

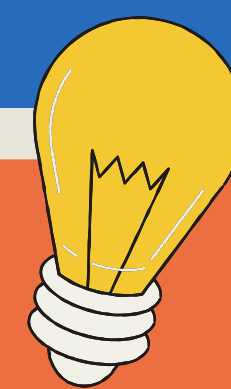
# “DON’T DITCH THE DIALECT”: INCORPORATING LEARNERS’ CHINESE HERITAGE LANGUAGE BACKGROUNDS IN UNIVERSITY MANDARIN CLASSROOMS

- This project was partly inspired by my experiences learning Mandarin in a university classroom mixed with Chinese heritage language learners (CHLLs) and non-heritage language learners (NHLLs).
- Being a heritage speaker of Cantonese and Mandarin, I formed meaningful friendships with other CHLLs. I began to wonder how our CHL backgrounds might be tools in the Mandarin learning context, especially when issues of identity and heritage language maintenance are at play

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### WHO ARE CHLLs?

- Broad and **heterogeneous** category (Li & Duff, 2018)
- Adapted from Weger-Guntharp (2006):
  - ✓ Ancestor with Chinese language variety as **first language**
  - ✓ Motivation to learn Mandarin in part because of their **heritage**
- Enables this study to capture perspectives from:
  - Low CHL proficiency participants
  - Mandarin learners with CHL background who **do not identify** with Mandarin as a HL
    - Contrary to definitions where HLLs are those who are learning their HLLs (e.g., Montrul, 2015)



### RELEVANT THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- **Critical language pedagogy:** learner-centered, contextualized with social justice values, language education is political (Correa, 2011; Crookes, 2021)
  - **Burgo (2023):** teacher-mediated translanguaging, storytelling, and counternarratives validates language varieties and empower HLLs to be **"agents of social justice"** (p.2)
  - **Jin and Liu (2023):** translanguaging triggered a **critical reflection** of Mandarin teacher's assumptions regarding "the complexity of Chinese languages...[and] the students' home language environments" (p.180)
- Practices which explore, validate, and incorporate learners' CHL backgrounds affect **both teachers and learners**

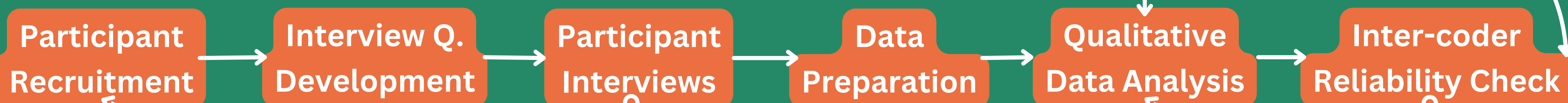
### GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

- Limited studies on CHL education targeting **both teacher and learner perspectives**
- Limited studies on CHL education in **university**, a context with transformative potential for HLLs (re-)connecting to their heritage (Wei, 2011; Montrul, 2015; Li & Duff, 2018; Liang, 2021)

## GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the **attitudes, practices, and challenges** related to incorporating learners' Chinese heritage language backgrounds in post-secondary Mandarin classes from **teachers' perspectives (TP)** and **learners' perspectives (LP)**?

## METHODS



## PARTICIPANTS: BC UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Teachers	Other languages	Teacher training	Years teaching Mandarin (total)	Years teaching Mandarin in university	Proficiency level taught/teaching	Primary classroom format
Violet	Taiwanese Mandarin, Taiwanese	TEFL (BA), TESOL (MA), Languages & Literacy Education (PhD)	13	2	Beginner, Intermediate	mixed CHLL & NHLL, non-mixed NHLL
Smiley	Taiwanese Mandarin, Taiwanese	Foreign Languages & Literatures (BA), Linguistics (MA), Applied Linguistics (PhD)	11	11	Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced	mixed CHLL & NHLL
Sarah	Shanghainese, Cantonese (listening)	TCFL (BA), Second Language Education (MEd), Language, Culture and Literacies (PhD)	24	19	Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced	non-mixed CHLL, non-mixed NHLL
Learners	CHL(s)	First exposure to CHL(s)	CHL use in daily life	Years of formal Mandarin classes	Highest level university Mandarin class	Primary classroom format
Kiri	Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka	Preschool	Almost never	11	Intensive Intermediate Mandarin (2022)	mixed CHLL & NHLL
Daiguo	Cantonese	Preschool	Occasionally	5	Intensive Intermediate Mandarin (2022)	mixed CHLL & NHLL
Sky	Cantonese	Preschool	Every day	9	Advanced Integrated Mandarin (2019, in China)	mixed CHLL & NHLL
Sam	Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese	Preschool	Occasionally	1.5	Intensive Intermediate Mandarin (2023)	mixed CHLL & NHLL

## KEY FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### ATTITUDES

#### Mixed Class Perceptions

- What may be perceived as a **negative** factor of mixed classrooms from TP may be a **positive** factor from LP (Fig. 1)

Figure 1  
Teacher and Learner Perceptions of Mixed Proficiency Levels in Class



Figure 2  
Venn Diagram of Teaching CHLL Rewards



#### Rewards of Teaching CHLLs

- Teaching CHLLs benefitted teachers' **personal lives**, as Chinese-speaking individuals (Fig. 2)
- Teachers' **personal linguistic experiences** contribute to language teaching (Cuellar & Oxford, 2018)

#### CHL Perceptions

- Negative attitudes toward CHLs (LP, n = 5) underscore the intersections of CHL teaching/learning, **trauma, and discomfort**

“There was a thing of Asian hate and I thought like okay, like maybe I shouldn't use [my CHL] so much outdoors. What if I get attacked?”

### PRACTICES

- Topics extend **beyond linguistic identities** (TP, n = 17; LP, n = 4) (Table 1), reflecting the interconnectedness of community, culture, and language in HLL identity (e.g., Li & Duff, 2018)

Table 1  
Reports of In-class CHLL Background Engagement

Participant group	Cultural topics	Personal projects	Alternative tasks
Teacher perspective	10	4	3
Learner perspective	4	0	0

- When it came to addressing learners' linguistic identities (TP, n = 8), TPs were **not as personalized** as the CHLL background engagement topics and practices
  - Learners reported in-class Chinese language variety (CLV) engagement (LP, n = 5), but not of their **own varieties**

### CHALLENGES

- Dealing with **perceptions of differentiated treatment** for NHLLs and CHLLs in mixed classes
  - From NHLLs & CHLLs
  - From language program administrators
- Desire to **share and discuss** issues with other teachers (TP, n = 1)
 

*I wish I can talk more about these kind[s] of issues [i.e., mixed class challenges].*
- Incorporating CHL background into **existing lessons and timelines** (TP, n = 3)
  - Aligns with LP: **limited knowledge** of learner CHLs (LP, n = 4)
  - Yet, many TP CHL practices were about **altering classes** (n = 7), not necessarily dedicating specific time

## PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Embrace learner assets

- Asserts that learners are **agents** in their own learning (Correa, 2011)
- Simply **inviting learners to share** their CHLL knowledge can foster conversations about linguistic diversity (Wu & Leung, 2022)

### Explore your relationship with your own languages

- Interacting in multilingual contexts and with sociolinguistic information can **shift linguistic ideologies** for teaching (e.g., Cai, 2021)
- Consider reflecting on how perceptions of your own **Chinese language background** impact your teaching practices (Cuellar & Oxford, 2018)

### Recognize the complexity of HL motivation

- HL motivation is **dynamic, multi-dimensional, and contextual** (e.g., Li & Duff, 2014)

### Integrate critical themes

- Dealing with learners' negative or uncomfortable attitudes toward CHLs can be **productive** with the support of **coping tools** (e.g., resource lists) and critical self-reflection (Driver, 2024)

### Alter and adapt lessons

- Consider the **multi-faceted** aspects of CHLL backgrounds: community, geography, food, politics
- **Adapt** projects to be **open-ended** and **self-reflective** (Smiley, personal communication, December 26, 2023)

### Discuss NHLL-CHLL differentiated treatment with learners and other teachers

- Explicitly explain **why** CHLLs and NHLLs have **different needs** for specific tasks (Montrul, 2015)
- Build **comradery** with other teachers with similar experiences

