**University of Alberta**

Task-Based Bilingual Program Innovation: A Model of Joint Efforts in Improving Students’ Heritage Language Fluency

by

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# Abstract

Despite heritage languages (HL) being promoted by some Canadian provincial governments as a subject in school or through bilingual programs, students' learning outcome is not satisfactory due to the inadequate time allotment and the teaching methods applied. Therefore the purpose of this project is to propose a task-based language teaching (TBLT) model that can improve students' HL competence and learning enthusiasm. The works of literature on HL curriculum innovations, TBLT theoretical framework and community-based language acquisition are expounded in light of their contribution to the designing of this HL project model. For example, Wu (2002) and Douglas (2005) have all proposed their own HL instruction approaches for catering to HL learners' diverse language proficiencies and learning interests. Zapata (2018) has proposed a project to study how the digital Learning by Design instructional materials can enhance HL learners' literacy skills. The interpretations of "task" offered by Willis (1996), Nunan (2004), Ellis (2003; 2009), and Long (1985; 2015) have provided a solid theoretical basis for designing an applicable task in this project. The intergenerational approach (Cordella & Huang, 2016), service learning approach (Ruggiero, 2018), and assets-based approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) indicate how to tap into community resources and conduct community-based HL program. Based on the pedagogical enlightenment drawn from the literature, the author has designed three technology-facilitated interactive HL learning tasks for the classroom, home, and community respectively. The project not only contributes to bridging the gap in the current literature related to HL pedagogy innovations, but also provides a concrete model for Mandarin bilingual-school teachers to facilitate students' learning.

**Keywords:** Task-based Language Teaching, Heritage Language Learning

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# Introduction

Canada has long been a linguistically diverse country due to its vast population of immigrants. Since the Government of Canada implemented the Canadian Multiculturalism Policy in 1971 (now called the Canadian Multiculturalism Act), the culture of ethnic groups is recognized as an indispensable part of Canadian culture. Following from that policy, provincial governments started to offer many of the minority languages as subjects in schools, and a few bilingual programs for promoting the learning of certain heritage languages (HL) were initiated. However, the linguistic rights of minority groups in Canada largely rely on the province in which people live (Cummins, 1982), since each province is allowed to make its own language policy and planning. For example, only a few of provinces provide bilingual heritage language programs and the time allotment for HL instruction varies in different programs, ranging from 50% to less than 20% of instructional time (Babaee, 2014, p.10). As for the programs with less than 20% of the instruction conducted in HL, this amount may not be adequate for the students to practice the language and develop proper language proficiency.

## Research Problem

According to discourse analysis, the time spent by teachers talking in class takes up a large amount of the overall time in traditional language classes (Nunan, 1993, p. 26) because they need to introduce the learning content, give explanation, ask questions, and offer prompt feedback. Therefore, within the limited length of exposure to the heritage language in the bilingual class, little time is left for each student to practice the language. There is also research indicating that students are more likely to talk to each other in the official language in heritage classes (Curdit-Christiansen, 1999), which, in my opinion, has largely to do with the traditional pedagogical methods applied in current heritage bilingual programs. As illustrated by Kalantzis and her colleagues (2005), the traditional teaching methods applied in formal education (e.g., question-answering exchanges between instructors and students, multiple-choice activities, or traditional exams) cannot reflect students’ real life experience. Adopting mainly the traditional language teaching methods, current heritage language teaching mostly focuses on academic language learning, while the students are not exposed enough to informal, colloquial forms of language use. The content learned from books and in these classes may have little to do with the daily lives of the students, so they are not able to employ what they have learned to express the complexity of daily life and the subtlety of their emotions and feelings. Current heritage language teaching is still unsatisfactory in terms of its limited time allotment and its inadequacy of teaching, which fails to offer students enough opportunity to practice their communicative competency in class.

Besides inadequate oral practice at school, the students may not use their heritage language much at home. A recent study on family language policy (Figueiredo, Martins & da Silva, 2016) showed that although most of the parents in the research used their HL exclusively or primarily to communicate with their children, most children used the official language in communicating with their siblings and in engaging with multimedia resources (TV and video games). That is to say, even if parents endeavour to prioritize minority language learning and use in daily life, many of their children tend to dominantly use the majority language (Fishman, 1991; Schwartz, 2010). Without enough emphasis laid on practicing the language within their social lives, and without proper measures taken to reinforce this language learning, it is understandable that many students may resort to English for communication, which they may feel more confident using. Both of these phenomena illustrate a problem concerning current HL instruction: students are learning their heritage language mainly as a subject instead of as a communication tool. Current instruction and family language environments fail to stimulate students into practicing their HL properly and fulfilling real life tasks with it, which contributes to their slow language acquisition.

## Personal Connections

Working as a teaching assistant in a bilingual school enabled me to gain a closer look at a current heritage language program in Canada. There were moments when some of my assumptions about the bilingual program were overturned. The first such moment occurred on my first day in the bilingual school when the principal told me that she particularly wanted me to help with the students’ reading and speaking because many of their students did not use Mandarin at home at all. In order to show me the situation, she asked students in Grade 4 to raise their hands if none of their parents spoke Mandarin at home. I was startled that almost one third of the class put their hands up. Before that, I always assumed that most of the students would be able to use their HL at home. After I got to know the students more, I came to realize that many of the children were third-generation immigrants. Since many of their parents cannot speak the HL fluently anymore, their family language tends to shift to the majority language. A small portion of students are children of mixed couples, in which case their parents will not speak the HL at home. At the same time, many of the students speak Cantonese or other Chinese dialects with their parents, which is vastly different from what they have learnt at school.

My second surprising moment came when I realized that the students are dominantly using the official language in their daily lives. They mainly use Mandarin when they are asked by the teacher to answer a question in it. Even in Mandarin class, English is still their priority when they want to talk to each other or make a personal utterance. The teachers in Mandarin classes are mostly adopting the traditional teaching methods. The teacher also expected that there could be some methodological innovations on HL education, so that the students can learn the language through more practical use in daily life.

Another moment like this happened when the Grade 5 Mandarin teacher asked me to help the students make sentences using the causal conjunctions just taught in class, which is typically content taught in Grade 1 in Chinese elementary school. Even though the students are in Grade 5, their Mandarin proficiency is still comparatively low to the extent that they are learning Mandarin content much simpler than that of their peers in the native country.

Besides what I have learnt in the bilingual school, my experience with local Chinese families has also led to my concern over the issue. I found that many of the children in local Chinese families do not speak Mandarin to their parents. Even if their parents only speak Mandarin to them, the children are prone to answer in English. This leads me to wonder what efforts can be made in raising parents’ awareness of the issue and encouraging young people to communicate more in their heritage language.

## Purpose and Rationale

In order to address the challenges confronting HL teaching, this project intends to explore literature related to HL education, task-based language teaching (TBLT), and community-based language acquisition practice. The research described in this project and subsequent recommended practices can offer insights toward heritage language teaching as well, with recognition of the particular needs and learning motivations of heritage language learners. Based on the wisdom drawn from the literature, I will propose innovations for current heritage language instruction by designing several applicable task modules intended to be carried out at the school, home, and community levels respectively, so that a joint effort can be made to offer a friendly language learning environment, to increase students’ daily employment of their HL, to inspire students’ motivation to learn the language, and to improve the learning outcomes.

The Canadian Census of Population in 2016 registered that the native language of more than 20% of Canadians was neither English nor French. According to the census, Mandarin is the most spoken non-official language, with roughly 641,100 Canadians speaking Mandarin at home. In Alberta, specifically, the number of mandarin speakers total 37,125 in 2016. It also predicts that by the end of 2036, more than a quarter of the Canadian population will speak an immigration language as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada). In such a culturally diverse country, the language rights of minority language speakers should be respected and protected, which not only is a verification of human rights and citizen rights (The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, 1982), but can be favorable for a country culturally and economically (Cummins, 1982; Rong & Preissle, 2009).

Recent research undertaken among monolingual and bilingual students has also revealed that from a personal perspective, being bilingual can bring children many benefits in cognitive (Blom et al., 2014), communicative (Trivedi et al., 2015), intellectual (Lee & Kim, 2011), and emotional growth (Costa et all, 2012). Instead of delaying the development of English literacy, being bilingual can facilitate English literacy learning (Hipfner-Boucher, Lam, & Chen, 2014). It can also enhance students’ learning outcome in mathematics, science, and many other subjects (Padilla et al., 2013). On the contrary, losing one’s HL may lead to negative impacts on individuals, families, and society (Kouritzin, 1999; Fillmore, 1991).

Despite being an essential societal and national resource in the face of globalization (Brecht & Ingold, 1998), HL begins to decline as early as in the second generation (Cho, Shin & Krashen, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2005). Within the Canadian context, there is also a noticeable generational shift from HL use at home to the use of the dominant official languages (Duff, 2008, p. 75). Therefore, it is necessary that people devote more effort and time toward improving their heritage language proficiency so as to facilitate personal development and contribute to the national cultural diversity.

# Heritage Language Maintenance Enlightenment

In this section, I will first of all clarify some basic definitions concerning heritage language instruction, and then review the literature concerning major factors influencing heritage language retention in order to have a clearer idea of the major issues to consider in designing a HL task. Literature on heritage language curriculum design and other innovations will also be reviewed afterwards. My focus in the literature review is to gain theoretical insights for designing the content and form of the HL task models presented later in this paper.

## Key Concepts in Heritage Language Learning

Before moving on to the literature on HL instructional strategies, it is important to first of all clarify some key concepts with regard to heritage language education.

**Heritage language**

Originally coined in Canada in the 1970s (Baker, 2001), the term “heritage language” has undergone many changes in its meaning and is now used when referring to minority languages (Cummins, 1993). The term is currently used to identify languages other than the dominant official languages (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001). In this paper, it is used to refer to the mother tongues of first-generation immigrants, or international languages in Canada. A heritage language is not necessarily a child’s first-learnt language (Cummins, 1982) since some immigrant families no longer use it at home; it is neither the official nor dominant language in a society.

**Heritage language maintenance**

Heritage language maintenance refers to the retention or preservation of one’s mother tongue, following the acquisition of a second language (Gardner, 1985). It can be predicted from this definition that learning one’s HL involves competing with the dominant influence of the majority language since “the opportunity (or social acceptance) for using the first [or heritage] language is severely reduced” (Gardner, 1985, p. 35).

**Heritage language education**

In its general sense, heritage language education can be understood as studies and practices with a focus on HL curriculum, teaching methodology, and other fields related to formal HL instruction. Literature about HL teaching is closely related to bilingualism and second language acquisition (Cummins, 1995; Valdés, 2005), which is quite understandable since many HL learners in Canada are receiving formal instruction of their mother tongue or heritage language through bilingual programs or foreign language learning programs (Babaee, 2014; Cummins, 1982). There are teaching approaches and perspectives that we can adopt from bilingual education and second language acquisition in order to direct HL instruction, although the focus of our teaching can be quite different since HL learners may have different attitudes and motivations for learning the language as compared to second language learners (Correa, 2011).

## Factors Influencing Heritage Language Maintenance

This section will make analysis over the factors that have been revealed by literature to influence HL maintenance. The literature on HL maintenance will provide us a clear picture of the factors to be taken into consideration in designing the task modules for this project. It is also concluded that HL maintenance cannot be achieved through merely individual or school endeavour. Instead, it requires joint efforts from parents, community and the whole society.

**Personal factors**

Learning motivations can largely influence students’ outcomes of HL learning (Lee & Kim, 2008). There is a great amount of research attention devoted to HL learners’ and second language learners’ different motivation and attitudes in learning the language (Cummins, 2005; Lee and Kim, 2008: Valdés, 2000). It has been concluded by some researches that there are unique reasons for heritage language learners to study their HL, including maintaining relationships with their family members and developing relationships with other members of their HL community (Comanaru & Noels 2009; Phinney et al., 2001), learning about their ethnic cultural heritage (Heather, 2006), and reconstructing their ethnic group identities (O’Rourke & Zhou, 2016).

Kang and Kim (2012) assessed the language competence of 30 second-generation Korean American participants through a questionnaire, self-assessment, and assessment of speech and writing samples. The analysis demonstrated that the HL learners who had a strong sense of Korean identity tended to have better language proficiency in Korean. Kang and Kim’s research conclusion is also in line with the multiple case studies of HL maintenance conducted by Guardado (2002). In this research, the author summarized from examining the successful maintenance of their mother tongue by two Spanish families that promoting a strong and positive Spanish identity is a crucial factor associated with HL maintenance. Establishing identity is crucial in a child’s development because it can help children build their “sense of belonging, worth, competence and achievement” (Hornberger & Wang, 2008, p. 7). It is essential for HL instruction to be designed to help students rebuild their identity as one of the inheritors of the language and culture, which not only satisfies their learning need, but is helpful in improving their learning outcome as well.

Another motivation for heritage learning lies in students’ perceptions of the sociopolitical status of the language, especially in the personal advantages of learning the language (Patricia, 2008, p. 78). Li’s (2005) survey of HL learners of Chinese revealed that most of the students were studying Mandarin to learn more about themselves, their ethnic cultures, and most of all, to increase their future career opportunities. Many studies have emphasized the strong association between language attitudes and language proficiency. A positive attitude toward one’s mother tongue often results in more efforts for learning, and more likely a higher language competence (Fishman, 1991; Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

It is understandable that the teaching approach applied should also lay emphasis on satisfying students’ needs and encourage their higher motivations for further learning and using the language in natural settings. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration during heritage language instruction design that helping learners establish personal connections with the language is both a goal and an effective teaching method. For example, HL instruction can incorporate content that helps tighten bonds between students and people in the country, nurture their love and pride for its history and culture, deepen their understanding of its economic potential, etc..

**Social factors**

Both parents and children will unavoidably experience language assimilative pressures from society (Crawford, 2000; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bemhard & Freire, 2001). New immigrants will constantly face the pressures for linguistic and cultural conformity in their new settlement. Acquisition of the dominant language is essential for immigrants and their children to gain access into the mainstream society. At the same time, negative attitudes toward HL in the dominant culture can also lead to HL learners’ complicated attitudes toward their mother tongue. Language ideologies within the dominant culture will have great impact on HL maintenance.

Sometimes demotivation for using or learning HLs comes from peers in the classroom or in the social circle. It has been found that in many of the Chinese HL classes, students talk to each other predominantly in the official language (Curdt-Christiansen, 1999; Wang, 2004). In their daily life, the students also have their own peer groups, within which the language choice will influence each child’s language attitude and language use. According to research undertaken by Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009), second-generation Chinese immigrant children in the United States seldom speak their HL with their co-ethnic peers in daily communication, even if they all have learnt the language at home. It is clear that there is a need to establish a model through which more encouragement for HL use among peer groups would be offered. Although it is important to note that this finding was from a study conducted in the United States rather than in Canada, my own experiences in a Canadian classroom recounted above would seem to suggest that the situation may not be entirely different in Canada.

Studies on HL shift have demonstrated that individual and heritage community efforts are not sufficient to fight against the assimilative forces of the majority language (Fishman, 1991, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Wong-Fillmore, 2000). The degree of social acceptance towards the HL is one of the vital factors influencing its retention, since learners’ motivations for learning and using the language will be heavily influenced by social attitudes. The insight provided by these research findings for this project is that a friendly and encouraging environment needs to be created for using the heritage language and exposing students to more contexts where speaking the language can be a respectable, helpful, valuable asset, which will in turn help inspire the students’ desire and willingness to employ the language.

**Familial factors**

Many studies have emphasized the central role played by parents in helping children learn their mother tongues (Li, 2005; Slavkov, 2017; Wang, 2004). It needs to be recognized that in different family situations, there are diverse issues regarding parents’ contributions toward HL maintenance. Some parents, having no idea how fragile their mother tongue is under the dominant influence of the official language (Wong-Fillmore 2000), just assume that by sending their children to heritage school or bilingual school, their children will naturally learn the language well, meaning that they do not have to make an extra effort at home. They don’t know that language loss will occur in homes where parents lack commitment to their children’s HL learning and practice (Budiyana, 2017; Liao & Larke, 2008).

Parental education and the HL proficiency of the parents are also important factors affecting HL loss or maintenance (Guardado, 2002; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). For example, as for the students whose parents can’t speak the HL, learning the language will be more difficult because they have less chance of using it at home and fail to receive HL tutoring from their parents. In addition, in many current heritage programs, there are large groups of students from families of different language dialects, in which case the parents may not be able to offer assistance for their children’s learning. Students with less exposure to their HL at home may need extra help from other channels (McGinnis, 1996). That is to say, before carrying out the home-based HL learning tasks designed for this project, parental heritage language literacy should be evaluated so that different tasks can be assigned to the students accordingly.

As for the parents who are capable of offering language assistance at home, more training and guidance are needed to augment their efforts. Lim and Cole (2002) evaluated the effect of parental communication strategy training on children’s performance in Korean. Various evaluation measures were used, and it was indicated through the research that there were positive and significant effects of the parental training on children’s oral performance in Korean. Therefore, it is important in the tasks designed for this project that the parents receive some guidance in helping their children learn the language effectively at home. Providing a task to be completed at home aims to offer such a framework so that parents can be more aware of the situation and contribute in a positive way.

**Pedagogical factors**

As for heritage language instruction, concerns have been raised that the existing literature on curriculum design for HL schools or heritage language instruction is relatively small (Douglas, 2005; Kondo-Brown, 2008). Further research efforts in this area are surely needed in order to support curriculum design and application. Innovations in bilingualism and second language acquisition can also be undertaken within the HL instruction framework with moderate alterations in order to cater to HL learners’ particular needs and unique features.

In current Canadian HL classes, it is not uncommon to see that the complexity of instructional content fails to match the cognitive competence of the students. As the students are growing up under the dominant influence of the official language, their vocabulary in their heritage language may not expand at the same speed as that of their official language so that, as a result, what is taught in class can only focus on simple content with basic vocabulary and grammar.

In other cases, heritage class teaching content doesn’t relate closely to students’ real lives (Douglas, 2005). The students are learning the language in an academic way and it is hard for them to make cognitive associations with the content taught. Therefore, a fixed curriculum may fail to arouse students’ interest, and even cause some confusion since the students can’t relate their life experiences to the learning content. Another problem of applying a fixed curriculum is that it cannot address students’ varying degrees of language proficiency. As mentioned above, heritage classes tend to be heterogeneous since the learners are from different family background and are exposed to different language environments.

According to some researchers and educators, the content-based language teaching methods currently favored in HL teaching are inadequate to meet students’ age-appropriate cognitive language proficiencies and may fail to cater to their learning motivations (Berardi-Wiltshire, 2009; Lee, 2002; O’Rourke & Zhou, 2016). Therefore, as for HL instruction, teaching of the language through more flexible forms of activities and through more casual forms of oral practice may hold greater promise than adopting the traditional methodology (Draper & Hicks, 2000).

The traditional teaching method adopted in bilingual class is another reason for students’ inadequate language competency of their mother tongue. A great part of the instruction undertaken uses the traditional teaching methods for second language learning, through which the teacher gives instruction for the content classes (e.g., science, mathematics) in the HL, while students have less chance to participate in conversation or to fulfill certain real-life tasks. A classroom observation conducted by Nunan (1993) revealed that in the content classroom, teachers tend to talk for about two thirds of the available class time (p. 26). It is imaginable that in a bilingual program where teachers need to teach content classes in the HL, very little time allotment is left for students to practice orally in class.

Li’s (2005) survey of HL learners reflected their feelings of childhood HL learning. It turned out that in the survey most of the students described their HL learning experience as being annoying and boring. Another retrospective study by Chow (2002) on Canadian university students’ early experiences as HL learners also revealed that the students were not satisfied with the programs and they believed the programs were not successful in developing their HL proficiency. These two surveys demonstrated that the traditional heritage language teaching pedagogy fails to offer students enjoyable learning experiences and is producing unsatisfactory learning outcomes.

The factors analyzed above indicate that HL maintenance requires joint efforts from teachers, parents, and communities. People from all levels of the society need to be involved to ensure that people’s mother tongues are not lost (Draper & Hicks, 2000; Slavkov, 2017; Kwon, 2017; Webb & Miller, 2000; Zhang & Davis, 2008). Therefore, it is important for more people to take on an active role to facilitate the learning and using of HL. Educational institutions may have better chances with establishing models to get more social resources involved regularly and actively. More encouragement should also be given to motivate students to practice speaking the language in their daily lives and in their family environments. Besides traditional formal instruction, helping students use their language in more life contexts is of paramount importance for improving their oral proficiency. Moreover, since heritage language classes are heterogeneous (Wu, 2006), with HL learners coming from different family backgrounds and having different degrees of exposure to the language, HL curriculum design should provide flexibility so that the issue of students’ individual differences can be addressed properly, and students can access content catering to their interests, cognitive competence, and language proficiency.

## Innovations in Heritage Language Curriculum Design

In order to address the heterogeneity of HL classroom and improve current HL instruction, many studies have proposed innovations in HL curriculum design. Wu (2008) developed a curriculum to accommodate the motivational and linguistic differences of HL learners. Three pedagogical approaches are used in the curriculum: the learner-centred approach; the 5 Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities); and the use of technology. Based on these three approaches, textbook materials were tailored to meet the needs and competencies of Chinese HL learners, technology was used to provide online reading and writing modules, and several activities requiring students to make connections with Chinese communities and Chinese culture were also included in the curriculum. For example, after assigning students some readings about Chinese culture, the students were asked to interview native speakers on the topic of the readings. They were particularly encouraged to interview their relatives in China. The students were also given opportunities to reflect on their Chinese identities and share their feelings and thoughts with their classmates.

The above-mentioned innovation is aligned with Douglas’ (2005) demand for developmentally appropriate practice in HL instruction. Developmentally appropriate practice is defined as a “kind of educational practice that takes into account individual differences in the children’s development by age, individual growth patterns, and cultural orientations” (Douglas, 2005, p. 242). Douglas proposed the following approaches for addressing HL learners’ particular needs: the learner-centered approach, the integrated approach, the standards-based and inquiry-based approach, the hands-on and activity-based approach, and the interactive approach. The first three approaches can contribute to teachers’ decision-making about teaching content and sequence. The remaining three approaches can offer guidance in designing instructional activities. Douglas suggested that HL curriculum design should start from what the learners are interested in and what they already have familiarity with. So, step one of HL curriculum design is to make an informal assessment of a student’s interests, acquired knowledge, and language proficiency (learner-centered approach). Step two is to associate the generated idea to the applicable academic contents (integrated approach). Step three is to establish instructional objectives, namely the language and content standards (standard-based approach). Step four is to collect teaching materials and plan instructional activities (inquiry-based approach, hands-on and activity-based instruction, and interactive approach), during which it is suggested to get the native speakers’ parents involved. Step five is instruction and concurrent students’ performance assessment (both formative and simulative assessment). This HL instruction practice not only serves as guidance for offering some flexibility over the teaching content in heritage classes but can also be a guideline for complementary learning beyond the classroom. Therefore, it is reasonable for some of the approaches to be adopted in the project to address the issue of heterogeneity of HL learners.

There are also innovations in HL education that focus on incorporating the lived experiences of the HL learners into the curriculum to meet their cognitive competence and help them become more highly motivated. Zapata and Lacorte (2018) have introduced a HL pedagogy based on the theoretical structure of Learning by Design, which emphasizes the importance of integrating informal learning (i.e., experiences) with formal (i.e., academic) learning. That is to say, HL curriculum design cannot be based on a fixed, one-size-fits-all model. Instead, HL instruction has to be carried out according to language learners’ specific conditions. It requires a lived curriculum consisting of students’ personal experiences, a “classroom dynamic that places students’ voices in the forefront and contributes to the learning process” (p. 43). The incorporation of personally relevant materials into the heritage curriculum can enhance and simplify the learning process since the instructional content connects directly to the learners and will help the teacher find out what they need.

According to Zapata and Lacorte (2018), the Learning by Design pedagogical model consists of four knowledge processes: 1) experiencing the known and the unknown, 2) conceptualizing by naming and with theory, 3) analyzing functionally and critically, and 4) applying properly and creatively. Based on the four knowledge processes, some HL teaching projects have been launched, within which open-source materials are developed to address the linguistic and cultural needs of Spanish HL learners.

Zapata and Lacorte (2018) have proposed a project aiming at improve heritage learners’ literacy skills with digital Learning by Design instructional materials. The planning of the project material is based on the demographic information of the students. The thematic focus of the project is around immigration, labour, family and cultural traditions, and bilingual and bicultural identity. Each topic is to be presented through multimodal digital ensembles, such as works of fiction and non-fiction belonging to different genres, websites, works of art, video interviews, and clips from open-source documentaries, etc. The students will access each instructional module through a school-based digital learning platform. After the creation of the materials, a detailed description and samples of the materials will be presented in the form of literary works, art, and comic strips, which is intended to connect students with a familiar topic in their life experiences and exposed them to a new perspective. This is the initial step of experiencing the known and the unknown. In the next module, several questions will be given to the students to facilitate their exploration of the structure of a sample narrative piece. It is expected that through the exploration, the students will be able to perceive how the genre works and how to convey meanings through the genre. This is the process of conceptualizing by naming and conceptualizing with theory. In the analyzing stages, the focus of the project moves to the linguistic resources that people employ to narrate a story (e.g., verb tenses, clausal elements, etc.). The students would be offered chances to talk about the effect of these linguistic resources, which is an essential step for improving students’ grammar and literacy skills. In the application stages, the students are asked to produce a narrative of their own immigration story or story of someone else in their family/community. Another task in the application stages is to produce a hybrid, multimodal narrative containing text and visual content (video and/or photos), through which the students would represent to the class the events and emotions in their immigration stories. It is also required that the students present a reflection over their narratives. The written narratives, visual narratives, and reflections would all be used for further assessment of students’ performance and learning outcomes. Thus, Learning by Design can offer a blueprint for designing HL curriculum, including the teaching materials, teaching processes, and students’ performance evaluations. It is a promising teaching methodology that is awaiting future researchers and teachers to employ it further in practical HL teaching.

The above-mentioned innovations can provide the theoretical and methodological basis for the establishment of HL education. They have great potential for future endeavors that will benefit heritage language learners. It is hoped that with the help of these HL curriculum innovations, future HL education can be tailored to meet specific needs and interests of the learners and renew students’ emotional connections to their HL, which in turn, can positively influence learners’ linguistic and cognitive development.

# Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Methodology

In the earlier sections, we discussed proposed methodologies and pedagogies for heritage language teaching. It can be summarized that heritage language teaching should ideally be learner-centered and undertaken through flexible activities or mission-based interactive learning, which is why many innovations in HL curriculum involve task completion. Many of the above-mentioned pedagogies, methodologies, and innovations point to elements of TBLT since it is an applicable tool for active learning.

The understanding of TBLT is useful for undertaking heritage language teaching, since some of its rationale can be well applied in language acquisition (Carrero Pérez, 2016; Ellis, 2003), especially in eliciting language use and involving learners in comprehension, manipulation, production, and interaction with the target language (Nunan, 2004).

The purpose of this project is to explore ways to enhance the communicative competency of students in current Mandarin bilingual programs. Task-based language teaching, being a theoretical branch of [communicative language teaching](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communicative_language_teaching) (CLT) (Nunan, 2004; Willis, 2004), is inherently applicable for addressing communication problems. As interpreted by Richards (2005), “task-based language instruction is an extension of the communicative language teaching movement, although it takes a different route to achieve its goals of developing learners’ communicative competence” (p. 29). It is widely believed that communication tasks can enhance students’ language learning through increasing their engagement in group work (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004).

## Understanding the Task-Based Language Teaching Framework

In order to work within the framework of TBLT, it is essential to understand what teaching activities qualify as “tasks”. In the following section I will answer that question by sorting out the literature on definitions and interpretations of TBLT.

The definition of a task given by Willis (1996, p. 53) is “a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome. In other words, learners use whatever target language resources they have in order to solve a problem, do a puzzle, play a game or share and compare experiences.” Nunan (2004, p. 4) defines the term as “a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form.” Meanwhile, according to Ellis (2003, p.16), the definition of a task is “a work plan that requires the learner to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct and appropriate propositional content has been conveyed.”

One shared understanding of the term “task” in the above definitions is that tasks focus more on communicative outcomes, instead of or in addition to the presentation of grammatical information. For instance, interviewing a classmate in the target language is a task. The communicative goal in this task is to obtain information through the interaction. The definitions also indicate that TBLT is distinguished from other approaches in terms of its focus on meaning, namely for learners to better process not only the semantic but also the pragmatic meaning in a real context. The definitions all reflect that TBLT is a process for learners to acquire the language by doing, by engaging in authentic activities, and by accessing authentic language resources and contexts.

Although TBLT features goal orientation and meaning orientation, this does not indicate that grammatical content cannot be part of the task. Ellis (2009) distinguishes between two kinds of tasks: those that are focused and those that are unfocused. “Unfocused tasks are tasks designed to provide learners with opportunities for using language in general communicatively. Focused tasks are tasks designed to provide opportunities for communicating using some specific linguistic feature (typically a grammatical structure)”(p. 223). Ellis (2009) maintained that if the syllabus of TBLT incorporates focused tasks, it will surely involve specifying the grammar. Besides, a hybrid task-based syllabus consisting of a mixture of focused and unfocused tasks is also possible. In this sense, students are able to focus on language points while fulfilling the pragmatic goal of a particular task.

The above analysis offers various definitions or interpretations of the term “task.” Besides these definitions, some scholars have furthered our understanding by offering criteria that apply to tasks. Ellis (2003) has specified his version of the criteria as follows: 1) A task constitutes a work plan of either teaching materials or activities. 2) The primary focus of a task should be on meaning, on engaging learners pragmatically. 3) A task should expose learners to real-world language use. 4) A task can involve any of the language skills. 5) A task will require learners to engage with cognitive processes. 6) A task must have a clearly stated outcome serving as the determinant of whether the task is completed (p. 9).

Both the definition and criteria can work together as a framework for designing a task-based language program. The criteria above have indicated that a purely linguistic-based language practice cannot be counted as a task and would probably not work well in increasing language proficiency. In this project, it is necessary for the activities designed for practicing heritage language to have certain goals to achieve, i.e., a gap needs to be bridged through communication. This pragmatic aspect of a task, the demand for a “clearly defined outcome,” naturally leads to another issue related to undertaking tasks: the assessment of task completion and learning outcomes. With careful design, tasks can be used as a good way for teachers to monitor students’ progress, evaluate their language proficiency, and offer further improvements in learning outcome.

According to Long’s TBLT Model (1985, 2015), which focuses on finding tasks that enable learners to accomplish real-life missions in the target language, a full syllabus is based on six key elements: (1) needs analysis to identify tasks; (2) task classification and task sequencing according to their complexity; (3) materials development; (4) teaching and pedagogical options; (5) learning outcome assessment; and (6) program evaluation. The six elements are used as factors assisting teachers in pinpointing authentic and appropriate tasks, organizing them logically, and examining their effectiveness in accordance with students’ preferences and specific situations. Also, this framework of TBLT syllabus offers one implication of authenticity, which is that an authentic task has to be able to relate to the students’ life and align with their cognitive competence.

## What Is Task “Authenticity”

Ellis (2003) also noted that it is essential that through performing the task, the language learners can “go through the same kind of communicative processes as if they were happening in real life” (p. 9). That is to say, tasks should either be real-world activities or able to illicit communicative behaviours required in real-life activities. In terms of defining real-world tasks, there have been many relevant discussions of task “authenticity.”

Task “authenticity” (Long, 1985) was initially understood as referring to the situation where language learning materials or practices are in line with typical target language use, exemplifying the target language community (Widdowson, 1996). “One of the crucial aspects of task authenticity is whether real communication takes place; whether the language has been used for a genuine purpose” (Guariento & Morley, p. 349). In this sense, task authenticity focuses on distinguishing real-life tasks from grammar exercises or drills of which the emphasis is on linguistic form. Long and Crookes (1992) referred to task authenticity as “reflecting real world target tasks, such as buying a train ticket, renting an apartment, reporting a chemistry experiment, taking lecture notes, and so forth”(p. 44). They also argued that classroom-based pedagogic tasks can only be complex approximations of real-life target tasks.

There are also many relevant studies focusing on learners’ perspectives (e.g., Breen, 1983; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Roberts & Cooke, 2009), on how authentic materials have been applied, and on the real effects achieved through undertaking tasks. Roberts and Cooke (2009) argued that authentic teaching materials could be modified or simplified as long as this process could provoke authentic responses on the learners’ side. Moreover, greater authenticity will arise when teachers adjust their task materials according to local realities (Ellis, 2003; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 2003; Widdowson, 1998).

Breen (1985, p. 61) summarized four kinds of authenticity: 1) authenticity of the task content, 2) authenticity of the learner’s interpretation, 3) authenticity of the learning process, 4) authenticity of the social situation where the task is conducted. Breen’s summary indicates that the learning material chosen, the learners' own contributions, the designed learning activity and the classroom setting may all influence the degree of task authenticity. Authenticity lies not only in the genuineness of the text and materials, but also in the way it is presented and perceived. Authentic learning content is, by itself, not sufficient to develop proficiency in the target language. A degree of instruction on form, together with learner production and prompt feedback, should also be considered as being important and necessary since it complies with the authenticity of the natural learning process. The simplified content can be used as a starting point for beginners, so that they can focus on certain basic language rules and social norms first, and then move on to more complicated and comprehensive real-life interaction.

Second language learners may have insufficient contextual knowledge to perform a task in an authentic way. With inadequate authentic input, inept task design and untimely feedback, learners may be prone to mistaken language usage. They may need more exemplar input to avoid the interference of the dominant language. Therefore, it is sensible to design a task in which students are given a chance to build input through self-study, constant interaction with a native speaker, or receiving constant and timely feedback. That is to say, the more cooperation and communication between learners and native speakers a task involves, the more likely task authenticity can be achieved. During the completion of a task involving interaction between learners and native speakers, the learners will consistently be exposed to exemplary behavioral and verbal models, and adjust their language use accordingly.

Additionally, since the materials of a task may not reflect learners’ real life communicative contexts, and a designed task within a classroom setting may fail to reflect real life language use, it is useful to expand the range of tasks to include real-life activity beyond the school boundary. In order to achieve a higher degree of authenticity, the tasks designed in this project include people’s daily actions and missions in diverse social settings, such as going shopping, seeing a family doctor in a heath center, borrowing a book in the library, going to a museum, attending community clubs, etc. In these settings, the students can learn their heritage language from completing these real world tasks alongside native speakers or target language users.

## Computer Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Practice

In recent years, many prominent second language scholars have realized the significance and potential of integrating TBLT with technology for language learning (e.g., Chapelle, 2003; Doughty & Long, 2003; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Salaberry, 2000). This instructional innovation explores how to attach technological factors to the application of TBLT and is a new way of conceptualizing the fusion between technology and TBLT (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014).The technology applied within TBLT can range from computer-related tools such as e-mail, forums, blogs, wikis, and online games to virtual synthetic environments.

González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) have argued that optimal blends of task and technology should have five essential characteristics. First, the primary focus of technology-mediated tasks should be on meaning. Second, good technology-mediated tasks should be goal-oriented. Third, online tasks should be learner-centered. Forth, tasks should promote reflective learning. Finally, a task must be holistic and draw on real-world processes of language use and real-world relationships (p. 6).

There are increasing amounts of literature in the field of fusion between technology and TBLT (e.g., González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Lai & Li, 2011; Thomas & Reinders, 2010; Thomas, 2013), offering exemplary technology-mediated TBLT projects for future curriculum design. Appel and Gilabert (2002) investigated how students of second language English in Barcelona and second language Spanish in Dublin can meet remotely through telecommunication and spend half of the session using each language. Sykes (2008) has created a technology-mediated task in a visual environment to teach students Spanish pragmatics. Collentines’ (2011) study reinvigorated traditional teaching methodology by adding a 3D world exploration component and synchronous computer-mediated communication chat. New research suggests that this kind of game-based teaching, especially with online role-playing games, can promote language learning and increase students’ motivation for communicative practices (e.g., Hitosugi, Schumidt & Hayashi, 2014; Reinders & Wattana, 2014; Sykes & Reinhardt, 2012). Lee and Markey (2014) carried out research between prospective Spanish teachers in the U.S. and prospective English teachers in Spain, who meet each other through tweeting and discuss their shared blog and podcast activities.

Technology can be used as a medium bridging the content students learn in class and the knowledge they practice in order to complete a task. A successful technology-mediated TBLT can promote students’ active engagement in communicative activities, reduce students’ fear of failure and embarrassment, increase students’ creativity while using the language, give them access to volunteers or peers in remote locations, and increase their exposure to authentic language environments and cultural enactments along with tremendous additional sources of input. In order to truly improve HL learning through technology-based TBLT, curriculum planners need to be creative enough to reinvigorate traditional tasks and to take advantage of the “singular affordances that new technologies open up which would be impossible to attain through tasks designed for completion within the walls of the traditional classroom” (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014, p. 68).

# Community-Based Language Acquisition Endeavour

In studies related to second language acquisition pedagogy, there has long been a discussion over the disconnect between decontextualized classroom learning and authentic communication in real life. In an attempt to bridge the gap, a number of possibilities have emerged focusing on the utilization of resources outside the limitations of the classroom. Some projects have explored how the L2 community can contribute to improving the proficiency of language learners (Clyne et al., 1995, 1997; Valdés et al., 2005). The community-based link with the younger generation is one of the crucial factors for language transmission (Fishman, 1991), and there are cases of heritage language resilience due to community support (Chumak-Horbatsch, 1999). Common u frame of reference bibliography

Some innovative partnership programs explore how to achieve language improvement through pairing heritage learners with foreign language learners. Another kind of community-based innovation is achieved through service learning, during which language learners work in the community with people from diverse language backgrounds and learn their language through interaction with them (Valdés et al., 2005).

## Intergenerational One-on-one Conversation Approach

Cordella and Huang (2016) have jointly proposed an intergenerational approach for complementing the formal learning environment with regular one-on-one conversations with a native speaker. Their project paired more than 160 secondary school students who were learning a second language with 106 older participants from the local community (ethic centres, churches, community clubs). Each pair held a one-hour conversation in the target language every two weeks. The topics were chosen in consultation with teachers to align with the curriculum and were tailored to the participants’ needs. The topics ranged from early life experiences, migration experience, work and family life, hobbies and interests, and issues concerning countries where the target language is spoken. This innovation offered learners a dynamic environment so that they could engage in language learning activities cognitively, behaviourally, and affectively.

## Service Learning Approach

Diana Ruggiero (2018) has addressed the teaching of Spanish to heritage language learners through the Creating Community project, in which the service learning approach was adopted. The project brought together students from an upper-division Spanish class for specific purposes and members of local non-profit organizations, as well as local community leaders and artisans. It was a small group, arts-based, collaborative project focusing on designing and supporting self-sustaining micro-economies centered on the arts (e.g., music, visual arts, fashion, and accessory design). The purpose of the project was to help integrate local immigrants within the community. Students were required to meet on campus to discuss assigned readings and issues related to the project, and to do related field work including attending various workshops, lessons, and community discussion forums dealing with leadership, community, community service, economics, and marketing. Throughout the project students engaged in a critical and reflective multimodal journal activity that involved digital storytelling, written student reflections, and self-generated questions for critical inquiry and further reflection.

## Assets-Based Approach

In recent community-based language learning projects, there has been a tendency to shift from a needs-based approach to an assets-based approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This change involves a shift from developing language programming by pondering what is lacking for the participants to identifying the existing abilities and resources of community residents and local associations. This assets-based approach begins by identifying the capacities of individuals, although it may extend to institutions such as social services providers, cultural groups, and businesses. The goal is to fully mobilize the local community and effectively use resources available. For example, through this approach, people can benefit from the elderly or local seniors as linguistic resources within the community.

The above-mentioned models can also be adapted for heritage language maintenance since under the dominant influence of official languages, heritage language learning and second language acquisition seem to share some common features. Furthermore, in an immigrant country like Canada, rich language and cultural resources already exist in local communities. The challenge is how to tap into these resources. Such community-based programs “promote(s) the utilization of community language resources, enrich the experience of young language learners” (Cordella & Huang, 2016, p. 20).

The community-based task presented later in this project includes both service learning and regular conversation, through which the old and young can get together to share their skills, knowledge, and experiences in a range of community settings. During this interaction, older people can help younger generations learn lessons about ethics, values, and culture that may not be available in immediate family circles.

# Task-Based Heritage Language Learning Design

In this section, I propose a model of heritage language learning that incorporates joint efforts from parents, teachers, and other social resources in order to offer students more opportunities to use and learn the language. It is expected that such an innovation can help evoke more willingness from students to speak the language in their personal life. I seek to achieve this goal by designing three categories of tasks, which are intended to be carried out at school, in the home, and at the community level, respectively. The task designed for school will be carried out with the use of technologies, such as computer-related tools or technology for creating virtual synthetic environments, as well as with the participation of volunteers to create as much real-life context as possible. The task designed for home can be separated into two parts, namely the interaction between parents and students and the interaction between students and their paired language learners through social media. The task at the community level will be undertaken by pairing the students with heritage language speakers, who specifically are volunteers or seniors from the communities, so that they can socialize and complete a real life mission together using the heritage language. Hopefully, these tasks can incorporate the wisdom gained from the above-mentioned theories and practices, and effectively enhance students’ language proficiency.

## Task for School

The task for school is designed largely for enriching the knowledge of textbook materials and reinforcing classroom learning. The students will be divided into small groups to communicate with volunteers or teaching assistants within diverse simulated contexts, such as at the supermarket, park, restaurant, work place, tourist resort, etc. The context chosen should be arranged in line with the content in the textbook so that the students can apply and practice what has already been recently taught. At the same time, the content of the task can be tailored properly to meet the needs and language competences of the students. The task will take on the form of information collection and inquiry. In a visual environment created with the help of technology tools, the volunteer can play the role of a roommate, tourist, customer, etc. The activities undertaken by the volunteer can include preparing a party for a friend, apologizing for breaking something, borrowing a book, bargaining with a vendor, going on a tour around the city, etc. Every group of students is required to report the information attained about the volunteer’s activities, thoughts, and emotions in the specific context through verbal interaction with the volunteer in the target language, which qualifies the process as completing a task of inquiry and information collection.

**Assistance and facilities**

In order to encourage more students to participate in the verbal interaction, students will be divided into small groups with at least one volunteer inside the group. Therefore, volunteer help from native speakers or those who possess at least a C1 level of proficiency on the Common European Framework (Byram, Zarate & Neuner, 1997) will be needed in class to facilitate the communication. They will be offered some general information (a script) related to the context, but they will also be allowed to add their own experiences to the script of the task. It is suggested that the context settings are what the volunteers are familiar with (e.g., a place he or she has been to or an activity with which he or she has been involved) so that they can contribute their understanding and feelings to the script of the task and provide more reasonable details to the students during their verbal interactions.

Additional innovative endeavours could be used to intensify the learning activities, such as adding special visual effects, which enhance the authenticity of the environment to more creatively engage the learners in using and acquiring the target language. Doing so can offer students additional background information to assist their description and interpretation of the context.

**Process of task completion**

**Step one.** Students will be divided into groups and assigned one volunteer, who will first notify them about the context of their task. Then the student will be offered opportunities to learn the knowledge related to the given context through self-conducted online learning and information searching. They will be required to write down what they have learned during the process for the teacher’s evaluation of their task performance. For example, if they are told that the context of their task is to visit a historical park in Beijing, the students can search for the relevant information about the park, such as its location, layout, history, famous attractions inside, etc. They can also search for commonly used vocabulary for such contexts through self-conducted study. At the end of step one, the students are also required to conceive their own questions for the volunteer in order to collect information about the context. The self-conducted study and lexical input can contribute to later verbal communication with the volunteer and facilitate them in conceiving of proper questions.

**Step two.** The volunteers can give a narration of their experience in a specific context, including the details of the setting, the time the event happened, the major activities that were undertaken, their personal feelings and emotions, etc. They can present all of this information through pictures, slides, video clips, or other technology adding visual effects. They can act out some of the scenario or carry out a conversation with other volunteers to demonstrate the situations. Then the students ask the questions they prepared in step one, and any other questions they may have thought of after watching the volunteer’s presentation. Every group member is required to ask questions while taking turns in order to guarantee their participation. The students will be asked to note down the essential information about the volunteer’s presentation and about their queries, in order to use this information for later group discussion. For instance, in the above-mentioned travelling scenario, the volunteer can give a general description of his itinerary, such as when he arrived at the historical park, the order of when he visited different sections of the park, who he met and what he said, what about the park attracted him the most, what he felt about the park, etc., which he can present in a visual environment with the assistance of technology tools. After the general description of the traveling, the students can ask him further questions with regard to the details of this park. Anything about the park that the students are interested in or needing clarification about can be asked, ranging from the fare to enter the park, its forms of transportation, the size and appearance of some of its architecture, to comments given by the tourists about the park, while the focus is on collecting and presenting to the class as much useful information about the volunteer’s experience in this context as possible. In this way, the major task of information collection and inquiry is completed.

**Step three.** The next step is to organize the information collected within a group and to rearrange it logically through discussion in the target language. Each student needs to report within the group the information he or she has collected and offer suggestions on how to present it to the class, which can be done through a creative way such as adding works of art, music, video, or other elements to their presentations to vividly represent the scenario.

**Step four.** The group members should jointly work on the class report related to the context. It needs to be specified that each group member should be assigned a certain part of the report so that everyone can participate orally in the presentation.

**Task evaluation**

Since the purpose of this project is to encourage the use of the heritage language and improve oral proficiency, the evaluation of students’ performances should reflect this focus. Learning enthusiasm and efforts contributed by the students could also be incorporated into the evaluation system. Therefore, the assessment of their performance consists of three parts: group member evaluations, students’ notes, and group presentations. Group member evaluation involves each student giving a brief comment on each of his/her group members’ performance in the task, based on contribution and enthusiasm in the query, discussion, and group presentation, so that the comment can help the teacher to give each member a final grade. Students’ notes include notes taken during the self-study, questions prepared for interacting with the volunteer, and a brief summary of the information collected during step two, which will be presented after each task for grading. The grade for each group’s presentation will be attained through averaging the grades given by all of the other groups.

## Task for Home

The task designed for home involves interaction between parents and students and/or interaction between students and their paired language learners of English. The choice between the two options largely depends on the HL proficiency of the parents. The form of the task should be diverse and engaging since the home setting is more suited for learning through casual and leisure activities, such as practicing the language through playing computer games. Some quest-based Chinese role-play games can be used well in conjunction with TBLT since the player will be exposed to many simulated contexts in the game. They will constantly be asked to complete certain missions using the target language, such as finding something, retrieving an object, or reading a note, which will provide them with input. Certain games with this feature can be introduced to language learning at home as well. As for the family without a parent speaking the language, tasks completed with peers or volunteers through social media can be an indispensable supplement. Regular oral interaction with learning partners will be included as part of the home-level task, with activities mainly being around sharing a reading report or movie review through a blog, communicating life experiences or jointly completing a learning project with computer-mediated communication, etc.

Another task for the students is to communicate with native speakers or language users of C1 level proficiency through social media. Students can share about their daily lives with native speakers, work on a creative project with them, or share with them their reflections and reviews about a movie, book, or TV program. During this process, it is expected that grammatical feedback and comments on the students’ cultural content in the discussion will be provided by the volunteers in order to expose the students to authentic language use and culture content. It is also important for parents to give support and supervision while performing the task at home in order to demonstrate to their children their attention to HL maintenance. Students’ use of social media should be monitored, and the teacher may need to clear the site with the school jurisdiction, administration and parents.

**Task one: Quest-based RPG game**

This task can be carried out either by students and their parents or by students and their language partners, who are ESL learners in China. They will be required to practice the language through engaging in role-play computer games, within which there is a large amount of Mandarin dialogue between the avatars. There are also some riddles to be solved in order to complete the missions in the games. The players can navigate the environment and communicate with other players orally or through typing. Language learning tasks can be embedded into gaming tasks either through interaction with avatars or with other peers, through both gaining input and producing output. In this kind of quest-based game, students may need to solve a puzzle, find out about the next mission, or comprehend the plot through questioning the avatar, reading the dialogue, and collecting clues from objects in the visual world, all of which are typical information gap tasks. For instance, the computer game named “The Legend of Sword and Fairy” is a role-play game carrying these features. As for this task, HL-speaking parents can offer some help with the Mandarin dialogue and explain the plot related to Chinese ancient culture, particularly the content implicating ancient customs and rituals. The task for the students is not only to understand the plot of the Mandarin- speaking role-play game and solve all the language puzzles in it, but also to discuss with their parents in the heritage language about the cultural content they have perceived through playing the game. This is due to the conclusion stated above that it is more effective for students to learn their HL if the task can contribute to their affective connection with the culture. For example, students can talk about the ancient costumes their avatars are wearing and how they differ from modern outfits. An audio recording of the summary of the discussion should be presented to the teacher for further evaluation.

**Task two: Social media communication**

If the parents are not linguistically competent enough to facilitate the completion of this task, the students can choose the second form of task, which is to pair up with a native learner in China and meet regularly through social media for oral practice.

The student and his/her language partner can discuss the content of their shared blog and podcast activities, in which case it is required that there are some postings touching on cultural self-reflections about the student’s life. Or the students can first watch certain Chinese TV programs, cartoons, or movies on their own, and then share their comments with their language partners on social media using the HL. This online meeting can also take the form of an interview. The students can pick a culture-related topic and ask their language partner about their understanding and experience around the topic. It is encouraged that the interviewees be their relatives in China, so that the completion of the task can also contribute to strengthening their association with their family members and provide opportunities for them to reflect on their Chinese identities.

Another form of this socializing through social media would be to ask the students and language partners to jointly work on a creative project or study report, such as designing a logo for a project or planning a travel itinerary and budget for visiting the other’s city, etc. It is expected that this engaging form of collaborative task can engender more exposure to the HL and more verbal communication. For example, during the planning of a travel itinerary, students need to search for relevant information about the city’s layout, landmarks, and geography, which can be regarded as a process of gaining input. After the first information-seeking period, students will meet in dyads on a computer-mediated chat and share the information collected. They may seek advice from each other and discuss the feasibility of their itineraries with their peers. By taking turns practicing and offering advice, they can focus on language output.

After each online meeting, students can provide feedback on their language partner’s cultural content, and their language partners can provide feedback on their language use, since the purpose of the task is to help students become acquainted with authentic cultural information and receive exposure to real-life language use and clear linguistic feedback. Each week, the dyads will be asked to jointly produce a five-minute video clip orally discussing a controversial topic related to their topic of the week. Regarding the interview task, the students are supposed to make a video on their own and summarize the content of the interview. This video will be used by the teacher for further assessment of the task and to help them make reasonable adjustments to the task design.

**Task evaluation**

In order to make the evaluation of students’ performance more objective, some general statistics from the parents or the volunteers will be collected, ranging from their frequency and duration of verbal communication with the students, to the topic range and depth of their discussion. The students should be given higher credit if, through completing the task, they demonstrate increased enthusiasm and frequency of using the HL at home or on social media with the native speakers. Another important reference for the students’ performance will be their recorded reflections, and their discussions after playing the game and each week’s online meeting. Besides grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity, and authenticity and naturalness, the teachers should take into consideration whether the content related to human geography, traditional customs, and historical culture has been noticed and accurately perceived by the students while they are giving grades for the students’ audio and video recording.

## Task for Community

The community-based task in this project includes daily interaction in the heritage language between the students and the volunteer senior native speakers, through which the old and young can come together to do daily chores and community activities in a range of settings. In the heritage language community, local seniors whose first language is the heritage language represent a key resource for program design (Lynch, 2008, p. 327). And their cultural and linguistic knowledge can be drawn on in a variety of ways: involving seniors in life narrative sessions so that their personal experiences can relate to the cultural and historical aspects of the heritage language, paring up the seniors and the learners for regular tutorship or other activities, visiting the seniors as a field trip to interview them and write a reflection, etc. During interactions like this, the older people can pass to the young generation not only practical language use, but also values and culture related to their heritage. At the same time, the young generation can help the seniors to learn English and, for newer immigrants particularly, to adapt to life in Canada.

**Task one: Community activities**

In this task, the teacher can pair up seniors and students for community-based activities. For example, community clubs regularly hold community parties or gatherings, in which the people attending play music or engage in leisure activities. It is recommended that the students and the senior volunteers can join in such gatherings for more social interaction and enrich the activities by adding more heritage features to them, such as performing traditional dancing, or singing folk songs, ballads, or pop songs in the heritage language, etc. Some communities encourage residents to jointly perform volunteer work, such as cleaning up leaves or snow in the community’s public spaces. The students and the seniors can also take part in such activities for socialization using the heritage language. In this process of interaction, the students will be naturally exposed to the vocabulary and expressions used commonly in those community settings and activities. For example, during community cleaning work, the vocabulary of the tools, people’s movements, directions, locations, etc., can all be learned and practiced.

The students can also go on a field trip with the seniors to a museum, science center, exhibition, or heritage festival event, during which they can share their comments and feelings towards the place and event in the heritage language. This partnership and mutual assistance can also stretch to the seniors’ daily lives. The students are also encouraged to accompany the seniors to do daily chores such as shopping, going to the bank, seeing their family doctor, etc., so that they can help the senior by offering some translation and, in return, they will be exposed to heritage language use in these settings as well. All of the tasks not only may fulfill the function of increasing students’ language use in social life and diverse settings, but also deepen intergenerational understandings and develop a volunteer spirit.

It is expected that the senior partners can help students learn the HL by teaching them new vocabulary, correcting grammar, stressing colloquial forms of expression, and improving their pronunciation and fluency. It is also required that the students take notes of new words learned from the immersive contexts and the linguistic feedback from the senior partners’ vocabularies, which is one form of evidence of their performance in the task and will be used for the teacher to make further assessment.

**Task two: Regular tutorship**

In this task, the teacher can pair the student with an older participant for a one-hour conversation in the target language every two weeks. The topics are chosen in consultation with teachers to align with the curriculum and are revised to be better tailored to the participants’ needs. This regular tutorship can involve seniors in life narrative sessions so that they can share with the students what normal life is/was like in their origin country, ranging from early life experiences, migration experience, work and family life, hobbies and interests, and issues concerning countries where the target language is spoken. For example, the seniors can talk about the landscape of their hometown, the most unforgettable memory of their lives there, and the biggest culture shock they have confronted since arriving in Canada. Or the seniors can share with the students their favourite ancient Chinese fairy tales, fables, or stories about the origin of some Chinese slangs and idioms, as these types of stories are often full of wisdom and cultural implications. Such sharing of experiences can familiarize the students with the humanity and geographic features of their origin country, deepen their understanding of the ideologies, values, and thinking modes of the people there, and inspire students’ enthusiasm around learning. After each meeting, the students will be asked to make a five-minute audio or video recording to retell the content of the tutoring, and to add to their personal reflection on the topic.

At the same time, such a tutorship meeting can also include the demonstration and imparting of traditions, customs and skills. As for artifact-making, there can be demonstration of paper cutting, embroidery, clay doll making, seal carving, etc. The seniors can also teach the students Chinese painting, calligraphy, martial arts, or how to make traditional food such as wrapping rice dumplings. Tutoring like this will help the students perceive the cultural wealth of the origin country and nurture their pride and affection towards their heritage. The task is not only for students to know about Chinese traditions and arts, but also to learn about how to perform these traditions and arts.

After every four times of such tutorship, the students will be given the chance to demonstrate what they have learned by performing and introducing it verbally to the whole class and all participants. For example, a student can paint a Chinese painting and tell the class about the history of Chinese painting, how to hold the brush, or even what inspired the creation of the painting.

**Task evaluation**

The evaluation of students’ performance in community activities can be made by the teacher based on both paired seniors’ comments, the audio/video recordings of the intergenerational events and activities, the students’ notes about the linguistic and cultural knowledge they have learned during the process, and their monthly presentations of tutorship content. As for the seniors’ comments, they are a way to offer information about the students’ enthusiasm for the activities; their improvement in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary; and their frequency of attending community activities, etc. In order to give a grade for the students’ records and notes, the teacher can give each student a different linguistic quiz consisting of 10 questions based on their records and notes. In the case of common activities or shared topics, the teacher can arrange a competition around a game quiz, examining how much they have learned about their culture.

## Commentary

The task has adopted approaches that are learner-centered, integrated, inquiry-based approach, activity-based, and interactive through which each student can learn through hands-on material and real-life interactions. Technology is used in the task for class and at home, since it not only adds to the authenticity and entertainment of the task but can also support flexibility and diversification in the task design for the heterogeneous heritage class. With the help of technology, students can learn through cooperation and self-exploration, and the specific learning content they are exposed to will cater to their language competency and learning interests. Thanks to the greater flexibility of technological communication, learners can be connected with a variety of speakers, locally and internationally.

It should be noted that the above tasks are merely intended to be a general framework for designing such tasks. As discussed earlier, the full syllabus for a task consists of six factors (Long, 2015). In order to complete the project as a task according to Long’s framework, the first step would be to conduct a needs analysis, involving the assessment of students’ learning interests, personal knowledge, language proficiency, household language use, and learning motivations and expectations through questionnaires, quizzes, and even interviews. Only if the students’ learning needs have been well addressed can we expect the task to be efficient in encouraging the proper amount of communication and affective engagement toward the language.

A complete task-based program in Long’s framework also involves program evaluation. After the students complete the task, they will also be asked to finish a questionnaire regarding its appropriateness and effectiveness. The questionnaires will include questions on task selection and sequencing, teaching assistance and partnership, familiarity and practicality of the topics chosen, personal learning outcomes and enthusiasm, and on further advice, etc. The students will be asked to score all the questions in a range from one to ten and rationalize their marking by providing detailed explanations and specific examples.

Another preparation before designing the task is to figure out what HL resources can be applied to the project and in what form these resources can be fittingly and aptly utilized. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) pointed out three levels of resources we can tap into in HL teaching: individuals, associations, and institutions. They also suggested that during the designing of community-based projects, it is necessary to carry out an asset inventory for each of the three levels and explore coordination and integration across them.

It is clear in the above task planning that many extra resources such as volunteers, ESL students, and seniors are used to facilitate the language program. Therefore, the teacher should try to tap into these resources and seek help from language institutions, senior organizations, cultural centers, churches, community clubs, schools abroad, etc. In order to obtain consistent and effective assistance from these resources, it is advisable to establish an organization or team that specializes in recruiting such volunteers, working on asset inventories of available resources, and taking charge of coordination work during the completion of the task.

# Conclusion and Significance

Fishman (1991) has made cautionary statements concerning the limitations of educational institutions in reversing language shift, because language learning involves more factors beyond simply formal instruction in schools. HL maintenance is a broad effort involving more public understanding and assistance for students’ cultural inheritance, rather than merely providing a school course.

It is clear that a joint effort made at different social dimensions is required to promote HL maintenance. To clarify how the different levels of the environment can contribute to a child’s heritage language learning, I would like to adopt some theoretic insights from Urie Bronfenbrenner’s “Ecological Systems Theory” (1979). Bronfenbrenner stressed the importance of studying a child in the context of multiple environments. He divided the environmental factors affecting us into five different levels. At each level of the system, efforts can be made to retain heritage language vitality by different entities.

The microsystem can be understood as referring to the factors that we are most frequently and directly in contact with, such as our family, our school, our neighborhood, our circle of friends. It is human nature to desire a sense of belonging within a group. And in order to fit into a new community, it is understandable that the children of new immigrants would no longer want to carry a distinctive identity through applying a different language. In order for parents to rebuild children’s sense of belonging within the microsystem, both the strategy of speaking the HL at home and establishing an HL-speaking social circle for their children should be adopted. With more opportunities to use the language in diversified contexts, the second generation will naturally increase their ease and readiness for speaking their HL and regain the recognition of their ethnic identity. Also, within the school context, more effort should be made to encourage exposure to the HL for all students in the school, not just the HL speakers. Besides holding diverse cultural and language events, establishing close contact with the homeland of the language, and developing on-line HL courses, school boards can also try to make innovative changes to current HL programs. For example, a “buffer class” can be designed for students who have inadequate exposure to the heritage language, or for students who have a lower language competency than their classmates, so that they can practice and gain additional language help and catch up with their classmates. School boards can also offer permission for students to be able to take credits through doing prescribed hours of community activities in the HL.

The mesosystem refers to the interactions between the microsystems, such as the interconnections between a person’s family and school, or between a school and the local community. And among this interaction, school boards can take the initiative to combine joint efforts, mobilize available social capital, and promote people’s general awareness of the issue. HL programs could be offered with the help of relevant immigrant communities. If there are too few immigrants or if they are too widely scattered to allow the formation of a viable minority community, maintenance of language, customs, traditions, and beliefs may prove difficult or impossible. It is hoped that school boards can work as a platform to carry out volunteer coordination, so that the social capital scattered around a city can be properly utilized.

The exosystem includes the invisible laws and policies in a society and around someone’s life. As a highly heterogeneous nation, Canada has adopted a linguistic policy of bilingualism and multiculturalism, which endeavors to protect and maintain the dynamics of diverse cultures brought to Canada through new immigrants. The social necessity of using the official languages of the host country will undoubtedly reduce minority groups’ opportunities for using their HL. I would like to see more language policies and planning in favour of heritage language learning: more governmental positions opened for bilingual people; more social services provided in heritage languages; more subsidies for heritage programs; more bilingual schools, heritage Sunday schools or community schools. Under these circumstances, people will naturally pick up the sense that the use of their HL is not only accepted but also welcomed and encouraged.

The macrosystem refers to the push and pull factors in a cultural context, for example, the cultural values, customs, socio-economic status of a country, community and ethnicity. It is commonly seen that the members of a cultural group will share common identity, heritage, and values. The chronosystem consists of environmental factors influencing our lives due to their particular historical background. Any major changes made on these two levels require a longitudinal joint effort made in every walk of society so that the generous, respectful, and welcoming attitude toward HL maintenance will become a national ethos and be internalized in every citizen’s mentality, ranging from governmental policy making and facility provision to the dominating publicity of mass media, and from instruction at school to general attitudes felt in real life. If an end to discrimination and animosity against heritage languages is achieved and it becomes a trend to be bilingual or even multilingual, it is more likely that more people would spend time learning their HL.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory suggests that people’s personal growth is constantly under the joint influence of different levels of interactions and decisions. We should share the mentality that there is work to be done on behalf of children by all of these entities: parents, teachers, relatives, neighbors, leaders of community-based organization, legislators, etc. The maintenance of HL also requires continuous intergenerational transmission, sustainable demography, active social institutions, wide social acceptance, and learners’ emotional attachment to their heritage identity. I hope that a wide recognition of the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism can be established, and minority groups’ linguistic rights and human rights can be respected.

The above analysis of theories and findings related to HL teaching methodology and second language acquisition can contribute to our understanding of HL maintenance and provide a theoretical background for future pedagogical innovations. And as mentioned above, the existing literature on HL instruction, particularly around the application of TBLT in HL teaching, can be expanded. The model established in this project, taking on an interdisciplinary approach, can add to current literature and cast some light on future exploration in this field.

Based on the analysis, it is expected that the project can establish a favourable task model that will help teachers in Mandarin bilingual elementary schools effectively enhance the communicative competency of students. By mobilizing more of the available social capital, teachers can receive extra assistance and students can have more exposure to the language, which supplements the insufficient time allotment for formal instruction.

As for HL learners, the project can help enhance their connections to the culture and communities of the language and restore or support their evolving ethnic identities. For people who speak the HL, the project can offer them a useful structure to contribute their efforts to HL education. Regarding people in society in general, the project can also serve as a form of publicity to enhance people’s awareness toward HL retention. If tolerance, support, and respect for heritage language maintenance can take root in more people’s hearts, a friendlier environment can be created for wider and more frequent heritage language use and development.

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