the topic, that would be good.”

One student talked about conversation class: “The level that I am looking for is maybe more of a graduate study level.... I feel that I want to read more difficult novels. And if there is a small class and a rule that we have to speak all in Japanese, that would be nice.” HLSs in a fourth-year conversation class mentioned that giving presentations and speeches and engaging in discussions are good ways to improve their speaking abilities, provided that the topics covered in higher-level courses do not overlap those covered in lower-level courses, as was the case for one HLS.

Many HLSs pointed out that there are not many chances to write compositions in courses and suggested that writing more would improve their writing skills. As the dominant language in literacy is English, they admitted that they do not write unless they are put in a situation where they have to write. Yet, given a chance, they seem to enjoy writing, and it seems to help them develop a sense of confidence: “Learning to write was a lot of fun...I have learned how to write formal letters, proper *sakubun*,<sup>27</sup> and proper way of writing.”

#### **4.2. How is it possible to improve their areas of weakness?**

I asked both HLSs and instructors how HLSs could build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses. The HLSs whom I interviewed told me what they are doing right now and what they feel that they should do to improve their Japanese. They are serious about improving their language skills and believe that they can strengthen areas of weakness (reading and writing more) simply by practicing more.

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<sup>27</sup> *Sakubun* means a short essay or composition in Japanese.

#### 4.2.1. Heritage language students' perspective

Reading was identified to be the area that the majority of HLSs felt that they really need to improve; they commented that they not only have to read more but also to cover a greater variety of reading materials such as novels, newspapers, and books. Takuya said, "Yeah, I just have to keep reading more and try to practice or reading Japanese newspapers or something like that....at home I should be trying to read newspapers or magazine articles and writing down the kanji." Sumiyo explained what she is doing: "I bought a novel from which a movie was produced and just by reading it, I will become able to read better. If it is something that I am interested in, I can keep on reading it."

The same approach was suggested as a way to enhance writing skills and kanji, writing more kanji and essays. "I have to write more composition. I think if I increase more vocabulary, my writing will improve. Writing essays is useful." All of them said that they spend a considerable amount of time practicing kanji by writing them over and over. They want more kanji quizzes in class, which they think will enhance their kanji knowledge. Also, taking the Japanese language proficiency test was suggested as it would become a goal for which one has to strive.

Although quite a few students commented that they wanted to improve their speaking abilities, few suggestions were made as to how to go about doing so. They simply mentioned that more practice would enable them to be better at speaking. Alison thinks that she has to speak Japanese all the time in order to improve her speaking abilities and believes she has to go to Japan to achieve this goal. A fourth-year student, Yuki, who spoke less fluently than other HLSs, suggested: "If we have to do interviews with Japanese people about topics that we have never asked before, then speaking ability will improve."

#### 4.2.2. Instructors' perspective

HLSs thought that they simply need more practice, whereas instructors emphasized the importance of raising language awareness.<sup>28</sup> All the instructors pointed out that HLSs have to acknowledge their problematic areas and also suggested some concrete ideas.

They emphasized that it is crucial for HLSs to recognize their own weak areas and to consciously work on them; therefore, bringing awareness to the use of language is vital. Another point that was frequently mentioned by the instructors is that HLSs have to focus on the choice of language in different situations; for instance, when HLSs talk, they have to focus on whether they are using the informal form or formal form and make an effort to keep the style consistent. Another suggestion was to have HLSs practice in order to be able to speak logically, which can be achieved by paying attention to the use of conjunctions and by practicing speaking beyond the daily conversational level.

One instructor noted that unlike non-HLSs who have been studying Japanese as a foreign language from the beginning, HLSs might not realize what instructors are seeking in their assignments. She pointed out that they are not aware that writing a composition is not a goal in itself but that conveying their ideas and messages is, pointing out that HLSs' compositions often have little content. She also mentioned that they sometimes miss the purpose of the assignment. For example, a HL student was instructed in a third-year class to write an interesting composition. Because the Japanese word, *omoshiroi*, means either funny or interesting/intriguing, he interpreted the word to mean funny and wrote his essay by following the style of a Japanese comic. If he were a student who has been learning Japanese as an academic subject, he would not have misunderstood his teacher's intention.

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<sup>28</sup> By language awareness, the instructors mean that HLSs need to bring their innate knowledge to consciousness and focus on the language forms that they employ.

Also, two experienced senior instructors suggested that HLSs would benefit from training themselves to look at Japanese as a foreign language:

Have them change the way of looking at Japanese to the way of looking at more like a foreign language. Those who can analyze are good. They think in English and translate that into Japanese. It is important to change the naturally acquired knowledge to the conscious one.

One of the two senior instructors teaching 418 observed some consistently occurring patterns in HLSs' grammatical mistakes and analyzed why they are having similar problems. According to her, even though they have acquired Japanese as their first language, HLSs do not have the same exposure to Japanese as Japanese people who have been living and going to school in Japan. While she was careful to mention that it was just her idea based on her personal observations, she found that HLSs tend to lack some grammatical knowledge. She pointed out that HLSs make mistakes that native Japanese people do not. This coincides with Yuko's comment that her mother told her that Japanese people do not express themselves the way Yuko did. The instructor thinks that it is good to have them correct their grammar mistakes by themselves. She goes on by adding:

However, since using the native approach is easier for them than using the grammar approach, i.e., analyzing the structure, they tend to rely on the native approach, i.e., whether or not the utterance sounds right to them. If they take the native approach, they have to read as much as Japanese people do.

She also considers it important to give HLSs more advanced reading materials and have HLSs discuss and write about them. Giving them materials higher than their linguistic levels presents them with a challenge for them, which leads to learning.

One junior instructor who has a lot of experience with HLSs suggested that it is helpful to teach learning strategies such as skimming to find new vocabulary and looking for keywords at a

paragraph level. As for writing, she suggested that having them look at the sentence structure level and then at the overall structure of the composition would be beneficial, as HLSs' compositions tend to be weak in coherence and logic. Another instructor emphasized that one has to read well-written books if he/she wants to be able to write good essays.

Incorporating activities that make HLSs think and analyze seems to be promising. Another junior instructor told me that HLSs enjoyed kanji games and exercises resembling a cloze test<sup>29</sup> to improve reading comprehension. He gave his students an article from which he had eliminated one of the paragraphs. By reading the rest of the article carefully, his students were able to conjecture what was written in the missing paragraph.

### **4.3. What are heritage language students' advantages and strengths?**

#### **4.3.1. The questionnaires and interview results**

Table 15 shows how instructors, HLSs, and non-HLSs perceive HLSs' strengths. In the questionnaires, I asked these three groups of participants to what degree they felt HLSs have advantages since I considered the perceptions of these three groups of participants to have an impact on classroom interaction; the scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Non-HLSs perceived HLSs to have more advantages and stronger oral skills than non-HLSs themselves do. While instructors considered HLSs' reading abilities to be toward a weaker scale (mean of 2.87), non-HLSs considers the abilities of HLSs' to be on a stronger scale (mean of 3.53). The interview results revealed that 4 out of 8 non-HLSs enrolled in 400-level courses expressed that it is not fair for them to study in the same classroom with HLSs even if it is a reading and writing course. Yet, those non-HLSs who showed dissatisfaction also perceived the weaknesses of HLSs in areas such as kanji, grammar, and *keigo*.

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<sup>29</sup> In a cloze test, learners are given text gapped with consistent number of words and fill each gap with an appropriate word.

Compared with HLSs (mean of 3.13) themselves, instructors and non- HLSs believed that HLSs have more advantages than as non-HLSs (means of 3.62 and 4.22 respectively). HLSs, themselves, did not feel strongly that they have better speaking, reading, and writing skills than those of non-HLSs though instructors and non-HLSs tended to believe otherwise.

Table 15 HLSs' advantages/strengths perceived by instructors, HLSs, and Non-HLSs

	Mean			Std. Deviation		
	Inst (n=8)	HL (n=16)	Non-HL (n=45)	Inst (n=8)	HL (n=16)	Non-HL (n=45)
Advantages	3.62	3.13	4.22	0.744	1.025	0.823
Listening & Comprehension	4.62	3.50	4.42	0.518	1.506	0.583
Speaking	4.25	3.38	4.42	0.866	1.088	0.621
Reading	2.87	2.63	3.53	1.356	1.088	0.869
Writing	3.38	2.75	3.53	0.916	1.183	0.815

*Note: Inst refers to instructors; HL refers to heritage language students; and non-HL refers to non-heritage students.*

#### **4.4. What are the challenges faced by the instructors?**

##### **4.4.1. Affective factors: Students' perceptions**

Three kinds of challenges were identified: 1) affective factors that have an influence on students' perceptions and behaviours, 2) problems stemming from administrative procedures and resources, and 3) pedagogical challenges.

First, all the instructors expressed that they always keep fairness in mind as expressed by a junior instructor: "When Chinese students say that there are many HLSs in class and that the HLSs are better than us, it is not easy for me to teach." The same instructor also mentioned that while walking around the classroom, she sometimes corrects HLSs' elementary school level vocabulary to more sophisticated vocabulary. However, she thinks it is generally difficult to give special instructions to HLSs when noticing how non-HLSs perceive this. In most of the cases, HLSs' linguistic abilities, especially listening and comprehension and oral abilities, were

perceived to be superior to those of non-HLSs' students except the knowledge of kanji. As a result, many non-HLSs feel a sense of unfairness regarding the presence of HLSs, despite of the fact that HLSs take the placement tests and are admitted to the given courses.

Four out of six non-HLSs interviewed expressed their frustration and pressure when studying with HLSs who speak effortlessly. They think that it is not fair that HLSs who already know the language study in the same classroom as university is a place where you acquire new areas of knowledge. The questionnaire conducted in the upper-level courses indicated that non-HLSs feel most strongly that HLSs have advantages in learning Japanese. It is not surprising that instructors are concerned about fairness: "When HLSs are in class, I have to concern both groups of students. HLSs are often very quiet." As one 200-level instructor puts it: "For example, I don't ask heritage language students a simple linguistic question. Even when everyone is quiet because they cannot answer such question as "what is the potential form of "come?" I never ask the question to heritage language students."

To promote HLSs' learning, a few instructors give HLSs additional assignments. This, in turn, seems to have the indirect effect of lessening the sense of unfairness. In the fourth-year conversation course, the instructor gave students written assignments after oral presentations and interviews and asked HLSs to write two times the amount as she asked non-HLSs to do. That was also the condition under which three strong HLSs were permitted to take the course, even though the instructor had at first declined their pleas as their oral skills were high. She had assessed them as over-qualified. Due to a variety of reasons such as the need to fulfill a literature or major requirement, or to enter the Bachelor of Education Program, they were eventually allowed to take the course.

The matter of fairness also applies to HLSs. This anecdote was brought up by both a HLS who heard this story and by instructors. In the previous school year, a well-intended instructor had given HLSs different assignments to practice kanji/ vocabulary, as their level was higher



than that of the course. She also added an extra kanji section to the tests, and this employed a different marking scheme for HLSs. This provoked HLSs in the classes to make a complaint against her to the Dean. The instructor told me that she now gives HLSs consent forms in order to avoid problems. This incident was discouraging for instructors. In fact, a few instructors commented that they give all students the same materials and assignments to ensure that they are fair to everyone. One instructor commented, perhaps, due to this incident: "In the upper classes, we have to give HLSs more advanced assignments but have to be careful so that they do not feel that it is unfair. We have to tell them that the assignments are for them and for improving their weak skills."

#### **4.4.2. Problems stemming from administration procedures and resources**

Assessment appears to be a big issue. According to the coordinator, "All HLSs are interviewed. Yet, placement is difficult as we have many students to interview, and when we realize that the level is not appropriate, it is sometimes too late." The fourth-year conversation instructor commented that she was surprised to find out that one of her HLSs whom she considered to be very fluent and over-qualified for her class, started his Japanese studies at the second-year level. In another instance, the senior instructor who gave additional assignments to HLSs expressed her frustration: "This year, just before the registration period was over, three students were sent to my class, but soon I found out that they were too advanced for my class. Since the registration period was already over, they could not transfer to another course." In fact, those students were initially assessed as second-year level and then were sent to her third-year level course. However, this instructor thought that her third-year course was still a little too easy for them. According to the HLSs, they did not even understand the instructions on the placement test: "At first, I was given a fourth-year level test, but I could not read kanji nor understand even the meanings of the instructions." In addition to the number of students that instructors have to

interview, the mismatch between the placement tests and HLSs' abilities appears to be the cause of the problem.

The availability of resources also influences course selections. According to an instructor who has been teaching for almost three decades, there was a time when two separate sections for a 300-course were offered, one for HLSs and one for non-HLSs. Also, another experienced instructor noted that there was once a 100-level grammar course for HLSs and non-HLSs who had been to Japan but never learned kanji or grammar formally (at school). According to them, this was possible because the coordinator (of the Japanese Language Department) at that time insisted. The variety of courses offered also depends on the administration, the availability of resources, i.e., budget and instructors, timing, or the ideas of the department head. Even during the time that separate sections were offered, many were of the opinion that dividing into different classes is troublesome in terms of administration and placement.

#### **4.4.3. Pedagogical approach**

Pedagogical approach is also an issue though, perhaps, it is perceived more as a concern rather than a challenge by instructors. There is a general view that the pedagogical approach employed at present is not suitable for HLSs: "The current approach is a disadvantage to heritage language students whose proficiency is close to that of native Japanese. Their improvement is slim." According to one instructor, "It is not that it is more difficult to teach HLSs. The approach is different. For heritage language students, we cannot teach them based solely on the grammar. The types of questions that heritage language students ask are different. For example, when non-heritage language students are struggling with structures, heritage language students ask questions like how to use them." The instructors are aware of the situation; however, they have to adhere to the current approach, as the majority of students are foreign language students.

While expressing this dilemma, one instructor commented that isolating HLSs from other students by providing a special HL track through first to fourth year might not be desirable as Canada is a multicultural country. Through reading and writing, HLSs and non-HLSs can share ideas. The concept that sharing ideas and values is important was also pointed out by two non-HLSs and one HLS. However, she indicated that she thinks it is a good idea to separate them during the first year level. For example, it is good to make a separate class for HLSs who are weak in kanji and writing though they speak Japanese at home and non-HLSs who have studied or lived in Japan. They both have similar linguistic abilities (weak in kanji and writing but strong in oral skills). She believes that as the level of class goes up, differences in linguistic abilities would be minimized because intellectual capacity would come into play. She also commented that it is easier to mix two groups of students if language classes are not divided into a reading class and a speaking and composition class as students are strong in different areas.

#### **4.5. What are the challenges faced by heritage language students?**

The nature of challenges faced by HLSs also varies. While some challenges stem from the difficulty of learning Japanese as a foreign language, others involve psychological factors. The former includes unfamiliarity or confusion with the current approach (grammar analyses and literal translation), the pace of class, the lack of suitable courses, a tendency to mix “discoursal styles” (Kondo, 1998b, p. 56), difficulties employing the formal register, and a low level knowledge of kanji. The latter involves affective factors such as pressure to do well, peer evaluation, and the level of supports received by instructors. These challenges are described in detail in the following sections.

#### 4.5.1. Challenges studying their heritage language as a foreign language

I heard many HLSs expressing concerns such as: "I don't know when I am asked a question like what is the noun modifier or relative clause. Grammar and analysis are difficult." This perception is prevalent, and it seems to be due not only to the fact that HLSs learned the language naturally, but also to the fact that they did not know the grammatical terms. The HLSs that I interviewed were placed in either the second year level courses or the third year level courses<sup>30</sup> when they started taking Japanese courses. There were even two students who had started from the fourth-year level.

HLSs did not learn technical terms relating to grammar that non-HLSs are taught in their first or second year of the study; consequently, they had to learn in the inductive way while listening to instructors' explanations. Ken, who started from the fourth-year course level expressed his surprise: "I never thought of the grammar...it is like a custom and have never paid attention to the rules, so I have no idea at all when we were asked about what the noun modification is, what the subject is or what the predicate is at the beginning of the term. I am not still sure about my answers although I just began to understand." Ken further remarked: "If I am given a glossary that includes grammatical terms and example, I would become able to understand clearly." Karen's comment parallels his remark: "When I understood what a subject means in English, it was not difficult. But before I did not know the terms, I did not understand teachers' questions. I have had those small problems...if there is the glossary (for grammatical terms), it would be very useful as those questions are asked in all courses." Yuko confirmed these statements, reporting that when taking a Japanese linguistic course, for the first time she came to understand what complex sentences, predicates, subjects, relative clauses, etc. are. After

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<sup>30</sup> Those who attended HL school for more than six years or elementary school for a short period of time in Japan generally started from 300 level courses, though the length of study was not always correlated to the level of course in which they were placed.

taking the linguistic course, reading became easier for her. Learning the grammatical terms and structures appears to be beneficial to HLSs.

Unless they are taught the grammatical terms explicitly, it is time-consuming for HLSs to figure out the meanings of these terms by listening to lectures. Moreover, it is a disadvantage to them. A fourth-year student, Takuya, who has been studying from the second-year level, spoke out, "The difficult thing is, since I've learned Japanese unconsciously, like grammar structure and stuff like that, if somebody says noun modification, it takes me a longer time to understand things like that. I really don't think about (it) when I speak Japanese or do Japanese." When I asked if he understands what a subordinate clause is, he answered, "I still don't know." Akira also told me that he could not answer a question on his first mid-term test as he did not know the term, 'passive voice' When he asked about it, the instructor told him that she could not answer him because he was writing a test.

When the HLSs enrol in foreign language classes, they have to adjust themselves to the different approach as well. John, a graduate student, said, "Non-heritage language students get used to looking at sentences at the word level, but I do not notice small things." Ken also commented: "I understand that instructors cannot change the way they teach, but I cannot answer when I am asked about just the meaning of a conjunction such as 'nanoni' or 'node.' I cannot translate just a conjunction alone as a sentence consists of a main clause and a subordinate clause and has a context. When a sentence is broken [down] too small, I get confused."

Focusing on grammar, rather than meaning, is new to HLSs. A first-year student, Jane just started studying in Japanese 310: "I find it pretty difficult in talking about grammar because they use transient [*sic*] clauses and modifiers and I really don't know. Even though I am an English major we never really learn grammar in that way, so I don't consciously think 'oh that is a noun modifier' .... You just don't use in regular schooling so it's kind of hard that way, like

subordinate clause.” Takuya considers the approach to be the cause of his difficulties: “I didn’t learn it grammatically, so maybe that is the difficult part about it.”

Not only are they confused by the terms, but the unfamiliarity with the approach also appears to lower their confidence level. According to Steve, “I know how to make sentences...but when my friend asks me why this word is put here, I cannot answer...and I don’t know kanji...so I don’t do well on the tests....How come certain sentences are the way they are? How the sentence go together is difficult.” Akira also mentioned that he was too embarrassed to ask what particles are when everybody else knows what particles mean. Several times I heard HLSs saying that being HLSs, they are pressured to do well but that they cannot always answer questions about structures nor explain grammar. In 310, there was an incident where a student answered incorrectly when the instructor asked him to identify the relative clause in the sentence. After class, I came across with the student outside the building. He looked rather embarrassed and said to me, “I did not do well today but will do better next time.”

Translating Japanese into English is new to HLSs. At HL schools, students read textbooks and answer questions about the content. Sumiyo said, “at HL school, everybody understood what the teacher said. Unless there were difficult words, everybody knew the meaning. We didn’t do literal translation.” She continued to explain: “Before I was enrolled in the third-year course, I never learned grammar so did not know what a group-one verb meant. Neither did I have a clue of what noun modification means. I did not understand what literal translation is like and what free translation is like, so I could not differentiate literal translation from free translation.” Literal translation, which requires reflecting grammatical structures in detail is not only confusing but also difficult as the structures of English and Japanese are different. Several students expressed frustration over this. Jane, for example, said, “In my 300 class, a Japanese writing course, our professor wants us to do literal translation, from Japanese to English and I found it really difficult because I don’t like... You have to break [sentences] down

into pieces .... You have to write .... 'It rained yesterday'<sup>31</sup> in the passive form. If you directly translate it (according to the grammatical structure), it doesn't make sense in English."

Requiring students to engage in literal translation ensures that they understand reading materials accurately. However, it slows down the class at the same time. Alison commented: "Although the class is interesting, the pace is very slow. When I look at the glossary, I can understand the meaning of the paragraph...it is very slow to translate the text." Karen explained: "It is very rare that I do not understand the text after I read it many times." Sumiyo also said, "You'll read one reading for maybe three to four weeks and ... you get bored of reading the same thing for four weeks." Tomoko thinks that it cannot be helped as other students need detailed explanations in order to understand the meaning of complex sentences, but she wishes to discuss the content and not dwell so much on translation. Tomoko further mentioned that she cannot ask her types of questions since they differ from those of non-HLSs, who just want to know the meaning.

As one of the instructors pointed out, HLSs have unbalanced skills, i.e., stronger aural and oral skills and weaker literacy and kanji skills. This makes it difficult to find an appropriate class for them as indicated by this comment: "I am enrolled in the 300-level reading and writing course since the instructor told me that the 200-level reading and writing course is too easy for me, but the writing part (for the 300-level) was just too difficult although I can somehow manage the reading part. I think that there is no writing course for my level." In fact, the course instructor considered that she should be in a fourth-year course.

Moreover, HLSs felt that even though they need to read more and that they want to be able to read newspapers, kanji is the big obstacle. I heard comments such as: "Although the 300 level reading and writing course is Ok, kanji is too difficult" and "The biggest problem is the

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<sup>31</sup> In Japanese, intransitive verb such as rain can be changed to the passive voice, and this usage is called adversative passive.

kanji.... I spend more time on kanji than any other my subjects, I guess.” Yuki wrote to me in an e-mail: “I was told to take the newspaper course. ...However, I have heard horror stories of the Japanese newspaper course. The kanji level is too high. I do not think I would be able to keep up. I had difficulty even with the 200 level of kanji.” One student even confessed that he dropped the newspaper course as he was overwhelmed by the amount of kanji and the difficulty of the content.

Almost all the HLSs answered that they have electronic dictionaries, which helps them to locate words faster and more easily. When I mentioned that it is not easy to find a kanji in a conventional dictionary, Miki agreed: “Yeah. If you don’t know how to read it, you cannot find it. ...Counting the strokes, it takes for me such a long time.” Yuki wants instructors to write down more kanji on the board. According to instructors, they teach the basics about kanji during the first year of instruction and after that they only give students kanji tests. Ken, however, mentioned that the tests only ask for readings or definitions because Chinese students do not know the Japanese pronunciation even though they know the kanji characters. Akira, Takuya, and Miki pointed out that as the majority of students are Chinese, they already know how to write them. Akira feels that “We are not given sufficient time to learn and use kanji.” He suggested that strategic instructions for learning kanji could be useful: “It will become easier to remember if we learn radicals or something.”

Although speaking is perceived as one of HLSs’ stronger skills, they have a hard time unlearning habits such as either using the informal form inappropriately in classrooms or mixing the informal and formal form. In addition, as they use Japanese mostly with family members and friends, it appears to be difficult to use the formal register style which they are not often exposed to. While they are aware that they have to use the formal register in class, mixing of the forms still occurs. Alison commented: “I know that I am not using the proper Japanese and that I have to speak formally to teachers, but it is very difficult.” Several times, I heard an instructor



reminding HLSs gently but firmly to speak in the formal register style. Even though HLSs are aware of the problem, it seems they need time to practice. Even a fourth-year student who was at first not allowed to enrol in the conversation class expressed: “Like *keigo*<sup>32</sup> and *sonkeigo* and all that stuff that we’d been doing lately, I don’t have any experience in that, so even if I’m learning that I think it’s worth it, I guess.” Frequent use of many colloquial expressions was observed both in classes and interviews. Another student in the same conversation class also commented that she did not realize that she was using a colloquial version until her instructor corrected her speech: “When my teacher corrects ‘-reru’ to ‘-rareru’<sup>33</sup>, I realize that my Japanese is not proper.” Also, during the interviews, I heard some of the HLSs saying “*yappari*”, “*anmari*”, “*sonde motte*”,<sup>34</sup> which are contracted vocabulary used in casual conversation. They use colloquial versions of vocabulary, not just the informal register style as they are accustomed to the vernacular.

#### 4.5.2. Psychological factors

Table 16 shows the questions asked to each group of participants and the mean values of answers in response to each question. The participants were asked to rate on a scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with 3 being neutral. The results indicate that although both non-HLSs (means of 2.76) and instructors (means of 2.75) felt almost neutral about whether HLSs should be in the same classroom, non-HLSs and instructors perceived quite strongly that HLSs have advantages in studying Japanese (means of 4.22 and 3.62 respectively). All respondents were enrolled in the third or fourth year classes whose content was quite difficult, so I thought that non-HLSs did not feel strongly that HLSs have advantages. On the other hand, HLSs felt neutral about the question (means of 3.13) that they do not feel strongly that they have

<sup>32</sup> *Keigo* and *sonkeigo* mean honorific speech, which is employed in the formal speech.

<sup>33</sup> When a group two verb is conjugated to the potential form in Japanese, you have to add a grammatical morpheme *-rareru*. However, in conversation, the colloquial version *-reru* is used among Japanese people.

<sup>34</sup> “*Yappari*,” “*anmari*,” and “*sonde motte*” are conjunctions, but they are colloquial forms.

advantages. While HLSs (means of 3.94) felt comfortable speaking Japanese in class, non-HLSs (means of 2.89) did not feel comfortable nor uncomfortable.

Table 16 Summary of questionnaire results regarding psychological factors

Is it fair that HLSs study in foreign language classrooms with non-HLSs?		
HLSs	Non-HLSs	Instructors
N/A	2.76	2.75
HLSs have more advantages in learning Japanese than non-HL students.		
HLSs	Non-HLSs	Instructors
3.13	4.22	3.62
I feel comfortable speaking Japanese in front of non-HLSs/HLSs.		
HLSs	Non-HLSs	Instructors
3.94	2.89	N/A

*Note: Instructors (n=8), HL students (n=16), non-HL students (n=44)*

HLSs emphasized that they are motivated now, unlike their childhood when they were forced to go to HL school (see Kondo, 1999, p. 451). Many of them chose to study Japanese out of a desire to become proficient enough to speak at the professional level or university level. However, there seem to be several factors that affect their learning. These factors include instructors' support and understanding, peers' evaluation, and the pressure to do well.

At times, HLSs are perceived to hinder non-HLSs' progress and intimidate non-HLSs and instructors. Though instructors in this study perceive the need to better HLSs' Japanese, 6 out of 8 instructors called HLSs "native speakers." An instructor explicitly mentioned that she wants them to be able to speak and write at the same level as university students in Japan. Only one instructor knew that HLSs only had completed Grade six level by attending HL school for twelve years. Instructors' expectations to HLSs were generally quite high.

HLSs wished that instructors sympathized with their need to further study Japanese. The participating HLSs believed that university is the only chance for them to improve their Japanese. For example, Sumiyo emphasized that university is the only place where one can learn

professionally and academically sophisticated Japanese and that there is no other place where she can continue to study after graduating from HL school. She spoke of her experience studying at a university in Japan, where she was barely able to understand lectures. After returning to Canada, she tried to register in a third-year level course; however, she was rejected at first and had to continue trying before she was finally allowed to register: "It think it depends on teachers as well. I hear that some professors who are a little bit biased against Japanese heritage students." She wants instructors to understand how HLSs have acquired their HL and to help them achieve their potential.

Yuki wrote to me saying that it was unfair when students of Japanese heritage were rejected for Japanese courses while other non-Japanese who grew up in Japan were not even questioned. While acknowledging that some HLSs who exceeded the course level lied in order to take the course or to improve their grade point average, she emphasized "The majority of students are truly taking it to better their Japanese." Like Sumiyo, Yuki's friends were also assessed as being too advanced in Japanese after their interviews. Yuki went on, explaining the situations of some of her friends who were not allowed to study at university:

Their writing and reading aren't good, but their speaking is very good. So when they go for an interview, they don't let them take Japanese because they are able to speak even though they cannot read at all. They are very disappointed, so some of them are taking Japanese at community centres to learn how to read and write. The community centers start reading and writing, but a lot of them say that the grammar [level] is a little too easy so they are not sure where they can go.

According to instructors, there are generally a few HLSs, usually two or three, in a class. Sumiyo believed that if more HLSs were allowed to enrol, it would reach to the point where instructors will begin to understand what kind of things they have to teach. This has been a

difficult and complex issue, as instructors are aware of non-HLSs' perceptions compounded with the fact that classes are geared for foreign language students.

Almost all HLSs commented on the fact that they were asked at the beginning of the term why they were taking Japanese. Yuko said, "When Chinese students say that it must be easy as you are a heritage language student or that you are native, I sometimes get upset." However, this first stage appears to be the only period during which they feel uncomfortable. Yet, peer perception does affect HLSs' behaviour: "Sometimes I try to hold back. ... like I don't want to be answering every single question, I have to let other people try to talk." Jane said, "If everyone is quiet and they don't say anything, I might put up my hand and say it or after they have answered the question." Jane always sat alone in class being the only HLS. In other classes that I observed, HLSs tended to sit together unless seats were taken already. The only time they mingled with non-HLSs was when they engaged in group activities. While many of them expressed that they are not uncomfortable in class, they did emphasize that they have the right to study in class since they paid the same amount of money as the other students. As in John and Steve's case, they feel pressured: "It was difficult, you felt embarrassed when they looked at you and expected you to know how to speak it." In Tomoko's case, this creates a barrier to learning: "I cannot ask my questions as mine are different from other students." Sumiyo made a similar remark, pointing out that she feels bad about taking up time by asking her questions. As non-HLSs also noticed, HLSs are generally passive learners in classrooms, waiting for instructors to call on them.

In the questionnaires, I asked both HLSs and non-HLSs to what degree they felt comfortable speaking Japanese in front of each other (see table 15). The mean value of degree of comfort among HLSs is 3.94 out of 5 while non-HLSs' mean value of degree of comfort is 2.89 out of 5. This means that non-HLSs felt slightly less comfortable talking in front of HLSs, while HLSs felt more comfortable talking in front of non-HLSs.

Some non-HLSs felt that as long as HLSs were placed in the right level and evaluated under appropriate criteria, their presence would be conducive to raising the level of the class, while others perceived the presence of HLSs as unfair. A fourth-year non-HLS, Victoria said, "If you just think, I should polish my childish childish Japanese, then well I don't think you should come to 400-level Japanese class. This is not where you polish you childish Japanese. It's where we learn how to express ourselves. ... I don't think it is challenging for them at all." It seems to be hard for foreign language students to understand why HLSs have to study their own language, even though all seven students whom I interviewed were aware that HLSs had problems with grammar, kanji, and register styles. Another non-HLS in the same conversation class said, "I feel more uncomfortable in oral classes with HLS. They can speak so fluently, I kind of feel pressured." Not surprisingly, some suggested that classes should be separated into two classes: "Like one is [*sic*] HLS and one is just... [*sic*] foreign language students. I guess that is more fair to me."

Victoria happened to hear her conversation teacher telling a HLS that the conditions of acceptance into the course were that the HLS write a longer report and be evaluated differently from non-HLSs. Based on what she heard, she suggested, "I think if you state it explicitly in the classroom to everyone, that would make us feel better but still we can't do anything about it, right? Like I'm not saying that the teacher herself is unfair, she is caught in this frustrating world." According to this instructor, some non-HLSs came to ask whether or not the presence of HLSs and some HLSs who were very good at speaking changed her expectations for non-HLSs' performance. From that experience, the instructor realized the importance of giving out clear explanations about assignments and differing evaluation criteria.

While instructors are placed in a difficult situation, HLSs sometimes feel that they are not treated fairly. Some non-HLSs, too, acknowledged that HLSs were marked more harshly than they were. Akira believed that HLSs should be evaluated in the same way as other students or

that there should be a course just for HLSs. He felt that the same evaluation process should be applied same way to every student. He mentioned that he had to write a test with an extra section of kanji questions within the same time period. Due to this time constraint, he did not even have a chance to read instructions carefully so got a bad mark. He also commented on his HL friend, who was evaluated more harshly because of his last name even though he had not gone to HL school. Karen also mentioned, "As far as I have seen, the marks are not a reflection of mark that you got in the exams because my exam scores were a lot higher than the final mark. So just the mark she thought I deserve...at the end of the term." These HLSs felt that they were not evaluated for their efforts and improvements and as a result, were less motivated: "As long as I have the requirement, as long as they permit me, to take the course, the teachers should consider all the students as equals. So I was feeling I was treated unfairly than other students. I do my best, so... It was very discouraging."

#### **4.6. In what way can heritage language students contribute to FL classrooms?**

In regards to what extent each group of participants felt that HLSs and non-HLSs could help each other to improve their language skills, HLSs felt most strongly that they could contribute, followed by non-HLSs and then instructors. Given limited contact with Japanese native speakers in language classrooms, I believed they could contribute to FL classrooms. However, the present instructors seem to perceive difficulties in using HLSs as a resource. This appears to be due to the fact that they are careful not to appear as if they favour HLSs, as the interviews with instructors revealed. One instructor stated that she would not use HLSs as a resource, as this may arouse ill feeling toward them.

The interview results show that the participating non-HLSs wanted to hear more about Japanese culture, including pop culture and about the Japanese people's daily life and experiences: "Maybe they can teach us a little more about the Japanese culture because we can

only study from the textbooks, which isn't real, not that it is not that real." Similarly, instructors noted that they sometimes ask questions about culture and use HLSs as informants. In contrast, quite a few instructors noted that they would not ask HLSs simple linguistic questions that would make non-HLSs to develop their confidence; as one of the instructors put it: "As language learning can increase a feeling of inferiority, so I usually ask a non-HL student who is able [to answer the question]."

Some students suggested pairing up or having group work. A non-HLS said, "You know, sometimes there are some sentences that are very long and the structure is kind of complicated, maybe they can help me to understand the basic meaning and then having a basic understanding of the structure, I can break it up into different parts and solve it by myself." A HLS mentioned the similar thing: "My partner was good at translating literally and noticed a little word that makes the meaning different. I was not looking at the word, but I could explain nuance well. It was good that two of us were able to translate it well."

Group/pair work could be helpful to each other if HLSs and non-HLSs were comfortable with each other. One of the non-HLSs said, "If I was [*sic*] the teacher, I would use or utilize them [HLSs] as much as I could." He suggested putting HLSs into different groups with non-HLSs and having HLSs and non-HLSs get to know each other. As he put it: "I'd make it more so that that they're the same level as the students, so people are a little more comfortable." He and another student suggested that topics/materials be chosen in such a way that nobody had an advantage. He was out-going and a more able student who had studied and lived in Japan, so that might be the reason that he did not feel intimidated and did not see HLSs as persons who made him look bad. Instead, he said, "I look at them as I want to be better than that." Another non-HL student found her instructor's teaching interesting: "She tries to ask the Japanese students about the culture, and then she tries to ask the native English speaking students the English grammar, and she tries to ask the Chinese students a passage refers to some Chinese newspaper." Though

she acknowledged that was a way everybody could contribute to learning, she still did not know if having HLSs in the same class was fair to non-HLSs as HLSs' presence takes away spots of foreign language students.

Several non-HLSs commented that HLSs could help with pronunciation as their pronunciation was more like that of native speakers. An instructor teaching 430 had HLSs correct pronunciation and intonation before the speech contest held in class. In some of the lower level courses, instructors said that they had HLSs do role play so that non-HLSs could see examples of dialogue.

Another thing mentioned by both non-HLSs and HLSs was that HLSs could help by explaining things in English: "Their translation is more precise so that helps." A non-HL student put it: "Instructors may have a problem when they try to convey the ideas to the students...from Japanese to English. They will miss some points probably there. Heritage language students will help them." Karen said, "Like when the teacher has a hard time with her English, and I try to contribute by explaining to the student when I feel like her explanation is maybe not sufficient to make other students understand." It appears that it is not easy to use HLSs as a resource due to affective factors; however, they can be a great resource if, through interactions, instructors are able to create classrooms where students feel comfortable.



#### **4.7. Summary of the research findings**

##### **4.7.1. Heritage language students' needs**

The study found that HLSs felt strongly that they need to improve writing and reading skills; particularly many of them were considering making use of Japanese for their careers. Studying independently to improve writing and reading skills is difficult for them. Some HLSs recognized the importance of expanding their vocabulary/expression and enhancing the content of their writing and speaking. The data revealed that they saw kanji as the major obstacle. In contrast, instructors did not realize how difficult kanji is for HLSs. Also, all HLSs considered *keigo* as the area to work on.

Like HLSs, instructors identified their need as improving their literacy skills; however, they felt that HLSs need to improve their oral skills sophisticated enough for utilizing at the academic and professional levels. They emphasized that HLSs need to match the content of their writing and speaking with their cognitive level.

##### **4.7.2. Heritage language students' strengths and weaknesses**

While HLSs' strengths are perceived to be their listening comprehension and functional oral skills, ways to enhance the strengths were not commented by instructors and HLSs. As for ways to improve their reading and writing skills, HLSs believed reading more and writing more composition and kanji could lead to improvement of their weaker skills and overall proficiency. Some instructors and HLSs thought that content reading is effective. Instructors regarded raising language awareness as vital and effective. They stressed that HLSs have to be aware of and focus on the forms that they have been unconsciously using. Because of different degrees of competence between HLSs' and native Japanese, some instructors also suggested HLSs could benefit by employing grammar analyses.

#### **4.7.3. Instructors' challenges**

Instructors face three types of challenges related to affective factors, administrative procedure and resources, and pedagogical concerns. It seems that non-HLSs' perception has a great influence on instructors' behaviours, which in turn affects classroom interactions. The current assessment tests also seem to be problematic as they can result in inappropriate placements that cause various problems. When HLSs' proficiency level greatly exceeds the level of a given course, it is particularly difficult for instructors as they have to deal with non-HLSs' dissatisfaction and a dilemma to accommodate the needs of two different groups of students. Also, limited course offering forced the fourth-year conversation teacher to accept over-qualified HLSs. Attempting to accommodate HLSs' pedagogical needs different from non-HLSs, some higher-level course instructors gave them more difficult assignments or modified tests. However, the majority of the instructors teach HLSs the same way as they do non-HLSs although they are aware that the current approach is not suitable for HLSs.

#### **4.7.4. Heritage language students' challenges**

Two types of challenges faced by HLSs were identified, and the first type of challenge stems from the difficulty of learning Japanese as a foreign language while the second type of challenge is associated with psychological factors. The former included unfamiliarity of terminology or confusion of the current approach, the pace of class, lack of suitable courses, a tendency to mix discursal styles, difficulty employing the formal register, and a low level knowledge of kanji. The latter included pressure to do well, peer perception, and the level of supports received by instructors. These challenges suggest that accepting HLSs as legitimate learners is important to keep them as active learners.

#### **4.7.5. Heritage language students as a resource**

Though HLSs are considered as a resource of the nation, it appears to be difficult for instructors to use HLSs at the classroom level. The ideas emerged from the interview data obtained from instructors, HLSs, and non-HLSs include: using HLSs as cultural informants and asking them to present role-play to show some examples. Foreign language students who learn from language textbooks do not usually have contacts with the real life language community, thus having HLSs could be helpful.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### 5.1. Improving literacy skills

The proficiency levels of HLSs in this study vary greatly as those in previous studies (Kondo-Brown, 1998 & 2001; McGinnis, 1996). Some started studying Japanese from the second-year level, others at the third or fourth-year level. They all perceived their aural receptive skills to be superior to their productive skills. Among those HLS who spoke fluently on a range of different familiar topics, the levels of their literacy skills differ considerably. Similar findings were observed in Kondo's study (1997). However, the participating HLSs all felt they needed to enhance their literacy (reading, writing, and the knowledge of kanji) skills. The tendency that Japanese HLSs have weaker literacy skills than oral skills (Kondo-Brown, 1998b, 1999, 2003; Matsunaga, 2003, McGinnis, 1996) was also observed among my participants. In particular, many participants emphasized the need to improve their writing skills, indicating it was imperative that they attain a professional-level command of Japanese. Ken said, "I can freely converse in Japanese, but reading and writing are different. I want to attain the level proficient enough to conduct business, like writing letters." Kondo (1999) has shown that bilingual and semibilingual HLSs who continue to study beyond the requirement stress the importance of academic Japanese because of their academic and professional aspirations, and because they know that they would not study reading and writing independently without taking a course. However, foreign language classes in the upper level and an accelerated track course for HLSs generally focus on literature study at the higher level (Valdés, 1995; Douglas, 2002; McGinnis, 1996), which is not necessarily incongruent with HLSs' interests and goals.

Kondo (1998a) notes that HLSs utilize the societal language or Japanese for different purposes and in different contexts. My participants speak Japanese at home or in the community while they receive formal education exclusively in English. The majority of my participants

considered their first language in literacy to be English. Only two regarded both English and Japanese as their first languages in speaking while none of the students regarded both English and Japanese as their first languages in writing. According to Valdés (1995), people who acquire their first language in a context where two languages are spoken in the community “may have very limited textual competence in one of their two languages because they have not been exposed to reading and writing in that language” (p. 314). It is hardly surprising that writing in their HL does not come easily as their dominant language is English. Unless they were given assignments and forced to write, they did not write in Japanese, although a few HLSs sometimes wrote letters or e-mail to Japanese friends. They noted a variety of reasons why writing was the most difficult task. These include insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and kanji, differences in written and spoken language, lack of practice. They commented that they did not have enough opportunities to write in class.

Many instructors commented that there was a gap between the content of HLSs’ writing and their cognitive level. They pointed out that HLSs wrote as the way they speak, and that the level of their writing was equivalent to that of elementary school children. There are three possible explanations for this. First, it can be attributed to few opportunities to practice writing in their HL as HLSs mentioned. Perhaps, the lack of practice may prevent them from utilizing a variety of sentence structures and conjunctions. Second, their range of vocabulary is limited, so they write within their knowledge of lexicon; HLSs’ need for vocabulary expansion has been mentioned in previous studies (Valdés, 1995; Douglas, 2003). Third, they may not understand or yet be able to utilize a set of rules that they have learned in FL classrooms, namely, the notion of written style versus spoken style, a problem which is identified by Kondo (1999).

Although most of my participants have studied at HL school, the exposure was limited - one and a half hours instruction once a week, 6 hours a month, totalling 60 hours per year. The range of instructional hours at HL schools was somewhere between sixty and eighty hours. The

level that they completed at HL school over 12 years is approximately Grade six, thus the reading materials that they were able to read do not match with their cognitive level.

It is understandable that university HLSs in the study commented on the need to read more intensively, and on a variety of topics from different sources, i.e., books, newspapers, and the Internet, in addition to stories and novels. They all perceived the benefit of reading. The general perception is that the better their literacy skills become, the more they will engage in reading. Tse's (2001) study showed that HLSs who have access to reading materials in their HL maintain high level of competence and have interest in reading in the HL for pleasure. However, as shown in Chapter 4, very few HL participants read outside class. Only one student went to the public library to borrow Japanese fiction books in the foreign language book section. A few occasionally read popular magazines. Nobody mentioned borrowing from the extensive selection of Japanese books available in the Asian library or reading free local magazines.

It is reported that recreational reading contributes to the high level of literacy in their HL. Some scholars (Cho and Krashen, 1998; Krashen, 1993; McQuillan, 1996,1998;Tse, 2001) have suggested that free reading programs, where students can choose their own materials, offers benefits such as learning vocabulary efficiently. Many of the participants also mentioned that content reading, rather than mere literal translation, was not only interesting but also conducive to learning new kanji and vocabulary, as well as improving reading and writing skills.

#### **5.1.1. Kanji as an obstacle**

Although HLSs know that reading is beneficial for bettering their Japanese, they do not read independently outside class. For HLSs who have grown up in North America, kanji is a major challenge. Douglas (2002) notes that the present approach is "to teach a handful of basic kanji and students then study the rest by themselves" (Douglas, 2002, p. 149). She points out that this merely promotes rote memorization, which in turn, arouse negative views learning Kanji.

HLSs' dominant language in literacy is English. Japanese orthography is different from written English in that the former does not utilize alphabetic characters. Japanese employs two types of script: 1) phonetic scripts called hiragana and katakana, each of which has 72 basic characters; 2) an ideographic script called kanji that carries semantic units. The largest dictionary containing kanji has 49,946 kanji, but only 3000 are usually utilized (Kaiho & Saito, 1989). The number of kanji for common use, "*Jyoojyoo kanji*"<sup>35</sup> is 1945, which are taught during the nine years of compulsory education in Japan. Each of these 1945 kanji has more than one way of being read and have several meanings: *on-yomi* for Chinese origin words and *kun-yomi* for Japanese origin words. These kanji are combined to make a number of *kango*. "To readers of an alphabetic system, memorizing characters seems overwhelming" (Kaiho & Saito, 1989, p. 151). Kondo (1998b, p. 48) illustrates the problem; students of immigrant background whose languages are not alphabetic still have difficulties in FL classes even if they speak fluently.

Traditional reading textbooks for FL students have a reading passage with a glossary, the purpose of which is sometimes just to introduce new kanji, sentence structure, and vocabulary with or without familiar kanji (Jorden, 2002). Jorden (2002) considers this format of teaching kanji as problematic. First, students encounter many words only once, but learning a variety of features of language takes time, "a large number of occurrences in a variety of contexts" (Jorden, 2003, p.98). Some HLSs told me that although instructors often announced during the class that they would be giving a kanji quiz on the next class, the amount of time given for studying kanji was not sufficient. As these students might only have seen some of the kanji once, they forgot them easily. In addition, kanji has multiple readings and meanings in different contexts and can be combined to make compound words. Jorden (2002) pointed out that in reading drills, students who have to read the same passage over and over become able to recognize the passage without

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<sup>35</sup> See Japanese language resource book. "*Jyoojyoo kanji*" are a list of kanji that should be known to read legislation, official documents, newspapers, magazines, etc.

actually reading it. Sumiyo, a participant in the present study, mentioned that she soon became familiar with the kanji appearing in the reading material as they read the same passages repeatedly for several weeks. Moreover, in the upper-level reading course I observed, authentic journal articles were used, and the level of difficulty of kanji and content of the articles (i.e., sentence structures, vocabulary, and topics) were not comparable with the kanji that HLSs learned at HL school.

All HLSs who attended HL school mentioned that they had little motivation, spoke in English mostly, and did not study outside of HL school hours. According to Jane, “how much you learn depends on your efforts, so the length of the study doesn’t guarantee you to know how many kanji [you are supposed to know].” Oketani reports (1997b) that the length of study at HL school is not positively correlated to students’ language abilities.

The textbook generally used at HL schools is *kokugo* (Japanese language arts); the same textbook is used in Japanese elementary school, where students learn approximately 900 kanji while completing a Grade six level. When HLSs do not engage in reading, it is hard to sustain even the 900 characters that they have attained in a period of twelve years. In turn, their insufficient knowledge of kanji keeps them from reading independently. All participating students except one expressed their difficulties in remembering kanji. HLSs said that every time they learned new kanji, they simply wrote them down over and over until they finally remembered them, just like those non-HLSs without Chinese background.

Even a HL student, who had attended elementary school in Japan for five years, dropped the newspaper course fearing that he would not be able to catch up. Kondo (1999) explains that the reasons that her semi-bilingual/bilingual students dropped the courses can be attributed to “self-efficacy” (p. 78). The prospect of doing well in a course affects HLSs’ motivation to continue to study. Among the five fourth year students in the present study, only two took the newspaper course in the previous school year, though all of them said that they would like to be



able to read newspapers. Unlike Kondo's participants who dropped out, the participants in the present study continued taking Japanese courses although they avoided courses in which they were not likely to succeed.

Kondo (1998b) also revealed that her fourth-year student dropped the course since she felt that she would not be able to catch up with the advanced non-HLSs who completed all those three year courses: “-No matter how fluently they may speak Japanese -[they] must master 300-level academic literacy skills (e.g., mastering of approximately 500 kanji during an academic year) or they will have trouble getting good grades and face immense difficulty when they decide to move on to Japanese 401.... Japanese 401 is primarily for advanced learners of Japanese who have studied formally for three years” (p. 57). In the present study, almost all HLSs expressed frustration about the fact that it was assumed that they knew kanji even though some did not take any lower-level courses. More consideration should be given to HLSs and non-HLSs without Chinese background.

#### **5.1.2. Vocabulary Expansion: Difficulties of compound words consisting of kanji**

While many HLSs emphasized the difficulty of learning kanji, there were only a few HLSs who considered vocabulary expansion important in enhancing their literacy skills. As of my knowledge, only one scholar (Douglas, 2002) specifically commented on the importance of learning a more difficult kind of vocabulary, *kango*, although scholars such as Kondo (2003) and Matsunaga (2003) commented on the need of vocabulary expansion. The reason for the need to develop more extensive vocabulary is that HLSs' language use is limited to the contexts of family and peer group settings; consequently, their vocabulary does not develop beyond the level of daily conversation. Therefore, they need to acquire vocabulary in order to express more abstract concepts.

Japanese lexicon contains a large number of loan words in addition to *wago/yamato kotoba* (Japanese words). Loan words are roughly divided into two types: *kango* (Sino-Japanese) and *gairaigo*. The former consists of compound words made of kanji while the latter includes loan words from European, Korean and Southeast Asian Languages.

Shibatani (1990, p.142) examined the report of the Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyuujo (which is called National Language Institute in English, hereafter KKK). The study examined 90 magazines from literary magazines, popular magazines, practical and popular science, domestic and women's magazines, and entertainment and hobby magazines published in 1956; the report is based on a sample of 40,000 different words out of 530,000 words (ibid, p.142). In literature magazines, *wago* constituted 58.9 % of the total words while *kango* constituted 40.0% of the total words. Even in popular magazines, 55.1 % of the total words was from *wago* while 41.2 % of the total words used was from *kango*. In a 1971 report by KKK that examined the vocabulary of newspapers, 26.3-43.9 % of the total words was *wago* while 50.7 – 65.3% was *kango*.

According to Shibatani (1990), *kango* in Japanese is equivalent to Latin words in English, in that *kango* words tend to express **abstract** ideas, and are mainly academic vocabulary. In other words, approximately 40 to 50 % of vocabulary appearing in materials read at the university level is *kango* whose meaning is abstract and not used in daily conversation. *Kango* words are difficult to read because: 1) they are exclusively written in kanji where Chinese reading is employed; 2) their meanings are abstract; 3) they are not used in everyday conversations. Therefore, when HLSs engage in reading and writing, kanji seems to impose two problems: recognizing and writing kanji and unfamiliar vocabulary. Moreover, even though HLSs sustain the knowledge of kanji that they learned before entering university, the vocabulary and contents of reading materials studied at university level are far more difficult than the approximately Grade Six level they may have mastered. Therefore, in addition to kanji, they

need to acquire a more sophisticated vocabulary consisting of *kango* that appear in written texts in order to comprehend newspaper, novels, and articles.

## **5.2. Developing academically and professionally sophisticated oral skills**

Although instructors perceived that HLSs in the study could carry a conversation fluently on a variety of familiar topics with “native or near-native like intonation and pronunciation” (Kondo, 1999, p.87; Matsunaga, 2003; Gambhir, 2003), both HLSs and their instructors felt that they need to improve *keigo*, the formal register. In particular, instructors mentioned HLSs’ deficiency in that they mix discursal styles. As Cho, Shin, and Krashen (2004) and Wong-Fillmore (1991) also noted, the domain of HL use by my participants is limited to family, siblings, and friends, which only require them to use the informal register. Only two HLSs commented that they sometimes use *keigo*, the formal register, at work: one at a restaurant, and the other at his father’s office; therefore, *keigo* is difficult to acquire as HLSs do not have opportunities to use it in authentic contexts. However, HLSs do have sociolinguistic awareness as to why and when they are supposed to use *keigo*. Some HLSs indicated that grammatical instruction on *keigo* was useful, as they had not fully understood the systematic rules: how to conjugate verbs and nouns to honorific and humble forms (*keigo*). They expressed the need for practice, since applying the knowledge is difficult due to scarce opportunities to use it.

In addition, instructors noted a lack of understanding of the discursal style. Akira mentioned that before taking a second-year level course, he was mixing the polite form with the informal form. Before being taught at university, HLSs were generally unaware that they were mixing the polite form (one of the forms in *keigo*) with the informal form; however, it seems to be hard to unlearn the habit of mixing different forms in their speech and writing. Many of them used contractions for verbs unconsciously. For example, Yuko wrongly used those verb forms in her classroom, and she did not realize that those forms were inappropriate until her instructor

pointed it out. I also observed that other students used variety of contraction versions of vocabulary only used in informal speech. According to Tsujimura (1997), when Japanese people speak in informal contexts, words are often shortened (i.e., nasal syllabification, vowel diffusion, contraction); moreover, entire sentences are sometimes abbreviated. HLSs need to understand the notion of different styles and to be aware of which styles they are using and be able to use an appropriate style in a given situation.

Another point frequently mentioned by instructors was a gap between the content of HLSs' speech and their cognitive level. Many instructors stressed their poor vocabulary and the lack of content in their speech. According to Ochs (1979), there are two styles of discourse - relatively planned (written) and unplanned (spoken). In unplanned discourse, speakers employ morphosyntactic structures that were acquired in the early stages of language development, whereas in planned discourse they utilize more morphosyntactic structures acquired later. HLSs' language contact and use is limited; even more, they tend to rely on their existing knowledge, and to use more familiar vocabulary and simple structures when speaking. Their limited range of vocabulary prevents them to discuss academic, social, or political topics, which requires more abstract and sophisticated vocabulary. Also, Maynard (1989) points out the fragmental nature of Japanese conversational language. Academic discourse differs from everyday conversation in that people have to speak clearly in complete sentences with sophisticated vocabulary in order to convey ideas. These factors may contribute to the poor content of HLSs' speech, which instructors perceive as childish.

Kondo-Brown (2001a) reported that all HLSs permitted to take the fourth-year conversation class indicated their desire to improve their Japanese language skills for work and for communication. The present HLSs showed a strong interest in working in Japan or making use of Japanese in their professional lives in Canada. Although they stressed that it was useful to learn how to do presentations and make speeches, the course did not seem to be challenging

enough as Takuya commented: "Conversation class is a little bit easy." In Kondo's study (1999), a HLS who stopped taking Japanese courses suggested that "the university Japanese program does not adequately meet their [HLSs'] needs of improving oral skills" (p. 80). It seems difficult to accommodate the needs of seemingly fluent HLSs in FL classrooms.

Existing HL track courses focus on developing literacy skills (Douglas, 2002; Kondo, 1998; Kono and McGinnis, 2001; McGinnis, 1996; Valdes, 1995). However, developing oral skills is equally important for HLSs in the higher-level courses. Kondo (2003) suggests that the most useful goal for advanced university language programs for HLSs is the acquisition of academic, high-level registers and vocabulary expansion, which would enhance HLSs' career opportunities (Kagan, 2003; Konno & McGinnis, 2001).

### **5.3. Kanji instruction to benefit from heritage language students' oral skills**

All groups of participants perceived that HLSs were superior to their non-HL counterpart in receptive and oral skills. It seems that HLSs' oral fluency can be an advantage in enhancing their literacy skills. Matsunaga (2003) reported that HLSs' oral skills are positively correlated with their reading comprehension abilities. Similarly, Oketani (1997b) showed that Japanese oral proficiency is positively correlated with Japanese reading proficiency, and that the two are interdependent. In other words, the familiarities of sounds of kanji helped them to understand the reading passages. She indicated that HLSs "could apply their oral skills to reading smoothly" (p. 7) if they know how to read most of the kanji in a text. In other words, HLSs' reading comprehension is influenced by their knowledge of reading kanji. Therefore, she suggested that HLSs at the intermediate and advanced levels would benefit from kanji instruction to enhance their reading proficiency.

How can FL classrooms help HLSs build on their oral skills to improve their reading proficiency? Douglas (2002) utilized computer technology, attempting to tailor individual needs

of HLSs and some non-HLSs without kanji background. Identifying HLSs' underdeveloped areas, she concentrated on strategies for the learning and reception of kanji and oral production of the formal register, as well as aiming to help them to become autonomous learners. First, she assigned her students a book report, through which she aimed to teach them how to locate unknown kanji and use strategies for learning them in order to reduce anxiety. Many HLSs in the present study expressed their frustration about learning kanji. Rather than promoting memorization of kanji, teaching strategies for learning them seems to be more helpful, considering the number of kanji HLSs have to be able to read.

Douglas' participants then had to choose their reading materials by skimming the Internet, then fill out a checklist recording the progress of their kanji learning, and write a summary of what they had read. They were given different kanji quizzes based on their readings. To promote oral skills, she had them do one oral interview and role-play to assess their development of the formal register. This way, it appears that HLSs' needs can be addressed; HLSs can learn the materials that match their own levels at their own pace. Douglas suggested that a presentation on the reading topic and role-play focusing on the formal register were effective. This curriculum is specially designed for HLSs and some non-HLSs, and extra resources such as an instructor, time, budget for opening such a course, access to computers, and HLSs' knowledge of computers are essential. Douglas's approach could be modified to teach a mixed class with non-HLSs or could be partially incorporated. Similarly, Compton (2003) notes that though some forms of computer technology integrated to the HL curriculum may be too expensive for small classes, web-based courses could be developed.

### 5.3.1. Bringing awareness into language learning

While HLSs expressed a resolution to simply work harder, i.e., to read more or practice kanji and *keigo*, instructors indicated that HLSs need to recognize their weak areas and consciously work to improve those areas. Many instructors, especially, stressed the importance of instilling language awareness. For example, HLSs need to focus on discoursal styles, written and oral, as well as on the formal register, *keigo*. One of the instructors recommended teaching relevant strategies. Although HLSs' enthusiasm for improving their HL is commendable, they may derive greater benefits and learn more efficiently by focusing on forms or on learning strategies in accordance with their goal.

Training HLSs to focus on the form that they are using in a given context seems to be helpful. According to Tarone (1982, 1983 as cited in Hadley, 2000), the vernacular style is characterized by "the informal use of language with little attention to form" (Hadley, p. 66). When speaking, language production involves an automatic process. By contrast, the careful style (writing) is produced when a learner undergoes heavy monitoring or attention to the form during production. "A more controlled processing of the language [is] needed to accomplish the task" (p. 66). Thus grammaticality judgement or form-focused production activities of various kinds require heavy monitoring.

For HLSs who have functional oral skills (on familiar topics), speaking is an automatic process. Unlike non-HLSs, HLSs do not seem to think about a sentence structure when talking about familiar topics. Moreover, many instructors noted that HLSs write the way they speak (also reported in Romero, 2000). This suggests that they are not monitoring their language use when writing. The instructors also commented that HLSs mix up the discoursal styles. As one participant mentioned: "I have been mixing up '-*mashita*'<sup>36</sup> and '-*datta*' before I took a second-

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<sup>36</sup> "-*Mashita*" and "-*datta*" denote the past tense. While the former is a part of conjugation of verbs in the formal form, the latter is a part of conjugation of copula (be verb) in the informal form.

year course.” There are two possible explanations for this. The mixing-up has been occurring because: 1) they do not clearly understand the different styles<sup>37</sup> reflected in the forms, 2) they may not be able to monitor easily because their speech production has been automatic. Akira added that he knew that there were different forms, but it was not a set of organized knowledge. Also, during the interviews I observed that HLSs used the formal forms in the beginning but later on began to be inconsistent by mixing with the informal forms. If they do not understand the rules clearly, HLSs need to learn a paradigm of verb conjugations and usage. However, instructors at different levels have been observing these mix-ups. This suggests that HLSs need to be conscious about which form they are using so that they can utilize the appropriate form in a given context. The formal register, *keigo*, which requires conjugating verbs and adding a prefix and suffix to verbs, can also be employed properly by raising awareness. Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (as cited in Kondo, 2003) suggest that HLSs at the university level will benefit by paying attention to the concept of register as well as to classroom activities that offer opportunities to practice the sophisticated registers.

In the present study, while some HL students were placed in second year courses, some were directly placed in fourth year course. Also, their proficiency levels within the same course appeared to vary. Considering the wide range of proficiency of HLSs, teaching strategies seems to be helpful for HLSs at different levels as they can choose strategies appropriate for their levels and learning styles. Although it was a special HL course in that Douglas (2002) taught her students to use a variety of strategies, teaching strategies could be incorporated into FL classrooms and be helpful for non-HLSs as well.

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<sup>37</sup> Utilizing different styles requires students to conjugate verbs or add a prefix to nouns; thus, grammar knowledge is required.



### **5.3.2. Challenges faced by instructors in foreign language classrooms**

Pedagogical needs differ between HLSs and non-HLSs (King, 1998). Often, “the teacher is caught in the middle trying to juggle the demands, -equally legitimate- of both groups” (King, 1998, p. 29). In classrooms where there are few HLSs, FL instructors may not have the time or training to address the needs of HLSs (Kondo-Brown, 2001b). Moreover, it has been observed by researchers that many instructors are not given any choice about what and how to teach in the classroom (Kondo, 1999). Instructors in the present study were also caught in the same situation. While they were aware that HLSs’ needs were not addressed, they had to adhere to the currently employed pedagogical approach geared for non-HLSs.

Affective factors appear to influence instructors’ behaviours. All instructors in the present study indicated that they were very careful to be fair to all students and to take non-HLSs’ feelings very much into account. Nevertheless, some non-HLSs had even gone so far as to complain to one of the instructors about the presence of HLSs in the same classroom. The present findings confirm Tse’s (2000) findings that the perception of FL students’ learning experiences has “important pedagogical and programmatic implications” (p. 69). Some non-HLSs even in the fourth-year-level conversation class commented they were discouraged by the presence of HL speakers who had contact with the language outside the classroom, as discussed in other literature (Krashen, Tse, & McQuillan, 1998; Tse, 1999).

Tse (2000) reported that the presence of HLSs in lower-level courses affects non-HLSs’ feelings negatively. Commenting on how the present non-HLSs felt, one senior instructor in the present study stressed that foreign language learning is associated with self-esteem: “I cannot ask HLSs a simple question. I usually ask non-HLSs first.” As some non-HLSs went to ask the fourth-year conversation instructor about her expectation of students’ performance because of their fellow HL classmates, it appears that the presence of HLSs brings anxiety to non-HLS, which in turn, can affect their motivation and participation.

Placing HLSs in appropriate levels helps instructors not only to teach mixed class more smoothly but also to keep non-HLSs from feeling discouraged or having ill feelings toward HLSs. It is essential to assess all HLSs with previous background, but it does not seem to be enough (McGinnis, 1996). In fact, even though all HLSs in the present study filled out a background information sheet, were interviewed, and took a placement test, instructors still found that the level of some HL students exceeded the level of the course.

McGinnis (1996) pointed out that there is a lack of fit between HLSs' skill and their course placement test. He found that the HLSs placed in the second-year course outperformed non-HLSs placed in the third-year class in their level of listening comprehension, grammatical knowledge, and reading skills. He also reported that the reading skills of semi-native speakers who enrolled in the first year course were significantly weaker than those of non-HLSs at the beginning of the second year. The present study also found that HLSs placed in the third-year reading and writing course felt that writing at that level was very difficult although they have good speaking and listening skills. This is consistent with McGinnis' (1996) finding, which suggests that assessment tests designed for non-HLSs are not suitable for HLSs. Kondo (2003) also highlights Valdés' (1998a) assertion that bilingual HL students do not fit into the hierarchy of language development described in the ACTFL guideline and that it provides little information at which level HL students should be placed in the existing curriculum. Therefore, it is very important to create placement tests or modify the currently employed ones so that an accurate assessment can be made.

### 5.3.3. Heritage language students' challenges

HLSs in the present study were seeking a class where they can continue to improve their Japanese. In some cases, the first challenge they face is to be accepted as a legitimate language student. Kagan (2001) reports that due to the fundamental differences between HLSs and non-HLSs, "many Slavic faculty question the legitimacy of heritage language students, dismissing them as 'native speakers' who do not need any instructions" (p. 2). This was also found in the present study in that some students had to ask many times to be allowed to take the course and another student was asked jokingly by the instructor why she had to take the course even though she was Japanese Canadian. Also, one of the HLSs wrote to me: "Because I know some of the sentence structures that my classmates are still not taught, instructors tends to (99%) deduct marks for using 'not-yet taught terms or grammar.' Similar observations that instructors are especially harsh on native speakers were made in previous research (Kagan, 2003; Krashen, 1998; Tse, 2001)

The second challenge for HLSs occurs when they adjust to a new way of learning Japanese. HLSs have naturally acquired Japanese, and their knowledge of the language is intuitive: "I want to learn the grammar and structures. Because sometimes you know that it sounds right but don't know why." Though some HLSs are more willing to learn grammar than others, all HLSs initially have to undergo some adjustment. At HL schools, they simply read the textbooks and think about teachers' questions, content, vocabulary (including kanji) and language usage. Alison said, "No, I never learned grammar at HL school. I just want to learn kanji, new vocabulary, and their usage; I don't think I want to learn what the noun modification is. I can understand the meaning (of a given passage) even though I don't know what it is." In a FL classroom they have to describe the language itself rather than just conveying what they understood. Moreover, they have to do so using grammatical terms that they do not clearly understand.

The articles that students in 408 read are from an authentic journal, with subject matter that was socio-political in nature. These are difficult even for a native Japanese speaker such as myself. Syntactic structures are complex. There are hardly any simple sentences in these articles; a typical sentence is a compound adjoined by a coordinate conjunction or disjunction or a complex sentence containing an independent clause and a subordinate clause. Relative clauses, too, are frequently employed. Moreover, in addition to kanji, HLSs have to acquire a more sophisticated vocabulary made up of *kango* as well. These materials are cognitively challenging. As Sumiyo explained, "University courses are geared for non-HLSs, that is the reason that we have been mainly doing literal translations, but we also need support."

It has been mentioned that HLSs are confused by FL instructions focusing on grammar; Romero (2000) mentions that when HLSs are given a grammar test, they do not do well although they can write as they hear and speak. HLSs in the present study were also confused by grammar terminology and by the grammar-oriented approach. The majority were not taught grammar explicitly; adjusting themselves to a different approach takes time and practice. The fact that the participating HLSs were placed in a higher level seems to be one of the reasons why they find it difficult to adjust to this new approach; they missed the systematic learning of grammar. Even though they did not learn what other students have learned, they had to get accustomed to a new approach in order to analyze their own language and describe it. Students in the third-year course have to engage in literal translation through detailed grammar analyses at the sentence level. According to one senior instructor who was teaching both third- and fourth-year reading courses, HLSs' greatest problems at this level were related to grammar analyses. This instructor believed that as there was a gap between the grammatical knowledge of HLSs and native speakers, the grammar analyses might be a great help to HLSs.

It seems that there is indeed a gap in linguistic knowledge, including grammar, between heritage students and native speakers. Kagan (2003) reports that the grammatical competence of

heritage students differs from that of native speakers: “[h]eritage language students lack the full spectrum of competencies because of their contact with a community of speakers, their incomplete or absence of education in Russia, dominance of English in their formal education.” (§4). Lynch (2003) suggests that “[t]he more frequent a form in discourse, the earlier it is acquired by child L1 learners and by adult L2 learners” (§6). When we take Kagan’s (2003) results and Lynch’s (2003) comment into account, we can speculate that language contact and use affect the knowledge that HLSs acquire. In other words, vocabulary, expression, and structures that HLSs encounter less frequently may not be acquired due to limited exposure to their HL. The range of linguistic knowledge that can be acquired by language use at home and/or the community and a Grade Six level textbook is very limited. This implies the usefulness of structural analyses. Supporting this idea, Kagan (2003) also suggested “they [HLSs] also have some grammatical intuition that will function effectively if supported by declarative knowledge of grammar” (§15).

Teaching HLSs how to engage in grammar analysis could be more effective and beneficial if they are given initial support. Miki, one of the participating students said, “I think that I am really lucky to learn the grammar. ...I think English is too different. You have to master grammar (of Japanese) and analytical parts.” She added that since she had a great English teacher, she could relate some grammar terms to those of English. However, nearly all HLSs admitted that they did not understand the terms well, and some were still not sure even at the fourth year level. As the previously mentioned senior instructor observed, HLSs could benefit from the grammatical analyses in attaining a professional-level command of the language – both written and oral. Kagan (2003) suggested that macro-level grammar approach is suitable; i.e., teaching “paradigms of declensions and conjugations rather than one case at a time” (Kagan, 2003, §15). To the best of my knowledge, there is no study that examined the effect of grammar instruction in teaching HLSs.

While they gradually adjust to a new approach, HLSs realize that their needs are not met. They realize that there is no appropriate course to meet their needs. Alison, a HLS lamented: "There is no writing course for a student like me." Two other students, Karen and Akira wished that there were a graduate-level conversation class. Akira said, "I will definitely take a special course for HLSs if offered: Learning written and spoken styles and *keigo* was useful, but learning what I already know is a waste of time." I also found this comment in one of the questionnaires: "I find it frustrating being a HL student because I feel that there is no appropriate class for my level." For example, the present HLSs enjoy reading in class, but some find it too slow as classes spend a lot of time on detailed analyses at the sentence level. They sometimes get bored or feel that they are not learning much. This is also reported in Romero (2002). Kondo (2001) explains that HLSs' receptive skill is not correlated with their written-productive skill because the high school curriculum of FL classrooms is not appropriate for HLSs.

#### **5.4. How can heritage language students contribute to foreign language classrooms?**

According to Kondo (1998b), HLSs can be a great resource in JFL classrooms. However, very few instructors mentioned cooperative learning activities through which students help one another. The idea of cultural informants mentioned by instructors and non-HLSs seems to be a useful idea as HLSs could present their knowledge and understanding on their cultures. Oxford (1997) points out that often teachers may be the major or only the direct contact in a FL classroom, but "cultural and linguistic ideas are best shaped through reflective inquiry with other people" (p. 448). HLSs could provide different perspectives from instructors.

HLSs' native-like pronunciation and intonation were also a great resource. Role-play by HLSs is a good demonstration or exposure of the target language for non-HLSs. Non-HLSs can practice the informal register with HLSs since students usually use the formal register.

exclusively with their instructors. Being exposed to and able to talk with HLSs is valuable experiences for non-HLSs to enhance their communication skills.

Also, some non-HLSs and HLSs thought that HLSs could explain things in English when other students cannot understand easily; it is not surprising as their dominant language is English. Previous research has shown that collaborative learning can help develop social and communication skills such as “asking for clarification, checking the understanding of others, explaining, paraphrasing, and acknowledging contributions” (Oxford, 1997, p. 446). Thus incorporating collaborative learning into classrooms could be conducive for language learning “if the atmosphere is nurturing and the proper assistance is available” (p. 448). Thus it is important for instructors to create a safe learning environment where students feel comfortable with one another.

## **Chapter 6: Pedagogical Implications and Limitation of the Present Study**

In this chapter, I will discuss the pedagogical implications based on the major findings, relevant for instructors who have HLSs in their FL classrooms and the limitations of the study. Finally, I will also discuss in which direction future research can be directed.

### **6.1. Summary of research findings**

The present study explored HLSs' experiences learning their HL in foreign language classrooms at university. Specifically, it attempted to identify the following: 1) HLSs' needs, 2) the ways of improving their weaker skills, their strengths, 3) challenges faced by instructors and HLSs, 4) HLSs as a resource in FL classrooms.

As a result, the study finds that the HLSs perceived the need to improve their literacy skills and oral skills proficient enough to be employed at the professional level. In FL classrooms, HLSs found grammar analyses confusing and thus difficult due to the unfamiliarity of the grammar terms and approach. Kanji was also found to be a major problem for them to read and write as well as to increase vocabulary. As the way to enhance their existing skills, content reading and teaching relevant strategies were suggested. Non-HLSs' perceptions were found to affect instructors' teaching and classroom interactions. In addition, the lack of a placement test designed for HLSs, of resources seemed to cause problems for instructors. While instructors' challenges are related to non-HLSs' perceptions, the lack of placement test designed for HLSs and resources, HLSs' challenges are the lack of awareness/understandings for their need of studying their HL and result from learning it as a foreign language. Although instructors found it not easy to use HLSs' linguistic abilities as a resource because of psychological factors, cooperative and collaborative learning activities as a group/pair could be helpful for both non-HLSs and HLSs.



## **6.2. Pedagogical implications for language instructors**

### **6.2.1. Assessment model**

Utilizing assessment tests designed for FL students of Japanese seems to create problems as those tests do not concern HLSs' unbalanced skills. Kanji and vocabulary seems to affect HLSs' comprehension of the tests and their performance, which results in placing them in lower level course.

The level of reading materials of the university level greatly differ from those taught at HL school in terms of content and vocabulary (including kanji and *kango*). Placement tests that are not influenced solely by the knowledge of kanji and vocabulary could alleviate this problem. Perhaps, giving a glossary of the kanji on the test may lessen the burden of kanji and allow them to utilize their aural skills to understand instructions and reading passages (Matsunaga, 2003). However, some caution should be taken as HLSs may face a great difficulty when placed in a higher level based on their oral proficiency alone.

### **6.2.2. Providing a glossary of grammatical terms used in class**

HLSs with prior knowledge are very often placed in the upper-level courses from the very beginning; consequently, they do not know grammatical terms to follow instructions in foreign language classrooms. Therefore, providing a glossary containing grammatical terms used in class could be very helpful for HLSs. If resources are permitted, giving HLSs a workshop on how to read texts while focusing on sentence structures prior to the commencement of classes would be beneficial.

### **6.2.3. Enhancement of oral and aural skills**

University conversation courses at the upper level could aim to develop oral skills sophisticated enough to employ at the professional and academic level. Having students do

presentations based on readings appears to be a good exercise. Practicing the formal register by role-playing as mentioned in Douglas (2002), could be incorporated in a FL classroom as well, since small grouping could allow students at similar levels to work together and engage in these activities.

Though not mentioned by any of participants, improving HLSs receptive skills to a higher level is equally important. Nobody appeared to watch or listen to Japanese news though some mentioned watching dramas; in fact, some admitted that they do not understand at all except the weather forecast. Perhaps, watching or listening to news on social/political topics in class could be beneficial to increase their vocabulary. Vocabulary could be enhanced through watching or listening to news, not just from reading.

#### **6.2.4. Teaching strategies of leaning kanji**

Nobody knows HLSs' struggle with kanji. Instructors should be aware that HLSs as well as non-HLSs without Chinese background found learning kanji difficult and frustrating. As Jorden (2002) suggested, rote memorization does not help HLSs learn kanji effectively. Therefore, strategies for learning kanji can be integrated in reading courses as Douglas (2002) suggested. Also, having them search their own contemporary reading materials through the Internet seems effective, given a range of kanji proficiency levels among HLSs. This forces students to read authentic texts and search the materials of their own interests.

#### **6.2.5. Separation of conversation class in lower-level courses**

Since HLSs' basic communication skills are stronger than non-HLSs', they should each have their own conversation class separately. Lynch (2003) recommends that HLSs and non-HLSs have separated classes at lower and intermediate levels due to affective reasons. In the present study, HLSs became frustrated as they felt that they were not evaluated fairly while non-

HLSs felt unfair or intimidated. Where the enrolment of HLSs is low, non-HLSs who have lived or studied in Japan could form a conversation class with HLSs since they have similar linguistic skills.

### **6.3. Suggestions for further study**

Kondo-Brown (2001b) points out that although many scholars lament that HLSs are ignored in FL programs, her study is the first empirical study, which provided preliminary evidence that formal instruction may not be helpful to improve proficiency of heritage students of Japanese. I set forth to explore HLSs' needs and challenges as well as a variety of issues that instructors have to deal with in foreign language classrooms. While pedagogical needs of the two groups are different, it is not feasible to change the current approach employed in FL classrooms where the number of HLSs is very small. Douglas (2002) taught her class where HLSs chose their own materials and studied at their own pace. Her class was geared towards HLSs but required additional resources, i.e., budget for opening a course, instructors' preparatory time, a computer lab, etc. However, some of her ideas can be incorporated into FL classrooms. Training HLSs to utilize language learning strategies such as cognitive and metacognitive strategies, according to their needs and goals would be a way to enhance learning. The same can be applied to help non-HLSs. Instructors in the study also saw benefits of bringing language awareness (raising consciousness, i.e., employing cognitive strategies) to HLSs. Future research can be conducted to explore how these strategies can be integrated in FL classrooms and how they can be used to enhance their weaker skills. Also, although there was no proficiency test administered to determine their areas of weakness, participants identified HLSs literacy skills to be weak compared to their high oral proficiency. When they were placed in the lower level course based on their literacy skills (inability to read text or instruction written in kanji on tests), instructors faced immense challenges. However, placing them in a high level course may cause HLSs to

withdraw from the course because it may be too difficult. There is a perception that HLSs could quickly learn literacy skills and that HLSs' linguistic abilities are matched with those of advanced non-HLSs (Kondo-Brown, 2003); however, there is no evidence for that. Future investigation can pursue how to scaffold HLSs with unbalanced skills so that they would continue to study at the advanced levels.

#### **6.4. Limitations and strengths of the present study**

The present study has its limitations in that the number of HLS participants is small, and that the duration of study is short, one academic term (September to December, 2003). The majority of students had Chinese background, and there were few Anglophone and Japanese HLSs in the program. If the present study were conducted at a university in the Prairie provinces, I might have had different results; thus the findings of the present study cannot be generalized since this is a unique demographic composition. Also, I utilized the questionnaires in order to see how the three groups of participants generally perceive HLSs' learning in FL classrooms, which might have overlooked individual differences. In order to see HLSs' strengths and needs, I conducted interviews with HLSs and instructors and utilized the questionnaires through which I attempted to explore the perceptions of those who were engaged in various class activities. However, I could have used a testing instrument to assess HLSs' linguistic abilities to identify the areas of their weakness and needs.

Despite the limitation, the study has achieved its goal, which was to better understand HLSs' learning experiences at university to hear their voices and to make others aware of their challenges. By inviting them to participate in the study, I hoped that HLSs would have an opportunity to think of their goals, needs, and challenges in learning their HL and focus on strengthening the areas of their weaknesses. One of the HLSs wrote to me: "I was really glad to have been a part of your research... I was able to think about a few things because of your

interviews. I realized that I shouldn't be so hesitant about asking questions." As further commented at the end of her e-mail to me, I hope "it is helpful for future Nikkei (Japanese Canadian) students. Also, I do hope this study helps researchers, teachers, and students to understand HLSS' needs, goals, and various issues surrounding HL education in foreign language programs.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaires

### Questionnaire to Instructors

#### Challenges, Needs, and Contributions of Heritage Language Students in Foreign Language Classrooms

**Heritage Language (HL)** students refers to those who have Japanese-speaking parents or those who have attended Japanese language schools and have some prior knowledge of the language though their language proficiency is not like that of native Japanese.

**A. Please circle one response for each of the following questions.**

**1. Have you taught or do you teach HL students in a foreign language class?**

Yes

No

**2. How many HL students do you have or have had in your class(es)?**

(Please answer by each course number if you have taught or are teaching more than one class with HL students.)

0   1   2   3   4   5   More (Please specify: approx. \_\_\_\_\_)   Course Number \_\_\_\_\_

0   1   2   3   4   5   More (Please specify: approx. \_\_\_\_\_)   Course Number \_\_\_\_\_

0   1   2   3   4   5   More (Please specify: approx. \_\_\_\_\_)   Course Number \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate descriptor.**

**1. It is fair for HL students to study Japanese in a foreign language classroom with non-HL students.**

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

**2. Non-HL students appear to be comfortable studying together with HL students.**

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

**3. HL students appear to be comfortable studying together with non-HL students.**

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

**4. Having prior language exposure (both acquired through home, Japanese community and/or HL schools) may not be necessarily beneficial since HL students rely on their existing knowledge and may not improve their abilities.**

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

5. It is challenging to teach and help HL students to improve their current language skills while the majority of class are non-HL students. (For example, proficiency level varies even in the same level course, the course materials are designed for foreign language students, and etc.)

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

6. HL students generally have more advantages in learning Japanese than non-HL students due to their prior knowledge of the language and culture.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

7. HL students generally have stronger speaking abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

8. HL students generally have stronger listening abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

9. HL students generally have stronger reading abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

10. HL students generally have stronger writing abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

11. HL students generally need to improve their listening and comprehension skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

12. HL students generally need to improve their speaking skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

13. HL students generally need to improve their reading skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

14. HL students generally need to improve their writing skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

15. HL students and non-HL students help each other and improve their language skills.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>neutral</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

**Comments**

**Thank you very much for completing this survey.**

## Questionnaire to Non-Heritage Language Students

### Challenges, Needs, and Contributions of Heritage Language Students in Foreign Language Classrooms

**Heritage Language (HL)** students refer to those who have Japanese-speaking parents or those who have attended Japanese schools and have some prior knowledge of the language though their language proficiency is not like that of native Japanese.

**A. Please circle one response for the following question.**

**1. Have you ever lived in Japan?** Yes No

If yes, how long? 6 month 6 month to 1 year 1 year to 1-1/2 year Others ( \_\_\_\_ years)

**2. Have you taken Japanese courses with heritage language students?** Yes No

**B. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate descriptor.**

**1. It is fair for HL students to study Japanese in foreign language classrooms with non-HL students.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**2. I feel comfortable speaking Japanese in front of HL students.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**3. HL students have more advantages in learning Japanese than non-HL students.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**4. HL students have stronger speaking abilities than non-HL students.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**5. HL students have stronger listening abilities than non-HL students.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**6. HL students have stronger reading abilities than non-HL students.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**7. HL students have stronger writing abilities than non-HL students.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**8. HL students and non-HL students can help each other and improve their language skills.**

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1



**If you have any further comments, please use the space below.**

**Thank you very much for completing this survey.**

## Questionnaire to Heritage Language Students

### Challenges, Needs, and Contributions of Heritage Language Students in Foreign Language Classrooms

**Heritage Language (HL)** students refer to those who have Japanese-speaking parents or those who have attended Japanese language schools and have some prior knowledge of the language though their language proficiency is not like that of native Japanese.

#### A. Please circle one response for each of the following questions.

1. What is your mother tongue/first language?

Oral:

Written:

2. Do you speak Japanese at home or have you attended Japanese language schools?

Yes

No

3. If yes, how many years have you attended the Japanese school?

None

1-3 years

4-6 years

7-9 years

9-12 years

4. If yes, whom do/did you speak Japanese with? (More than one response is possible.)

Parents

Siblings

Japanese Canadian Friends

Japanese friends

5. 1. Have you ever lived in Japan/attended school in Japan?

Yes

No

If yes, how long?

6 month

6 month to 1 year

1 year to 1-1/2 year

Others ( \_\_\_\_ years)

#### B. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate descriptor.

1. I feel comfortable studying Japanese in foreign language classrooms with non-HL students.

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

2. I feel comfortable speaking Japanese in front of non-HL students.

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

3. I feel I should give opportunities to non-HL students to answer instructors' questions.

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

4. HL students have more advantages in learning Japanese than non-HL students.

Strongly agree  
5

agree  
4

neutral  
3

disagree  
2

strongly disagree  
1

5. I think that I have stronger speaking abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree

agree

neutral

disagree

strongly disagree

5                      4                      3                      2                      1

6. I think that I have stronger listening abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

7. I think that I have stronger reading abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

8. I think I have stronger writing abilities than non-HL students.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

9. I need to improve my listening and comprehension skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

10. I need to improve my speaking skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

11. I need to improve my reading skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

12. I need to improve my writing skill most.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

13. HL students and non-HL students can help each other and improve their language skills.

Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

**Thank you very much for completing this survey.**

## Appendix 2: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions for Heritage Language students

1. When and for what purpose do you use Japanese outside the classroom? Where and with whom did you use Japanese outside the classroom?
2. Have you attended Heritage Language (HL) schools?
  - 2.1. If so, how many years have you studied at HL schools?
  - 2.2. Can you tell me about your experience learning your heritage language at those schools?
3. Why are you taking this course?
4. Can you describe your experience learning Japanese at UBC?
  - 4.1. How is it similar or different from your experiences at your heritage language school if you have attended HL schools
5. Rank the following 4 skills in order from the most proficient to the least: writing, reading, speaking or listening.
  - 5.1. Why do you think you have acquired proficiency like this?
  - 5.2. Which language skills do you think you need to improve the most and why?
  - 5.3. How can you improve those skills (or that skill)?
6. How do you perceive your learning experience in Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) classes?
  - 6.1. Do you find it difficult?
  - 6.2. What is difficult for you?
  - 6.3. In what ways is it difficult for you?
7. How do you feel about studying in a classroom where everybody else is learning Japanese as a foreign language? (Does it make you feel uncomfortable?)
  - 7.1. Do you find it difficult to learn Japanese as if you were a foreign language student?
8. Do you feel you need more challenges while improving your current language skills?
  - 8.1. If yes, what kind of activities/materials do you think you would need?
  - 8.2. If no, why?
    - 8.2.1. What do you think of the materials that you are using to study Japanese now?
    - 8.2.2. What are other materials that you think could be used to improve your skills?
    - 8.2.3. What kind of material do you find interesting to study? Why?
    - 8.2.4. To what degree do the class materials interest you?
9. Do you feel non-heritage language students think that you have any advantages over them? Do you yourself think you do? If so, please describe.
  - 9.1. In what ways do you think you can contribute to your classroom activities?  
i.e., helping your fellow classmates or playing a leader role, etc.
10. In what ways do you think HLLs and non-HLLs can help each other?

### Sample Interview Questions for non-HL students

1. What do you think of the fact that there are some HL students taking the same courses as you do?
2. Do you think that they have any advantages or disadvantages?
  - 2.1. If so, please describe.
3. Do you think that they may find it difficult to study their own HL with non heritage language students?
  - 3.1. If so, please describe.
  - 3.2. If not, why?
4. In what way do you think HL students and non-HL students can help each other?
5. In what way do you think HL students can contribute to your classroom activities? (i.e., helping fellow classmates or playing a leader role in classroom activities, etc.)

### Sample Interview Questions for Instructors

1. How do you find teaching HL students in a foreign language class?
  - 1.1. Do you find any differences between classes made up of only non-HL students as opposed to classes mixed with HL students?
  - 1.2. Is one more difficult than the other?
2. Do you think that HL students have advantages or disadvantages over non-HL students? If so, please describe?
3. Do you think that HL students tend to rely on their existing language skills?
  - 3.1. If so, please describe how they rely on their knowledge?
  - 3.2. Are their prior language skills and experiences beneficial or not desirable to improve their language skills?
4. According to you, what are their challenges as they learn their HL in a foreign language classroom? (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation)
5. To what degree do you think HL students feel comfortable studying among non-HL students?
  - 5.1. To what degree does their FL classmates' perception affect their comfort level in class?
6. In which language skills, listening, speaking, writing, and reading, do you feel that HL students tend to be stronger or weaker?
  - 6.1. Why do you think so?
  - 6.2. Which language skills do they often need to improve the most?
  - 6.3. How do you think they can improve the weaker skill(s)?
7. Do you give different materials or assignments to HL students? What kind of materials and classroom activities do you think would be beneficial for HL students to optimize their language skills?
8. Do you give special roles to HL students, or use them as a resource in your classroom?
  - 8.1. If so, please describe how you use their language abilities?
  - 8.2. Is it possible for HL students to contribute to classroom activities?
    - 8.2.1. If yes, how
    - 8.2.2. If no, why
  - 8.3. How do you think HL students and non-HL students can help each other?

### Appendix 3: Classroom Observation Check List

**Class:**

**Date:**

	Frequency	Total	G.Total
<b>Instructor's Questions To HLSs</b>		<b>L:</b> <b>C:</b> <b>R:</b>	
<b>Instructor's Questions To NHLs</b>		<b>L:</b> <b>C:</b> <b>R:</b>	
<b>HLSs' questions</b>			
<b>HLSs' Production</b>			
<b>NHLs' Questions</b>			
<b>NHLs' Production</b>			

**\*L refers to linguistic questions while C refers to cultural questions, and R refers to a request made by instructors to read students.**

**Comments:**

## Statement of Informed Consent

Title of Study: Challenges, Needs, and Contributions of Heritage Language Students  
in Foreign Language Classrooms

If you are willing to participate in this study, please fill in the information below.  
Be sure to keep page 1-3 for your own records and to return a signed copy of page 4 to Yayoi  
Shinbo by next class.

---

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to  
participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records. (please check ☒)

**Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study (For the interview).**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**The following part is for those who also agree to participate in classroom observations.**

- Please check if you agree to have your classroom observed: \_\_\_\_\_
- In order to arrange a date and place for the interview and observations, please indicate  
below your contact numbers:

Phone number (Day): \_\_\_\_\_ Evening: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please keep this copy for your records.**



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**Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study (For the interview).**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**The following part is for those who also agree to participate in classroom observations.**

- Please check if you agree to have your classroom observed: \_\_\_\_\_
- In order to arrange a date and place for the interview and observations, please indicate  
below your contact numbers:

Phone number (Day): \_\_\_\_\_ Evening: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this copy to the researcher.**

### Statement of Informed Consent

Title of Study: Challenges, Needs, and Contributions of Heritage Language Students  
in Foreign Language Classrooms

If you are willing to participate in this study, please fill in the information below.  
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---

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\_\_\_\_\_ I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records. (Please check  $\checkmark$ .)

**Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study (For the interview).**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**The following part is for those who also agree to participate in classroom observations.**

- Please check if you agree to have your classroom observed: \_\_\_\_\_
- In order to arrange a date and place for the interview and observations, please indicate  
below your contact numbers:

Phone number (day): \_\_\_\_\_ Evening: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please keep this copy for your records.**

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\_\_\_\_\_ I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records. (Please check ☒)

**Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study (For the interview).**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**The following part is for those who also agree to participate in classroom observations.**

- Please check if you agree to have your classroom observed: \_\_\_\_\_
- In order to arrange a date and place for the interview and observations, please indicate  
below your contact numbers:

Phone number (Day): \_\_\_\_\_ Evening: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this copy to the researcher.**