

the identity of subjectivity (Botsis & Bradbury, 2018).

Language portrait research on HLLs learning and maintenance, focusing on High-Level Languages (HLLs), such as the Cantonese-HL classroom at the University of British Columbia in Canada, explores the potential to enhance language teacher education. In the study, LP was reported to help students reflect on their language knowledge and the function of HL for everyday use, which ultimately led to these students engaging deeply with their HL. The effectiveness of LP in promoting teachers' self-reflection and awareness was also emphasised by Coffey (2015) in teacher training for Chinese language teachers in the United States. It is reported that the process of creating LP helped teachers to develop a deeper understanding of their own linguistic identity and the diverse linguistic backgrounds of their students. It is clear that learning a language involves the development of a sense of identity and cultural awareness. The LP method therefore facilitates language learners to develop their sense of identity and cultural awareness in a creative and expressive way to reflect on their language learning experiences (Muller, 2022). To summarise, LP is considered by language teachers and researchers as one of the approaches to promote language learning and maintain cultural identity awareness as well as to improve language teacher education.

HERITAGE LANGUAGE & HLLs' CULTURAL IDENTITY

The term heritage language was first introduced in the 1970s by the Ontario Heritage Language Project Group. It was widely adopted and supported by American scholars in the field of endangered language preservation and language revitalisation and later applied to language teaching, i.e. the teaching of non-English languages, in the 1990s. According

to Fishman (1991), HL refers to a language or a variety that was acquired at home or in the community in which the individual grows up, but is not necessarily the dominant language of the surrounding society. This is the case when a person has a cultural or familial connection to a particular language that is not commonly spoken in the country in which they live. For example, a child growing up in the United States with Spanish-speaking parents may learn Spanish at home, but is also exposed to English at school and in the broader community. In this case, Spanish is considered the child's heritage language. However, Fishman (1991) emphasised that HL must be "a language of special personal or family significance other than English". The acquisition of HL can be seen as incomplete monolingual acquisition in a bilingual context rather than monolingual acquisition, as we cannot fully categorise it using either the concept of traditional monolingual or bilingual acquisition. It exhibits traits of bilingual acquisition as well as traits of monolingual acquisition. Montrul (2012) compares the characteristics of learning a first language (L1), a second language (L2) and a high-level language (HL), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Difference between HL、L1 and L2

	HL	L1	L2
Early exposure to the target language	±	+	-
Language input in natural environments	+	+	-
Successful and complete acquisition	-	+	-
The language petrochemical phenomenon	+	-	+
Language transfer phenomenon	+	-	+
Motivational and emotional factors have an impact on language learning	+	-	+

Language Portraits: Interpreting Linguistic and Cultural Identity Among Heritage Language Learners

Note. * " + " indicates the presence of this feature, "-" indicates the absence of this feature, "±" indicates the presence of both

HLLs differ from L2/FL and native speaker learners because they have special characteristics and difficulties. On the one hand, they have the same difficulties as other language learners, such as limited vocabulary, interference with the mother tongue, slurred speech, and slow speech rate. On the other hand, they have better grammar, speak with a native accent, and feel a stronger sense of belonging to the HL/culture. Learning heritage language starts at home. In contrast, learning a second language begins in a classroom. The arrival of many Spanish-speaking students in the United States in the 1970s had a major impact on the teaching of Spanish in the United States, where Spanish teachers referred to these students as "native Spanish speakers," "native Spanish-like speakers," or "bilingual students." These students were reported to be fluent in Spanish compared to the Spanish teachers. However, they could not understand or express themselves using specialised terms when traditional grammar instruction was delivered in traditional Spanish classes as FL instruction. Linguists were unable to classify these students; neither learning Spanish as a mother tongue nor learning Spanish as a second language. Terms such as "heritage speakers", "heritage language " and "heritage languages speakers/learners (HLSs/HLLs)" have been introduced to study similar trends (Valdés & Geoffrion - Vinci, 2011). As for overseas Chinese and their descendants who learn Chinese languages and dialects in their local community, they are considered HLs. Even though some overseas Chinese communities have Chinese language schools that teach other Chinese languages besides Mandarin (Putonghua). The identity constructions of Mandarin learners with different dialects were highlighted by Wong and Xiao (2010), who urged in their study that the development of Chinese as a "heritage language" for dialect

speakers should be considered pedagogically. However, the current trend in international Chinese HL teaching is the use of Mandarin as the medium of instruction, as Chinese HL is seen as a means of preserving, promoting, and unifying the Chinese diaspora. Therefore, a Chinese HLL has been defined as a learner of the Chinese language who lives in a Chinese-speaking household, can speak, or at least understand Chinese, and is at least somewhat bilingual in Chinese and the local language.

Previous studies have shown that language and culture are closely intertwined. HLLs may have a stronger connection to their cultural identity than those who speak only the dominant language of a single community. Erik Homburger Erikson, a Western psychologist, argued in 1961 that a person's sense of identity is shaped by various factors, including their experiences within their cultural group. In one of his earliest and most influential works, he introduced the theory of psychosocial development, in which he highlighted that the development of identity is a crucial stage in a person's psychosocial development. Since then, much research has been conducted on cultural identity, particularly on its formation, maintenance, and impact on various aspects of individual and collective life. Some studies have focused on the role of cultural identity in shaping social attitudes and behaviours, while others have examined the relationship between cultural identity and mental health and well-being. In addition, Tajfel and Turner's (2001) social identity theory framework is often applied in the fields of intergroup relations, organisational behaviour and political psychology as it conceptualises the construction of individuals' self-concept based on the social groups to which they belong, and other important work includes the 'concept of borderlands', where "borderlands" are considered to be the space between cultures where identity is constantly negotiated. However, this chapter provides an insight into the relevance of using

LP in the study of linguistic and cultural identities in psycho-affective dimensions among HLLs through literal or symbolic mapping. Valdés and Geoffrion - Vinci (2011) reported that the motivations of HLLs of Hispanic immigrants in the United States for learning Spanish reflected a high degree of emotional attachment of the learners to the native language and culture. The study also revealed their experiences of dealing with discrimination and marginalisation through symbolic mapping captured by LP.

ACCULTURATION AS A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The study of acculturation is an important area of research in social psychology and cross-cultural psychology because it helps us to understand the psychological and cultural processes that individuals go through when they move from one culture to another. HLLs navigate between the dominant culture and their culture of origin and experience the results of their chosen adaptation strategies for acculturation. One of the earliest and most influential acculturation models was proposed by Berry J. W. in 1992, who categorised an individual's cultural adaptation strategies into four outcomes. These are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Integration means retaining one's cultural heritage while adopting the values and practices of the new culture; assimilation is adopting the values and practises of the new culture and abandoning one's cultural heritage; separation refers to maintaining one's cultural heritage and avoiding contact with the new culture; and marginalisation denotes not keeping one's cultural heritage and not adopting the values and practices of the new culture. Based on Berry's (2017) acculturation model, numerous studies have explored other aspects of acculturation, including the psychological and social processes involved, the role of language and communication, and the impact of acculturation on mental

health and well-being. In particular, racism and discrimination are highlighted as a major challenge for immigrants to a new cultural environment, as in the case of African immigrants in the United States. Ryder et al. (2000) examined the relationship between acculturation strategies and psychological adjustment among immigrants in Canada and concluded that individuals who pursued an integration strategy showed better psychological adjustment than those who adopted other strategies.

For HLLs, the process of acculturation can be complex as they move between the dominant culture and the heritage culture. A recent study by Chung (2019) shows that the acculturation experiences of Korean-and Spanish-speaking HLLs in the United States exhibit a bicultural orientation, using both English and HL in different contexts. The study highlights the importance of recognising and appreciating learners' biculturalism and promoting bilingualism as HLLs switch between English and HL in their daily interactions. The other study by Kim (2023) explored the role of family support during the acculturation process of Korean HLLs in the United States and concluded that family support is an important predictor of learners' bicultural orientation and Korean language use in various contexts. The acculturation process in the context of Chinese immigrants in Western countries has been studied extensively. Language proficiency, social support, exposure to the host culture, and cultural differences (Chen et al., 2021) are factors that influence the acculturation outcome of Chinese HLLs. Social support from family, friends and community organisations influence the acculturation outcome. Wei et al. (2013) claimed that Chinese immigrants with high proficiency in the Chinese language are more likely to maintain their traditional cultural values and practices than those with lower proficiency, while Chen et al. (2021) emphasised that social support from family, friends and the

local community can positively influence the acculturation process. How high or low the level of exposure to the host culture is also influencing the outcome of immigrants' acculturation. The degree of exposure can be categorised into the length of stay, the frequency of interaction with members of the host culture and the degree of immersion in the host culture. Studies have shown that exposure to the host culture has a positive influence on the acculturation process. Exposure to the host culture influences the way Chinese immigrants learn about and adapt to the new cultural environment (Jia & Aaronson, 2003). Finally, cultural differences between the host culture and the immigrants' culture of origin may also contribute to the outcome of acculturation. Cultural differences can manifest themselves in many ways, such as differences in values, beliefs, and behaviours. Chen et al. (2021) concluded that cultural differences can lead to an acculturation process when immigrants are faced with a clash of values between their traditional cultural values and the values of the host culture.

Chinese identity theory is the most influential framework for the construction of overseas Chinese identity in various historical and social contexts. The theory emphasises the dynamic nature of Chinese identity, which is shaped by historical experiences, cultural traditions, social interactions, and political circumstances. Accordingly, Chinese identity does not have a fixed or essential characteristic, but is rather an identification process influenced by external factors from the immigrant country. In other words, Chinese identity can take on different forms and meanings depending on the historical and social context in which it is constructed. Thus, Chinese identity may be defined by cultural traditions and values in one context and by political or economic factors in another. He added that the construction of one's identity as Chinese depends largely on the individual's engagement

with the cultural environment and social network. His academic work entitled *Southeast Asian Chinese Research* (东南亚华人研究) focused mainly on how the immigrant Chinese from Southeast Asia, i.e. the Chinese from Singapore and Malaysia, built their cultural identity over time. The theory highlights the complex interplay of historical, social, and political factors that have influenced Chinese identity in Southeast Asia. In the context of Malaysian Chinese, these factors include: i. historical experiences: The Chinese community in Malaysia has a long history of migration and settlement in the country dating back to the 19th century. This historical experience has shaped their sense of identity and their relationships with other ethnic groups in the country; ii. cultural traditions: Chinese cultural traditions, such as language, religion, and customs, have been an important source of identity for the Chinese community in Malaysia. These traditions have been nurtured and passed down from generation to generation; iii. social interactions: The Chinese community in Malaysia has had extensive social interactions with other ethnic groups in the country which have influenced their sense of identity. These interactions have taken place in various settings, such as the workplace, school, and social organisations; iv. Political circumstances: The Chinese community in Malaysia has been affected by various political circumstances, including colonialism, nationalism, and ethnic tensions. These circumstances have influenced their sense of identity and their relationship with the state and other ethnic groups. In short, it is important to adopt a context-specific approach to understand how the Malaysian Chinese community constructs its sense of identity over time.

CONCLUSION

Research on HLLs has shown that these learners often face particular challenges when it comes to maintaining their HL and their culture, as acculturation to the dominant culture is an ongoing process. Despite this, there is a lack of research looking at how Chinese HLLs' cultural identity, acculturation and language learning experiences are represented in their language portraits. One potential area of research is to examine how HLLs' cultural identity, acculturation, and language learning experiences are reflected in their language portraits, as LP often offers a summary of learners' expression of feelings or experiences about each language learned, rather than accentuating the progress of language learning (Busch, 2010). Researchers could examine the extent to which HLLs' cultural identity and acculturation are acknowledged and integrated into their language portraits and how HLLs' language learning experiences are shaped by their cultural identity and acculturation. There is a need for the development and validation of language portrait assessment instruments that address the unique experiences and challenges of HLLs. Researchers could also investigate the effectiveness of language portraits for assessing the language learning experiences of HLLs and designing effective language instruction and support for HLLs.

Although there has been an increased interest in the study of HLs in Malaysia, there is still a research gap in understanding the relationship between HLLs' cultural identity and their language learning experiences. Nevertheless, there is limited research on how HL learning experiences can shape or influence cultural identity in the Malaysian context. While there are studies on the cultural identity of ethnic minorities in Malaysia, there is a lack of research that specifically addresses the cultural identity of

HLLs. This is a significant gap in the literature, especially to understand how HLLs navigate their cultural identity in relation to their language learning experiences (Kim, 2023). There is also a need for research that explores the various factors that may influence the relationship between HLLs' cultural identity and their language learning experiences in the Malaysian context, and how these factors are represented in their language portraits. This research gap represents an important area for future research that can help deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between language, culture, and identity in Malaysia. With this understanding, we will then be able to formulate effective language teaching and support programmes for HLLs. After the implementation of these effective programmes, the perpetuation and revitalisation of HLs and cultures will be ensured.

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