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'What about me? I'm not like Chinese but I'm not like American.': Heritage language learning and identity of mixed heritage adults

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Abstract

This study examines heritage language (HL) experience and identity of 12 adults of mixed heritage backgrounds through in-depth autobiographical interviews. Each participant has an English-speaking American parent and an HL (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, or Vietnamese)-speaking immigrant parent. The interviews explored each participant's experience in the HL while growing up, self-claimed proficiency in the HL, attitudes toward the HL, and self- and other-perceived identities. The findings suggest that HL proficiencies varied widely, tending to correspond with the extent of the participants' interaction in that language. Three participants had extensive HL experience while nine had limited HL exposure. These nine mainly attributed their lack of HL proficiency to their parents' and/or their own reluctance to use the HL, which arose from

various societal and personal pressures to shift to English. This paper discusses the implications of these findings on heritage language education.

Key Words: biracial adults; ethnolinguistic identity; heritage language; language attitude; language experience; mixed heritage

> One thing that came across… was that… all this like, we need to validate the minorities, and they need to be proud of their heritage… And I was like, what about me?... No one cared… And then so when you uplift these minorities, then the people like me feel even worse… These people are wow, they're Spanish, or wow, they're Korean ... But you know it's like, well, what about me? … I'm not like Chinese, but I'm not like American. Well, I mean, I look Chinese, or whatever, there's something, you know, different, but we don't really know.

Suzanne is a 24-year-old American of a mixed Chinese and European American background who teaches English as a Second Language. In the above excerpt, she describes some of her M.A. TESOL coursework which addressed the importance of promoting the native languages and cultures of immigrant students. As someone who had had very little opportunity to learn her father's native language (Cantonese) growing up, she feels that mixed heritage individuals like her are often forgotten in discussions on heritage language learning. This study explores the language experiences and perceptions of mixed heritage adults in the U.S. like Suzanne who have one minority language speaking first-generation immigrant parent and one English-speaking American parent.

In recent decades, increasing attention has been given to bilingualism and heritage languages as valuable resources for the individual, the community, and the society (He & Xiao, 2008; Hornberger, 2002; Kondo-Brown, 2006; Peyton, Ranard & McGinnis, 2001; Lee & Shin, 2008; Valdés, Fishman, Chávez, & Pérez, 2006). Language policy which recognizes the rights of linguistic minority communities to maintain and strengthen their mother tongues has been shown to have wide-ranging benefits not only for the groups

involved but also for the society at large (García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán, 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

However, relatively few studies have specifically examined heritage language learning by mixed heritage individuals (but see De Souza, 2006; Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000). In most cases, mixed heritage persons are discussed in passing, as part of larger, more homogeneous heritage language communities. Very little discussion has focused on the specific challenges that mixed families face in maintaining heritage languages. What are the background characteristics and experiences of mixed heritage individuals in terms of levels of HL proficiency, language attitudes, and motivation to learn? How are self- and other-perceived identities of mixed heritage individuals related to their HL learning and maintenance? The current study attempts to address these questions.

What is a 'heritage language'?

There is much debate over what constitutes a heritage language (Wiley & Valdés, 2000). In the U.S., the term 'heritage language' has been used to refer to an immigrant, indigenous, or ancestral language that a speaker has a personal relevance and desire to (re)connect with (Wiley, 2005). The term 'heritage language' has been used synonymously with 'community language', 'native language', and 'mother tongue' to refer to a language other than English used by immigrants and possibly their children. For pedagogical purposes, Valdés (2001: 38) defines a heritage language speaker as "someone who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken and who speaks or at least understands the language and is to some degree bilingual in the home

language and in English". Van Deusen-Scholl (2003: 221) takes a broader view and characterizes heritage language learners as "a heterogeneous group ranging from fluent native speakers to non-speakers who may be generations removed, but who may feel culturally connected to a language." She makes a distinction between 'heritage learners' who have achieved some degree of proficiency in the home language and/or have been raised with strong cultural connections from 'learners with a heritage motivation' who "seek to reconnect with their family's heritage through language, even though the linguistic evidence of that connection may have been lost for generations" (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003: 222).

The individuals discussed in this study have a partial connection to a minority language through an immigrant parent but range from minimal to high proficiency in that language. Although English defines part of the participants' heritage since they claim half of their ancestry through their English-speaking American parent, I shall use the term 'heritage language' to refer to the minority language spoken natively by the immigrant parent.

Heritage language learning and maintenance

Heritage language experiences and perceptions of mixed heritage persons are worthy of investigation for several reasons. A large body of research has shown that pressures for language shift are significant in many language minority families and communities (e.g., DeKlerk, 2000; McCarty, Romero-Little, & Zepeda, 2006; Sandel, Chao, & Liang, 2006; Shin, 2005; Vail, 2006; Young & Tran, 1999). Observations of different communities that come into contact with a majority language have shown that

there is almost always a complete shift in language use within three generations barring any special effort (Fishman, 1991). However, recently, more and more language minority families and communities are undergoing a complete shift in language within two generations with no intervening bilingual generation (Wiley, 2001). If it is hard for both parents to successfully pass down the minority language to children in a majority language speaking environment, it is presumably more difficult for one parent to achieve the same goal. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the native languages of the mixed couple occupy different positions in the language hierarchy. It is often the minority language speaking spouse who feels obligated to make the cultural and linguistic adjustments of living in America as an ethnic/racial/linguistic minority. The burden of having to learn the spouse's language often falls on the minority language speaking spouse, who may adapt to the mixed marriage by adopting English as the default language of the family.

In addition, there are various social and political forces that may make it difficult for the HL speaking parent to pass down his/her language to the children (see also, Campbell & Christian, 2003). For example, there may be stigma associated with marrying outside the racial/ethnic group which may limit the HL-speaking parent's interaction with other HL speakers in the community. Some may feel ostracized due to marrying outside the racial/ethnic group. Some immigrants may have fled difficult life circumstances in the country of origin (e.g., war, poverty), and may choose to abandon their native languages in favor of English, the language of their new adopted society. The fact that English is a high status language both in the U.S. and abroad may also lessen the perceived importance of maintaining the minority language. Even if the language

minority parent sees the value of maintaining the HL, there may be practical limitations such as lack of access to an HL speaking community and inadequate tangible resources (e.g., language teaching materials, high quality HL schools, well-trained teachers, etc.) which make HL learning difficult (Kondo-Brown, 2006; Peyton, Ranard & McGinnis, 2001).

The topic of the current study straddles different bodies of research on (1) language and identity, and (2) mixed heritage identity. Since very little research has looked at the language identity of mixed heritage individuals, in the following, I provide separate reviews of the relevant literature in these areas.

Language and identity

Much of the research on language and identity has been on "full" heritage individuals whose parents come from the same ethnic/racial background (e.g., Caldas, 2008; Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2002; Kanno, 2003; King & Ganuza, 2005; Lee, 2002; McKay & Wong, 1996; Peirce, 1995; Tse, 2000). Many of these studies suggest a link between heritage language and ethnic and cultural identity. In her research on ethnic identity formation, Tse (2000) examined attitudes toward the heritage language in narratives of Americans of Asian descent. She found that for many, heritage language is closely associated with ethnic group identification, and attitudes toward the ethnic group and its language speakers are related to the individuals' own language ability and interest in maintaining their heritage language. Similarly, Lee (2002) examined the role of cultural identity and heritage language maintenance among 40 second-generation Korean-American university students in the U.S. and found that heritage language

proficiency tended to correlate with the degree of the participants' bicultural identification.

Many studies suggest that language identity is contextually embedded and constructed through interaction. In a study of Japanese returnees from Canada, Kanno (2003) showed that her participants' Japanese and Canadian identities varied widely, depending on where they were, with whom they were interacting, and their own developmental phase. Such shifts in situations not only defined their relationship with English but also their sense of linguistic and cultural confidence. Drawing from her research on immigrant women who are learning English in Canada, Peirce (1995) showed that individual language learners have complex and sometimes contradictory social identity, which changes across time and space. She argues that motivation to learn a language is not a fixed personality trait but must be understood with reference to social relations of power that create the possibilities for language learners to speak. She argues for the notion of 'investment' rather than 'motivation' to capture the complex relationship of language learners to the target language.

Caldas & Caron-Caldas (2002) examined the evolving language preferences of their three French/English bilingual children, twin girls aged 13 and a boy aged 15. The children were raised in a predominantly French-speaking home in south Louisiana by the bilingual French/English-speaking authors, but spent summers in French-speaking Quebec. As the children moved into adolescence, they spoke significantly more English in their Louisiana home, but maintained their use of French in Quebec. The children's preference for English in Louisiana and French in Quebec was attributed to their desire to identify with monolingual peers in those settings. In a follow-up study, Caldas (2008)

examined the changing bilingual self-perceptions of the three children from early adolescence through early adulthood. He found that the children valued their bilingualism much more as older adolescents than as younger adolescents. As older adolescents, they were less affected by peer pressure and had a greater sense of bilingual identity.

As one of the few studies on mixed heritage individuals' language identity, the research by Pao, Wong, & Teuben-Rowe (1997) suggested that language may be strongly related to mixed heritage identity. The authors divided the participants into two groups based on acceptance or non-acceptance of the minority culture in their upbringing. They found that the acceptance of the minority culture allowed for a more positive self-identity, whereas non-acceptance resulted in feelings of isolation from both cultures at times.

Mixed heritage identity

Another body of research, not related directly to language, has shown that children of mixed marriages face a number of challenges in constructing their identity. Living in the intersection of two cultures with different discourses and expectations, they must negotiate group boundaries when traveling between heritage communities (Nakashima, 1992; Root, 1996; Wallace, 2001, 2004). While many mixed heritage individuals learn to discern and adapt to the cultural norms of each group, they are frequently subjected to marginalization in their respective heritage communities because of their dual ancestry and cultural experiences (Wallace, 2001). They describe how "being mixed means they face suspicion, hostility, and other marginalizing reactions within the community as their legitimacy and loyalty are tested across new contexts" (Wallace, 2001: 120). Feelings of marginalization can be compounded by physical

appearance, as in the case of Suzanne whose more Asian features preclude her from being seen as a mainstream English-speaking white American. Learning a heritage language may provide some mixed heritage students with a means for gaining greater access and legitimacy within the ethnic group.

The perception that individuals belong to one community is deeply entrenched in our society. Conventional models of ethnic and racial identity tend to view identity development as a linear, finite process that reflects a person's ascribed membership within a single heritage community (Root, 1996). Ethnic and racial diversity is often visualized in spatial terms that neatly chart communities as separate and discontinuous spaces. In many ways, people are seen as metaphysically bound to these spaces, naturally "rooted" to one community through the fact of birth and blood (Malkki, 1992). Nakashima (1992) notes how mixed heritage individuals are often expected to fit into traditional ethnic and racial identity models since there is no space for talking about a mixed race/ethnic experience. The labeling of mixed heritage individuals as problems is prevalent in our envisioning of race and ethnicity.

In contrast, some recent research on mixed heritage identity accounts for diversity in identity by highlighting the variability of racial and ethnic experience across different contexts (Greene, 2002; King & DaCosta, 1996; Miller, 1992; Phinney & Alipuria, 1995; Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wallace, 2001, 2004). Wallace's (2001) study of fifteen high school and university students from many different types of mixed heritage backgrounds (e.g., African American and European American, Asian and European American, Latino American and European American, Native American Indian and European American, Afro-Caribbean and Asian American) showed ways in which

mixed heritage identity is situational in nature and cannot be considered as a homogeneous group experience.

Through in-depth interviews, Wallace (2001) found that identity is dynamic among the mixed heritage students she studied, who tended to adjust both their behavior and ways of identifying across different social contexts depending on the nature of the interaction or situation. Although some students identified more strongly with one of their heritage communities, Wallace argues that the most significant finding from her study is the existence of a stable, mixed heritage frame of reference. Using this frame of reference as a starting point, these students construct their identities in dynamic, often open-ended ways. These more context-sensitive studies on mixed heritage identity represent a move away from analyzing broad inter-group processes and a step toward articulating the uneven nature of racial and ethnic experience across traditional communities.

Methods and Participants

Twelve adults, 8 female and 4 male, were recruited through my personal and professional contacts. All 12 participants met the criteria that they are mixed heritage individuals with one English-speaking American parent and a first-generation immigrant parent who is a native speaker of a minority language (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, or Vietnamese) (see Table 1). The parents of seven participants had met while the American fathers were stationed overseas on U.S. military bases. Three participants were born overseas, but all of them had moved to the U.S. before school age and grew up

in the U.S. All participants have at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution except for Bryan and Donna who had some college coursework.

(Insert Table 1 about here.)

To generate the language histories of the mixed heritage adults, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews adapting an Expressive Autobiographical Interview (EAI) approach (Wallace, 2001). The EAI blends an autobiography technique with a structured expressive interview method to draw out the participant's view of reality as it relates to a desired topic. The interviewer develops questions around the topic and directs these questions at the participant during crucial points of the participant's narrative account. I chose this method because a structured interview with a set of pre-established questions does not allow for a fuller exploration of personal and historical details that may surface during the course of the interview. I needed a more flexible approach that could accommodate diverse experiences of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds.

The questions were related to the extent of each participant's access to and experience in the HL while growing up, self-claimed proficiency in the HL, attitudes toward the HL, self- and other-perceived identities, and presence or absence of a desire to teach the HL to the next generation (see Appendix). For the purposes of this study, the EAI was designed to elicit information about the participant's developmental experiences as they relate to language learning and identity negotiation across temporal and spatial contexts. The individual interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Discussion of Findings

Heritage Language Experience

The linguistic profiles of the participants varied widely, depending on background experience and extent of interaction in the HL while growing up. Participants' HL experiences depended largely on parental support for the HL which ranged from very active support (e.g., Kenny) to no support (e.g., Suzanne) to active discouragement (e.g., Sharon). Three participants (Kenny, Monica, and Jennifer) had significant HL experience growing up whereas the other nine had limited opportunities to learn the HL. Below, I highlight some of the participants' HL experiences.

Born to a Taiwanese mother and an African American father who was in the U.S. military, Kenny described his mother as "always making sure I learned the language I really didn't want to learn." He said he learned Chinese only because she emphasized it so much.

> Chinese was actually the first language I learned … since I lived in Taiwan for about five years. It was the only language… And then when I got here, [my mom] still tried … actually made me and my brother go to I guess what they call Sunday school which is like a Chinese version of language school. So all throughout elementary school, middle school, and high school, I went to Chinese school Sundays… When I was in 8th grade, my mom actually had an opportunity to send me and my brother to Taiwan... And it was funny because after about two weeks there, I pretty much started speaking like a native… After three months when we came back, my mom said, "Wow, you guys sound completely different."

Although Kenny resented having to always go to Chinese school as a child, he said he is glad that he has kept up with the language. He currently has little opportunity to speak Chinese on a day-to-day basis, but switches to it sometimes and surprises unsuspecting Chinese speakers, many of whom think he is black. When Kenny was growing up, people sometimes asked him whether he was adopted. This was because his stepfather is a white American of an Irish-German background and his younger brother who was born to his mother and stepfather "looks completely Chinese." However, Kenny observed that he did not experience any prejudice growing up as a mixed heritage person. He attributes this to being around people who are tolerant and having close friends who are also biracial. It also helped that his mother taught him and his brother to embrace both of their cultures and emphasized the benefits of bilingualism.

Like Kenny, Jennifer had significant HL experience through her mother. She described her father as an English-speaking second-generation Italian American and her mother as an immigrant from Korea who "didn't have much English when she first came." An only child, she lived with her mother until she was 19 when her father started living with the family. Jennifer grew up deeply involved in the Chicago Korean community and interacted frequently with her mother's siblings and their families who lived in the area. Jennifer stated that her Korean is much more advanced than that of many Korean Americans who can claim full Korean heritage.

> Obviously I'm like mixed but… I grew up …in more in like a Korean community 'cause I went to a Korean church with… lots of Korean friends… My mom spoke to me in Korean … very much so… When I was going to the Korean church… a lot of the young adults… people who are

> like 21 and above … a lot of them didn't know how to speak Korean... they weren't even comfortable saying like a phrase or anything. They wouldn't even speak [Korean]. And I just thought that that was really strange… I could understand it way better than a lot of the full blood Koreans.

While Jennifer never learned Korean in an institutional setting, she has visited Korea twice. She said that when she came back from spending three weeks in Korea in 2004, she was "really good in Korean." Although she interacts in Korean far less now that she is married (to an American of a German background), Jennifer considers her knowledge of Korean important in her identity because "it was part of my upbringing."

Like Jennifer, Monica is also highly proficient in Korean. She was born in Seoul to a Korean mother and an African American father who was in the U.S. military. Her parents were divorced before she turned four when she moved to the U.S. with her mother. Her mother subsequently married a Korean man whom she met in the U.S. and had a daughter with him. Monica explained that her stepfather had a strict Korean-only policy at home and would ignore her and her sister if they did not address him in Korean. She describes him as extremely traditional, "very, very strict… very, very tough".

> [My stepfather] spoke to me only in Korean… He, honestly, won't even acknowledge you unless you speak to him in Korean… He ignores my sister. He'll look at my mother and say, 'your daughter is trying to say something.' That's how it is, even now… When I look at the method that he used to make me speak Korean, I think it's a little extreme. I'm not bitter about it. My sister is. Because that's her father, you know. And she

has no bond with him at all. Because she doesn't speak Korean. He basically just doesn't acknowledge her at all. They're very, very strict.

Well, my stepfather is. Very, I mean, very tough. Very, very tough.

Monica attended a weekend Korean language school from when she was 11 to 16 years of age. Although she does not look Korean, her Korean proficiency gave her access to the Korean peer group. She said, "Koreans tend to keep to themselves… pretty homogeneous group…they're not very friendly to outsiders. But with me, as soon as I say something in Korean, all of that disappears." In college, she majored in linguistics and education and spent a year in Mexico in a study abroad program. It was in Mexico that she tasted independence from her parents for the first time. Immersing herself in Spanish, she became so fluent that her Spanish proficiency seemed to have even surpassed her Korean language skills. Monica is married to a Brazilian man from whom she learned to speak Portuguese. She feels that her Portuguese is probably as good as her Korean now and volunteers at a hospital as an interpreter for Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese. Linguistically gifted, Monica loves languages and wants to learn Italian next. However, she worried that she might "push Korean out. I tell my husband, I think I'm going to Korea and do a four-week immersion thing…to go see my family and just be there. Because I'm losing it. I'm so upset about that… Because it's who I am."

Aside from these three, the other nine participants had limited HL experience while growing up. There were various reasons for lack of HL input as explained by the participants. One was parental reluctance to teach it to the children. Describing her Cantonese proficiency as "zero," Suzanne admitted that when her father speaks Cantonese on the phone with someone, "it's just noise. I wouldn't even know if they're

speaking Korean." Born and raised in Hong Kong, Suzanne's father came to the U.S. when he was 19 and went to a community college to become a nurse. He had made a complete shift to English (except to use Cantonese with his relatives from time to time) and family communication has always been in English in Suzanne's home. Suzanne noted that her father speaks "English all day, every day… He's very comfortable here and he's pretty patriotic."

> I think I even at some point, wanted to learn Chinese... My mom said that she even tried herself to learn and thought about putting us in Chinese school, but my dad just wasn't supportive… He was like, kind of neutral… Since she couldn't help us with homework, it's almost impossible. She couldn't help. And so she was like well, I guess I won't do it then. So it was unfortunate….I even remember my sister expressing the same interest in elementary school... I would like to go to Chinese school. But nothing ever came of it. And it's just really disappointing… I feel like I never even got that chance.

Suzanne admitted that she cannot "claim that I'm Chinese in anyway except just my genes. Culturally, I was raised in an American household… If I had spoken Cantonese, I would have felt more Chinese." However, most people who meet Suzanne for the first time think she is Asian. She said, "I get Korean a lot. Looking at my last name, some people think I'm Vietnamese. But nobody thinks I'm white."

In contrast to Suzanne's father's indifferent attitude toward teaching Cantonese to his children, Sharon's mother actively discouraged Sharon from learning Vietnamese.

> My mom never tried to teach me [Vietnamese]…She didn't want me to learn and she even in a sense kind of discouraged me to learn. And she wouldn't even correct me if I made mistakes… she doesn't realize what a disservice she did me…she doesn't realize, and she didn't realize the cultural issues or problems growing up… Language is so important. And they really kind of screwed us over.

Sharon explained that when her mother came to the U.S. in the 70's, she faced a lot of racism. Fleeing her war-torn country, Sharon's mother felt that she had to abandon Vietnamese and learn English to survive in America. She did not want her daughters to endure the same kind of prejudice she suffered. However, Sharon's experience of growing up as a biracial person in the U.S. was anything but easy. She recalls frequently being called "half chink" by people who noticed her mixed features. Yearning for a group to belong to, she drifted toward Hispanics in high school because "I looked more Hispanic back then." In college, she started hanging around Asians more but did not feel fully accepted by them as she "wasn't the long haired typical Asian… It gave me kind of a complex. For them, I was too big." She took Vietnamese language courses in college but her Vietnamese abilities were never adequate for her to be able to have a heart-to-heart conversation with her mother. She described her relationship with her mother as having a distance, which she attributes to a lack of a common language.

> My mom has no sense of humor except in Vietnamese… One time, I said some things in Vietnamese. Her face turned red and she fell off her chair. She was laughing so hard. It was dirty language of course I didn't learn from her… You can't get that kind of richness [in English]."

Heritage Language and Mixed Heritage Identity

While various societal and personal pressures drove the HL-speaking parents to shift to English, some of the participants admitted that they resisted learning the HL as children. For example, Gloria, whose mother is from Colombia, did not want to learn Spanish because none of her friends spoke it.

> Maybe around elementary school, I started noticing that my mom is tanner than everyone else's mothers… My mom would try to teach us Spanish growing up but we would tell her no. I told her no and my sister told her no… Because it was different, it was different than what everyone else was speaking… But she still tried a little. She still spoke to us more but she wouldn't force us to speak. So my sister and I both understand a whole lot more than we put out.

To Gloria, turning her back on Spanish was a way to try to fit in the English-speaking peer group. However, later in middle school, Gloria realized that she could not be fully accepted as a white person, which prompted her to learn Spanish as a foreign language in middle and high schools and later in college.

> When I got to middle school, everyone was like, "You're not white. Well, you're not Spanish." And I'm like, "Oh, where do I fall?"... I felt like I had to pick a side kinda. I know I'm not white. But I'm not really Spanish. And I think a lot of Spanish people have the belief, well, do you speak it?

While Gloria successfully obtained her B.A. in Spanish, she never finished her intended minor in French. She explained that she "didn't feel the connection [with French]. I had

no desire to know more. But with Spanish, I wanted to know more." When asked what she considered herself as, she answered, "I consider myself as an American but if you get into ethnicity, I do consider myself Spanish… I'm more Colombian than American." Gloria had a strong desire to learn Spanish because knowledge of Spanish was intimately connected to her evolving sense of who she was as a "Colombian, a Latina." As Peirce (1995) argues, Gloria's investment in her heritage language could be seen as an investment in her mixed heritage identity.

Similarly, Patrick described his experience of trying to fit in his peer group, which was mostly white. However, he was often ridiculed for his Asian features, which left him confused about his identity. Blaming his trials on his part-minority heritage, he repeatedly made fun of his mother's accent and pestered her for speaking Korean to him. His resistance to Korean was so strong that his mother eventually gave up trying to teach it to him.

> People called me Chinese, Chinese boy… At first it was confusing. I just wanted to be white… I tried opening my eyes wider… Eventually I learned that it didn't matter… [My mother] had tried to [teach me Korean]. And I've always been like a real goofball. I made fun of her and stuff, and didn't want to learn. I was just really annoying I guess and she pretty much gave up. But I've learned some basic things… all the bad words, you know, baby talk, things like that. But to actually speak, no I, I kind of put her off to it… Well, I mean I regret, I wish I did learn.

Both Gloria and Patrick initially rejected their heritage languages because they wanted to identify with the mainstream white group. But, as their later acceptance and, in the case

of Gloria, active pursuit of HL demonstrate, negotiation of mixed heritage identity is a dynamic and continuous process, sensitive to changing social contexts and developmental phases (Tse, 1998; Wallace, 2001).

Similar to Gloria and Patrick, Julie's motivation to learn Japanese was based on the fact that she was not accepted fully as a white person. Growing up in an all white neighborhood, she felt as though she was "always in an identity crisis." She shared that it was not until she was in her 30's that she finally started feeling comfortable with herself.

> I always felt like an outcast because I was always made fun of… They would call me chink, or jap or any other name like that and so I found it very hard to trust people… I felt like I was Japanese but then I wasn't, and so I felt like I had to try and be Japanese and in order to do that I had to speak it. And so, it was sort of an effort to finally fit in somewhere. You know, to say, okay, I belong somewhere.

Julie's mother did not speak Japanese to her and her brother while they were growing up. In high school, Julie asked her mother to send her to a Japanese language school and studied Japanese on her own. She then went on to study Japanese in college, did a study abroad in Japan for a year, and lived and worked there for two additional years. Although she had had very little contact with Japanese speakers growing up, Julie learned so much Japanese in those three years that she could consider herself an advanced speaker. The three years that Julie spent in Japan were critically important in shaping her mixed heritage identity.

> When I'm not exposed to Japanese for a while, I feel like a part of me is missing… I feel like starved a little bit... I need that dose of … part of my

> heritage just to feel grounded again almost… When I go back to Japan, I just feel like that part of me is filled again… I feel like, in America, it's like I have to either give it up, you know, because you speak English everyday and it's just not really around you and you have to make an effort to put it into your life. And so I miss it… I miss the way people interact with each other [in Japan].

Julie now speaks to her mother in Japanese and observes that they get along much better than they used to in the past. She explains, "I think [a lot of our conflict] had to do with her misunderstanding, the tone, the way things were said. Whereas when I speak to her in Japanese now, things go a lot smoothly." Julie's experience supports the findings of many studies that show the benefits of heritage language learning on parent-child communication in immigrant families (e.g., Shin, 2005; Wong Fillmore, 2000).

Whatever the reasons might have been for lack of HL learning while growing up, some of the participants described having various feelings of loss, sadness, and bitterness in not having knowledge of their HL. For example, Octavia feels that Vietnamese is an integral part of her identity that is missing. She laments that lack of knowledge of Vietnamese prevents her from communicating adequately with her mother and relatives on her mother's side, including a half-sister who was born and raised in Vietnam.

> To me, [Vietnamese] is a part of me that's missing…it's sort of a void. I mean I'm a complete person but it's still a part missing… I have an older sister that I met like maybe early 90's, born and raised in Vietnam. And coming to the States where she didn't really know any English or very little and I couldn't communicate with her. You know what I mean? This

> is your family… It's a disconnect. You can't communicate with your own blood.

Octavia is married to a Cambodian American who is bilingual in Khmer and English. Wanting to instill a strong sense of Cambodian identity in their two young daughters, Octavia gave them only Cambodian names. However, much to her dismay, her husband is not very keen on passing down Khmer to their children and does not speak it to them. Octavia wants to learn Khmer but there are no Khmer classes near where she lives and Khmer books are hard to find. Octavia's situation is similar to that of Suzanne's mother who, as a non-Cantonese speaker, found the task of teaching Cantonese to her mixed heritage children extremely daunting.

Knowledge of the HL is intimately connected to how Suzanne sees herself. She feels that her lack of knowledge of Cantonese prevents her from considering herself as Chinese. Assessing Cantonese to be too difficult for her to learn as an adult and yet determined to gain fluency in a language other than English, Suzanne has been studying Italian for the past several years.

> If I had spoken Cantonese, I would have felt a lot more Chinese… I think it would have affected how I felt, you know, my identity a lot more… There isn't bitterness… I don't know if I can say regret because it wasn't my choice. But I think there is sadness. There's also frustration because number one it would have been a whole lot easier… Just the initial exposure would have made it easier. But now, any language, I'm starting from scratch… I love language. It's been a dream to be fluent for me, for a long time… Any language, I don't care… I have the best shot with Italian

so I'm just going with it… It's kind of maybe my way of compensating. Well I didn't have the opportunity to be Chinese so I can be sort of an adopted Italian… Something other than just American.

Suzanne's statement that she wants to be "something other than just American" suggests a mixed heritage frame of reference (Wallace, 2001) from which she envisions a new identity as an 'adopted Italian'. As Kanno & Norton (2003) argue, language learners have images of the communities in which they want to participate in the future, and these "imagined communities" have a large impact on their current learning. Although Suzanne is not a member of her "imagined community," she hopes to gain access to it one day. It is not only Suzanne's current social participation that affects her learning of Italian but also her imagined future affiliations.

Intergenerational Transmission of the HL

The participants' responses to the question of whether they would like to teach the HL to their (future) children were largely dependent on their own HL experience as well as their views of their own and their children's identity. The three participants who had extensive exposure to HL as children (Kenny, Jennifer, and Monica) said they would certainly teach it and "start early." As for the remaining participants, their responses ranged from "yes, definitely" (Bryan) to "I would make the option available to them but the choice is theirs" (Michael) to "no, I wouldn't" (Donna). Bryan and his African American partner have a five-year-old son whom they want to help learn Chinese by letting him interact with his Taiwanese relatives.

> I have a five year old… Teaching him Chinese is definitely something that I do plan on doing. With his mother… she's definitely open to it… one of my aunts and… my cousins they live not too far from us so we've made it clear to my little cousins who are very proficient in Chinese that we want Jerome to learn… Regardless of what percentage of him is Chinese, he is Chinese. Because I'm half-Chinese. Whether that makes him a quarter-Chinese, he has it in his blood. And I think that's important… which is also kind of like my drive with wanting to learn… I think it's important that he learn because he is that.

Bryan's motivation to teach Chinese to his son is rooted in his view of his son being part-Chinese, which is also what motivates Bryan to learn more Chinese as an adult.

While identity figured considerably into some of the participants' desire to teach their HL to the next generation, most of the ambivalent or negative responses stemmed from practical limitations such as the participants' own lack of HL proficiency and the desire not to teach the wrong way to speak the language. For example, Donna who had very little interaction in Korean growing up said, "I wouldn't teach them Korean 'cause I'd mess it up. But I would encourage them to learn different languages… like if they go to a school that offered Korean, I would encourage them to take that before anything else." When parents cannot serve as effective models of HL use, children clearly stand at a disadvantage in terms of learning the HL. However, there may be creative solutions to help such families to learn the HL which I discuss in the next section.

Conclusion and Implications

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from this exploratory study is the need for greater attention to individuals who do not fit the traditional profile of the heritage language learner. The twelve mixed heritage individuals discussed in this study expressed varying degrees of desire to learn their HL in order to connect with part of their heritage, as well as to define their ethnic and cultural identity (Kondo-Brown, 2003; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). The current study is limited by a small number of participants that represent a vast array of mixed heritage backgrounds (e.g., Chinese, Colombian, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese from one parent, and African- or European-American from the other). Furthermore, seven of the twelve participants have military fathers. Since the ethnic groups represented in this study are quite different and may have different views on ethnic criteria such as the ability to speak the HL or the presence of ethnic physical features, future research may investigate individuals from these different backgrounds separately and in greater detail than the current study has done.

Despite these limitations however, the current study has shown that for many mixed heritage individuals, the heritage language may figure importantly into their understanding of who they are. Living at the intersection of two cultures, mixed heritage individuals are frequently subjected to marginalization in their respective heritage communities because of their dual ancestry (Nakashima, 1992; Wallace, 2001). This study showed that while some of the participants used their knowledge of the HL to gain greater access to and legitimacy in the HL community, some who never developed in their HL lamented not being able to connect with their HL-speaking parents and extended family members at a deeper level. Thus, knowledge of the heritage language seems to be a considerable facet of mixed heritage identity for at least for some of the participants.

This study also showed that negotiation of mixed heritage identity is dynamic and continuously shaped by changing social contexts and developmental phases (Kanno, 2003; Peirce, 1995; Tse, 1998; Wallace, 2001). Some of the participants reportedly rejected their heritage language at various stages of their development in an effort to identify more with the mainstream group, only to embrace it later in their lives (see also Caldas, 2008).

These conclusions point to several implications. First, parents need to be educated about the importance of intergenerational transmission of the HL (Fishman, 1991; Hornberger, 1998). Successful language learning and maintenance strategies usually involve the efforts which must start with language transmission at the level of the family (Campbell & Christian, 2003). As perhaps the single most important source of heritage language input, parents play a major role in children's language learning. But in order for the heritage language to be successfully learned by children in mixed families, there must be concerted effort by both the HL- and non-HL-speaking parents to promote the use of the HL. HL-speaking parents should be supported to speak the heritage language to children and have the children respond in that language. If the HL-speaking parent has limited proficiency in the HL, one may connect with HL-speaking relatives or members of the HL-speaking community for opportunities to interact socially in that language.

Second, this study emphasizes the importance of providing mixed heritage children with voluntary opportunity to participate in heritage language education, which is broad and intensive enough to enable them to fully develop a range of communicative repertoire in that language. This may involve not only HL learning in institutional settings but also trips to the HL parent's country of origin and sustained associations with

HL-speaking peer and social networks. HL programs need to recognize the unique set of challenges that face mixed heritage students as they learn the language of one of their parents. HL teachers and staff should be mindful of the possibility that experiences of marginalization at HL schools can drive some mixed heritage students away from the HL, and strive to create a classroom atmosphere that is inclusive of diverse experiences and identities.

This study also calls for the need to offer HL programs for adult learners who have not had much experience with the HL growing up but nevertheless wish to learn the HL as a way to (re)connect with their heritage. As it happens, most of the existing community-based HL programs in the U.S. are geared toward school-age children and curriculum and materials may not be entirely appropriate for adult HL learners. One possibility might be for community-based HL programs to collaborate with university-based HL programs, many of which already cater to mixed heritage populations and have more established adult-oriented curriculum and materials. Similarly, there is a need to think creatively about program options to include families, such as classes in which children and non-HL-speaking parents can participate together.

At a time when the nation is becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse, improving the heritage language education of mixed heritage populations is a worthwhile effort not only for the individuals involved but also for our society.

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Table 1. Overview of the Participants[1]

Name	Gender	Age	Father	Mother	Place of birth	Sibling(s)	Marital Status	Occupation
Octavia*	Female	29	Black	Vietnamese	Washington, DC	1 older sister	Married	Full-time mom
Monica*	Female	29	Black	Korean	Seoul, Korea	1 younger half-sister	Married	Realtor, Mary Kay consultant, interpreter
Gloria	Female	31	White	Colombian	Baltimore, MD	1 younger sister	Married	Speech therapist
Sharon	Female	27	White	Vietnamese	Washington, DC	1 older adopted sister	Married	Graphic Artist
Patrick*	Male	30	White	Korean	Augusta, GA	1 younger brother	Married	Engineer
Michael*	Male	32	Black	Taiwanese	San Antonio, TX	1 younger brother	Single	Government employee
Bryan*	Male	28	Black	Taiwanese	Japan	1 older brother	Single	Claims prevention specialist
Julie	Female	35	White	Japanese	Red Bank, NJ	1 older brother	Married	Student and full-time mom
Suzanne	Female	24	Chinese	White	Baltimore, MD	1 younger brother, 1 younger sister	Single	ESOL Teacher
Kenny*	Male	29	Black	Taiwanese	Taiwan	1 younger half-brother	Single	Marketing Specialist
Jennifer	Female	27	White	Korean	Evanston, IL	No sibling	Married	Accountant
Donna*	Female	26	Black	Korean	Monterey, CA	1 older brother	Single	Bartender, Musician

*The fathers of these participants were in the U.S. military.

[1] All participants were given pseudonyms.

Appendix: Interview Questions

1) Please tell me your name, age, your current residence, your occupation, and highest education.
2) Where were you born? Where were you raised?
3) Please tell me about your family. Where were your parents from? How did they meet? Your mother's and father's (language) background. Do you have any siblings? How old are they? Where do they live? (spouse? children?) What is/was your family like? (relationships with family members, other relatives, etc.)
4) What was it like for you growing up as a mixed heritage person? What were the ethnic/racial backgrounds of your friends?
5) Did your mother (father) speak to you in Language X as you were growing up?
6) How much contact with Language X speakers did you have growing up? How about now?
7) Did you go to any community heritage language school (weekend school)? If so, when and for how long?
8) How proficient are you in Language X? (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)
9) Have you ever been to your mother's (father's) country of origin? If so, when and for how long?
10) How important was proficiency in Language X for you as you were growing up? How important was it for your parent(s)?
11) How important is proficiency in Language X for you now as an adult?
12) Do you ever wish that you could speak (read, write) Language X better? Why or why not?

13) How were you received by people from your father's ethnic/racial background? How were you received by people from your mother's ethnic/racial background?
14) How do strangers see you? Can people guess your ethnic/racial background? What kind of comments do people make about your physical appearance, language (speech), name, other?
15) If you could relive your childhood, is there anything you wish your parents had done differently in terms of language?
16) How do you identify yourself ethnically/racially?
17) How important is knowledge of Language X in your identity as (your response to #16)?
18) If you have children, would you teach them Language X (or any other language other than English)? Why or why not?