Students of Chinese Background: Characteristics and Possibilities for Greater Success

Agnes Weiyun He, AAAS & MIC, Stony Brook University, April 12, 2017

from a WeChat group
Outline

- Students of Chinese background: unpacking heterogeneity
- Linguistic repertoires: complexity in bilingualism
- Learning styles: culture and cognition
- Instructional strategies: suggestions
- Institutional policies: ??
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Largest language in the world

http://mentalfloss.com/article/64594/proportional-map/worlds-largest-languages
Most commonly used non-English languages in U.S.

http://arcgis.mla.org/mla/default.aspx
Chinese Dialects
Chinese Scripts: "dragon"
华裔美国学生以及中国国际留学生。
Scripts and dialects

- Society script same as home script
- Society script different from home script
- No home literacy in Chinese

Mandarin is the student’s home dialect or is comprehensible to home dialect
Mandarin is unintelligible to home dialect
Students of Chinese Background: unpacking heterogeneity

- Chinese **Heritage** Students
- Chinese **International** Students
- *Regarding various Chinese-background students as a homogenous group can be problematic*
Chinese Heritage Students

- Early linguistic exposure in the home
- Some proficiency in Chinese
- Bilingual to limited extent
- Dominant in English
- Ethnic/cultural connection to China

Cummins 2005; Fishman, 1964/2001; Valdés, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003; Wiley, 2005
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth place</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Steve</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Tom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td></td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of US arrival</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Steve</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Tom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parents from TW</td>
<td>Parents from HK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home dialect</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Steve</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Tom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandarin; Southern Min</td>
<td>English, Mandarin, Indonesian</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Mandarin; Southern Min</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior CHL experience</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Steve</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Tom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>home</td>
<td></td>
<td>Church sponsored classes</td>
<td>home</td>
<td>Weekend classes; visits to China</td>
<td>home</td>
<td>home; tutor; HS classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language skills</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Steve</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Tom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese speaking; 100 word reading literacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking, listening</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading</td>
<td>Fairly strong in all skills</td>
<td>Advanced speaking (Zhanglang 蟑螂 =&gt; zanglang 肮螂)</td>
<td>Speaking and listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stated learning goals</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Steve</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Tom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn Mandarin (qing (请) or qin (亲)?)</td>
<td>Reading and writing</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>Classical and literary Chinese</td>
<td>Reading and writing</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variability: comparing 6 profiles

Listening/Speaking

Reading

Writing
Chinese International Students

- Those who hold Student Visa
- Talent
- Wealth—China’s nouveau riche
- US education as symbol of status
- New arrivals vs. old timers
- Undergraduate vs. graduate students
Outline

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Linguistic Repertoires

- **Receptive/passive bilinguals**: native fluency in one language, and can understand but not speak a second language.
- **Dominant bilinguals**: native fluency in language one, with elementary to intermediate proficiency in language two.
- **Balanced bilinguals**: use both languages but do not necessarily pass for a native speaker in either language.
- **Perfect bilinguals/ “gold standards”**: speak two languages with nativelike fluency, indistinguishable from native speakers of either language.
- *All are assets in today’s globalized economy as they navigate cross-cultural differences and bridge linguistic divides.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receptive bilinguals</td>
<td>International students</td>
<td>Heritage students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant bilinguals</td>
<td>Heritage students</td>
<td>International students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced bilinguals</td>
<td></td>
<td>Small numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect bilinguals</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rarities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chinese Heritage Students: challenges

- As more Chinese International students come to American campuses, it seems easier to forget that Chinese Americans exist outside of this one subgroup of prominent international students.

- A growing awareness of (and sometimes animus toward) Chinese International students on campuses that in turn negatively impacts Chinese American students.
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Learning Styles: Culture & Cognition

- Differences vs. Deficits
- Common cultural perceptions: modest and diligent; highly value education; respectful of authorities (elder people, teachers and scholars)
- Common (negative) perceptions: rote, silent and passive
The Western meaning of ‘education’

“Education” is derived from the Latin ēducātiō: ē- ("from, out of") dūcō ("I lead, I conduct")

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nominative</td>
<td>ēducātiō</td>
<td>ēducātiōnēs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>ēducātiōnis</td>
<td>ēducātiōnum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dative</td>
<td>ēducātiōnī</td>
<td>ēducātiōnibus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accusative</td>
<td>ēducātiōnem</td>
<td>ēducātiōnēs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ablative</td>
<td>ēducātiōne</td>
<td>ēducātiōnibus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocative</td>
<td>ēducātiō</td>
<td>ēducātiōnēs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Chinese meaning of ‘education’

教 育

教 育
Cultural Foundations of Chinese Education

- the Imperial Civil Examinations (科舉, abolished 1905)
- Western Learning-- "Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application" (中學為體, 西學為用)
- New Culture Movement (新文化運動) – a new Chinese culture inspired by global/western values (esp. science and democracy) (1910s-1920s)
- reduplication of the Soviet model (1950s-1960s)
- explorations of new approaches to education since the economic reforms in the late 1970s
Education: East and West

- Confucian heritage: modesty and diligence, harmony, order, respect for authorities, and pragmatic acquisition of knowledge
- Western tradition: equalitarianism, individual development, independent and critical thinking, communication and cooperation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features commonly associated with ‘American’ education</th>
<th>Features commonly associated with ‘Chinese’ education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep learning</td>
<td>Surface learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>Memorization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-improvement and overall growth</td>
<td>Accumulation of skills and facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal curiosity</td>
<td>Parental expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as learning facilitator</td>
<td>Teacher as knowledge dispenser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindle a fire</td>
<td>Fill a bucket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different Views on Learning

| meaning of learning | A process of acquiring Truth and Skills  
|                     | • Acquire something concrete, useful  
|                     | • Acquire something accepted, recognized, legitimized, validated |
| process of learning | To move from not knowing, not possessing, not commanding Truth and Skills to knowing, possessing and commanding them |
| optimal mode of learning | • unconditionally listen to the professor and accept what the professor says.  
| | • participation would not be necessary or productive;  
| | • Premature/excessive participation could disrupt and delay the professor's transmission of 'truth' and 'skills' |
| | A process of exploration, discovery and perfection |
| | To verify or falsify what is given through the student's own reflection, reasoning, critique, observation, experiences or experiments. |
| | discussion and debate, between not only students and students but also students and professors.  
| | Learning from the professor AND from fellow students. |
Different Views on Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the role of language?</th>
<th>medium of conveying information and meaning</th>
<th>means to construct and discover information and meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the value of communication</td>
<td>what has been validated by the authorities and experts</td>
<td>Meaning emerges from interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What others would find valuable or interesting</td>
<td>Communication gives shape and significance to meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the moment for participation</td>
<td>when ideas and information are ‘correct’ and ‘accepted’.</td>
<td>Communication is a process of self-discovery, self-perfection and a process of mutual-discovery and mutual-perfection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>when others can understand me!</td>
<td>Anytime, all the time!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions about Learning: East and West

- Q from US: how do Chinese teachers produce students who perform so well on standardized tests and international competitions (in all areas beyond math and science)?

- Q from China: how do American teachers produce students who go on to create new companies and industries that end up dominating the global economy? What is the magic for ‘creativity’?
Rethinking Some Dichotomies

- Deep learning (critical thinking) without surface learning (memorization)?
- Participatory learning (collaborative, exploratory) – how and when?
- Ability-orientation (what and why of the options) vs. assessment-orientation (what’s the correct answer?)
- Individual vs./in the collective?
- Confucius and “learning” (学问)
- *Are Chinese students obedient, passive and non-participative-rote-learners? Maybe, or maybe not.*
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Instructional Implications

- Understand why students of Chinese background may be different (but certainly not necessarily deficient)
- Know our students, beyond their physical appearances
- Turn students’ existing features (esp. learning styles) into assets, not liabilities
- Keep in mind: In a globally constituted university, many of our very best students were not trained the “American” way
- Nurture the ability to combine the best from the East with the best from the West
- Encourage personal transformation -- changing aspects of the culture if they are counter-productive in the U.S.
More specifically,

- Be explicit about expectations and try to give examples or models.
- Provide options for success.
- Discuss cross-cultural challenges explicitly.
- Reinforce the student’s strengths while explaining what he/she still needs to work on.
- Recognize that students may be differently acculturated to classroom situations.
- Don’t assume that a student who looks “foreign/different” is an international student or that one who exhibits writing difficulties is necessarily an ESL speaker.

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/internationalization
Policy Recommendations?

- **Our mission:** global engagement; bringing talented faculty, students and scholars here from all around the world; clear and unequivocal support for all students of Chinese background, who are part of the fabric of University life.
- Develop intercultural competence for all.
- Ensure that the voices of all students of Chinese background are heard and addressed.
- Help all students of Chinese background find the resources they need -- academic, social, linguistic, or psychological.
- **Our moment:** NOW.
Thank you! 谢谢! 谢谢！

子曰：’知者不惑，仁者不忧，勇者不惧’

The cultivated know no bafflements.
The compassionate experience no agonies.
The courageous harbor no fears.

-- Confucius
[translated by AWH]