Learning to Compose: Characteristics of Advanced Chinese Heritage Writers

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Abstract

This paper studies the characteristics of the writing of advanced Chinese heritage language learners. Judging from their lexicon, syntax, and textual organization in writing, I categorize them as native speakers but semi-native writers. Not identifying either the direct English or the circular Chinese style in their disorganized rhetorical structuring (cf. Kaplan 1966; Tsao 1983), I argue that written discourse patterning is a higher cognitive development threshold these advanced students need to reach after achieving certain linguistic competence (cf. Cummins, 1976). I also propose teaching methods that emphasize extensive reading, instructive assignment directions, outlines, itemized grading and multiple drafts in order to help students improve their composing skills.

Introduction

According to the 2000 United States Census (McGinnis, 2005), 46 million Americans spoke a language other than English at home; in California, for example, the rate was as high as 39%. Students with such a background are called heritage learners, who „are raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, speak or at least understand the language, and are to some degree bilinguals in that language and in English” (Valdés, 2001, p. 38). With the rapidly increasing number of heritage students, there has been a great demand for more research on heritage language teaching and learning (Brecht & Ingold, 1998; Lynch, 2003). Polinsky and Kagan (2007) even relate the evolving interest in heritage learners to the emergence of the study of creoles forty years ago.

Chinese, being the third most commonly spoken language in the U.S. (McGinnis, 2005), claims a large number of heritage language learners. The book Chinese as a heritage language: Fostering rooted world citizenry (Xiao & He, 2008) and the special Heritage Language Journal issue on Chinese (2006) mark the incipiency of systematic research on Chinese as a heritage language in the U.S. One outstanding problem, however, is that very few works are related to the teaching of writing to Chinese heritage students (henceforth CHLL). Most of the studies available are on the identity, motivation, and language use of CHLLs (e.g. He, 2008; Jia & Bayley, 2008; Weger-Guntharp, 2006).

As McGinnis (2005) points out, most of the students in upper-level Chinese classes are heritage learners, training to improve their writing, reading, and translation skills; so the teaching of writing constitutes an important part of third- and fourth-year heritage Chinese curriculum, not a factor that can be downplayed. This paper studies the characteristics of advanced CHLLs” writing, in particular the textual organization in their expository academic essays, the most commonly practiced and taught genre in college curriculum (Brown, 2001).
There are many different types of heritage learners, depending on whether one concentrates on their linguistic competency or their literacy level (Douglas, 2001; Dumitrescu, 2000). For example, in terms of linguistic competence, Polinsky and Kagan (2007) distinguish complete (uninterrupted) and incomplete first- and second-language acquisition patterns among heritage learners. In this paper, I study the incomplete second-language acquisition by higher-level CHLLs. After scrutinizing 320 writing samples by 20 advanced CHLLs, I conclude that these advanced CHLLs are native speakers, but semi-native writers, as can be seen from their lexicon, syntax, and textual organization (cf. Liu, 2008b, where 20 randomly chosen essays from these 20 students were examined). In particular, I argue that the disorganization of their essay writing is a result of their linguistic competence not reaching the threshold to rhetorical structuring, a higher level of cognitive development (cf. Cummins, 1976). I also provide pedagogical suggestions on training CHLLs to improve textual organization.

The next section offers the research rationale and hypotheses of this paper after providing a literature review on contrastive rhetoric and a comparison between L1, L2, and heritage language writing. After that, the research methodology is introduced, followed by the data analysis. In light of the analysis, there is a discussion about why CHLLs are native speakers but semi-native writers, and related pedagogy is also introduced.

**Research Rationale and Hypotheses**

**Literature Review**

**Contrastive and Intercultural Rhetoric**

Needless to say, unlike walking and speaking, writing is a learned behavior (Brown, 2001; Lenneberg, 1967) and has many culture-specific features. Textual organization, for example, varies from language to language or from culture to culture.

Based on his survey of the writing samples of EFL students from various countries, Kaplan (1966) concludes that different languages have different rhetorical structures. Although his findings, for example, that English writers get straight to the point, exemplified by the use of topic sentences, and that Chinese writers spiral around the point, have been criticized for being simplistic and over-generalized (cf. Brown, 2001), contrastive rhetoric research has had great impact on EFL writing pedagogy since Kaplan’s initiation.

Kaplan (1987) further specifies the differences between written language and spoken language with respect to grammar and textual organization. He regards writing as the product of composing that requires complex learned skills such as planning, drafting, and revising (cf. Brown, 2001; Collins & Michaels, 1986). Composing pedagogy, therefore, should focus on how to make students generate and organize ideas coherently (Brown, 2001).

In recent years, Connor (1996; 2002; 2008) has studied contrastive rhetoric with a much larger spectrum of genres and texts, and suggests using the term *intercultural*
rhetoric to emphasize the cultural basis for the typology of the organization of the whole text. Furthermore, Connor (2008) has noticed the emergence of many writing style universals nowadays as a result of a more robust intercultural communication world-wide.

**Chinese Written Rhetoric**

Contrary to Kaplan’s findings, Mo (1982) sees linear paragraph organization in Chinese expository writing, with the help of *qi* „beginning of the argument”, *cheng* „development of the argument”, *zhuan* „introduction to a subtheme”, and *jie* „conclusion”. Zhu (1997) reports such straight-forward organization in Chinese business writing as well. On the other hand, taking a historical approach, You (2008) proposes not to treat Chinese writing as static. Instead, she argues that the themes, be they on Confucianism, Marxism, or today’s new value system, determine the textual organization.

Tsao (1983) lists other rhetorical contrasts between Chinese writing and English writing, for example, Chinese’s preference for parataxis (i.e. a preference for simple sentences over the use of coordinating or subordinating) versus English’s preference for hypotaxis (i.e. a preference for subordination and coordination within a complex sentence) in connective use and the Chinese liking versus the English disliking of quotations.

Based on his study of the grading of the writing section of HSK (the Chinese Proficiency Test), Feng (2006) points out that in TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language), the perception of one’s „nativeness” in writing is greatly determined by the proper use of formal conjunctions, thanks to the diglossic situation between written Chinese and spoken Chinese. Collins and Michaels (1986) have also noticed that rhetorical organizers and sentence-level adverbials are crucial for fashioning inter-sentential cohesion, which affects the native flavor of one’s writing (cf. Liu, 2008a).

Limited by space, I will not further the comparison between Chinese written discourse patterns and those of English. I hold the requirement of a topic sentence in every paragraph characteristic of English written rhetoric. Mo’s (1982) argument about Chinese writing applies to the whole text layout, but not necessarily within each paragraph. Nevertheless, thematic cohesion (Gumperz, Kaltman, & O’Connor, 1984), i.e. how the linkage between parts of a written discourse ties up the whole text, matters in both English and Chinese writing and will be used as a tool in this paper to characterize CHILLs’ writing.

**L1, L2, and Heritage-language Writing and Pedagogy**

Compared with their L1 counterparts, L2 writers, according to Silva (1993), do less planning, use fewer words and lexical varieties, make more mistakes, and apply inappropriate rhetorical conventions, when it comes to material organization as discussed in the previous sections. Challenged by the differences between L1 and L2 literacy conventions and limited by L2 proficiency, learners do not automatically master their L2 writing skills (Kern, 2000), as they normally do in their L1 writing. This can be due to the nature of native „writing ability [which] is more closely related
to familiarity and fluency with the conventions of expository discourse” (Kogen, 1986, p. 25; cf. Myles, 2002). L2 writers need to learn these cognitive, rhetoric, and social conventions while their L2 or inter-language competence is still prone to development or fossilization over time (Myles, 2002).

In response to the above-mentioned contrasts, Silva (1993) and Myles (2001) argue for a distinct theory and pedagogy of L2 writing that used to take L1 writing as the model. However, they suggest that L2 writing instructors should also include the training of the textual and rhetorical issues, which are meta-linguistic but affect the „nativeness“ of L2 writing, as discussed in the preceding section.

On the other hand, according to Chevalier (2004), in writing, heritage learners possess some understanding of types of English written discourses and can draw from their knowledge of English in approaching similar genres in the heritage languages. After learning that stylistic conventions in the heritage language might be significantly different from those in English, for example, they are ready to attempt to produce target at text types. He also reports that heritage learners across languages share a lack of familiarity with the variety of stylistic registers available to the educated native speakers.

When it comes to heritage language pedagogy, Chevalier (2004) argues that, compared with L2 instruction that focuses on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, heritage language instruction seeks to give students the tools to develop bi-literacy in English and in their home language. In other words, heritage language education is mostly about writing skills, similar to those of L1, but compared with L1 literates, heritage learners need to improve their mastery of formal written discourse in the target language. He suggests that students need to develop an awareness of the tools native writers use to construct discourse in the heritage language and that reading assignments with questions lead students to the targeted features of each genre.

**Hypotheses**

In summary, as mentioned above, heritage writers, with their bilingual background (Valdés, 2001), tend to have higher linguistic proficiency than L2 learners but are less eloquent with rhetorical techniques than L1 writers (Kern, 2000). Then, what characteristics do CHLLs show in their writing, who, according to Chevalier (2004), are prone to equate speaking and writing? Considering their unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds, should they be categorized as L1 or L2 writers (Silva, 1993)? What kind of teaching methodology should we implement to improve CHLLs Chinese writing? These are the puzzles I am interested in solving in this research.

I hypothesize that the demanding task of character-writing, their limited Chinese proficiency, and the diglossia between spoken and written Chinese are obstacles for CHLL writers to achieve native Chinese literacy. They are native speakers but semi-native writers who will sacrifice textual structuring for orthographic and linguistic accuracy. Consequently, like its L1 and L2 counterparts, pedagogy of CHLL writing should also stand independently; for example, under-used extensive reading would prove to be a more effective tool to help improve CHLL’s textual organization.
Methodology

The 320 expository essay writing samples I studied were collected from 20 CHLLs of a very competitive American university. Half were collected from their third-year (CHI 306: Accelerated Chinese Writing I) writing assignments and the other half from their fourth-year (CHI 406: Accelerated Chinese Writing II) writing assignments. The students had completed first- and second-year Chinese on the heritage learners” track, i.e. CHI 106 and CHI 206, which used the same teaching materials, but were 1.5 times faster than the courses on the non-heritage track. The reason I chose the advanced CHI 306 and CHI 406 students for this research is that (1) their previous Chinese courses, i.e. CHI 106 and CHI 206, focused on character writing and grammar drilling, but not essay writing; (2) at the advanced level, their linguistic competence and literacy level allow them to write full-length essays; for example, in CHI 306, the minimum length requirement for essays was 500 characters (cf. McGinnis, 2005), and in CHI 406, 800 characters.

All 20 students have a Chinese-speaking family environment, with an average age of arrival in the U. S. being 5. They received their formal elementary and secondary education in English. Such age effects and linguistic backgrounds make these students native speakers of both English and Chinese (cf. Olson and Samuels, 1973). Nevertheless, judging from their vocabulary and language use preference, English is by far the dominant language (He, 2008; Wiley et al., 2008).

As shown by the example in (1), I itemized students” grades into five 20-point categories and required two drafts of each paper to capture the status and progress of their writing more accurately. Grammar and Word Use reflected students” linguistic proficiency; Content and Structure revealed their textual organization. Overall Impression signified reader’s response. I based my characterization of CHLL writing on the point average and common comments of each column, which I will go into greater detail for in the discussion section.
Data Analysis

In the comparison with the all-category average of 18.6 out of 20, the most apparent shortcomings I observed in these students’ writings are (a) insufficiency in written lexicon (avg. 17.2/20 for Word Use), (b) transfer in syntax from English (17.6/20 for Grammar), and (c) disorganization in textual structuring (15.7/20 for Structure) (cf. Liu, 2008a). Here, I will give a summary of (a) and (b) and elaborate on (c). While lexicon and syntax are at the sentential level, organization is at the discourse level, which is the focus of this paper.

Lexicon and Syntax

Limited in vocabulary restricted to writing such as *zongeryanzhi* „in short” and *chucizhiwai* „furthermore”, CHLLs” writings demonstrated a lower literacy level and lacked the native flavor (cf. Feng, 2006). This corresponds with Wray’s (2002) remark that one fundamental difference between children’s and adults” second-language acquisition of the lexicon lies in their different identifications of formulaicity, i.e. expressions that appear to be processed without recourse to their lowest level. On a similar basis, CHLLs” writing also showed learners” difficulty in spontaneously using thousands of „unteachable” (Chen, 2002) four-word idioms like *shou-zhu-dai-tu* (watch-stump-wait-rabbit: to watch the stump for a rabbit: to be opportunistic, to rely on chances) in Chinese, due to their fossilized archaic syntactic structures and multifold cultural and historical connotations.

Chevalier’s (2004) claim that heritage learners tend to write the way they speak might prove to be partially true, if we take a look at the syntactic errors CHLLs made in their writing. I argue that heritage learners tend to write the way they speak only when English syntax and Chinese syntax do not differ significantly. For example, although they never put the relative clause after the noun when they speak, they do it in writing very frequently, an apparent transfer from English, and an error shared by zero-beginners (Xing, 2006). Furthermore, what is more challenging in learning is those post-verbal prepositional phrases like *guigong yu* „owe one”s success to”. They are relics from classical Chinese (Shi, 2002; Sun, 1999) and are productive only in very formal writing and speech.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>语法 Grammar</th>
<th>词汇 Word use</th>
<th>内容 Content</th>
<th>结构 Structure</th>
<th>整体印象 Overall impression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>一 Draft 1</strong></td>
<td>18/20 Please pay attention to the ba-structure.</td>
<td>19/20 Please distinguish between formal and colloquial style of words.</td>
<td>15/20 The points are not very original.</td>
<td>15/20 You need a conclusion.</td>
<td>18/20 Ok structure, and grammar and vocabulary use, but not convincing enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>二 Draft 2</strong></td>
<td>19/20 Good correction</td>
<td>19/20</td>
<td>18/20 There is improvement, but still weak.</td>
<td>18/20 Conclusion doesn’t cover all the points made.</td>
<td>19/20 There is progress, but should have stronger arguments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the lexical and syntactic challenges these students faced in writing were mostly caused by the literary register of the written rhetoric.

**Textual Organization**

In addition to lexical and syntactic difficulties at the sentential level, in terms of textual organization, CHLLs tended to ignore the structuring of an expository essay while concentrating only on the accuracy of grammar and character-writing (cf. Liu, 2008a). Very often, especially in CHI 306, their writing looked like a loosely organized essay, with the points they wanted to make scattering here and there to fulfill the length requirement, as shown in (2) and (3), two random examples of a choppy style from the first paragraphs of two essays. Example (2) is a student’s A-minus composition from CHI 306, *Movie Idols in Hollywood*, in which there is an apparent lack of textual cohesion (see Appendix 1 for the translation of the entire essay of example (2)). Example (3) is the first paragraph of another student’s A-minus review of the movie *Pushing Hands* in CHI 306. The students were more concerned with using the required vocabulary than with paragraph structuring. No topic sentence was present in these two paragraphs to render the theme of the essay, as required in English essay writing. Even if we assume that the writers followed the non-linear Chinese style, we do not see coherence between sentences. So, unlike the syntactic transfer we have discussed in the preceding section, we do not see style transfer in organization. Or in other words, we do not see thematic cohesion of any sort from any culture’s written discourse convention:

(2) Title: 好来坞的电影偶像　*Movie Idols in Hollywood*

这是星期五的晚上，你正在考虑租什么电影好。对我来说，一般最大的影响力是谁是电影里的演员。演员的吸引力是最大的，因为电影故事的内容归功于演员们。我个人选电影的时候，会顾及谁是主角。有中国演员更适合我看。好莱坞满足了我这个兴趣，因为现在有越来越多的中国演员。

„This is Friday evening. You are thinking about what movie to rent. As far as I am concerned, the biggest influence is the actors in a movie. The attraction of the actors is the biggest, because the success of the content of the movie lies in the actors. When I choose a film, I care who the protagonist is in a movie. I prefer to see Chinese actors in a movie. Hollywood is satisfying my need these days, because there are more and more Chinese actors in Hollywood.”

(3) Title: Review of *Pushing Hands*

<<推手>>这部电影表现了中国人对美国的刻板印象。它对中国人的描写很真实。电影的导演是李安。

„The movie “Pushing Hands” shows the stereotypical Chinese view of Americans. Its description of the Chinese is accurate. The director is Ang Lee.”
Discussion

Based on the characteristics discussed in the data analysis, the CHLLs’ Chinese writing competence seems to be similar to that of the Group II heritage Russian learners studied in Bermel and Kagan (2001), who are capable of a comprehensible exchange in written Russian, but it is unlikely that native speakers would perceive their writing as an acceptable one from adult Russians.

Overall, in light of these CHLLs’ competence and performance in written lexicon, grammar, and rhetoric structure which resemble neither those of their L1 nor those of the target language, our students can be categorized as native speakers but only semi-native writers of Chinese. Although they can pass as native Chinese speakers, their writings read foreign to a Chinese reader. By the same token, Polinsky and Kagan (2007) discover that heritage (Russian) speakers have an advantage over L2 learners in relearning their home language, but this advantage is more apparent in phonology and lexicon than in morphosyntax or discourse structure. It is also these advantages that separate CHLLs from non-native writers who still have greater difficulties in basic lexicon and syntax, besides literate vocabulary, grammar, and structuring. While I can attribute their lexicon and syntactic deficiency to the lack of exposure to Chinese writing, their structuring shows no sign of the English style they have learned in high-school or the Chinese style that is based on a culture that is not completely outlandish to them. What, then, makes them such a special group in terms of textual organization?

Reading Input

Intensive vs. Extensive Reading

Readings are important input for these students to learn how to write in Chinese (cf. Chevalier, 2004). Writers incorporate what they have learned from reading to their writing (Anderson & Bower, 1973; Fillmore, 1981; Langer & Flihan, 2000); for example, Bermel and Kagan (2001) argue that the best way to address the issues of transfer and lack of familiarity with stylistic registers in heritage students’ writing is to assign reading that is considerably beyond the students’ active production level (cf. Liu, 2008a).

Is the disorganization observed in CHLL’s rhetorical structure, then, a result of the paucity of stimuli, i.e. reading materials that target at CHLLs and stress textual organization? To some extent, it is. Although I propose to separate the teaching of heritage learners from that of L1 and L2 students, limited by the choice of textbooks on the market, we use the same teaching materials for CHLLs and L2 students. Moreover, confined by the traditional grammar and translation method in Chinese teaching, most of the L2 Chinese textbooks are intensive-reading-oriented.

Intensive reading aims to build L2 students’ grammatical and lexical systems of the target language (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). However, for the training of writing, which is a higher-level process of learning a language, extensive reading should also be needed (Walter, 2004), which, to some extent, is a more effective way to familiarize students with the writing styles in the target language. Thus, treating reading texts as a structured resource for information rather than a collection of
grammars points might be a remedy for CHLLs’ loose writing structure (cf. Liang, 2005).

In my own teaching, I gave students extra extensive reading materials to help them learn about structuring on a weekly basis. For example, I let them regularly read and extract outlines of well-structured essays written by famous Chinese writers, teaching them to pay attention to topic sentences and inter-sentence coherence. With such input, I cannot therefore blame students’ problems in structuring completely on the paucity of proper input.

**Writing vs. Composing**

To many L1 or L2 learners, Chinese is difficult in terms of its complicated pictographic writing system; a literate, for example, is expected to know how to write about 3,000 different characters. Chinese distinguishes *xie-zi* “write-character: character-writing” and *xie-zuo* “write-compose: composing”, both of which can be translated into English as *writing*, the former closer to *spelling* and the latter *composition* (cf. Xiao, 2006 and 2008). After learning about 2,000 active characters, CHI 306 and CHI 406 CHLLs have to compromise composing for writing, as a result of struggling between orthographic accuracy and stylistic elegance. In addition to the disabling limitation of the grasp of Chinese characters, they have to struggle between lexical appropriateness and syntactic accuracy before honing the skills of textual organization.

Meanwhile, although CHLLs are guided at the lexical level to learn expressions that are restricted to formal writing, similar to L1 speakers’ learning process, they may resort to English, their dominant language, at the syntactic level for transfer when utilizing difficult Chinese grammatical structures. Such linguistic competence prevents them from strategically structuring their essays. Apparently, we cannot hold the impoverishment of proper Chinese input and transfer from the direct English style completely responsible for the lack of textual cohesion in their essays. I argue that even at the advanced level, especially before the minimal training in CHI 306, CHLL students may still treat writing as a way to expand their Chinese vocabulary and to guarantee grammatical and orthographical accuracy and are therefore distracted from textual organization, which is a higher-level, more abstract, meta-linguistic and culturally-based requirement (cf. Cummins, 1976; Walter, 2004). In order to help students cross this cognitive threshold, it is helpful for a language teacher to be aware of the cause of the lack of structuring in students’ writing and provide them with exercises that target the aforementioned problems.

**Teaching Tactics**

Chevalier (2004) contends that strategies for composing written discourse must be taught. Connor (1996) suggests discussing explicitly the differences between English rhetorical traditions and those of the target language to the students and guiding them through a process of understanding those schemata while not attempting to eradicate them. The self-understanding on the part of the students may lend itself to more effective appreciation and use of rhetorical conventions.
Considering their special characteristics and needs and following Silva’s (1993) and Myles’ (2001) separation of L1 and L2 writing pedagogy, I propose to treat the teaching of CHLLs’ writing independently. In light of the difficulty our advanced CHLL students have encountered in organizing their essays, the following teaching methodology, which I have been adopting, is put forth.

**Instructive Assignment Directions**

A well-planned assignment gives the teacher many chances to assist and evoke the best from the students (Throckmorton, 1980). In addition to the requirements on topic and length, I also pose questions that might serve as the basis for the students to construct their arguments logically, as illustrated in Appendix 2, an example of the homework assignment for a review of the movie *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*. I start with a general question, *Do you like this movie, and why?* to train the students to establish a point for the writing first. I then ask *What is the story line?* to let them base their argument on facts. The next questions *Why is the movie called Eat, Drink, Man, Woman and which character interested you most?* guide them to support their main point. I accompany the questions with recommended vocabulary to make them more tangible and I suggest other questions to let them develop their arguments, such as *What symbolic techniques does this movie use?* and *How do you compare a Chinese family and an American family?*.

**Outline Requirement**

I require students to generate outlines for the extensive readings I give them. I let them prepare sketchy outlines for class presentations, debate scripts or speeches, listing the main and subordinate points, supporting examples, and key words and expressions. I also make it a rule that each writing assignment be accompanied by an outline. The outline guides the students to form a clearer train of thought and consciously plan the structure of their writing. It also helps them to come up with and organize their topic-area knowledge so that they can write better texts containing more content (cf. Friedlander, 2001).

Appendix 3 is an example of a student’s outline for the article *College Students of Our Generation* in CHI 406. Following Mo’s (1982) pattern, the student began with the argument that today’s technology was more developed and society more open, but we had lost some principles. Then he developed his argument by elaborating on such sub-themes as how technology and social openness had made people more individualistic. He then concluded that the older generation might have lived a better life than we. From the outline, we can see the process of conscious composing instead of sporadic writing up the way one speaks.

Considering that many writing style universals have emerged cross-culturally nowadays (cf. Connor, 2008), I do not intend to make the students strictly tailor their writing to Mao’s pattern or the so-called Chinese-specific circular pattern, but it is more important to train them to write with a plan, after they have reached certain linguistic competence.
Itemized Grading and Multiple Drafts

In assessing the students’ writing, I itemize students’ grades by giving separate scores and comments on grammar, word use, content, structure, and overall impression. By doing this, I help students realize that writing was not only about grammar and vocabulary and that they need to pay attention to the content and its organization. I do not give a final grade until students turn in a revised second draft by incorporating my comments. Such a practice will help students to internalize my remarks and make progress in the future.

Conclusion

Judging from CHLLs’ lexicon, syntax, and written discourse pattern, I categorize them as native speakers but semi-native writers. In other words, advanced CHLLs are in transition from writing to learning how to compose. I argue that the lack of appropriate textbooks and the overall linguistic competence prevent CHLLs from writing like native Chinese literates. I provide some teaching methods that, in particular, target at the lack of organization in their writing. As a result of implementing these methods, I have noticed students’ progress at the end of CHI 406. However, before their overall linguistic competence reaches that of a well-educated Chinese writer, which is, unfortunately, beyond the curriculum of our four-year college Chinese education at this moment, CHLLs still need to continue learning and practicing. It is expected that more CHLL-oriented textbooks and pedagogy will speed up the learning and teaching processes in the future.

Notes

1 I am grateful for the very constructive comments by the two anonymous HKJAL reviewers and those by Wai Lan Tsang. I also thank Wendy Wang, Hsin-hsin Liang, Hongyin Tao, and the audience of the 2004 Princeton University Annual Conference on Chinese teaching for their suggestions. In particular, I want to thank my students at UCLA, UVA, and Wayne State University, from whom I have developed the interest in studying heritage Chinese writing.

2 According to Polinsky (2004), incomplete language acquisition refers to that of a healthy child who starts out as a monolingual or with a dominant L1 but later switches to his/her L2 as the dominant language before age 10.

3 I will discuss in the data analysis in greater detail what I mean by semi-native, which I hold to be different from non-native.

4 I will later show, however, that heritage learners sometimes do not or are unable to equate speaking and writing, especially when there are some marked syntactic difficulties in the heritage language.

References


Appendix 1 Translation of the First Paragraph of *Movie Idols in Hollywood*

This is Friday evening. You are thinking about what movie to rent. As far as I am concerned, the biggest influence is the actors in a movie. The attraction of the actors is the biggest, because the success of the content of the movie lies in the actors. I care who the protagonist is in a movie. I prefer to see Chinese actors in a movie. Hollywood is satisfying my need these days, because there are more and more Chinese actors in Hollywood.

This is Friday evening. You are thinking about what movie to rent. As far as I am concerned, the biggest influence is the actors in a movie. The attraction of the actors is the biggest, because the success of the content of the movie lies in the actors. I care who the protagonist is in a movie. I prefer to see Chinese actors in a movie. Hollywood is satisfying my need these days, because there are more and more Chinese actors in Hollywood.

My former favorite Chinese movie star in Hollywood is Bruce Lee. He has very good acting skills, especially his Kung-fu. His Kung-fu is real Kung-fu in films. He made great efforts to become such a big idol. I remember that I liked his movies a lot before, though there is a lot of violence. But I know Bruce Lee has the right to represent the Chinese, because he is a good actor, regardless of his nationality.

Today, my favorite star in Hollywood is Jackie Cheng. His Kung-fu is about the same as Bruce Lee’s, but his acting skills are more interesting. Most of his movies are comedies or action movies. His movies do not have a lot of violence, but real Kung-fu. The audience is very satisfied with his performance, because he is a very entertaining actor.

My mother thinks that Chinese idols are only those in slap-stick movies. She says, “Why do you only watch violent movies?” She thinks that I should become a Kung-fu master. But I told her that I was not picky; I watch all kinds of films. I only like Bruce Lee and Jackie Cheng, because they are Hollywood’s dedicated and talented stars. Actors are the most important factor of a movie. Now there are more and more Chinese in Hollywood and I have more choices when selecting a movie.
Appendix 2  Instructive Assignment Directions

看《飲食男女》有感
Review of Eat, Drink, Man, Woman

你喜歡這個電影嗎，為什麼？（用上至少 5 個詞）
Do you like this movie? Why? (Use at least 5 of the given words)

這個電影講了一個什麼故事? （用上至少 5 個詞）
What is the story line of this movie? (Use at least 5 of the given words)

這個電影為什麼叫飲食男女? （用上至少 3 個詞）
Why is this movie called Eat, Drink, Man, Woman? (Use at least 3 of the given words)

這個電影有很多角色，其中你覺得最值得寫一寫的角色要數哪一個，為什麼？
This movie has many characters. Which one interested you the most, and why?

爸爸 (father):
保持, 辛苦, 熱衷於, 失望, 趁, 放棄, 安慰, 乾脆, 退休

老大 (oldest daughter):
事業, 原諒, 合適, 回憶

老二: (second oldest daughter):
經歷, 嫌, 安靜, 挑剔

老三: (youngest daughter):
活潑, 熱情, 好奇心

其他 (other character): (用上至少 5 個詞) (use at least 5 of the given words)

你也可以考慮一下: (You can also think about)

這個電影用了哪些象徵（xiàng zhēng, symbolic）手法？
(What symbolic techniques does this movie use?)

美國家庭和中國家庭有什麼不同?
(How do you compare a Chinese family and an American family?)
Appendix 3  Outline of a Student’s Writing

College Students of Our Generation

I. 科技更发达，社会更开放，可也失去了一些原则

   Technology more developed, society more open, but some principles lost
   1. 科技更发达, technology more developed  
   2. 网上社会, internet society  
   3. 控制知识更多了, control more knowledge  
   4. 信息更方便, information more convenient  
   5. 思想更开放, ideology more open
   6. 社会各种现象都能接受, more tolerance for various social phenomena
      6.1 男女之间, relationships  
      6.2 宗教，政治，民族，年龄, religion, politics, race, and age

II. 比老一代更个人主义，

   Compared with older generations: more individualistic
   1. 忘了家庭的重要, family values lost
   2. 很难团结在一起, hard to be united
   3. 不为集体想, 自己的利益, focus on own interests, not group’s

III. 科学进步却把人拉开了, technology separates us

   1. 网上代替了面对面谈话, internet instead of face-to-face conversation
   2. 太多的不同想法, too great a diversity

IV. 总结: 有些方面, 老一代的日子比我们还过得好一些

   The older generation might have lived a better life than ours in some respects