

**OUTSIDE SCHOOL ENGLISH LITERACY
OF SCHOOL-AGED NEW IMMIGRANT CHILDREN
FROM CHINA**

by

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University Graduation Diploma, Jiangsu Institute of Education, 1999

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the
Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2008

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Abstract

This study explored non-school English literacy experiences of children from low English Chinese immigrant families who have been in Canada for less than three years. Observing from the perspective of sociocultural learning theory, I examined what the two focal children's outside-school literacy lives were like and how parents supported the children's literacy development. Data was analysed by drawing on the theories on emergent literacy, "family as educators", and "funds of knowledge", and by seeing how their performances were shaped by traditional Chinese educational principles and values.

Ethnographic investigation methods were employed in this case study. Field notes, artifacts from participant observation, and interview information were the major data sources.

The findings revealed a lack of communication between Canadian schools and Chinese immigrant families, which resulted in the families' efforts either being not known to or not recognized by mainstream institutions. The inquiry should have implications for future research.

Keywords: English literacy, non- school contexts, new immigrant Chinese, school-age children

Subject Terms: ESL literacy

To Simon,
who was often tucked in bed earlier than he wished to spare me time working,
who gave me reasons to persist in pursuing excellence.

Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to my senior supervisor, Dr Kelleen Toohey, for her graciously receiving me, whose keen support and guidance have sustained me throughout the research process, and whose words of encouragement are always deeply appreciated.

I am sincerely grateful to Dr Roumi Ilieva and Dr Huamei Han whose comments on the early versions of this thesis and insightful feedback have been inspiring.

I am also indebted to the two families who generously opened their lives to me and shared with me their family histories, life stories, happiness, worries, and concerns, without which this research was impossible. Their trust and faithful cooperation are gratefully acknowledged.

My heartfelt thanks go to Dr Yaoguang Luo who has guided my academic path and is ready to back me up in many ways.

I owe special thanks to my son's friend, Daniel Sloseris, and his parents for their help during my hard time, making their home my son's second home.

My final appreciation goes to my husband, my mother, and my extended families in China whose love is always there.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of problem

Cultural and linguistic diversity has been a salient feature of many Canadian cities since the 1980s. The great influx of Asian immigrants to Canada in the past decades has noticeably increased the number of non-English speaking school-aged children in the current classrooms of most metropolitan regions. China is Canada's leading source of immigrants since 2001 census year, with 14 % of all recent immigrants coming from there between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Of the total of over one million persons who have Chinese as a mother tongue, more than half (672,000) came between 1981 and 2006. In the six largest census metropolitan areas of Canada, nearly one in five of the population speaks Chinese as mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2008). These new immigrant Chinese families represent a new and important context for the investigation of English language and literacy education.

Studies of literacy are numerous and outside-school literacy research has received more and more attention in recent years, with an emphasis on the home environment in children's literacy development (Heath, 1983; Wells, 1986; Snow et al., 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1997). Interest in English as a second language literacy education is seen in an increasing number of ethnographic investigations. This area sees literacy as closely related to learners' ethnic minority home cultures (e.g. Li, 2000, 2002; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Zhang et al., 1998; Strucker et al., 2004; Gallagher, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2007). However, literacy studies on specific ethnic minority groups of people, especially scrutiny of the intra-ethnic differences (Li, 2000), are still rare.

Since the 1980s immigrants from mainland China to Canada have grown from mainly family class to include: students on study permits, skilled workers, and more recently, business category immigrants. Young children's English literacy learning in these new immigrant families attracted my attention because of my past profession as an English language teacher in China and present study in this area in Canada, both of teaching English as a second or foreign language. New immigrant Chinese scholars have carried out exploration into this area (e.g. Zhang et al., 1998; Li, 2002, 2005;

Zhang, 2007). But their focal families represented only part of the situations of Chinese immigrants' complicated backgrounds. Their focal students were mostly from university-educated families, in which quality education is a most essential value. The parents, at least one in each family, generally came with study permits, studying in graduate schools in North America. That is to say, they are well-educated people and have some English capacity to help the children with literacy learning at home. My intention, however, is to further investigate some other kinds of family conditions, which are nonetheless significant, and to add to a more nuanced portrait of English literacy in practice in Chinese immigrants' lives in the wider Canadian society. It is my opinion that in these Chinese immigrant families, many efforts have been made to facilitate the improvement of English literacy of their young children. I wished to discover what those activities are like, why they are chosen, and whether the families' efforts are known to or recognized by mainstream Canadian schools.

In the generally agreed upon sense, literate people are those who can read or write, and those who cannot are not literate, or illiterate (Purcell-Gates, 2007). This definition cannot be simplistically applied to second language learners (SLLs). How do we define a person who is adequately literate in his/her first language but has little knowledge of a second language? S/he is actually a literate person but his/her situation regarding the second language is even lower than "illiterate". Illiterate people can at least listen to and speak the language, albeit not read and write it. Literacy is essentially related to language. Therefore, when a monolingual literate person (in first language) comes and lives in another country where a different language is used, the concept of "literate" no longer makes any sense. For example, one mother of a focal family in my study fits into none of the categories distinguished by Venezky and extended by Guofang Li (in Li, 2002).

- 1) Nonnative speakers of English, literate in their own language.
- 2) Nonnative speakers of English, lacking required literacy in their own culture.
- 3) Nonspeakers of English, lacking required literacy in their own culture.
- 4) Nonnative English speakers, literate in English.
- 5) Nonnative English speakers, lacking required literacy in English culture.

(p.15)

This mother should be defined as a “nonspeaker of English, literate in her first language”, adding to the classification listed above. In fact, increasing number of cases like this mother are seen in recent immigrant families of the business category. They immigrate to Canada without any language requirements and consequently encounter language barriers, albeit assisting with their children’s English literacy learning. The present study was designed to probe literacy experiences in two low-English families and the odds and struggles with pushing their young children’s literacy development in out-of-school environments.

Almost all Chinese immigrants coming or staying with children affirmed that they chose to migrate for a better future for the next generation (e.g. Igoa, 1995; Li, 2000, 2002; Beynon et al., 2003), at the expense of losing their own good jobs and enjoyable lives back in the home country. Living in a totally strange cultural environment can be challenging and frustrating, especially when one does not know the language, which is counted as the key to integration (Walters, 2007) and the most important skill affecting the success of adjustment (Liu, 1996; Williams & Snipper, 1990, cited in Li, 2002). However, for many adult immigrants, one reason they are eager to learn “some” English is to monitor their children’s school and/or home work (Purcell-Gates, 1997). Living between two different worlds, communication between these parents and their children’s school teachers is rare and inefficient (Ironsides, 1985, Li, 2008). Parents feel helpless, and teachers seem to be powerless. Both parents and teachers are trying their best to support and encourage the young learners, but neither side feels satisfied. This situation is becoming even more salient with the increasing number of newcomer immigrant students in current classrooms. Mainstream institutions in education have been criticized for not being able to incorporate minority culture and language into curriculum or teacher education (Beynon et al., 2003). Few teachers are trained to work with the fast changing demographic composition of classrooms nowadays (Li, 2008).

Second language learning is like first language learning in the sense that both are about language acquisition, sharing some common rules and strategies. While it is unlike first language learning in the fact that the learners have already had first language knowledge and are older in age; as well, those who are literate do not learn only from listening and speaking. Few Chinese people learning English (either as a foreign language in China or as a second language here in Canada¹) would or could differentiate between English language and English literacy. English language learning

for them is about all the four aspects – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For them, it seems that there is no such thing as a person who can listen, understand and speak English but cannot read or write it at all. A similar oft-heard disturbing story is that many English learners from China claim they are fine with reading and writing but experiencing hardship listening and speaking. It is not surprising that some Chinese students can achieve high scores in language tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, or GRE, but cannot talk smoothly in English in daily life, and that university students can read and write academic articles but are not able to express themselves well orally. I heard many Chinese students report that listening was the most difficult part to them, and witnessed two who were doing post-doc in UBC but could not speak English even in full sentences. From my over a decade's English teaching experience, I find that ELLs who learn English in China are usually able to write down what they speak but are not necessarily able to speak what they write. Traditionally, Chinese language education either in formal institutions or in the home milieu has focused on literacy abilities rather than conversation skills (Beynon et al, 2003). Examining Chinese families' literacy practices and intentionally arranged literacy activities for young children is important to educators as they plan their school language and literacy instruction.

1.2 Researcher's investment

Teaching English as a foreign language in middle schools was my job for fifteen years in China, and I have spent much of my life either learning English or learning to teach English. Formal English education generally starts in middle schools in China, though nowadays it starts in elementary schools in some big cities. Therefore, my job could be seen as beginning English language instruction. Right before I came to Canada, some friends asked me whether I would stay after my studies. My quick response was "No, never. In China, I teach English. But over there (in Canada), who needs me to teach them English? It is their language." Many people, including myself, expected that going and living in an English-speaking country, grasping English language would not be a problem soon. Language learning would not be a worry in one's life. Coming to Canada, I first studied at Vancouver Community College (VCC) and then Simon Fraser University (SFU), both in the area of English language teaching (TESOL: *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages* at VCC, and TES/FL: *Teaching English as Second/Foreign Language* at SFU). My internship and later volunteering at VCC teaching in an ELSA² program brought me opportunities not only to

teach ESL but also to get to know a number of new immigrants from China. In communication with them, I found that English learning was never easy for many newcomers, and the deeper concerns of many of these people (those with young children at school) were not about themselves but about their children's well-being here in Canada. Their devoting time to learn English is half for living here and half for monitoring their children's study.

My own child, a five-year-old boy when he first came to Canada in 2006, spoke and understood no English upon arrival. He was enrolled in SFU childcare centre as well as a public elementary school. My initial worries and his actual experience have aroused my great interest in observing and evaluating his English language and literacy development. Though my Chinese friends think that I must be expert in tutoring him as an ESL practitioner myself, I have never purposely spoken English to him at home or limited his reading and writing to "English only", assuming that I will never be a better model than his Anglo teachers and native peers, and that his Chinese must be preserved and developed. Studies showed that it is the quality and quantity of family interaction that is important, whatever language is used (Young, 1997). Theorists of bilingualism encourage non-native parents to use their minority language to interact with their children at home (e.g. Cummins, 1993) to guarantee the quality and quantity of parent-child interaction. Nevertheless, I actually have done something to facilitate my son's English learning: I read storybooks to him as required by the school, for instance. I realized that such an activity would be impossible in some families such as my selected ones.

Due to my EFL teacher's job back in China and my studies of TESL here in Canada, I have been frequently consulted by my Chinese friends and friends of theirs, most of whom are new immigrant parents to Canada, about their children's English learning in and out of school. I found, on the one hand, they were contented with their children's rapid rate of acquisition of English in the new environment and had little worries about the children eventually master the language; on the other hand, they felt schools had not done enough to assist their children to adapt quickly to school instruction or to be involved in the learning community. Supporting programs like pullout ESL are intended to help, but neither children nor parents feel it works well. Many parents and ESL learners prefer regular classes where they feel they learn much more useful English than in the ESL classes. From the perspective of many of my Chinese

friends, contact between school teachers and families is insufficient. Avoiding offence, both sides maintain conservative attitudes toward each other, and at times misunderstandings ensue. Common complaints from school teachers are: some of those parents seem do not care about their children's education (or the parents "care" too much and "push their children so hard") and do not cooperate with the school; some parents, however, suspect that certain bias against non-native students exist in some schools. It seems that a huge gap is there to be bridged. My perception is that Chinese parents do care and show a strong commitment to their children's education and English literacy acquisition. However, their own learning experiences in a quite different sociocultural background impede their understanding of the Canadian education system, and their English ability prevents them from communicating effectively with schools. They make every effort to support their children's learning. Nevertheless, what they think or do is either unknown or not yet recognized by teachers. They seem to be able to do little to improve the situation and sincerely hope that the school can initiate assistance to immigrant parents.

Being a researcher of the same social and cultural origin as the participants in my study, I have the privileged position of having easy access to these Chinese families. I feel it is my great interest and in a way "duty", to further explore the area and to help to build bridges between mainstream school teachers and Chinese parents by providing some first-hand in-depth observations and analyses. This study concerned the development of English literacy of young children from new Chinese immigrant families and I focused on how English literacy was developed and supported in outside-school milieux. I presented two case studies to see what family literacy activities the children in the selected families engaged in – the choices of the children and of their parents, how the parents assisted with children's learning and how their preferences were shaped by their ages, genders, cultural backgrounds, traditional education beliefs, and personal and family experiences. Further, I explored reasons for the lack of communication between school and family. My goals are to reveal:

- 1) the complexity of family dynamics around literacy (Solsken, 1993) and
- 2) what school teachers should know about Chinese families so they can better accommodate the diverse funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992; Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) brought by students from different sociocultural backgrounds, and

- 3) ways that teachers and parents can work collaboratively to support the children's acquisition of English literacy, and hence overall advancement .

During the course of my investigation, I found that the two focal families I selected, though of the same sociocultural background, were from different immigration categories and were rather different in terms of after-school literacy facilitation methods. This verified the claim that "[e]ven within one society, patterns of family life differ in terms of values, education, occupation, income, religion, and ethnicity. Different economic status, ethnicity, and religion shape different family values" (Leslie & Korman, 1989, Ogbu, 1978, cited in Li, 2002, p.17). What Chinese children and adults decide and choose to do is embedded in and shaped by traditional Chinese educational concepts (Li, 2002, 2005) and individual life experience. The differences surfaced and the comparison will be described in the later chapters.

1.3 Research questions

My research focuses on outside school multiple literacy events and practices of new immigrant school-age children from China. My general research question is what activities Chinese immigrant families chose for their school-age children to facilitate their English literacy development and why those activities were chosen. I hope to provide school teachers with a portrait of Chinese families who make every effort to find ways to help their children with English language and literacy learning. I wish to expose Chinese parents' eager desire to communicate with school and willingness to cooperate, as they did so well in their home country. In further detail, I will address these questions:

- 1) In what family literacy activities do the children in these two families engage?
- 2) In what family literacy activities do the parents in these two families engage?
- 3) What are the parents' perceptions and opinions of those choices?
- 4) What should Anglo teachers know about Chinese families so they can better support children's acquisition of English literacy?

1.4 Location and research subjects

I conducted this research in metropolitan Vancouver, where the two focal families live and I study. The significance of doing such research in such a location is obvious. In two of the six largest census metropolitan areas, Vancouver and Toronto, almost 75% of

the Chinese population in Canada lived as of 2001. Vancouver lists number two in the population of non-official mother tongue, slightly lower than Toronto by 2.5% (Toronto, 43.6%; Vancouver, 41.1%). However, the percentage of the population with Chinese mother tongue in Vancouver doubled that of Toronto (Toronto 19%; Vancouver, 38.4%), and was much higher than the other four largest metropolitan areas (Statistics Canada, 2008). According to a study released by Statistics Canada (Thompson, 2007), almost 40 percent of school children in Vancouver speak a language other than English or French. Though the 2006 Census revealed Vancouver's appeal as an immigrant magnet has dropped one spot, in one of its cities, Richmond, half of all recent immigrants come from China (Choate, 2007). It is true that Chinese people have the advantage of being able to make use of the services provided by Vancouver's well-established Chinese community (Fleming, 1989). The community only helps to make everyday life easy and accessible. With regard to educational issues, however, multilingual services seem to be minimal. I did not find much practical help for Chinese parents provided by schools in my inquiry and the parents I worked with were not satisfied with the current situation in this regard.

The participants in my research are two school-aged children and two mums from two new immigrant Chinese families. The children are more or less literate in their first language (Chinese in this case). But in English learning, they are still at the beginning level. My focus was on their out-of-school literacy activities, especially the literacy intervention and support from their low-English-level parents. I explained how traditional Chinese educational beliefs influenced their choice of literacy facilitation outside school under the circumstances of low English family environments.

Literacy research on Chinese immigrant families in recent years (e.g. Li, 2001, 2002, 2005; Zhang, 2007) reflected some significant features of family literacy support shaped by traditional Chinese cultural and educational principles. Given that every family is different, scrutiny into the complexity in this regard is still far from enough. Those parents who first came to Canada holding study authorizations generally have higher English levels than those who initially came as landed immigrants. Immigrants of the skilled-worker category are usually a little better at English than those of business category. Accordingly, home environments and instructional support in terms of facilitating English literacy development vary.

The first focal family (Kate's³) came to Canada as "skilled worker", like many of Chinese immigrants in the past decades. The other (Ling's) represents the category of

business immigrants who are becoming numerous in recent years. Both families have two children. This abnormal family size indicates another story of many Chinese immigrants. As Chinese citizens are not allowed to have more than one child per family under the birth-control policy, many Chinese couples move overseas and give birth to another child.

Kate's family first came to Canada in 2004. She and her younger sister were sent back to China soon after landing and came again to join their parents in 2006. At the time of this study, Kate was in Grade 5 in a Vancouver public school. I got to know Kate's mum in the ELSA program during my internship there. She worked very hard in learning English, hoping that one day she would find a job.

Ling was a kindergartener upon arrival and was in Grade 1 when I home visited. His elder brother, Ping, was an undergraduate student at SFU then. Ling and his mother first landed at the end of 2005. Ling's mum and I became friends because of Ling's cousin, my former student in China, whose parents are also friends of mine. We are from the same city. Ling's mum knows little English.

1.5 Methodology

To find out what is actually happening to these learners' English literacy practices in outside school milieux, the best way would be to enter the homes of informants and observe from their real lives. To recognize people's lived lives and their deep thoughts, the best way is to listen to their own voices. Therefore, home visits were a regular weekly activity throughout the research process, during which I made field notes based on observation of family literacy practices. Informal visits started right after I got these two families' verbal consent, although data collection did not begin until after ethics approval from the university was obtained and the families was secured (See Appendix 1). Home visits to the two families took place mostly on the weekends. Research ethics application was approved at the beginning of October 2007 from Office of Research Ethics of Simon Fraser University. During the process of home visits, I observed the family activities without commenting on any phenomenon. Field notes were written down right after each visit instead of at the site so that my participants would not feel uncomfortable and change their behaviours. Observed information was double checked with related focal people whenever necessary. I also asked to see any materials from

the children's school with the intention of making connections with their non-school activities. I also took photos and artifacts were collected with permission.

Four structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the two children and their mothers. Interviews of the adults were carried out in Chinese for about an hour each, while in a mixture of Chinese and English for half an hour or so with each of the children. All four interviews were digital recorded and transcribed. In addition, government documentary materials were used to illustrate the demographic trends of Chinese immigrants in Canada.

Ethnographic investigation was the principal methodology of this case study. Data analysis was guided by sociocultural theories. Ethnography is believed to be "particularly suited to gaining insight into questions embedded in social and cultural communities and practices such as education" (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, cited in Purcell-Gates, 2000, July, p.3). As I stepped further into these new immigrant families, studies on emergent literacy, family as educators, and funds of knowledge also helped me better understand the complexity of the literacies in practice that I observed. Conveying a non-judgmental attitude, I carefully reflected my position as a Chinese community member, an international student, and a researcher, and I examined my possible subjectivity in analyzing and interpreting data. Advantages of having "a native conduct ethnographic research in his/her own culture" described by Kaplan (1972, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984, p.35) are, familiarity with the community structure and organizations, access to subjects, knowledge of the language and facility in making contacts and avoiding feelings of unfamiliarity, to name some of them. Hymes (1978, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984) believed that insiders were well suited to conduct ethnographic research in their culture. He argued, "the person doing the ethnography may be from the community in question. Indeed, I think it is highly desirable that this be the case" (p.35).

1.6 Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I first briefly introduce the background of my research - my interest in this area, my initial consideration of the problem, my teaching experience, and my privileged status in conducting such an investigation. I then describe my investment in this research. I explain how the research plan was structured and what I have done

with it. And I finally explained my research questions and referred to my theoretical framework and research methodology.

The next sections are organized as follows. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to second language literacy acquisition theories. Similar studies of Chinese immigrant children's literacy development activities are also discussed. Chapter 3 explains the general structure of the investigation. Description of the focal families and the research methodology of this study are presented in some detail. The process of ethnographic interviews is introduced. Chapter 4 presents the research results from over three months of participant observation. The two focal families are compared in terms of their assumptions, choices, beliefs, and expectations of literacy activities the children engaged in. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and draws conclusions. Research questions are answered. Pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research are made.

1.7 Notes

¹ English is taken as a foreign language in China because it is not an official language there, compared with in Canada as a second language which is one of the two official languages.

² ELSA (English Language Services for Adults) - a government sponsored program in BC for new immigrants to Canada. In provinces other than British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec, its equivalent program is called LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada).

³ To protect the privacy of these research subjects, pseudonyms are used for all the four people involved. My choosing of either an English name or a Chinese name indicate the focal family's choice in real life. Any other people involved (family members, tutors, etc.) are also given pseudonyms.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Hull and Schultz (2002) stated in their prominent book: *School's out!: Bridging out-of-school literacies with classroom practice*, that recent literacy research has shown ever-growing interest in documenting and analyzing the writing and reading activities that go on out of school – in settings such as homes, community organizations, and after-school programs. They pointed out that it is in these informal out-of-school contexts that the major theoretical advances in the study of literacy have been made. One branch of study in this area, has been attentive to the considerable pressures on recent immigrants to learn and put to use the literate practices of their adopted countries. Out-of-school ESL literacy studies mostly take a sociocultural perspective and see new immigrant ethnic minority students' literacy lives in non-school settings as bearing their unique cultural tradition, world view, family history, educational beliefs, and other perceptions which may be quite different from those of the mainstream society. More and more, those differences are considered less as elements of "deficit" than as valuable "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Gonzalez et al., 2005) in young children's L2 literacy acquisition course. Those divergent social and cultural contexts are believed to provide ample potential resources which can form the bases for education of linguistic and cultural minority students.

Most immigrant families come to Canada with high expectations for a better life and a prosperous future for their children (e.g. Igoa, 1995; Li, 2000, 2002, 2008; Beynon et al., 2003). The parents' roles as educational agents are more often seriously played than not, no matter whether they are "literate" people or English speakers. Another aspect related to the new immigrant children's English study is their previous first language knowledge. Their emergent English literacy as L2 is influenced by L1 and hence has distinct characteristics.

Under the umbrella theory of sociocultural literacy learning perspectives, I will mainly address theories on emergent literacy, on family as educator, and on funds of knowledge respectively in the following literature review.

2.2 Sociocultural perspectives on literacy learning

Traditional view that children start to learn to read and write only at the onset of formal school literacy instruction was challenged by sociocultural perspectives on literacy learning. Literacy acts are nowadays widely accepted as embedded in the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they occur, hence, Hull & Schultz (2002) insisted that literacy studies must take into account of the social, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts both in and out of school. "Shaped by different social and cultural norms and values, literacy acts – their functions, meanings, and methods of transmission – vary from one cultural group to another" (Langer, 1987; Wagner, 1991, cited in Li, 2002, p.12), and are meaningful only in their sociocultural contexts. Immigrant families' literacy lives are definitely shaped by their home cultural perceptions and influenced by their lived experiences. In examining new immigrant children's English literacy activities in outside school settings, at home, in the community and in the larger mainstream Canadian society, I have been informed constantly by the works of sociocultural theory on literacy learning, which will serve as the theoretical framework of this study. Factors such as socioeconomic status, parents' education levels, family life history, ethnicity, age, and gender all enriched my understanding and interpretation of these immigrant families' choices, decisions, losses, and struggles with regard to their children's English literacy learning in Canada. Research on emergent literacy, family as educator, and (cultural) funds of knowledge also play important roles in accounting for these children's ESL literacy experiences.

Sociocultural approaches to learning and development are built on the belief that "human activities take place in cultural contexts, [and] are mediated by language and other symbol systems" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, cited in Lo, 2001, p.9). Temple, Ogle, Crawford, and Freppon (2008), in their studies of diversity classroom literacy teaching, confirmed that children's language develops in certain sociocultural contexts. For this reason, Purcell-Gates (1997) argued that in order to understand the process of learning, one must also specify and seek to understand the social contexts within which learning occurs. Literacy as cultural practice (Purcell-Gates, 1997, 2007) implies that beginning literacy development must be studied within the cultural contexts in which it occurs - the home and community. Purcell-Gates (1997) claimed that:

To understand and gain useful insights into literacy learning, one must thus explore the classroom settings and other settings within which

people learn to read and write. The goal is to understand how the participants perceive, interpret, and evaluate what they are doing (p.6).

Before the switch to sociocultural perspectives of literacy studies, a psycholinguistic orientation on second language acquisition (SLA) research dominated this area. However, seeing second language learning as an individual internalization and conceptualization process has been criticized by sociocultural theorists for its ignorance of how learners acquire from social interaction, and in “recognizing the social and cultural situatedness of language learning and use” (Toohey, 2000, p.9). A sociocultural perspective on SLA challenges traditional ways of understanding SLA and suggests that researchers investigate the social relations and cultural practices of groups (Toohey, 2000). Seeing literacy as multiple and social (Purcell-Gates, 2007) has been accepted by more and more scholars and formed a new era of language and literacy studies. My research responds to Purcell-Gates’ (2007) call for “more case studies of literacy in practice within specified social contexts” (p.viii), and I hope to contribute to “the growing database on literacy as cultural practice” (p.ix). Using an ethnographic approach to conduct such a study, I hope to “enrich existing, insufficient data” (Rudes, Goldsant & Cervenka, 1980, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984, p.36) of Chinese immigrants’ literacy lives in Canada.

According to Wertsch et al. (1995, cited in Toohey, 2000), the “goal of a sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human action, on the one hand and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this action occurs, on the other” (p.12). Sociocultural knowledge provides such an angle so other people can see what, how, and why something is happening in a specific social context which is different from their own. Immigrant families came to the host country, bearing with them their deep-rooted home cultural values and historical literacy orientations. Their perceptions of a new “foreign” language and literacy learning are probably not the same as those of the mainstream culture. What they do or choose to do may not make good sense in the host culture but must be valued in their home cultural notions.

It is necessary for immigrant parents to be open to a new adopted culture, help their children adjust to the new environment, acculturate not assimilate; while for educational institutions must be open similarly to diverse cultures, embracing and accommodating their newcomers. As Lo (2001) anticipated in her study, with more knowledge of each other, parents may become more aware of the school’s

performances, and teachers and school administrators will know more about the parents' desires and children's needs. Lo asserted that greater mutual understanding and cooperation among people of different cultures will bring in a higher level of peace and mutual respect, which is what our world is always pursuing. Under the slogan of "multiculturalism", efforts should not stay at the level of policy-making and academic studies, if intentions are to help.

2.3 Emergent literacy

An emergent literacy perspective sees literacy as "a body of cognitive knowledge about written language and a set of processes for using that knowledge" (Solsken, 1993, p.3). It "seeks to identify the knowledge and processes that individuals possess, the order in which they are acquired, and the environmental conditions which best support their acquisition" (Solsken, 1993, p.3). Purcell-Gates (2004) also referred to emergent language knowledge as the emergent knowledge of written language, but she specified,

Emergent literacy needs to be concerned with the emerging conceptual and procedural knowledge of written language, including the reading and writing of the language. Any other concerns, such as home environments and preschool experience, should be relevant to the study of emergent literacy only to the degree to which they contextualize, promote, or hinder the development of written language knowledge (p.102).

Children's development of emergent literacy concepts is believed to depend upon their exposure to print and print use and experience with literate others in their lives using print for real-life reasons (Purcell-Gates, 2000, 2004). Relating to non-native children's emergent literacy development in English, two issues arise. One is that their initial literacy experience happened in their first language; the other is they have little exposure to L2 literate others in their home environments in the new country. In fact, more and more immigrant families prefer their children to use their first language at home, in order to communicate with non-English speaking adults in some family cases; and to maintain their L1 ability for others.

In contrast to the earlier reading "readiness" for formal school instruction perspective, the emergent literacy research insists that young children learn about reading, writing, and print before formal schooling (Goodman, 1986; Solsken, 1993; Purcell-Gates, 1997). Caiping Zhang and others (1998) observed that much research in emergent literacy had been based on practices of Western, middle-class communities.

Heath (1983, cited in Hull & Shultz, 2002) documented that when children from different communities entered school, only the middle-class mainstream students, whose language use was similar to that of the teachers, were successful. The functions and uses of literacy practices in various communities as well as the differential preparation children from different communities brought to school were not acknowledged. Zhang et al. (1998) reminded us that “both researchers and educators must recognize that different cultural groups engage in somewhat different literacy practices” (p.183) and those differences should not be simply neglected.

Accordingly, ELLs¹ first language literacy experiences should never be ignored when they start second language learning. Temple et al. (2008) claimed that school-age children’s first language ability and emergent literacy knowledge of their L1 have positive transfer to English literacy acquisition. In this sense, many Chinese families expose their children to print at early ages and the “common underlying proficiency” (Cummins, 1981, cited in Temple et al., 2008, p.493) can help transfer reading and writing skills to the second language study. Students do not have to learn this knowledge and skills again. This linguistic interdependence hypothesis developed by Jim Cummins (1981, 1989, cited in Temple et al. 2008) indicates that there exists positive transfer of skills from the SLLs’ L1 to L2. From this perspective, the fact that many Chinese parents try hard to expose their young children to print at early ages, though in their first language, will definitely benefit their English achievement. Those parents should be relieved by knowing this.

2.4 Family as educators

In Chinese educational conception, parents are regarded as a child’s first educators in life, the same as in other cultures (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Studies in various cultural contexts show that all parents are capable of helping their children learn, and minority parents, despite their socioeconomic status and levels of English proficiency, can support their children’s learning in a variety of meaningful ways (Goldenberg, 1987; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Taylor, 1983, cited in Li, 2005). Li demonstrated how Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill’s (1991) “Family as educator” model made very good sense in evaluating Chinese immigrant families’ literacy facilitation. She summarized the five elements of this model as:

- 1) *Literacy environment of the home*, which includes parental provision of literacy to the child and parents' own literacy behaviours and preferences. Parental provision of literacy to the child includes different home literacy dimensions such as the number of books present in the home, parents' expressed interest in reading, and children's opportunities to listen to stories or read from books.
- 2) *Creating opportunities to learn*, which includes ways parents indirectly facilitate children's literacy through providing access to other people and activities, promoting personal interests, and exercising control over their leisure time. These opportunities can vary from attending music, ballet, and swimming lessons to spending time with other adults e.g., friends of the family.
- 3) *Parental direct teaching*. Parents who can support their children's learning may choose to teach their children the skills that they believe to be prerequisites for school achievement as well as the skills that they believe the children are not learning adequately at school.
- 4) *Parental education*, which refers to the level of educational attainment of the parents. More educated parents may provide more opportunities and activities that promote literacy, and may be more directly involved in their children's learning.
- 5) *Parental expectations*, which refers to parental aspirations for their children that are transmitted through demands, support, or encouragement. (p.10)

I will use the above descriptors to evaluate the home literacy environments of my focal families in a later section.

Chumak-Horbatsch (1984) analyzed closely how language planning in the home milieu was important in children's majority English language acquisition and minority home language preservation. She portrayed how Ukrainian parents were quite deliberate in their planning about maintaining their first language. Her research showed us that language decisions were essentially part of a larger cultural decision or compromise (Carisse, 1971, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984). Hancocks (1972, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984) found that language decisions in Chinese families depended heavily on parents' language proficiency. Most new immigrant adults have language difficulties themselves – and there is no means for them to make a bilingual

language rule at home, even if they wished to do so. Needing to grasp English urgently after arriving, many Chinese families are hesitant in requesting that the children adhere to a “Chinese only” home language rule. They are tolerant of children’s spontaneous use of either language in everyday life (Hancocks, 1972, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984). Home language retaining and developing are usually put on back burner.

Recent research (Zhang et al., 1998; Li, 2002, 2005; Zhang, 2007) on new Chinese immigrant families’ literacy lives showed us the complicated feelings of both the children and the parents. Adults were mostly fluent and literate in their L1 but struggled painfully with English learning, while school-age children learned English fast at school but did not care about continuing learning Chinese as their parents expected. Attitude studies regarding heritage language schools reported that the language schools typically served the desires and purposes of the parents far more than those of the children. Such schools represented anxious attempts by parents to maintain and preserve their native language (Bausenhart, 1971, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984; Beynon et al., 2003). It seems that children’s motivation and interest in L1 maintenance are relatively low, and it is parents’ persistence that determines attendance at heritage language schools.

2.5 Funds of knowledge

Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) claimed that “the concept of funds of knowledge . . . is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge.”(p.ix-x). For educators to operate a funds of knowledge approach is to seek to understand the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives. Gonzalez et al. asserted that the funds of knowledge and experiences within immigrant families could become educational resources for curriculum development and provide insight into more effective pedagogical practice. It was argued that the use of these funds in practice could also affirm the cultural identity of students and enhance relations between teachers, students, and their parents (Browning-Aiken, 2005).

According to Gonzalez et al. (2005), funds of knowledge represent one of the household’s most useful cultural resources for teachers to bear on their work. Educators nowadays are urged to be aware of cultural issues and to try to incorporate culturally appropriate (or “sensitive” or “responsive” with similar meaning) pedagogy since households of learners are seen as “containing ample cultural and cognitive resources

with great potential utility for classroom instruction” (Moll et al., 2005, p.75). Based on these theories, ESL students’ first language and other prior knowledge should be taken as “a frame of reference rather than an interference to the acquisition of L2” (Duquette, 1993, cited in Young, 1997, p.94). It is also believed that a so-called “zone of comfort” will result in the transmission of funds of knowledge, and traditional pedagogical approaches of schools sometimes threaten the cultural frame of such zones of comfort (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 2005). To ensure the transmission of funds of knowledge to school sphere, the classroom environment should be able to provide students with such a “zone of comfort”. In addition, in the pages that follow, I argue it should also be a “zone of safety” where ESL students feel safe to be different from the majority others, and a “zone of belonging” where students feel they are inside group members rather than outside intruders.

Instead of traditional home visits in which teachers usually report or discuss specific issues of students, Gonzalez et al. advocated that teachers should venture into their students’ households, not as teachers but as learners and ethnographic researchers, to learn from them and their communities. Such household visits are essentially “research visits for the express purpose of identifying and documenting knowledge that exists in students’ homes” (Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales, & Amanti, 2005, p.89). They are part of “systematic, intentional inquiry” (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990, cited in Gonzalez et al., 2005, p.89). Such visits to students’ households, observing their real everyday literacy lives, “foster a relationship of trust with the families” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p.xi) and benefit not only the students, but the teachers/researchers as well. A positive home-school relationship and genuine teacher-parent partnership will benefit generating new forms of literacy instruction and bring in fresh air to the public education system eventually.

2.6 Chinese families’ perspective on literacy

In traditional Chinese education, a strong emphasis on literacy rather than conversation is a prominent feature in language teaching (Beynon et al., 2003). Chinese parents make every effort to emphasize the children’s literacy development from early ages. To be literate is taken as prerequisite to success in every aspect of life and “the pathway to upward social mobility and to an individual’s well-being in society” (Li, 2002, p.130; Zhang et al., 1998). In addition, the status of immigrants also plays an important

role in shaping the parents' high educational aspirations. Chinese parents believe that academic achievement is an avenue to middle-class occupational status and upward socioeconomic mobility (Zhang et al., 1998). Some immigrant children are warned that in order to obtain employment in Canada (or other immigrant-receiving countries), they need to be much better than their Caucasian native counterparts (Li, 2008). Against a deficit view of linguistic minority students, Asian students are at times perceived as model students (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Peng, Wright, 1994, cited in Li, 2002) among peers in terms of attitudes to learning and academic achievements. Chinese students have impressive reputations of being hardworking and capable of high academic achievements. However, newcomer children confront a totally new school environment, strange teachers and peers, new learning materials, and most urgent of all, necessary English language and literacy skills to deal with all the new surroundings and survive the new school life. How soon and how well the children will adjust to the new life depends heavily on to what extent their families can facilitate their adapting, no matter whether that facilitation takes place in English or their home language.

Acknowledging students' cultural origins and their outside school lives are recognized as important to be better aware of the students' either failure or success at school. As Li (2002) stressed, in order that their literacy behaviour and performance can be better assessed and their needs can be better addressed, it is necessary to see the children beyond the schoolyards in their specific sociocultural contexts.

Chinese immigration to Canada has a history as long as over a century, but massive immigration generally started from the late 1980s. Early immigrants from China were mainly people living in southeast coastal provinces, such as Guangdong and Fujian, coming as unskilled labourers (CBC New Online, 2007). Later skilled worker immigrants and the recent increasing number of business category immigrants were joined by a large portion of people from many other provinces of China. People who come at different times, from different areas and under different conditions may speak different language dialects (widely spoken Chinese languages overseas are Mandarin and Cantonese) and hold different beliefs about literacy and child rearing. According to Temple et al. (2008), social variations in language use are revealed in the use of dialects, registers and social discourses. People speaking different geographic dialects, employing various registers, and applying appropriate discourses (forms of language that are used in social situations) reflect intricate personal and cultural affiliations.

Seeing all Chinese immigrants as having the same cultural roots therefore demonstrating the same traits and perceptions, is therefore problematic and inadequate to understand the complexity. Economic environment, age, education background and lived life experience all influence Chinese immigrants' understanding of the mainstream society and determine their choice of what is worthwhile to do and how to do it.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I illustrated the general theoretical framework of my study. Under the umbrella theories of sociocultural approaches to literacy learning, I explored from three angles in relation to literacy lives of the school-age children from non-English-speaking Chinese immigrant families in Canada. Drawing on the studies on emergent literacy, on family as educator, and on funds of knowledge, I explained respectively, 1) how ELLs' emergent literacy experience is different from that of native-speaker children's, and the assumption that their first language literacy knowledge has positive impact on their ESL literacy acquisition; 2) that the parents' roles as educators should never be denied even though they are incapable of conducting "direct teaching" because of English language inefficiency and education levels; 3) how Chinese families' cultural backgrounds, literacy conceptions and their everlasting educational support can be taken as valuable cultural funds of knowledge implemented into their school intellectual pedagogy. By drawing on some related studies, I will also depict how Chinese family's perspectives on literacy and literacy learning are shaped by traditional Chinese education principles in later section.

2.8 Notes

¹ ELLs: English language learners, children who arrive in American classrooms with no English or insufficient English for learning to read and write in English (Temple et al., 2008). I assume the same classification in Canadian settings in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Determined by the nature of the topic of this research, ethnographic investigation is taken as the principal methodology of this participant observation case study. However, I do not here present a comprehensive description of full-scale ethnography. My study is an ethnographic-style exploration of several community members within certain domains (Fleming, 1989). Data collection focused on seeing literacy, or literacies, as cultural or social practices in two selected new immigrant Chinese families with young school-aged children. I was guided in data analysis by drawing on the theoretical framework of sociocultural theories on literacy development, through the lens of the “emergent literacy” concept, the “family as educator” model, and the “[cultural] funds of knowledge” approach.

I chose to examine new immigrant Chinese family’s literacy issues after long consideration. I combined the academic implications and the advantage of me doing such research with the fact that new Chinese immigrants are growing rapidly in the passing two decades while studies in this area are still rare and needed. Hence, its value in terms of either theory or practice, in its own right, is undeniable. My initial intention was to fill in, not fill up, the gap between Chinese immigrant families and Canadian mainstream institutions by illustrating what Chinese immigrant family’s literacy lives are like, and also indicating to Chinese families what the school expects of them. That goal has been intensified during my research process with the realization of my sense of duty, as a Chinese community member, to work for my people, not only for the purpose of academic interest.

3.2 Researcher’s position as the participant observer

Believing that I am a proper person to conduct such ethnographic investigation as an ethnic insider, I assume I can understand and interpret Chinese immigrants’ literacy issues and their thoughts and feelings well. My position as a Chinese community member, an international student, being the researcher was examined and consideration

was made to try to avoid judgment and subjectivity in interpreting and analyzing the attained data.

Of the same ethnic heritage as the focal families, the advantage of my doing such a study lies not only in easy access to the families and an insider's view of their lives, but also in eliminating the discomfort associated with cultural incongruence, so as to increase the validation of the data (Purcell-Gates, 1996). I know about Chinese foreign language (English) education curriculum from my previous teaching experience in China. Being a parent of a young child currently studying in grade school, I was given a good chance to understand Canadian public education principles and curriculum, and thus was able to further explain some mismatches and misunderstandings between Chinese families and mainstream schools.

3.3 Sample selection and participants

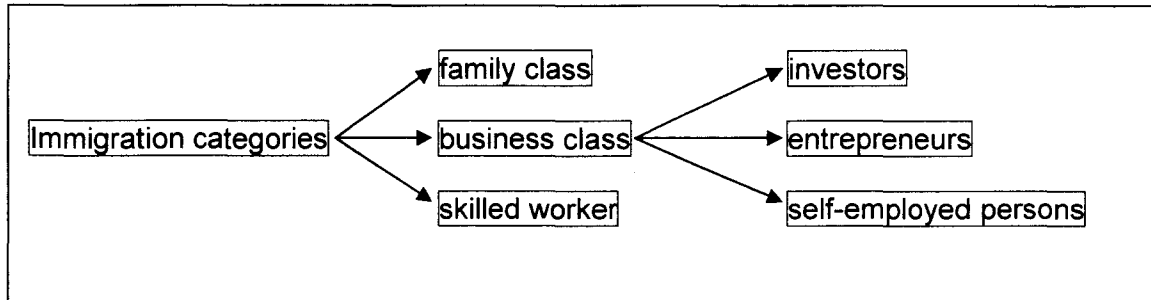
Limited by my focus in this research, I selected focal families and participants under three criteria: 1) new immigrant families, which means living in Canada no more than 3 years (PR[permanent residence], no citizenship); 2) with at least one child studying in Canada no longer than three years; 3) parents' English levels are not high. Those criteria were generated under the consideration that the very first few years could be the hardest time for new immigrants (both adults and children) especially when they do not have advanced English proficiency, and that this period of time could be critical to their new lives in a new country and their future establishment.

Two focal families were selected from among my Chinese friends and acquaintances in Vancouver. Considering that existing studies on Chinese children's family literacy practices, though few, have mainly looked at either successful, middle-class children from well-educated families (Li, 2002, 2005; Zhang, 2007) or families in which both parents work and have little time to supervise the children's learning (Li, 2001, 2002, 2003), I deliberately limited my focus to two distinct family contexts in terms of their socioeconomic status, parent education level, parenting style, and educational belief. The situations of these two families are nonetheless representative among new immigrants from China.

Given that every family is different, scrutiny into the complexity with this regard is still far from enough. Those parents who first came to Canada as international students and then stayed have generally higher English levels than those who initially came as

landed immigrants. And immigrants of the skilled-worker category are usually a little better at English than those of business category families. Immigration categories are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 1: Immigration categories



Economic conditions of immigrant families vary depending largely on pre-immigration situations in the home country. Accordingly, home environments and instructional support regarding English literacy learning could differ considerably.

One family, Kate's, was chosen because it represents those who strongly believe in and follow a traditional Chinese educational philosophy. Long-established Chinese educational thoughts and approaches are firmly held by Kate's mum (Xian) who believes that they are valuable heritage of Chinese culture and are definitely effective. Her assumption is if those learning strategies work well in China, they must also work here. Meanwhile, Xian, like many immigrant parents, believes that effort and hard work will make up and the children will finally make it in the new country (Gibson, 1988; Ogbu, 1982; cited in Li, 2003).

Xian and her husband met in Japan when they both studied there, so both of them speak some Japanese. They went abroad early and did not have much work experience in China. Unlike some other Chinese families, they have never thought of returning to China some day. To my surprise, Kate's dad does not speak much English despite the fact that he has been here for around ten years. He has been working in Japanese restaurants run by Chinese, mostly Shanghainese, and they habitually speak Shanghai dialect among colleagues. He is the bread-earner of the family and works long hours every day. Kate's mum looks after the two children and does house duties. After she sent the younger daughter to a day care, she started to think of doing something to support the family. The life goal of this couple is to have either jobs or their own business

and raise the two children so they can go to university and have good jobs when they grow up. My focal child in this family, Kate, had been in Canada for almost two years and was just entering Grade 5 at the time of this study. Kate's younger sister, Jane, was 5 years old and did not speak any English.

The other family, Ling's, was chosen because Ling, from my point of view, could typically represent another group of Chinese immigrant children who enjoy material luxury but have a lack of motivation to study hard, with parents who have little ability to help. Ling was a kindergartener upon arrival in Canada in 2005 and was in Grade 2 at the time of my observation. Ling's elder brother, Ping, was an undergraduate student then. I got to know Lian (Ling's mum) through Ling's cousin, a former student of mine in China, whose parents are also friends of mine. We are from the same city. Ling's mum knows little English. Coming as a family, they represent the class of business category immigrants, investor specifically, who are becoming numerous in recent years. Though Ling's parents are at beginning English levels, they have few worries about money. Having their own house and a good car, their material circumstances are comfortable. With Ling's elder brother living at home, all external family affairs requiring English knowledge present no problems. After first landing in Canada, Ling's dad went back to China and stayed there looking after their family business. Lian was concerned about her own English language deficit and the difficulties she was experiencing guiding Ling, whom she described as an extremely smart but a spoiled boy. She sometimes felt frustrated and helpless when she found no way to communicate with the school and few friends to consult.

Chinese people of Lian's age suffered a lot from the so-called Cultural Revolution when they should have been studying in school. They did not have chances to receive adequate school education and experienced unimaginable hardships in pursuing their career success later. They thus truly wish a good education environment and opportunity to allow their children a promising future. However, children from these families are at times spoiled or neglected by parents who are too busy making money to take care of them. It is not totally their fault that they have no motivation to study hard because they have everything they want; their poor study habits may be partly a result of their parents' working so hard that they fail to give the children enough attention at their early ages. Working in a popular school for over ten years, I saw many parents, like Ling's, running their business day and night, but ignoring their children's education. Many of them paid

large sums of money to send their children to “good” schools in the hope of the school would take over the responsibility of educating them.

3.4 Home visit and participant observation

Basically, this is a participant-observation descriptive study (Purcell-Gates, 2004). Purcell-Gates insisted that “[o]nly by entering the homes of the informants as participant observers could the field researchers observe naturally occurring instances of literacy use” (Purcell-Gates, 1996, p.410). Before writing the research proposal, I talked to the two potential families, mothers and focal children, about my study and requested permission for observing, interviewing and writing about them. With their verbal consent, I started informal visits to their homes without taking any field notes or collecting any data, focusing on getting familiar with the family to avoid “performance behaviours” (Purcell-Gates, 1996, p.412) in the later formal observations. Supposing that those informal visits could be tested as a pilot study, I paid much attention to what information I would and should collect for my research. Official home visits started soon after Ethical Approval was obtained from Simon Fraser University in early October 2007, and data has been collected since then by informing the families.

Observation was done mostly in the informants’ homes during the weekend and during several excursions we did together, with one of the families also at Scout (Canada) meetings and at the soccer field. I went to the two families’ homes every weekend, half a day in each family, except occasionally when either the family or the researcher was not available. Informal visits before Ethical Approval was granted provided me not only with a clear idea of what to observe, but also gave me confidence and a sense of safety to go on with my observation. Those informal observations were undertaken as a pilot to ensure the later formal study was on the right track.

Since most observations took place at the focal families’ homes, both the mothers treated me as a friend rather than a researcher and chatted with me on many random topics. I intentionally did not take any notes at the time to avoid any discomfort and interrupt the flow of our conversations. Instead, I finished field notes right after every home visit, and also included my reflections on some issues, which I called reflexive journals. I checked back with the mothers about any unclear information. I am grateful to the two families for their cooperation and support of my research. Every time I asked

whether I could write about a specific issue, they made quick response by saying, "Certainly. I just trust you."

My experiences of observing the two children were different in addition to many other distinctions between the two children because of their physical environments and the children's personal traits. Observing Kate was much easier due to the fact that almost all her home activities happened in the living room where people usually stayed, as well as the fact that Kate's way of learning and her assigned study tasks were familiar to me as a teacher from China. She is well behaved and obedient – a good daughter and a good student under the criteria of Chinese traditions and culture. Most of my weekend home visits saw a similar pattern of Kate's activities: practicing the piano, doing mother-assigned English learning exercises, going to the tutor living downstairs, and playing with her younger sister. Usually I chatted with Xian who was always busy with either cooking or other household chores. She frequently turned to Kate, inquiring about something or asking her to show me what she had done during the past week. Everything seemed to be clear, easy and smooth at Kate's home.

Some unexpected hindrances appeared during observing Ling. Ling's family lives in a three-story house. He did not always stay in the main/second floor where the living room, kitchen, and dining room are located, so he was not always within my sight. And it was improper for me to follow him going upstairs or downstairs. However, most of his activities actually happened on the main floor. Every time I visited, I tried to find out any new literacy related materials whatever they were, chatted with Lian about Ling's school study and home events. For most of the times, I went through Ling's school materials, explained to Lian what they were and what parents were supposed to do. I sometimes helped Ling with homework and checked his home reading under his mum's request. But at the end of my formal observation, I talked with Lian why I had not done much intervention before and promised that I would help later on and would keep in touch as always.

The difficulty in documenting Ling was also related to what I perceived to be a defiant personality. According to his mother, he is a child who does not listen to instructions. He has his own strong ideas of what to do or not. It is never easy to convince or force him to follow. However, Lian reported, once in a while, Ling could be very eager to learn. For a short period of time in Grade 1, Ling was quite self-motivated to finish his homework after school every day without any help, taking finishing

homework as the first important thing to do after school. That happened soon after the family got to know he had never done any assignments in the year of kindergarten and some serious “talks” took place. Unfortunately, for most of the time, Ling shows little interest in school or home assignments.

In addition to field notes, artifacts were collected and pictures were taken under permission. Confidentiality was assured in all these actions. That is to say no pictures of people and no real names would appear in any occasion relating to this study, as well as the thesis. Literacy-related artifacts and documents from the two focal families included environmental print, the children's self-initiated reading and writing materials, parent assigned tasks, school worksheets and reports, and parents' reading and writing materials. It is necessary to make explicit that the children's school work and reports were not covered in this study, but they are inevitably relevant when one examines students' literacy learning, and I suppose school assessment is one important way of reflection. It is still a fact that we generally evaluate students by means of their school performance. In this research, I describe two new immigrant children's outside school literacy events. Their school teachers' comments in this regard will be taken as one aspect of analyses.

3.5 Interview procedure

Ethnographic interview was chosen as another chief information collecting method. Spindler (1982, cited in Fleming, 1989) warns that an ethnographic interview “must not predetermine responses by the kind of questions asked” (p.28). I critically challenged my position as an “insider” investigator and the possible presumptions due to the familiarity with the focal families as well as our common cultural origin. Semi-structured protocols and open-ended questions were applied to provide participants with more free space to voice their deeper thoughts and feelings.

At the end of home visits, four in-depth interviews were conducted with both children and their mothers. Interview questions were revised based on the previous home observations. Before interviewing them, both adults and children were informed about the interview procedure, estimated time length, language use, and interview questions. They were allowed to decline any questions that they did not want to answer. Fortunately, both mothers accepted all my inquiry without any hesitation. Interviews with them went smoothly.

Interviewing Kate was easy but quicker than planned. She is cooperative but like many Chinese students, she gave very brief answers such as “Yes”, “No”, or “I don’t know” or even just nodded or shook her head to my inquiring. Whereas I would not say she was not willing to talk with me, I doubted she was nervous about the recorder. During another visit when she was alone with me, she kept talking to me for over two hours. Igoa (1995, p.73) observed the difficulty in doing research with children and perceived that “they may be apt to say what adults want to hear, or they may say ‘I don’t know’ when they are afraid or do not wish to reveal their feelings and thoughts”. I cannot confirm whether that is the case with Kate, but her responses to my interview questions were brief and no surprise. I even suppose I would possibly get similar answers from many of other Chinese students.

Problems occurred when interviewing Ling. I anticipated some impediments beforehand, but still did not expect the level of difficulty I encountered. Because his mum did not agree to Ling’s request to play soccer before doing the interview, Ling was displeased. I tried to chat with him and assured him the interview would be no more than twenty minutes. Lian promised him they would later play soccer and another extra compensation. Nothing seemed to have changed his mind. I tried to start my questions. Here is an episode.

... ..
J: Can you remember how long you have been in Canada?
L: 7 years.
J: 7 years? How old are you?
L: I am 100.
.....
J: How would you rate your academic ability in English now?
L: Excellent.
.....
J: How much time do you spend in doing your homework every day?
L: A whole day, 24 hours.
.....

Undoubtedly, he understood my questions well but merely did not want to answer appropriately. After I interviewed Lian, she tried again to coax Ling into helping me complete the interview. And this time it worked. We finally finished the interview. Though the second time interview went smoothly, he did not take it very seriously. Given his past performance, I was not surprised by his responses.

Interviews of the adults were carried out in Chinese for about an hour each and in a mixture of Chinese and English for less than half an hour for each of the children.

Language choice was based on the consideration of interviewee's language level to ensure them maximum comfort and adequate articulation. All four interviews were digitally-recorded and I transcribed them. All information provided by participants was locked confidentially in a secure place in my home office, and all materials will be destroyed one year after the study.

3.6 Data categories and analyses

The obtained data was then categorized following the same set of subtitles, e.g. home environment or extracurricular activities. Some similarities and differences are presented in another section.

Data analyses were under the guidance of sociocultural theories, seeing the Chinese immigrant families' chosen literacy activities as their "cultural practices" (Purcell-Gates, 2007). I analyzed the collected data through three theoretical lenses - emergent literacy, family as educator, and funds of knowledge. The emergent literacy concept was examined in relation to the Chinese immigrant children's particular ESL circumstances, assuming a positive transition from their L1 knowledge to L2 acquisition. The "family as educator" model was confirmed though the two Chinese parents play an active role in only two of the five aspects (i.e. creating opportunities to learn and parental expectations), comparing with well-educated families where the parents' education levels are high, literacy environment of the home is more desirable, and parents are able to conduct direct teaching. However, these families' struggle and persistence in supporting the children's literacy learning just do not allow us to deny their role of "educating agent" (Li, 2005, p.10). The funds of knowledge approach was examined from Chinese students' complex socioeconomic backgrounds and distinctive school performances even though they are from the same ethnic group.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, I first discussed ethnographic investigation as the main method of the research process. As mentioned before, this study is an ethnography based on participant observation by home visiting the two focal families as well as joining the families in some of their other activities. Literacy events experienced by the focal children and instructional literacy practices assigned by parents were the data I was looking for and collected. I explained the significance of doing the study on Chinese

immigrant families and my intensified feeling of responsibility to do such a study. I further examined my position as the researcher. I explained my criteria for sample selection and introduced the chosen participants in some detail. I then described the processes of two ethnographic research approaches - home visits and ethnographic interviews. I finally explained how the obtained data was categorized and analyzed.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I present research results. First, data from each family is presented. Comparison and contrast of some similarities and differences are generated afterwards. All information is based on the facts at the time of data collection. All names used are pseudonyms.

4.1 Kate

4.1.1 Family profile¹

Table 1: Kate's family

Family members	Age	Previous occupation in China	Current occupation in Canada	Education level	Time in Canada
Father	44	Technician	Chef	Post-secondary, China	10 yrs
Mother (Xian)	36	Little work experience	Short temporary jobs	Training school diploma, China	3 yrs
Kate	11	---	---	Grade 5, Canada	1.5 yrs
Jane	4	---	---	Day care	1 yr

4.1.2 Living environment and home setting

Kate's family lives in a rented one-bedroom apartment in an old three-storey building in central Vancouver, which is not considered a favourable area due to its busy traffic and the high density of diverse populations there. The location was first chosen for the convenience of Xian to attend ELSA program at VCC which is close by. The family has lived there for more than two years and so far has not thought of moving. What Xian likes about it is its convenience and their good relationship with the landlady. Since Chinese people are famed for their care in selection of schools and living environments, I was curious about their preference. Xian confirmed that Kate's school is fairly good and

she felt the surrounding area was not too bad. But she then confessed that she would never go out after dark unless she had to. I think that is also the reason why Kate stays at home most of the time after school. Even though the playground is nearby, it is not frequented by Kate and her sister. I hardly saw other children playing there either.

Though four family members live in it, Kate's home is always clean and tidy. The couple occupies the only bedroom and the two sisters share a bunk bed in the living room. Also in the living room are Kate's piano, a couch, a dinner table and four chairs, and two desks next to each other. One of the desks is occupied by a desktop computer and the other is for Kate to study on. Almost all of Kate's activities take place in the living room, studying, practicing the piano, sleeping, eating and playing. The kitchen is open and connected to the living room. Xian sometimes criticizes Kate for being easily-distracted. However, Kate does not have a quiet place to study and with Xian cooking in the kitchen and Jane playing around; it is actually hard for Kate to concentrate, not to say when there are people visiting.

Kate's home is rich in display of photos of family members on the piano, awards from Kate's school and art work done by Kate and other family members on the wall. Ornaments are visible and several cases of plants are on the balcony, growing well. Although not spacious, everything seems to be in its place in this home. Xian grew up in China's biggest city, Shanghai. The city has an historical reputation for its limited living spaces and for how housewives there are good at organizing, making full use of every inch of space. Xian's home reflects that talented characteristic.

In the living room, a small TV set and a DVD player are for Jane to watch videos her parents brought from China. Several cases of cartoon videos are always on a side table. Xian told me Kate does not have much time to watch TV. Kate confirmed that she did not like watching TV in the interview. Occasionally she watches Chinese animation with Jane, but not other TV programs. A small bookshelf is occupied with candy cans, board game boxes, some Chinese books, and a set of *English Smart*. Some Chinese newspapers are put on top of the microwave oven. Xian told me she regularly reads local Chinese newspapers, such as “环球华报”(Global Chinese Press), “加中时报”(Canada-China Times).

Since not many books can be seen, when asked, Kate fetched from the bedroom and showed me some storybooks borrowed from her school and some bought from a school book fair. Xian does not often take the children to the public library though she is

well aware of the benefits of it. Once I was shown some library books, printed in traditional Chinese characters. Kate cannot really read much traditional Chinese. She sometimes reads to Jane with the help of Chinese pinyin. She reads to Jane English storybooks too. Xian recalled she started reading Chinese storybooks to Kate when she was very young. But now, Kate is old enough to read by herself. Xian cannot help much when she is reading English books. Kate told me she sometimes asked her mum for help with English grammar, and she often helps her mum with pronunciation and vocabulary.

4.1.3 Home language use and first language maintenance

Kate and her sister both have English names but they are not often used at home. In Kate's home, Shanghai dialect is mostly used by the two adults. The two girls can generally understand Shanghainese but they do not speak it. Xian estimates that Kate speaks 80% standard Chinese, 10% Shanghai dialect, and 10% English at home, but I heard almost only standard Chinese. Kate's dad works five days a week, including Saturday and Sunday, from 11a.m. to 9p.m., so the children usually do not have much time to talk to him. He knows some Japanese but not English. Xian stays at home and it is she who communicates mostly with the children. Also, as found in many other family literacy studies, it is usually the mother's job to supervise the children's study (e.g. Zhang et al., 1998; Li, 1998, 2002; Lo, 2001).

Before she came to Canada, Kate had finished Grade 3 in China and has a relatively high level of Chinese language knowledge. She learned English at school in China, but neither Kate nor Xian conceived she learned anything useful there. Xian's worry upon her arrival was more about English acquisition than Chinese maintenance. She inquired of relatives and friends, looked for learning materials and tutors to facilitate Kate's fast improvement in English and adaptation to the new environment. It was not until two and a half years after arrival that Xian, for the first time, enrolled Kate in a weekend Chinese course. It happened right after I finished my formal visit.

4.1.4 Home literacy activities: Computer use and other reading and writing

Kate's home has a desktop computer in the living room. Besides reading on the internet for entertainment, Xian uses it to look for jobs or opportunities for a home business and once in a while, to communicate with relatives back in China. Kate's dad

spends a lot of time on the computer when he is free at home. Kate's parents do not watch much TV but watch movies downloaded from the internet on the computer. As for Kate, the only chance she uses the computer is to look up English words in the E-dictionary software bought from China. At the end period of my home visits, I taught Kate how to use Microsoft Word and send emails for the purpose of sending me her writings. Kate did have an email address but she never used it. She told me her friend helped her register it.

Xian habitually reads several Chinese newspapers. Some are free and she finds them helpful. She cuts and keeps a lot of articles about health procedures, cooking, parenting, and education. Xian once expressed her regret that she missed several pieces of a series of articles written by parents, talking about how their children got into Ivy League colleges after graduating from high school. She asserted that they were instructional even though her daughters may not necessarily be able to go there in the future. She once read several local English newspapers recommended by the instructor when she was in ELSA program, but she no longer does so. Xian tries to use English as much as possible to talk to people like shop assistants and bank clerks. She is the person who handles most of the family affairs despite the fact that it is actually difficult for her without the language tool. She told me her Chinese friends are her main information sources.

Xian is a rather strict mother in terms of her parenting style. Schooled in a harsh traditional Chinese educational system, Xian holds very firm beliefs in hard work, high standards, and persistence. She started Chinese literacy education for Kate when she was one year old. She read to her storybooks, taught her Chinese characters, and when Kate was asked to practice handwriting, Xian was so strict that she did not allow any errors or scribbles. All written work and her books and stationeries must be always neat and tidy. Whenever the work was not satisfactory, Xian demanded that Kate redo it.

Though Xian is very strict with Kate, she also speaks to her as to a grown-up. And Kate is obviously a good helper to her mum in many ways. She is such a careful girl that she can always respond to her mother's inquiry, such as where a certain item is or something they did before. Xian asks her for opinions when they talk about family affairs. With her English improves, Kate helps her mum with language problems more and more in everyday life.

Xian is the person who supervises the children's study at home. She actually looks after the whole household, though she has been longing for an outside-home job all the time. She had a little work experience in China and in Japan before coming to Canada. During the time of my visits, she worked in different places as a factory worker or an office janitor for short periods of time. Before her younger daughter went into kindergarten, she looked after her at home by herself. Her decision to send her to day care was more or less influenced by my child's day care experience from which he learned English quickly. Xian thus had more free time to think about either finding a job or starting a family business. The latter has been her preference. She and her husband once considered buying a laundry shop and once the Japanese restaurant where her husband worked, both without results. At the end of my home visits, she was investigating in a flower and grocery shop and thinking of taking it over and running it by themselves. If that really happens, she undoubtedly will be extremely busy, and consequently will have much less time to attend to the children's study, or even their daily lives. As she anticipated one day, "If you want to see me then, you'll have to come to my shop." Fortunately, she thought, Kate was old enough to take care of her own study.

4.1.5 Self-chosen and assigned extracurricular activities

Kate has few self-chosen leisure time activities though she does have her own hobbies. For instance, she likes collecting and has a good collection of bookmarks and stickers. She is almost always assigned by her mother a variety of learning-related tasks. At the beginning of my visit to her home, she has been learning *English Smart in 90 Days* both by herself and from a tutor, the daughter of the landlady who helped her with English learning. In addition to the day-by-day assignments designed in the book, Kate was asked by her mum to write down all the new vocabulary from each unit, look them up on the computer using the E-dictionary software named *Kingsoft PowerWord* they bought from China, jot down the Chinese translation (see the insert pictures), learn them by heart, go to the tutor (three times a week for half an hour each time), and prepare for a daily dictation given by her mum. Any misspelled words are required to be rewritten ten times each as "punishment". Teaching in China for years, I can easily recognize the typical Chinese teaching manner in Kate's home. Xian told me several times that Kate is not learning consciously and willingly, so she sometimes "just teach

her a lesson". Her intention was to let Kate know what she was supposed to do and not to do.

Figure 2: Kate's vocabulary work at home

<p>27/ dizzy</p> <p>ditch 沟, tao-bi</p> <p>trouser 裤子</p> <p>ankle 踝</p> <p>uniform 统一的, 校服</p> <p>demand 要求</p> <p>dragging 拖曳用的</p> <p>puke 呕吐</p> <p>handy 手边的, 方便</p> <p>scuffle 混战</p> <p>muffling 包, 蒙住</p> <p>squeal 长声尖叫</p> <p>so-call 所谓</p> <p>twirl 转动的</p> <p>firm 公司坚定的</p> <p>shove 推</p> <p>fudge 梦话</p> <p>stiff 硬的</p> <p>flickering 闪烁</p> <p>blush 脸红</p>	<p>27/ dizzy Sunday</p> <p>mooch 走</p> <p>link</p> <p>link 挽</p> <p>luxury 华丽的</p> <p>jangle 吵架</p> <p>dab 擦</p> <p>beam 笑</p> <p>postal 邮政的</p> <p>definitely 绝对</p> <p>8 words</p>	<p>May 5 June 2007</p> <p>scrawl 乱涂</p> <p>grime 污垢</p> <p>Scanning 扫描</p> <p>quid 硬币, 零物</p> <p>childminder 照看孩子的</p> <p>scoop up 气起</p> <p>duvet 羽绒毛</p> <p>Zoom lens 变焦镜头</p> <p>dump 倾倒</p> <p>trendy 流行的</p> <p>hipster 世面灵通的人</p> <p>Smudgy 脏污的</p> <p>lime 酸木梨</p> <p>gel 成冻, 胶</p> <p>wrinkle 皱纹</p> <p>henna 红褐色</p> <p>practically 实际上</p> <p>stud 大头钉</p> <p>mutter 咕哝</p> <p>flaster 狼狽</p> <p>streaked 有条纹的</p> <p>stain 污点</p> <p>tan 棕, 色的</p>
	<p>June 3 dizzy</p> <p>brick 砖</p> <p>stuff 材料</p> <p>iron 铁 插电的电熨斗</p> <p>chirp 唧唧叫的</p> <p>mood 情绪</p> <p>iceberg 冰山</p> <p>vast 巨大的</p> <p>slab 混凝土</p> <p>workshop 工厂</p> <p>grab 抓, 月庄 grabby</p> <p>skew 歪斜的</p> <p>straggle 散乱</p> <p>lupine 白羽扁豆</p> <p>delivery 递送</p> <p>sack 牛皮纸袋</p> <p>clay 粘土</p> <p>courier 运快信的人</p>	

Figure 3: Kate's vocabulary improvement assignment includes hundreds of pages like this.

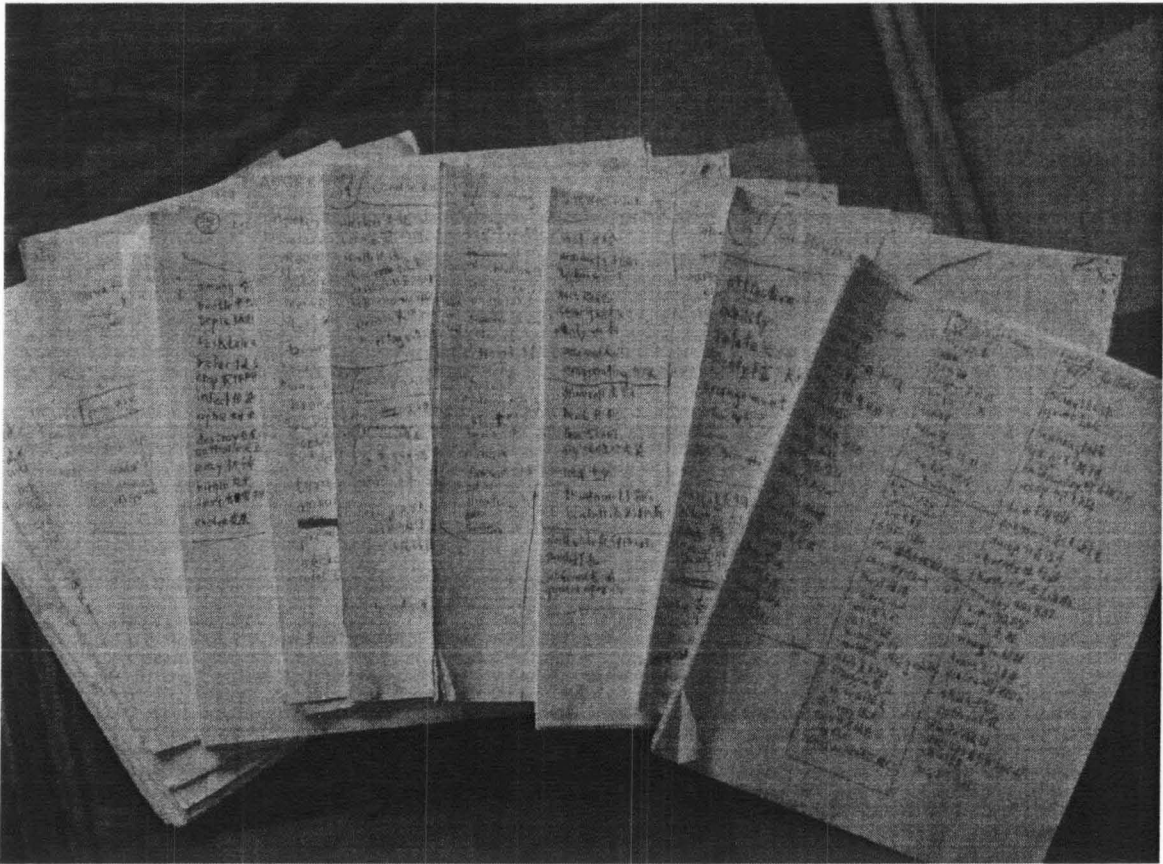


Figure 4: Kate was required to rewrite the misspelled words.

Day 56 The CN Tower

skyline 地平线 skyline skyline skyline skyline skyline skyline skyline
 purpose 目的 purpose purpose purpose purpose purpose purpose purpose
 telecommunication 电讯 telecommunication telecommunication telecommunication
 antenna 天线 antenna antenna antenna antenna antenna antenna antenna
 apex 顶点 apex apex apex apex apex apex apex apex apex
 reception 接待 reception reception reception reception reception reception
 glass 玻璃 glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass
 breathtaking 令人叹为观止 breathtaking breathtaking breathtaking breathtaking
 view 景色 view view view view view view view view view
 revolve 旋转 revolve revolve revolve revolve revolve revolve revolve
 simulate 模拟 simulate simulate simulate simulate simulate simulate simulate
 various 各种各样的 various various various various various various various
 structure 结构 structure structure structure structure structure structure

x

pg 4

Even for entertainment activities, Xian has requirements. I once brought Kate some jigsaw puzzles given by a neighbour but never expected her to finish one, because each had a thousand pieces. Kate finished the first one in about a month's time with a little help from other family members, and the second one in around twenty days almost all by herself (See insert pictures). It was a surprise to me. Xian told me Kate did over 80% of the job and she urged her several times in the process, telling her if she does something, she should persist to the end.

Before *English Smart*, Xian's brother-in-law, who's been in Canada since he was young, bought Kate a set of *Master Reader* (4 levels, see insert picture), a computer-based English learning materials. Kate used the first – blue level – before she turned to *English Smart*, and felt it helpful in improving her pronunciation and spelling. She did not really cover the reading materials supplemented to the book and the other three levels.

Xian's landlady is from Taiwan. She is very nice to Xian's family and likes them living there. Her daughter (Shaohua, pseudonym) is a music graduate from UBC but currently stays at home because of health problems. Under the request of Xian, Shaohua agreed to tutor Kate in English for half an hour three times per week. They thus started *English Smart*. According to Kate, the tutoring was focusing on reading comprehension and grammar explanation. Journal writing started later, one essay per week and was kept for a year until the end of tutoring. Over a year's time, Kate finished all the six levels. Shaohua felt she could not help Kate any more and suggested that Xian find a native tutor to teach Kate English writing.

Figure 5: Kate completed two a-thousand-piece jigsaw puzzles in less than two months

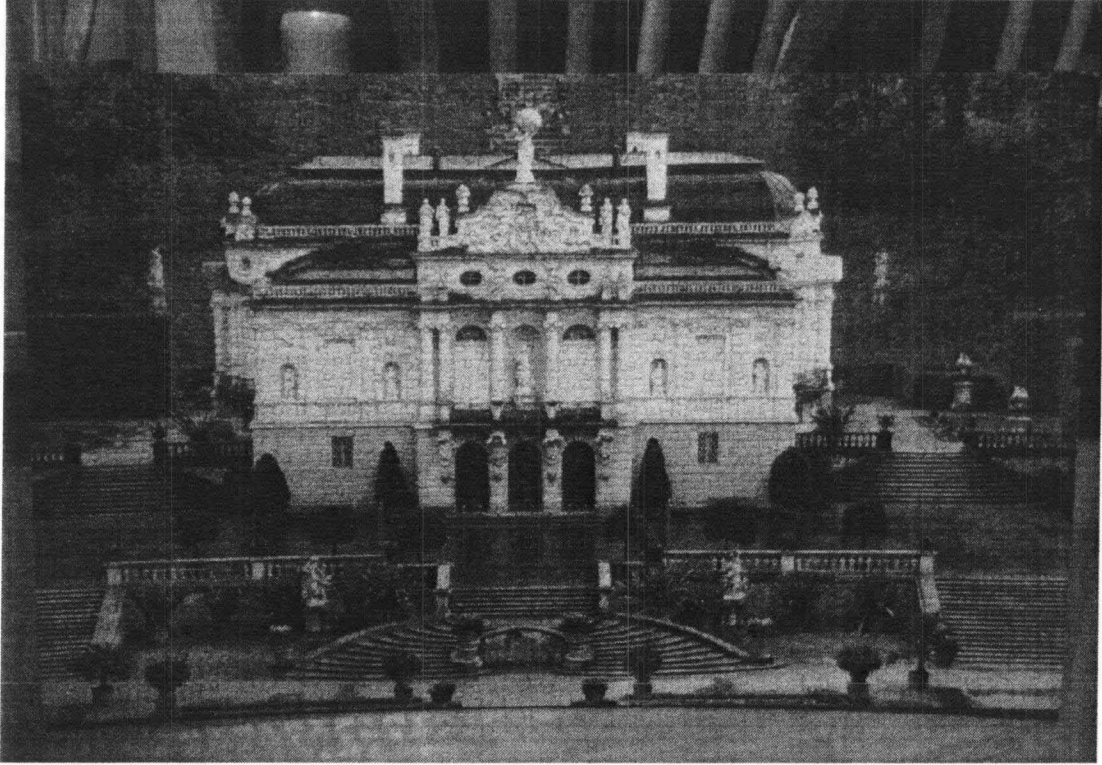
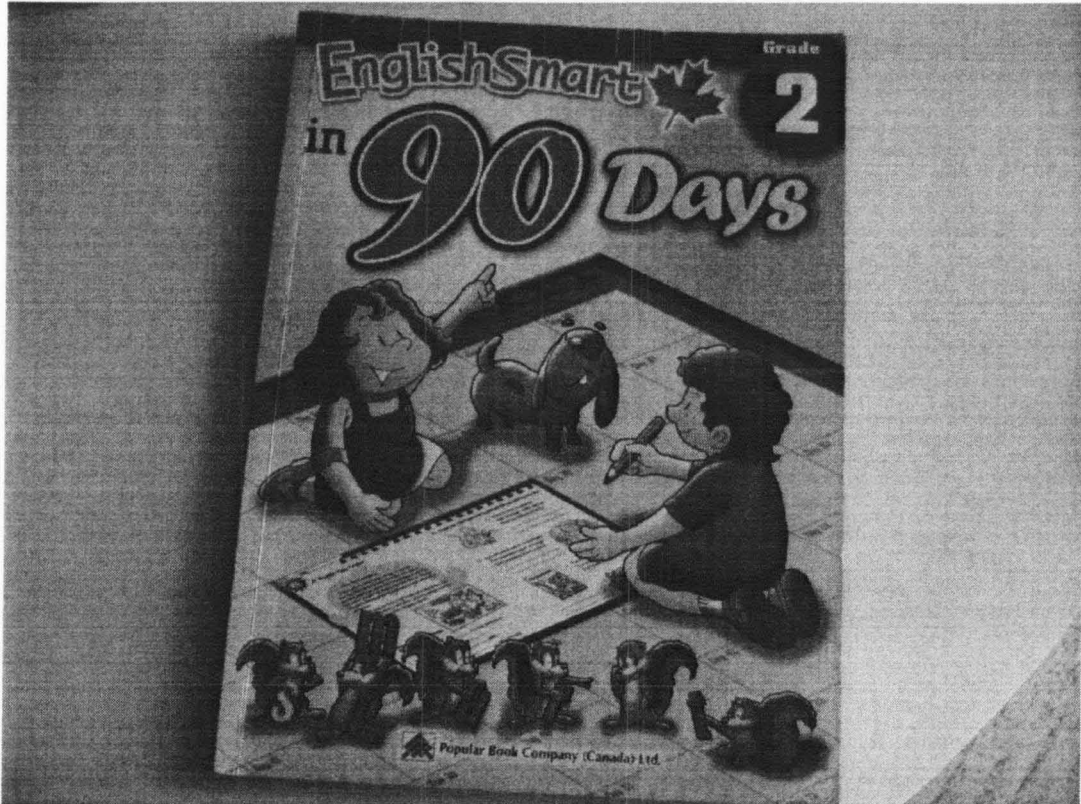


Figure 6: Kate's English learning materials



The new tutor (Ian, pseudonym) was introduced by the mum of Kate's classmate who lives in the same building. Ian speaks English with an Australian accent. He tutors several students on the weekend and maintains a good reputation among parents. He diagnosed Kate's reading at the level of Grade 6 while writing between Grade 3 and Grade 4. This evaluation corresponds to the first tutor's (Shaohua) assessment. Ian decided to choose the Grade 6 book of the same series of *English Smart* but from the new edition for Kate. His focus is on grammar and writing. Kate is required to write on a given topic every week. Ian checks and further instructs her how to improve it, e.g. how to employ complex sentences.

One aspect of this research I hoped to make clear was my intervention in the children's English literacy learning. My previous teaching experience in China seemed to influence the two mums' expectation that I would supervise the children's English learning. They talked to me about their children's English literacy learning, which was what I needed for my study, and they also asked me for advice. I had the idea at the very beginning of the observation that I should not give any comments of mine to change what was happening in the two families. My intervention could only take place after I finished my data collection. And the results of the intervention could only be used for further studies, if applicable. For that reason, when I felt it was the appropriate time, under Xian's request, I introduced Kate to an intermediate level workbook of *Focus on Grammar*. It was Xian who was extremely excited about it and said she would do the exercises after Kate finished them first. She believed I know best and that kind of book is something she has been looking for. In fact, she was once clearly informed by Kate's teacher that they do not teach grammar at school when she expressed her worries and raised such a question. Her own English learning experience, the same as mine, impressed us deeply that grammar is important. Rules are rules, and rules must be always followed precisely.

This cultural resonance appeared because we, Xian and I, are from the same cultural background and educated in the similar education system. As an experienced teacher, I can easily tell what these Chinese parents want and how good they would feel about getting each grammar point done based on that test-oriented grammar-focused English teaching and learning curriculum. However, this is not to say I approve of such an approach. Having experienced the disadvantage of an overly grammar-stressed pedagogy, I know there are a number of ways to learn English more interestingly, more

effectively, and more easily. From both my observation and Kate's journal writing, I got the impression that Kate did not really like the tasks assigned by her mom. She was experiencing "disconnections between parental expectations and school expectations" and "had to juggle between two different kinds of instructions – the traditional Chinese teaching at home and the mainstream Canadian instruction at school" (Li, 2005, p.15).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Kate does not have many spare time activities. During the period of my home visits, she went for piano lessons once a week. She does not often watch TV. She occasionally watched Chinese version cartoons with her younger sister until recently, when she started watching a program called *Teenage Witch* under the request of "watching some English program" by her new tutor. Except for her homework, she spends most of her time playing with her younger sister, including reading her storybooks, both in Chinese and English. On the weekends, she sometimes goes shopping with her mum.

Kate is fond of outdoor activities from my observation. She would never miss any opportunities to take part in school events. For almost all vacations, she joined the KidSafe Program² and enjoyed it a lot. Her opportunities to swim and skate are mainly from those activities. Many children have miserable experiences in their first time camping, but Kate had a wonderful time in the school-organized week-long camping trip which was her first time. In the several times we went on outings together, her enthusiasm and enjoyment impressed me. During our trip to Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park, Kate actively took us from place to place with the help of a guide map. She seemed to have little difficulty in reading the guidelines and was eager to cover all what was happening there.

At the age of eleven years old, Kate does not keep many toys any more. She told me she had never had any electronic games. Her classmates once asked her why she had no D.S. games (Nintendo handheld game system) and embarrassed her by questioning whether it was because her family was poor. She insisted that those are boy's games and she does not like them at all. Besides, she does not think it is right to bring those games to school because it is, in fact, not allowed. She can tell that some students just want to show off. To her great pleasure, her dad bought her a new laptop from the USA for her Christmas present this year. She felt it was something good and necessary to learn about.

Generally, Kate follows a traditional Chinese learning style which is highly valued by her mum. No matter whether she likes it or not, she must work hard on it and finish all tasks in a timely manner. This practice was supported and even enhanced by Kate's Taiwanese tutor who shares the same cultural history.

4.2 Ling

4.2.1 Family profile

Table 2: Ling's family

Family members	Age	Previous occupation	Current occupation	Education level	Time in Canada (year)
Father	49	Administrative staff	Self-employed businessman	Post-secondary China	8 months (cumulative)
Mother (Lian)	49	Administrative staff	Housewife	High school	2 yrs
Ping	24	---	University student	Undergraduate, Canada	4 yrs
Ling	7	---	---	Grade 2, Canada	2 yrs

4.2.2 Living environment and home setting

Ling's family lives in a new house in a middle-class neighbourhood in Burnaby. It is close to SFU for the convenience of Ping and for the proximity of a top elementary school for Ling to attend. The house is three-storied and five people lived in it at the time of study visit. Ling's father looks after the family business in China, and pays frequent visits to the family here. Two Chinese students live with Ling, his mother and his elder brother for most of the time.

Ling's house is decorated with framed art works from China, matching the luxurious classical hard wood furniture shipped from their Chinese home. Western style ornaments are seen in the kitchen and the washrooms which were said to be there when they bought the house. The yards were delicately redesigned by Ling's dad. The lawns are usually well maintained with several vegetable patches and flowerbeds along the sides.

In the living room of Ling's home, I saw books from school once in a while. Some Chinese storybooks are piled on the lower level of a tea table. Various pieces of mail are left on the table or on the couch. Video games and electronic game devices are on the TV stand, including the latest ones bought from China by Ling's dad and those bought in Canada by Ping. Right after I finished my formal observations, Ling's dad came home for a visit. On Boxing Day, he and Ping bought a brand new home projector and a Wii which were put in the living room, taking place of the "old" TV.

4.2.3 Home language use and first language maintenance

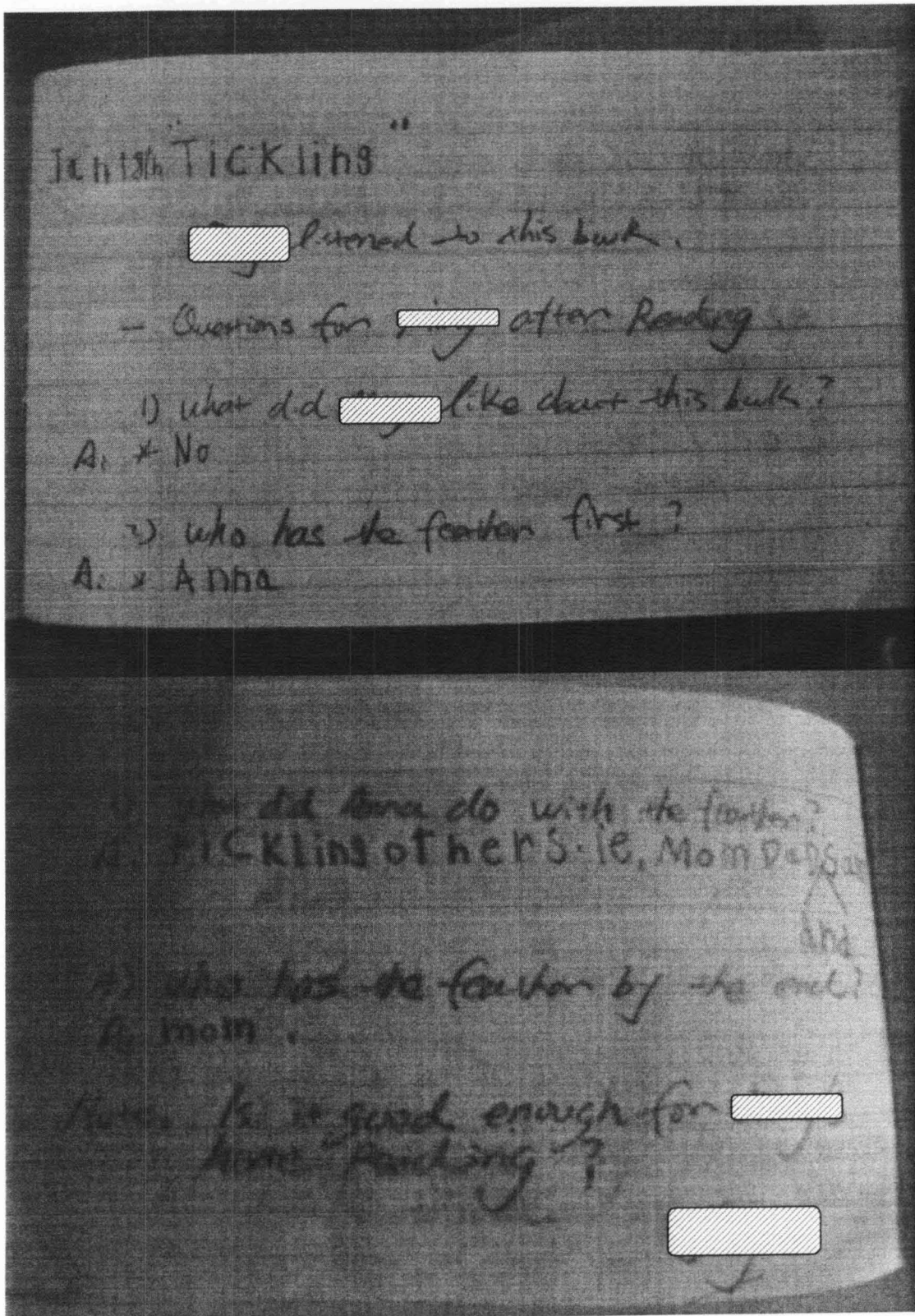
Nobody in Ling's family has an English name. Ping recalled that he did not use an English name the first time going abroad (for his case, it was six years ago to England), and thus he does not want to take the trouble to change it. The same thing happened again with Ling when he came to Canada with his mum. Without an English name, he entered kindergarten. When Ping and his mum talked to the school teacher about giving Ling an English name upon entering Grade 1, the teacher did not suggest they do that. His Chinese name has thus been kept. There is another good reason for this, which is also mentioned by Ping, that their names in Chinese pinyin (Chinese phonetic symbols) are easy to read by English speakers without any confusion about pronunciation. That is quite true. Though Chinese pinyin symbols are mostly the same as the English alphabets in writing, they are varied in pronunciation. Many Chinese names are oddly pronounced by non-Chinese speakers and sometimes are even hard to recognize.

In Ling's home, the three family members (four if the dad is here) speak in their hometown dialect – Nanjingnese, while the other two home-stay students speak standard Chinese. Ling and his brother occasionally switch from their hometown dialect to standard Chinese when talking to the two resident students. One of the students has an English name, but is not addressed by it in Ling's home. Both of them are addressed in a typical Chinese way of adding a "xiao (means 'young')" to their surnames. Almost no communication in English happens among the five people in Ling's household.

Ping was already a university student when the family first came to Canada. He had the experience of studying alone in England. Since both his parents know little English, he has been a great help at home. From buying the house to paying monthly bills, he handles most of the external family affairs.

Ping seems to be too busy to supervise Ling's schoolwork and home assignments. The fact that Ling never did any homework for the entire kindergarten year annoyed Lian badly when she got to know it. Like Donny in Purcell-Gates's study (1997) missing the kindergarten year because his mother had no knowledge of it, Lian had no idea at all whether there was homework or not, and nobody told her about it, either. Her impression was, as in many Chinese parents' view, that Canadian students just play, and do not have much homework. Therefore, it seemed to be acceptable to her for kindergarteners to have no after-school work. She was so upset that she insisted that Ping goes to Ling's school once a week to meet his teacher since the beginning of Grade 1. Lian also initiated using a school-home communication book in the hope that teacher could write down what should be done at home every day. But the plan did not seem to be appreciated by the school teacher. Ping was demanded to check Ling's homework every day. Regrettably, as a fourth year university student, he could hardly afford the time to read to Ling or listen to him reading on a daily base. Ling's home reading log showed that, for one day, Ping accompanied Ling's home reading, asked him questions (all written down, see inserted pictures) and commented on his reading. Brief comments continued for several times. And then, Ling just signed for himself, copying the previous comment words like "Very good!" or "Good job!". I asked him whether it was fine to do that and got an ambiguous answer "hmm . . ." and he turned to another topic soon. Ling's manoeuvre in dealing with his mum's questioning about language is also indicated in other situations. Whenever his mum asks him "What does it mean?" or "What did that guy say?", Ling usually responses by saying, "How do I know? It's French." Lian knows sometimes he is not telling the truth.

Figure 7: Ling's home-reading record (real names are covered)



Ling was five years old when he came to Canada. He learned to read and write some simple Chinese characters in China. Lian started reading storybook to him very early and they have read many books, including some sets of child's version of classical works. Like most Chinese parents, Lian hopes Ling will retain Chinese after coming here. Ling was sent to weekend Chinese schools for two terms, but quit at last because "he doesn't want to go".

Before my formal observation, Ling and his mum went back to China for a summer vacation. During the two months, Ling was enrolled in an Olympic Math program, Chinese lessons, and a Karate course. The math and Chinese lessons are both full time, several hours a day, five days a week, including extra homework. Lian intended to take Ling to swimming lessons too but later gave up because the pool was too crowded. English-related activities were not under consideration during that vacation. However, I clearly remember Lian once asked me about camps here in Vancouver which were not organized by Chinese societies. She hoped that Ling would sharpen his English and learn about Canadian culture in those activities. It seems to be a common practice among Chinese immigrant families to send children back to China during long vacations to learn Chinese. A broadly accepted consensus is that language is better learned in the authentic environment where people using the target language.

I witnessed a big attitude change of Ling during my study. For his first year here in Canada, Ling spent only two and a half hours every day in kindergarten and stayed with his mum most of the time. His English did not progress much, according to his mum's report. At that time, Ling still requested and listened to her reading Chinese books to him. After entering Grade 1, the time spent at school became longer. On the suggestion of Ling's schoolteacher, he was sent to the community centre after school, taking part in various activities to sharpen his language skills. For whatever reason, Ling's language attitude changed dramatically. He intentionally avoided using his first language outside home. One day Lian told me Ling stopped his dad rudely from speaking Chinese in front of others and refused to translate the teacher's words for him. It was a shock to them as well as to me.

Connecting to what I learned from interviewing Ling, I found he frankly expressed his disinterest in continuing to learn Chinese. Though his parents gave him many examples to convince him that knowing Chinese language would be a great privilege in the future, Ling just did not care. He stopped talking to his parents in public places, since

he had to speak in Chinese to them. He refused to bring Chinese food for lunch and he did not listen to his mum's story reading in Chinese any more.

Although there were researchers assuming some parents might believe that the purpose of using the minority language for literacy is to maintain speakers of that language in an inferior social position (Temple et al., 2008), nowadays, more and more minority people choose to preserve and feel privileged to know their L1 in addition to English. Of all the languages spoken in Canada, Chinese is the most spoken language after English and French (Statistics Canada, 2007). Chinese seems to be commonly recognized as one of the most important languages in the future world. Ling's refusal to use and continue learning it must have its untold reasons. The "language shyness" (Krashen's, 1998) seemed to appear to Ling. The deep reason, Cummins (2006) argues, is the assumption that "literacy" refers only to literacy in the dominant language - "English"- which may cause students to internalize a sense of shame in relation to their home language and culture.

4.2.4 Home literacy activities: Computer use and other reading and writing

Given Ling's present age and English level, it is a critical time for his parents to read to him. However, Lian and her husband cannot meet this need. Ling's brother, a fourth year university student, is just too busy to manage it, either. Every time Lian talks about this, she feels helpless and upset. She is well aware of how important it is and she started to read to Ling Chinese books when he was only several months old. She told me Ling enjoyed that and they covered a large number of storybooks and some classical works. Ling could name every character and remember almost all the details. Chinese storybook reading had continued for a while after they came to Canada. But now Ling just wants to read English books. He reads by himself and on occasion, he reads to Lian which is required by both his mum and the school. To Lian's great regret, she is not able to understand anything.

Lian has tried very hard to find ways to facilitate Ling's homework, especially English literacy learning. She once used E-dictionary and web-dictionary to get Chinese translation and the real-person pronunciation function to check Ling's comprehension and reading. She listened to his home reading though she did not really understand anything, judging only by whether he read fluently or whether the tunes sounded beautiful. One can just imagine how time-consuming it is to do all these and how boring

it could be to Ling to learn in that way. What is even worse is how much actual help she can be. Lian takes Ling to the public library without any ideas which books to look for or recommend to him. Realizing that she cannot assist Ling effectively with English, Lian sincerely hopes she could help him form and develop good self-directed learning habits in several years' time so that he will be able to study consciously on his own initiative in his future school years.

At Ling's home, there is a laptop computer in the den and a desktop in the master bedroom upstairs. Ling's brother and the two live-in students each have their own laptops. The laptop in the den is almost always on. Ling's mum uses it to do stock trading, read Chinese web news, and communicate with Ling's dad when he is back in China. Lian surfs on several Chinese websites, reading news and health procedure articles and obtaining recipes. It did surprise me when I learned that Lian entered the stock market during the time of my regular home visit. She was excited to start and encouraged Ping to do it with her. She believed that she had sufficient experience in the Chinese stock market and her son knows English so they could work as a team. "Making money is one thing," Lian said, "the most important thing is for Ping to learn to do it."

Lian also reads some door-by-door delivered shopping ads for information. Having three university students living in the home, it is not very hard for Lian to get language help from them. With heavy load of housekeeping and daily life commitment, Lian feels it is hard for her to learn English, especially at her age. After coming to Canada, she attended the ELSA program for one month, and soon gave up because she found "it didn't help". She studied the Bible with a Chinese lady who came to her home once a week but she was not really engaged in it. She is not a religious person and claimed that she would not do anything more than just sitting and listening. Lian does not have many authentic opportunities to write English. Ping handles all family affairs which need to be done in English. Whenever necessary, she signed her name in Chinese characters. Lian's way of naming some supermarkets or department stores is unique but effective. To name some of them, the one that begins with 'Z' is 'Zellers'; the one that begins with 'W' is 'Winners'; the one that begins with 'S' is not 'Safeway' but 'Sears'; 'Safeway' is 'the foreigner's grocery store' while 'T & T' is 'the Chinese grocery store'; 'Superstore' is 'the store that offers no bags'. 'Wal-Mart' and 'Ikea' both have chain stores in China, so they both have Chinese names. 'Costco' is pronounced following the sound of Chinese pinyin. But for shops in big shopping malls, she mainly depends on

memorizing the relative position, colour, sign, and display of each. When asked whether she would like to learn English in the future if possible, she immediately replied, "Yes, of course." Her deep regret of not knowing English and strong desire of learning impressed me many times during our conversations. In my view, that sorrow exists in thousand of other new immigrant mothers like Lian, who have little knowledge of the new country, the language, and have few relatives or friends to help out, while maintaining common high expectations for the next generation.

Feeling a loss of contact with the outside world, Lian once worked in a laundry factory for a short time, but soon quit. Her husband does not want her to go out to work, and prefers that she looks after their sons well. Their business in China is running well and there is no need to worry about money. Lian was a capable person in her previous work and business. She is not enjoying her present life and sometimes feels unsatisfied about doing nothing here but rearing children. She said she had no other choice because of Ling. Her husband does not want them to go back to China, and no one else could look after Ling except herself.

4.2.5 Self-chosen and assigned extracurricular activities

Apparently different from Kate, Ling enjoyed more self-chosen leisure activities. It was a tough job to push Ling to do anything he dislikes, Lian said. She stopped sending him to Chinese school because he did not want to go. Every time when it was time to go for a swimming lesson or Scouts meeting, Lian had to persuade him hard before leaving home because Ling did not find them fun any more. Sometimes Lian has to promise a reward or extra praise as exchanges for those commitments. Skating is fine so far. Currently, Ling is interested in playing soccer and often requests his mum or brother to play with him, in addition to the soccer club events. Ling lately told Lian he wants to play hockey. Lian does not want to allow him immediately. She feels it is too much for herself and she is really tired of Ling's demands. Lian is clear that Ling is spoiled. It is almost impossible to turn down his demands or ask him to do anything he does not want to do. Lian was glad to find an after-school club for Ling to go from Monday to Thursday so he did not have to come home early and pester her. Ling liked it at first, but his interest was waning and sometimes he just did not want to go.

Since Ling's homework continues to be a headache for the family, Lian thought it would be good for me to check his writing and listen to him reading when I home visited

them. To her great disappointment, Ling just did not want to follow her advice. I could see his reluctance to sit down with me even for 15 minutes. And finally, when he was asked to read to me one day, he claimed it was something he was afraid of most. His mum was so angry and criticized him, “你就是不想学习. 就是想玩. 你最好是一天到晚玩.”(You just don't want to study. You just want to play. It is best for you to play all day long.)

I agree with Lian that Ling is a very smart boy. He learns fast and has a good memory. Among his work from school, I found a worksheet titled “How to be . . .” and four boxes each categorized “Kind”, “Friendly”, “Welcoming”, and “Helpful” (See inserted figure). Ling clearly wrote something in each box but it made no sense to me. He interpreted everything he wrote and I was surprised. The sheet was from his Grade 1 schoolwork, and he could remember everything though it was not correct English at all. However, a correspondence between grapheme and phoneme (Purcell-Gates, 1996) is obviously present in this worksheet. Ling could not only make up the words, but also he could interpret them exactly a year later. Ling's other reading and writing indicate that his knowledge of phonics (orthographic knowledge or letter-to-sound relationship) (Temple et al., 2008; Solsken, 1993) has developed noticeably with his learning progress in school.

One can see spelling mistakes were many in Ling's writings. His “invented spelling”, according to Temple et al. (2008), is useful in several ways and thus should be encouraged.

- 1) It leads children to focus carefully on the spoken language they want to write down and practice finding its units of sound.
- 2) It challenges children to think of the relationships between letters and sounds.
- 3) It provides useful diagnostic information to the teacher about the children's growth as writers and even as readers. (p.114)

This also explained why Ling's misspellings were not often corrected by his teacher, because “correction will only serve to dampen enthusiasm and diminish active participation” (p.491).

Figure 8: Ling's worksheet from Gr. 1 (real name are covered)

Name:

ü



How To Be...

Kind	Friendly
<p>win swen Jopiat that p[REDACTED] you help to pick-up.</p>	<p>My moms and go to mom's house and I said you want to drink.</p>
Welcoming	Helpful
<p>that in one peopl- nen in school you have to say Welcome.</p>	<p>win swen don't no how to tie shoelace I help him to tie it.</p>

Ling's interpretation of the sheet

Kind - When someone dropped their purse you help to pick it up.

Friendly - My mom's friend go[went] to mom's house and I said you want to drink.

Welcoming - There are one people new in school you have to say welcome.

Helpful - When someone don't know how to tie his shoelace I help him to tie it.

Ling's concepts of writing and print (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Temple et al., 2008) were also well demonstrated in Ling's self-initiated chapter story writing about "Cheezy", a hamster kept in his class. This significant event happened during my observation. Ling's mum told me excitedly one day over the phone that Ling asked her for a composition book. She gave him one which is for Chinese composition and Ling wrote his stories in it, all by himself, not required by school teacher or anyone else. The layout of a book, title for each chapter, knowledge of uppercase and lowercase letters, knowledge of punctuation, the short forms "Ch1", "Ch2", and "Ch3" instead of "Chapter ...", the first letter wordart of each chapter, and the illustrations all clearly showed some conventional conceptualization of writing and print. It really looked like a storybook (See figure below). Compared with the worksheet from Grade 1, Ling's English literacy level had improved tremendously. Lian attributed all the progress to his school education.

Compared to Kate, Ling's spare time activities are many and various. He has kept taking swimming lessons and goes to "loonie skating" every week. He has also joined a soccer club and Scouts Canada. His spontaneous entertainment includes going to indoor golf, movie theatres and other places with his big brother.

Getting to know about Ling's toys took me some time. He has almost all the most popular games. At his home, I saw MEGA BLOCKS, NEO, SHIFTERS, table soccer and numerous electronic games (See inserted pictures). A latest Nintendo Wii (a popular video game system) was purchased during my research time. I saw Play Station 2, "Wii Sports" games which includes around ten popular sports games and "TEEN ADOLESCENTS" which includes Guitar Hero, Wireless Kramer, Striker Controller, and Legends of Rock. He updates them frequently. Toy weapons, dinosaur models have long been abandoned in the toy box at the room corner. Tamagotchi was favored and then disposed of during my home visits. Ping commented that Ling could play those video games even better than him and the other students living in his house. Ling learns very fast and is so good at them. Lian told me they bought those games to entertain Ling, but feels pleased that he is not really addicted to them though he loves playing.

Figure 9: Ling's self-initiated chapter story writing

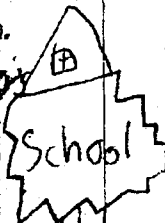
Chezy's best birthday ever | Ch 1
Today is Cheezy's
birthday. His mom
buyd a top for him.
His dad buyd a soccer ball
for him. Cheezy
played and played.
Now its mi ove time.
They went to buy
more toys. Soon
they got home and
Cheezy played with
his dad and mom
with his new toys
and Cheezy went to bed.



happy
Birthday
to you



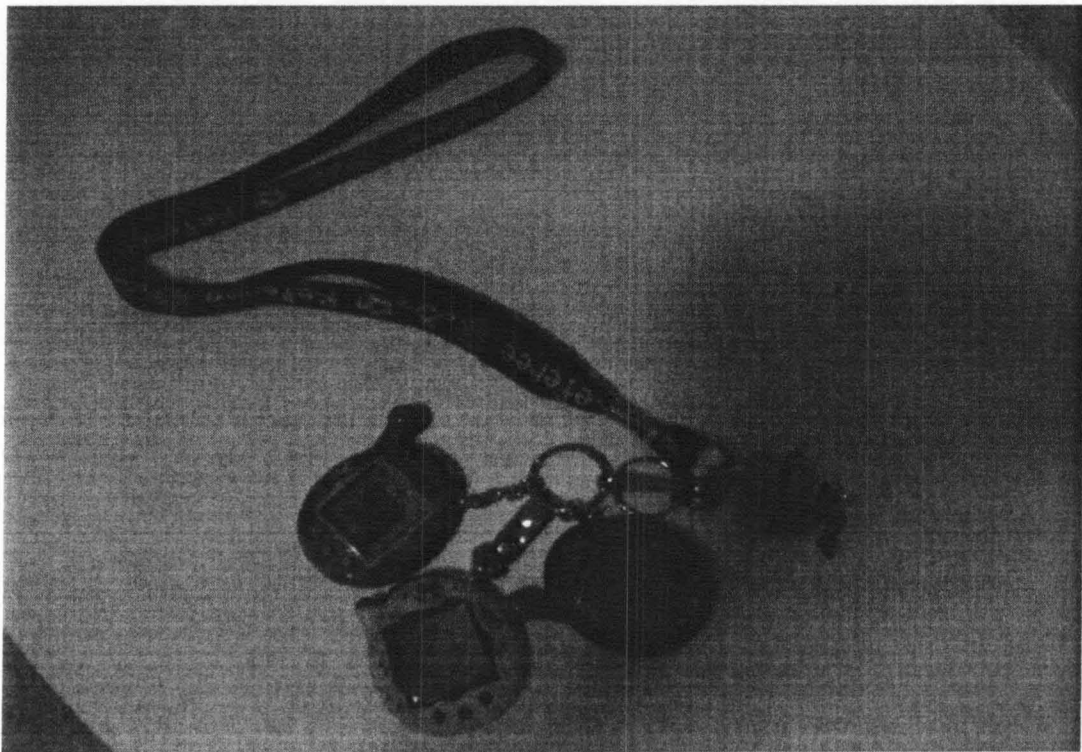
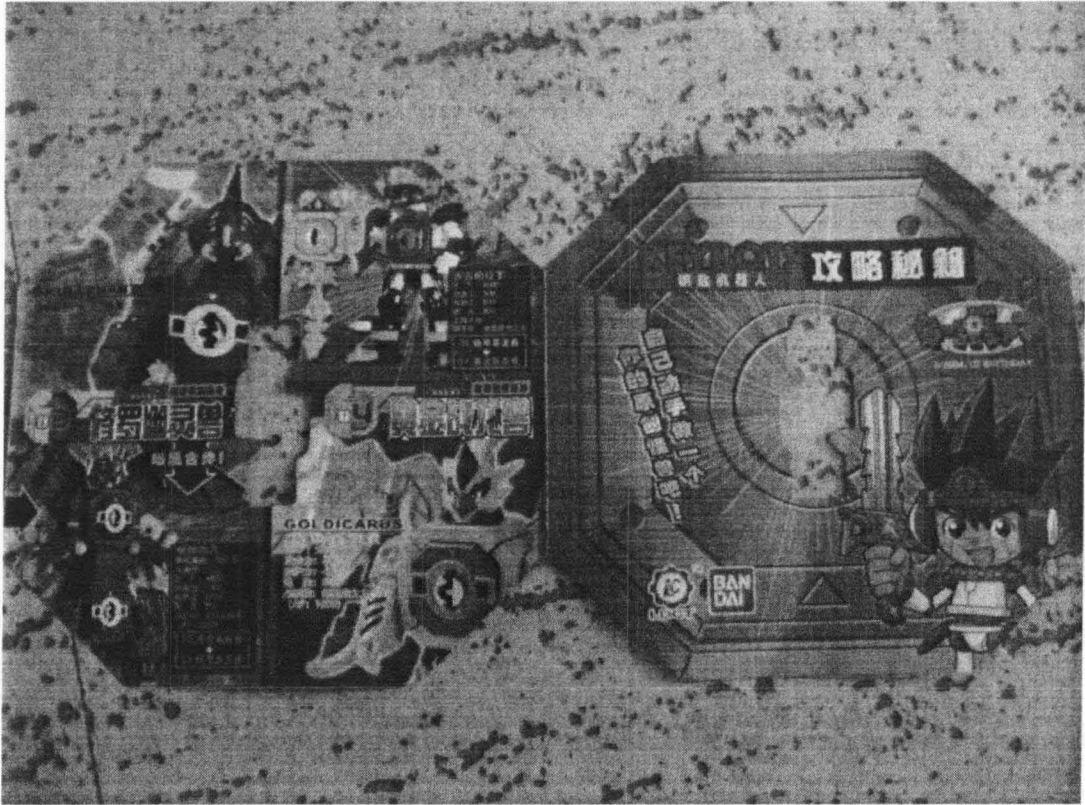
School time | Ch 2
Cheezy had his
birthday. Now its time
for school. Cheezy
is in Gr 1. Cheezy
saw the class room.
It was so big. Cheezy
best thing was math.
When Cheezy got
home he had school time
dinner he played
bingo with mom and
dad and Cheezy
went to bed.



School
Cheezy's
class
room



Figure 10: Some of Ling's toys



4.3 Comparison and contrast

I presented above the collected data of two focal children from home visit observation. Though coming from the same ethnic and cultural background, these two children as well as the families are different in many ways. Socioeconomic conditions, family histories, parenting styles, and gender differences all shaped their different literacy experiences in out-of-school contexts. In the next section, I will present some commonalities and differences of the two focal families.

4.3.1 Home language and literacy

Speaking about names, how children are addressed at home is another issue that attracted my attention. Many Chinese immigrant families choose English names for their children, or they are addressed by Chinese nicknames. My observation shows that Jane has a nickname but it is rarely used. In these two focal families, all the four children are more often than not called by their full Chinese names. It is common that in China, people whose names contain two characters are more often addressed by full names than those of three characters are. When I asked about this, both mothers hesitated in responding. Instead, they showed me a meek smile, implying that they cannot speak English well and prefer not to do so.

Krashen's (1998) analysis of "language shyness" indicated that speakers of a heritage language become shy about using the language when they are criticized. It may explain, discursively, these mothers' lack of confidence in speaking English because of worrying about making mistakes. They may not have been in "critical environments" (Beynon et al., 2003, p.20) or ever been criticized, but I find it is a very common attitude among Chinese people that they worry about not being able to speak English properly and thus are reluctant to speak it.

Communication in home settings in these two families was mostly in Chinese. Fantini (1976, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984, p.18) found that the interlocutor is the "principal determinant" of language choice, and switching between languages is unconscious and done with little difficulty. Parents' language proficiency sometimes limits the home language use to only their mother tongue. The fact that neither mother in these families speaks English and that they are the children's most frequent interlocutors can be taken as the reasons for the children's (unconscious) using Chinese at home. The deliberate language planning in immigrants' homes described by Chumak-

Horbatsch' (1984) does not exist in many Chinese immigrant families. It is unrealistic for new immigrant adults who have language obstacles to make a bilingual or "English only" rule at home even if they wished to do so.

According to Wells (1980, cited in Chumak-Horbatsch, 1984), strategy selection is the reflection of mother's attitudes towards language and child rearing. Though living conditions vary sharply, neither family hesitated to spend money on daily expenses. Good food, toys, clothes, and school supplies are never short. At least once a week in both homes, children were taken to eat outside the home. In those family events, children played active roles. They picked the restaurants (usually non-Chinese ones) and ordered the food. I witnessed Kate's and Ling's familiarity with and expertise in ordering (in English) their favoured food. Kate's mum (Xian) could name some oft-chosen items and is happy to learn more from the children, while Ling's mum could just tell from the pictures and she interpreted them in Chinese. Usually she just paid for whatever Ling ordered without bothering to know what they are. Ling sometimes told her in Chinese. Things are easier at McDonald's because it is very popular in China and most people know the food sold there.

In both homes, toys are many and usually kept in toy boxes neatly. Toy styles demonstrate some apparent gender preferences. Stuffed dolls are the toys of choice for Kate, while e-games, sports games, dinosaurs, and toy weapons and warriors are the themes of Ling's. Kate has been required to be organized since young. She often helps Xian clean up or just does it by herself. She has formed a habit to have her belongings well organized. At Ling's home, it is Lian who does most of the cleanup. Lian sometimes complained but found it hard to ask boys to be always organized. Here a gender difference emerged also from parents' requirement to children's behaviour. It is acceptable for a boy to be unorganized, not for a girl.

4.3.2 Home-school contact

Contacts between both families and the children's schools are minimal. Besides intake interviews (parent-teacher conferences) every semester, both mothers initiated a meeting once with the school teachers. Unfortunately, neither of them felt the meeting was satisfying or of much help. Due to the fact that both mothers have language barriers in communicating in English, Xian had her landlady's daughter, Kate's first tutor, go with her, and Lian had her elder son go with her. Both meetings lasted a short time.

In Xian's case, she reported the teacher gave very fast and brief answers to her questions and assured her that everything was good with Kate. Xian did not feel really happy about the teacher's "exaggerated" praise. She said she knew her daughter was not that good, but the teacher just did not want to talk more. She feels Canadian teachers do not care (same findings in Li, 2003, 2008) if the students are not good enough. In China, parents can visit school teachers without setting up appointments and teachers always have something to tell the parents what they should do and how the children can be better and better. Parents feel good in the sense that their children are paid attention to and they are expected to be outstanding. Most importantly, parents like Xian perceive that Chinese teachers care.

Lian fully relies on her elder son in communicating with school. They were once called on by school and were twice (during my home visit) issued Behaviour Report because of Ling's misbehaviour at school (I am indebted to the family for sharing these with me). They did not feel very upset meeting with the principal who did not blame them (which would probably happen in Chinese schools). Lian is annoyed by having no means to communicate with the school teachers, and not knowing much about Ling's school performance, but in one of our conversations she sounded truly happy about and convinced by the comments made by Ling's Grade 1 teacher. She felt the teacher knew Ling very well and the comments were fair enough.

Both Xian and Lian hopes that the school can provide Chinese service like in many other places (e.g. banks, department stores) to assist communication between school and Chinese parents. Lian recalled several years ago when the family sent Ping to study in England, the school in England sent staff to China every year, holding conferences to report to parents about their children's study life overseas. She feels it is the school's job to let the parents know about the child's school performance and does not feel it good here since she has no idea of those things.

Throughout my investigation, only three school materials were found have other language translation in addition to the original English version: one was Parent Donation Program with Chinese translation on the back of English page; one was the school handbook with a Chinese version and a Korean version about ESL program, not other information; the other was Emergency Preparedness Plan with only indications, "Important information. Please have this translated", in Chinese among several other unofficial languages.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I presented my observation data of two focal families separately but under same subtitles first, and then some commonalities were described by comparing the two families. Further discussion on those results will be conducted in the next chapter.

4.5 Notes

¹ Family profile adopted the model used in Guofang Li's (2002) *"East is East, West is West"*?

² KidSafe Project: A registered charity launched in 1993 with the mission to provide nurturing safe havens for at-risk inner-city elementary school students when schools are traditionally closed. Currently, it is running in five Vancouver elementary schools. Retrieved from <http://www.kidsafe.ca/index.html> on Feb 19, 2008.

Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Summary of findings

Two families from different immigration categories were deliberately selected, considering that existing literacy research on Chinese immigrants has not covered these specific circumstances. Addressing their commonalities with other Chinese immigrant families, I tried to find out more distinctive features in terms of parents' education background, literate level in both L1 and L2, and parental choice of literacy facilitation for their children.

5.1.1 Family issues

Kate's dad first came as a skilled worker and the other family members joined him several years later. Ling's dad came with the whole family as a business investor, while Ling's big brother already studied here as an international student. In his study, Paul Yeung (2005) identified some challenges Chinese immigrants face with economics in a new country. It is true that neither of the two focal families showed any urgent financial hardship, but both families' experience still confirmed Yeung's findings. Skilled worker class immigrants encounter difficulties with their foreign credential validation and therefore hardly get equivalent jobs to their professions in their home country. Kate's dad was a technician, but has worked as a cook in Japanese restaurants since he came to Canada. While Ling's family is a so-called satellite family, with the dad currently working back in China, Ling's parents have been thinking and inquiring about setting up a new business here but haven't seen any practical possibility yet. Without English, Ling's dad feels no means to investigate the market opportunities here, despite the fact that he is confident in his business experience and investment capability.

Though neither of the families has worries about life expenses, they do not feel they have settled down in Canada. Kate's parents look forward to having their own house, which will bring them "sense of a real home". Ling's mum is frustrated by not knowing English and thus "can do nothing here". Ling's big brother will graduate soon and probably find jobs in other cities but he has been the de facto household head of the family in Canada. His leaving will undoubtedly make it harder for Ling's mum to live with

Ling by herself. Kate's parents, once their family business starts, will confront with difficulty in monitoring the children's study. Parents of both families are unable to supervise the children's English learning directly. However, this is a drawback as well as an inspiration. They thus demand the children to study harder by themselves; otherwise, they will not be able to compete for jobs with the local students in the future.

In this study, all participants share the same cultural roots. In both families, Chinese dialects were used at home. Neither of the mums could read or listen to the children's home reading assignment in English, though both started Chinese story reading at their early ages. Home environment is unfavorable in terms of English print and print use. High expectations and inadequate home-school contact were found, which also validated findings from other studies on immigrant families. However, parents from both families showed same supportive attitudes and eagerness to get involved in children's education, especially in facilitating their urgent English literacy acquisition.

Despite many similarities, their choice of literacy facilitation varied. Kate's mum stressed rote learning and intensive drilling by following some traditional Chinese learning strategies. She searched English learning books and found tutors for Kate constantly. Kate was required to learn from them every day and persist until she finished what she was supposed to do. Ling's mum, however, felt like following Western education style but got lost in the process due to her English inability. She tried to follow the school and involve Ling in the local community by taking part in various activities. This considerable difference between the two mothers in terms of their beliefs and values illuminates Lo's finding that mothers who were brought up in the same culture may also have different beliefs and behaviours as they grew up in different "social contexts," and have different degrees of "individual consciousness" (Berger, 1998, in Lo, 2001, p.90).

5.1.2 Children's F1 and ESL literacy experiences

Children's development of emergent literacy is believed to depend upon exposure to print and print use and experience with literate others using print for real-life purposes. For ESL learners like my focal children, they often do not have a favorable print environment and have few literate others around them at home, both in the sense of English language and literacy. However, their L1 experience and emergent knowledge cannot be simply ignored. Kate and Ling both had Chinese language knowledge. Kate

can basically read and write Chinese by herself. Ling cannot really read or write much in Chinese, but his mum's reading to him covered a wide range of child literature in Chinese. His conventional concepts of writing and print evident in his chapter story writing proved clearly the positive transfer from L1 to L2 in terms of ELLs' reading and writing skills claimed by Cummins (in Temple et al., 2008) in his linguistic interdependence hypothesis.

The children's home literacy experiences indicate that their practices are embedded in particular cultural values inherited from the families' home cultural background, and they are closely related to their parents' education levels in their home country (Li, 2002). Kate's and Ling's parents both arranged various extra-curricular activities so the children could grow up in an all-around way. Though to different extents their Chinese style educational aspirations were nonetheless very similar. This study showed that the two mums never stopped "creating learning opportunities" for the children. They did conduct "direct teaching", checking spelling, translation, and pronunciation, with the help of electronic dictionary. They instructed the children in common learning strategies through their own education and understanding. They spared no effort in fulfilling their duty as "educating agent".

In China, it has been my experience that children's education has been recognized by many parents as the most important pursuit in life. Middle-class families feel satisfied with their own achievement but worry that it will mean nothing if the child (most students are the only child at home for the last thirty or so years) does not develop well. Working-class families put all their expectations on the children's educational success so that they could find good jobs in the future. Most parents demand the children not only to study hard at school, but also commit after-school time either to get tutoring in schoolwork, or to learn arts, e.g. playing musical instruments. Students usually spend long hours at school every day and their limited leisure time is often occupied by assignments from both teachers and parents. Study to midnight or after is a common phenomenon among Chinese students through elementary to secondary schools.

The two new immigrant families in my study were familiar to me as I also attended and taught in Chinese schools. Kate learned from textbooks and did vocabulary and grammar exercises on a daily base. She was asked to learn by heart and be accurate. She had private tutors teach her English reading and writing. She took

piano lessons once a week and was required to practice every day. Kate may encounter quite different expectations from school and family, but she seemed to fulfil both. In China, students are expected to “render respect and obedience to the teacher in the same way they respect their parents” (Igoa, 1995, p.100). Kate is obedient to adults which a good girl (and student) is supposed to be in Chinese tradition, and she is a “dedicated, responsible, and respectful” (teacher’s comments) student in her teacher’s eyes. Her mother’s expectation for her future was that she would go to university and have a stable job which she thought “good enough for a girl”.

Ling, however, did not have many subject-related tasks but participated in extra-curricular activities. He liked games and sports and was enrolled in swimming, skating, and soccer lessons. His mum thought there were more opportunities in Canada than in China to learn about those because of the facility availability and she believed Ling’s language experience in those activities would definitely influence his English literacy development. Ling enjoys numerous and the most updated electronic games. Insisting that the Chinese education system is not suitable for Ling, Ling’s parents hoped he could have a complete western education and establish himself here. Lian encountered some “headaches” in disciplining Ling. Though she sometimes felt frustrated, she never gave up trying alternative ways to direct and encourage him. She mentioned several times that Ling did not know how to get along with other children, but she realized that it was important for a boy to have adequate social ability in future to achieve career success.

5.1.3 Family support and expectations

The two focal families I chose have many aspects in common with other Chinese families in Canada, as well as with each other. The most noticeable commonality is their high expectations for their children’s education and future (e.g. Wu, 1998, in Li, 2002), no matter how high or low their own educational levels are. Chinese people are known for their strong desire to pursue high academic achievements (e.g. Li, 2002; Igoa, 1995; Yeung, 2005). For thousands of years, Chinese Confucian philosophy has held the strong belief that only by being academically outstanding can one get opportunities to move to higher social position and enjoy prestige and reputation. Their immigrant status, when seen as a disadvantage against the local natives, compels them to seek to excel in order to compete with their mainstream counterparts (Zhang et al., 1998; Li, P., 1998; Li, 2002). While sharing these values, my two focal families are distinctive in many ways.

Reflecting on their deep-rooted traditional Chinese educational beliefs and experiences, I found that in these two families, some literacy activities were their deliberate choice. However, I also felt it was a step of last resort because of no better choice for the parents under existing circumstances in a new country. They felt they had no capability to help the children by direct teaching, and they had no idea what they were expected to do by the Canadian schools, yet both have chosen to do something to accomplish the purpose of facilitating children's language and literacy learning. From the parents' perspective, without English proficiency and knowledge of school curriculum here, the only safe approach they could find was to judge from their own educational history, instructional knowledge and beliefs. For instance, Xian believed that learning by rote worked well in China for thousands of years, so it must function here in Canada. Lian felt like following western education principles but was lost in communicating with the teacher and found no help available from school. Both mothers sincerely expected that even if they were not able to do anything to support the children's study, the Canadian schools would not fail them finally. All in all, the good reputation of Canada's education system was the foremost reason for their decision of immigrating.

Despite the fact that many Chinese believe maintaining the Chinese language would be beneficial in future and they would like to spend time and energy to assist the children to keep learning Chinese, neither of the focal families had a clear requirement with this regard. It is true that both the two participating children and their siblings use only Chinese at home in order to communicate with parents (including extended family here in Canada or back in China) (Beynon et al., 2003). However, formal L1 literacy learning (reading and writing) seemed to be temporary and at will. Both mums have strong desires for their children to keep learning Chinese and enrolled them in weekend Chinese schools. One focal child, Ling, started attending Chinese school soon after they came to Canada, but stopped going two terms later because he did not like it and his mum just did not want to push him too much. Like many children from immigrant families, Ling can listen and speak in his L1 but cannot really read or write. Chinese education principles of language learning put focus on literacy rather than oracy. To be able to listen and speak is not taken as "knowing" the language or being literate. Ling's language attitude, if continues, will lead to diminishing use of Chinese language. Even as demanding as Kate's mum was, her major attention was obviously to English improvement. A fact is that Kate may not have problem with oral Chinese and have

basic literacy knowledge, but it is not clear that her written ability will improve a great deal.

In examining Chinese parents' role as educators to the children, my impression is that they are doing a lot without any hesitation to fulfil their parental responsibility. However, what they do is either not known to school teachers or not recognized as proper or effective. If not thought of as uncaring or uncooperative, Chinese parents are sometimes considered too demanding by Canadian teachers. There exists a serious disconnection between school instruction and family education which is caused by not only not knowing each other but also the divergent opinions and values towards child education (Li, 2008).

From the perspectives of sociocultural learning theories, ethnic minority immigrant students' literacy experiences in non-school settings are recognized as bearing their particular cultural tradition, worldview, beliefs, and values. Although differentiated from those of the mainstream, they are believed to have ample potential resources – funds of knowledge - which can inform education of linguistic and cultural minority students. Without such funds of knowledge, stereotyping or misunderstanding may happen, which is, as Purcell-Gates (1995) put it, “the result of a profound lack of knowledge about a particular group”. If made known to school teachers, Kate's mum-assigned tons of literacy development tasks and Ling's mum's total loss of monitoring his homework should be seriously considered, and changes must be accordingly made to their instruction and evaluation of these students.

5.2 Limitations

In this ethnographic case study, I focused on two selected families, each from one major immigration category of the new generation of Chinese immigrants. I intended to look closely into their family literacy lives and explore in-depth observations of the parents' (both are mothers as in many other studies in relation to education) delicate efforts in supporting their school-age children's English literacy learning in their first few years in Canada. Due to the limited number of my informants, any generalization of findings should be cautious even within the same ethnic group of people. I agree with Lo (2001) that every study has limitations and with Ironside (1985) that studies need to be less generalized. While seeing the commonalities among the same ethnic group is necessary and helpful in accommodating diverse cultures, seeing the differences

between members of a culture is essential in acknowledging each individual's specific human traits and meeting their particular needs. Findings from one sample might be valid to some others, but never to the group of people as a whole.

Also, literacy is an even more complex topic nowadays. Literacy research at different times, in different contexts, about people of diverse ages, genders, languages, social conditions, culture backgrounds, and religions cannot be simple or easy. Immigrants' ESL literacy, in its own right, implies complicated circumstances. Research on new Chinese immigrants' ESL literacy is only one portion of the whole picture. It has little relevance to other immigration situations, e.g. immigrant refugees. My standpoint of conducting such an investigation is explicit – I was of the same ethnic and cultural origin as the focal people, was from a similar education system, have ample experience working with school-age children and parents, my area of studies, and most important, my interest in and desire of making Chinese immigrant families' struggles with English literacy known to mainstream institutions and policy makers.

Another limitation is, as confirmed in Yeung's study, that Chinese people are generally reluctant to participate in research, and do not feel comfortable expressing "personal issues" openly (Weiss & Weiss, 2002, in Yeung, 2005, p.196). I must be careful not to be offensive, though I was promised generous permission to conduct this research. In addition to assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, I asked my participants about specific issues I hoped to cover. I needed their understanding that my purpose was to reveal what parents chose to do and what difficulties and problems they had in supporting children's literacy development, and their stories were written to represent issues relating to new Chinese immigrant families as a group, not only for themselves. My goal was to inform educators, school administrators, and policy makers what Chinese parents and children were doing and choosing to do, and what kind of help they need to better facilitate the children's literacy learning in their most difficult first few years in Canada. I avoided discussing some sensitive concerns, if not closely related to my topic of outside school literacy practices.

The disadvantages of me, as a native person doing ethnographic research with my own people, are another aspect of limitation of the present study. Same cultural roots, similar educational experience, and having a young child studying in the same school system, involved in the same ESL program, subjectivity cannot be fully ruled out when

interpreting the research findings. Empathy for my informants and the research focus on only the side of the families may affect my understanding of the whole picture.

Still one more limitation is related to a new literacy study area – video games and literacy learning. It has been broadly discussed by James Paul Gee (2007) how good video games produce better learning condition than many of today's schools and how good video games combine pleasure and learning, as well as controversial issues surrounding games (e.g. violence). However, my lack of empirical knowledge of video games definitely limited my understanding and interpreting Ling's literacy life which was extensively related with playing video games. Whether the games he seems addicted to are "good" ones and benefit his literacy learning or how the games influence his English literacy development are currently beyond me.

5.3 Implications

5.3.1 ESL programs and minority language services

Both the two focal students in this study, Kate and Ling, receive ESL support at school. Ling is in ESL pullout and Kate goes to Resource Team. Consistent with other research results, neither the students nor their parents highly approve of that support. The students do not feel it is helpful for their language improvement or that it meets their educational needs (Yeung, 2005), and they do not feel comfortable to be there either. Results from this study are consistent with other studies (Yeung, 2005; Temple et al., 2008). Both parents and the ESL students are not happy with the ESL classes because their regular classroom time is deprived, and because students feel singled out as "special" or "different". The parents feel it is a waste of time and prefer the children to stay in their regular classes so they can follow better. This mismatch between the program design and its actual effect needs further exploration. Reasons should be examined from both the program itself and the receivers' perspective.

Yeung (2005) quoted from the Vancouver School Board survey, in which same concerns about ESL system were revealed and acknowledged,

[Immigrant students] are further discouraged by the ESL and Transition Programs. While these students knew that they would have to improve their English after coming to Canada, it is clear that few anticipated that they would be placed in ESL and Transition Programs and might stay within them for years. It seems that programs designed to incorporate non-English speaking immigrant students into the Canadian education

system have had an unintended negative impact on some of these students. . . (p.145)

Unfortunately, several years have passed since Yeung's study and little progress can be seen; immigrant students still see themselves "suffering" from the mandatory ESL classes. Findings from my study confirm those observations. One focal child, Ling, neither likes ESL nor feels he is learning anything interesting or useful from it. The other, Kate, thinks that it helps but is not necessary. My observation of two Chinese immigrant children implies to me that in addition to zones of comfort, young children also need zones of safety and zones of belonging where real transmission of funds of knowledge could occur and be sustained. Their language, culture, life style which are distinct from those of mainstream, need to be embraced rather than attacked; they need to be considered as equal members in the group rather than as different outsiders.

Other approaches or programs designed and implemented for ELLs consist of bilingual education, immersion instruction, and sheltered English instruction (Temple et al., 2008). Regrettably, none of those turned out to be successful or long standing in many school jurisdictions. Future studies should be designed to examine why these well-intended programs were not welcomed by the target population. Only by finding out the problems, can teachers and administrators work together, adjusting and developing a new, appropriate framework for teaching and working with ESL classes (Yeung, 2005).

Many early family literacy programs aim at enhancing adults' and young children's literacy at home, but non-English-speaking family literacy programs are hard to find, to my knowledge. Though Strucker et al. (2004) have worked and called for research on family literacy for ESOL families, these studies are usually done with families with low SES (socioeconomic status), and with dysfunctional, marginalized, usually minority families. Research addressing Chinese immigrant families' specific situations is sorely scarce.

With regard to language services, it should be acknowledged that multilingual services work well in some public service institutions and business markets. Chinese language service provides enormous convenience to those who need it. However, to many parents' great concern, school-related affairs are mostly monolingual. That is far from enough. What parents feel powerless about is the children's learning and activities at school and the way to further supervise them at home to foster their learning.

It may be true that Chinese characters, images, mascots, and ornaments are more often seen than not in classrooms as well as the outside world. Chinese foods are favoured widely, Chinese festivals are celebrated, and Chinese people in Canada are gaining higher social status than their ancestors. However, as Temple et al. (2008) reminded teachers who are working in the ever more demographically diverse classrooms, awareness of cultural differences must go far beyond holidays and foods. A climate of respect for cultural differences should be improved (Ironsides, 1985). For teachers to establish culturally responsive language and literacy pedagogy,

Ethnographers remind teachers that they must view how parents use language in rearing their children, the range of types of language use in the home, and the amount of exposure that children experience with respect to the diversity of languages, to the diversity of speakers of languages, and to the diversity of ways of using language outside of their homes (Heath, 1986, cited in Temple et al., 2008, p.47).

Requesting all teachers to be able to speak several languages other than their own is too demanding. However, schools and teachers can make use of sources from parents and communities, inviting parents to classroom sharing their knowledge and expertise, having bilingual parents to help with language issues. This would not only benefit the school and classroom teaching, but also bring minority students the sense of pride and hence promote their motivation to perform well in school.

5.3.2 Home-school partnership

Findings from my research shows that these Chinese parents' contact with school is not easy, with only the school phone number given, no teacher's phone number or email address. Intake interviews are as short as 10 to 15 minutes per semester. The message passed on tends to make parents feel that they are not welcome to more contact with either the school or the teacher. The relationship is thus far distanced. These parents feel rejected. Most Chinese parents feel reluctant to initiate communication with school teacher. This is contrary to the circumstances in China where parents could be given the teacher's home phone, even the cell phone number and email address if the teacher has one. Parents can call any time even in the evening to the teacher's home. Teachers are usually willing to maintain a close connection with parents and will hardly refuse the parents' contacts. I would not say language is the only reason for the lack of teacher-parent communication here. "The culture has set the home

and the school . . . into separate spheres and erected powerful barriers between them” (Ryan and Adams, 1995, cited in Li, 2002, p.9). The schools and educators have also neglected the relationship between the family and the school (Chandler et al., 1993, cited in Li, 2002).

Traditionally Chinese students and the parents maintain an attitude of deference toward school and school authorities. Ironside’s (1985) study on *Chinese – and Indo-Canadian elites’ views on education* found that Chinese parents are often reluctant to participate in school meetings or parents’ committees. Even well-educated parents who speak English fluently find it hard to advise their children if they themselves were not educated here. For those with language problems, this difficulty is compounded. Ironside pointed out that it is constant in literature that schools are asked to make special effort to communicate with parents and take an active role in cultural maintenance. In Chinese cultural perspective, too, teachers are always seen in the power position and are perceived by parents to have the authority of knowledge. Thus, it is vital for teachers to initiate communication and change (Li, 2002). To my understanding, these Chinese parents would spare no effort to contribute time and energy to assist school with the children’s education.

Revealed from my investigation, the communication gap between parents and school teachers seems to annoy parents. For these Chinese parents, language inefficiency is another obstacle in addition to the prevailing cultural barriers (Ryan and Adams, 1995). It was documented that a California school district changed its format for parent nights to honour the different experiences of parents (Temple et al., 2008), and it worked very well. My focal families had problems when attending teacher/parent conferences too, and their initiations to communicate with school teachers did not end up being satisfying. It would be appreciated if the schools would make some effort to adjust to the parents’ needs - spare more time, make the teachers available to individual families, and provide services to ethnic minority groups in their home languages, at least for the few times of teacher/parent conferences every year. However, home-school relationships should not be only a duty for teachers to speak to parents or vice versa when issues arise, but a regular common job – a partnership - which is to be accomplished by teachers and parents working collaboratively together.

Few studies examine Chinese immigrant children’s English literacy development, or focus on their first few years’ experience, and in outside school settings. Language

and literacy practices in the two focal families in this study demonstrated some big differences from those valued in school. Future studies in this regard should pay attention to Chinese specific cultural and historical backgrounds. What schools and teachers think and do should also be heard. Further exploration should focus on how funds of knowledge – social and cultural resources of Chinese immigrants – can be used to bridge home to school disparity. Themes and dimensions should be looked for at the same time.

5.4 Conclusion

Generally, this research revealed a disturbing picture of two Chinese immigrant children's out-of-school literacy lives - parents with low English proficiency, high expectations, endless struggling, anxious attempts to support, doing a lot without knowing they are helpful or not, poor communication with school, helpless children left to their own resources and so on. Mutual understanding and partnership between immigrant families and local schools are urgently needed and will greatly benefit the English literacy development of new immigrant children. Through the efforts of both sides, I believe the current situation can be improved.

Chinese has been growing rapidly as a third mostly used language in Canada since the 1980s. "Indications from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) show that China will continue to be a key source country of immigration to BC and Vancouver in the foreseeable future" (cited in Yeung, 2005, p.153). In some Chinese-attractive areas, Chinese students are over half of the school population (Young, 1997). Chinese people traditionally put a high value on education. Parents, no matter what socio-economic status or educational background, want their children to do well at school and attend university (Ironsides, 1985; Li, 2002). However, low English ability parents, unfavorable home print environments, strong desire to provide support to children's learning, high expectations, and heavy dependence on school instruction regarding English literacy as encountered by my focal families are some haunting anxieties of many Chinese parents.

Temple et al. (2008) pointed out that how children use language in their homes and communities has important effects on their use of language in classrooms, especially when they are learning to read and write. The following interview episodes ring a loud warning bell to our education system. The first one exposed immigrant student's helplessness with school assigned homework when they cannot get help from

their low-English parents, while the second one represented some negative environments in the community activities. Both will have influences on the child's language use and literacy development.

(J stands for me, and S the interviewed student.)

.....
J: Do you do your homework all by yourself or other people help you?

S: One.

J: Then who, who helps you?

S: God.

J: Were your parents able to help you?

S: No.

.....

.....

J: I know that you often go to the club after school, what do you do in the club?

S: I fall on people's head . . .

J: Are you allowed to do that?

S: You are even allowed to say f-**-k.

J: At the club?

S: Yeah.

J: I don't believe it.

S: I believe it.

.....

Anecdote as an ending

During my research process, an anecdote which happened between my son and me kept coming up to my mind. It made me think of the immigrant children's exceptional situation of English literacy learning for the period of their first few years in a new country.

One day my son got an itch on his back which was beyond his own hand to reach. I was asked to help scratch it. Following his directions, I tried hard to locate the very spot. Once in a while I touched it but soon got lost. At last, he said "It's OK. It's OK." But obviously I did not solve his problem well though I intended to.

Relating to the situation of the fast increasing number of Chinese immigrant students in Canadian classrooms and having difficulties adjusting to the school partially because of language proficiency and cultural diversity, both government and schools have been trying ways to help. However, parents and children do not find them satisfying. Like me searching for and scratching the itch for my son, occasionally I could

reach the exact spot, but most of the time and effort was of little help. As an old Chinese saying goes, this was “scratching from outside of the boots”, meaning it does not really help no matter how hard one works since the itching spot is deep inside the boot.

The endless effort of immigrant Chinese parents has to be better known and recognized by the education system, an effective way of properly guiding and incorporating these efforts into the education system has to be established. By doing so, one can reach the real itching spot and another old Chinese saying “Half the effort and double the success” can then be achieved.

Appendices

Appendix 1



OFFICE OF
RESEARCH ETHICS

October 3, 2007

street address
Simon Fraser University
Multi-Tenant Facility
Room 230, 8900 Nelson Way
Burnaby, B.C. Canada
V5A 4W9

Shuqin Jin
Graduate Student
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University

mailing address
8888 University Drive
Multi-Tenant Facility
Burnaby, B.C. Canada
V4A 1S6

Dear Shuqin:

**Re: Outside School English Literacy of School-aged New
Immigrant Children from China - Appl. #: 38541**

I am pleased to inform you that the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research has been approved on behalf of the Research Ethics Board. This approval is in effect until the end date October 3, 2010, or only during the period in which you are a registered SFU student.

The Office of Research Ethics must be notified of any changes in the approved protocol. Request for amendments to the protocol may be requested by email to dore@sfu.ca. In all correspondence relating to this application, please reference the application number shown on this letter and all email.

Your application has been categorized as "minimal risk" and approved by the Director, Office of Research Ethics, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board in accordance with University policy R.20.01, <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/research/r20-01.htm>. The Board reviews and may amend decisions or subsequent amendments made independently by the Director, Chair or Deputy Chair at its regular monthly meetings.

.../2



OFFICE OF
RESEARCH ETHICS

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“Minimal risk” occurs when potential participants can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms incurred by participating in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the participant in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research.

Please note that it is the responsibility of the researcher, or the responsibility of the Student Supervisor if the researcher is a graduate student or undergraduate student, to maintain written or other forms of documented consent for a period of 1 year after the research has been completed.

If there is an adverse event, the principal investigator must notify the Office of Research Ethics within five (5) days. An Adverse Events form is available electronically by contacting dorc@sfu.ca.

Please note that all correspondence with regards to this application will be sent to your SFU email address.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hal Weinberg", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director
Office of Research Ethics

c: Dr. Kelleen Toohey, Supervisor

/jmy

Appendix 2

Letter for Adult Consent

(Written consent)

Dear xxx,

I'm Shuqin Jin, and I am a graduate student at Simon Fraser University. I'm interested in learning how Chinese students who are newly to Canada acquire English language and I'm conducting a research for my MA thesis. The purpose of this study is to obtain in-depth understanding of the outside school literacy activities of school-aged new immigrants from China. By doing that, I hope to provide some insightful observations and useful information to both parents and school teachers who are facing an increasing number of Chinese background students.

In order to help me do this, I will pay home visits and observe what after-school activities your child do and how they help (or not) with his/her English language development. Also, I'd like to interview you and ask some questions about your child's English language learning. The interview will take about 30 minutes. I'd like to tape the interview, so that I can go back later and look more closely at what he/she has said. I'm hoping you will be willing to help me, but if you'd rather not, that's fine. Do you have any questions?

The interview and the audiotape of it will be used by me only for the purpose of completing this research. I promise not to use your real name in what I say or write about the interview. I will give you a pseudonym by which I will always refer to you.

The research results can be obtained by contacting Shuqin Jin Faculty of Education Simon Fraser University BC V5A 1S6 Phone 778-898-9562.

To direct your concerns or complaints, you may contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics at SFU at 778-782-6593 or hal_weinberg@sfu.ca

Sincerely,

Shuqin Jin

Simon Fraser University

Appendix 3

Letter for Child Consent

(Oral consent)

Hi, I'm Shuqin Jin, and I am a student at Simon Fraser University. I'm interested in learning how Chinese students who are newly to Canada acquire English language. In order to help me do this, I will pay home visits and observe what after-school activities you do and how they help (or not) with your English language development. Also, I'd like to interview you and ask you some questions about your English language learning. The interview will take about 20 minutes. I'd like to tape the interview, so that I can go back later and look more closely at what you have said. I'm hoping you will be willing to help me, but if you'd rather not, that's fine. Do you have any questions?

Shuqin Jin

Simon Fraser University

Appendix 4

Letter of invitation for Consent by parents for minors to participate

(Written consent)

Dear Parent,

I'm Shuqin Jin, and I am a graduate student at Simon Fraser University. I'm interested in learning how Chinese students who are newly to Canada acquire English language and I'm conducting a research for my MA thesis. The purpose of this study is to obtain in-depth understanding of the outside school literacy activities of school-aged new immigrants from China. By doing that, I hope to provide some insightful observations and useful information to both parents and school teachers who are facing an increasing number of Chinese background students.

In order to help me do this, I will pay home visits and observe what after-school activities your child do and how they help (or not) with his/her English language development. Also, I'd like to interview him/her and ask some questions about his/her English language learning. The interview will take about 20 minutes. I'd like to tape the interview, so that I can go back later and look more closely at what he/she has said. I'm hoping you will be willing to help me, but if you'd rather not, that's fine. Do you have any questions?

The interview and the audiotape of it will be used by me only for the purpose of completing this research. I promise not to use your real name in what I say or write about the interview. I will give you a pseudonym by which I will always refer to you.

The research results can be obtained by contacting Shuqin Jin Faculty of Education Simon Fraser University BC V5A 1S6 Phone 778-898-9562.

To direct your concerns or complaints, you may contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics at SFU at 778-782-6593 or hal_weinberg@sfu.ca

If you agree to my observing and interviewing your child, please fill out and sign the form below. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Shuqin Jin

Simon Fraser University

Appendix 5

Interview with Kate (Transcription)

- J Hi, Kate. Can we start now? We'll just have a talk and you can answer my questions either using Chinese or English, for some questions, if you don't want to talk more, it's OK.
- J First, which grade / class are you in? You call it division, right?
- K Right, Division 4, grade 5.
- J Did you ever learn English before you came to Canada?
- K Yes, a little bit.
- J For how long?
- K One year.
- J At what level, at school or by private tutor?
- K School.
- J So at school for one year?
- K en. (*Means agree.*)
- J How long have you been in Canada? (pause)The first time you came here is in August 2006?
- K en.
- J How would you rate your academic ability in English now? Good, fair, or poor?
- K Fair.
- J How much time do you spend in doing your homework every day?
- K Half an hour.
- J Do you do your homework all by yourself?
- K My mom helps me sometimes.
- J Do you understand your teacher when he or she gives instructions in class?
- K Yes.
- J Do you ever feel frustrated in class when your teacher gives instructions or when you try to express yourself in English? Always? Often? Sometimes? Never?
- K What does "express" mean?
- J "You want to say something in English".

K Never.

J So you understand your teacher and you can express yourself properly, right?

K Ah ha.

J That is good, no need to ask this one. (Skip a question)

J Do you speak Chinese at school?

K No.

J How do you feel about speaking English at school? (pause) How many students are there?

K 26.

J How many of them speak Chinese?

K None of them.

J None of them, so you never speak Chinese at school.

K No.

J Are you allowed to speak Chinese at school?

K Yes.

J You are allowed?

K Ah ha.

J Do you agree that, do you think students should be allowed to speak Chinese at school?

K (no answer)

J Do you have many friends?

K Some.

J Do you speak English or Chinese to each other? (pause)All English?

K Ah ha.

J Can you tell me why, even with Chinese? Are your friends all English speaking people or are they Chinese?

K They are Asians.

J They are Asians, but they don't speak Chinese?

K They are Japanese.

J They are Japanese. You all speak English?

K Ah ha.

J What activities do you do after school?

K Stay at home.

J Do you think after school activities help you in learning English?

K (no answer)
J Do you like watching TV?
K No.
J What do you like?
K Um. . .(no answer)
J Do you want to go on learning Chinese?
K Not really.
J Do you want to improve English?
K Yeah.
J Do you have any plan for the future?
K Mm. . .(Shaking her head)

Appendix 6

Interview with Ling (Transcription)

(Combined with the first time interview when Ling did not cooperate, telling some nonsense, and the second make-up interview with some of the questions.)

- J Can you tell me which class you are in? You call it division, right?
L 11.
J Did you ever learn English before you came to Canada?
L Nope. (looking around, paying no attention to the interview)
J Do you remember how long you have been in Canada?
L 7 years. (did not want to answer questions properly)
J 7 years? How old are you?
L I am 100.
J How would you rate your academic ability in English now?
L Excellent.
J How much time do you spend in doing your homework every day?
L A whole day, 24 hours
J Do you do your homework all by yourself or other people helping you?
L No. . . I mean one.
J Then who, who helps you?
L God.
J Were your parents able to help you, do they help you with your homework?
L No.
J Do you understand your teacher when he or she gives instructions?
L (no answer)
J Do you speak Chinese at school?
L Nope.
J How many students are there in your class?
L The whole world.
J How many of them speak Chinese?

L I don't know.

J Does your teacher allow you to speak Chinese in class?

L I don't know.

J Are you allowed to speak Chinese?

L Yes, but I don't want to.

J You don't want to. Can you tell me why?

L Because, because. . .

J Are there many students speak Chinese?

L Never.

J They all speak English?

L Never.

J Let's talk about your friends, do you have many friends?

L I have a friend named, I have a guy, a friend, I don't know what is his name but I can spell it, it spells as f-*-*k (laughing)

J Is your friend a Chinese or English speaking person?

L He speaks bad English, he only speak one more, that he knows how to spell it, it start with "sh" then and then it, "sh*t".

J Do you often talk in bad words?

L Talk, talk, talk.

J I know that you often go to the club after the school, what do you do in the club?

L I fall on people's head. . .

J What is that?

L I pee in the bathroom, I mean I pee in the garbage can.

J Why do you do that?

L And I broke the gink of the crown and I pull people's eye with a . . . (giggling)

J Are you allowed to do that?

L You are even allowed to say f-*-*k.

J At the club?

L yeah.

J I don't believe it.

L I believe it.

J Do you speak English or Chinese in those activities?

L I speak, ... I speak dragon

J I can see you understand my questions, but you just don't want to answer, right?

L What are you saying?
.....
J Two more questions, do you know how to read and write in Chinese?
L I don't know.
J Do you want to learn Chinese?
L No!
J Do you want to improve you English, learn more English?
L
J Do you have any plan for the future, like when you grow up?
L I have one.
J what is that?
L (no answer)

(The second time interview with some of the questions.)

J OK. Let's do some of the questions. We won't start all over again. Can you tell me "did you ever learn English before you came to Canada"?

L No.

J How long have you been in Canada?

L 2 years.

J Do you like learning English?

L Yeah.

J But you don't like Chinese any more?

L Yeah. (meaning he doesn't)

J Can you tell me why?

L I don't like it. I don't have to have any.

J Is it hard to learn?

L Yeah.

J Do you think it's useful to learn Chinese?

L Yeah, yeah.

J You agree that Chinese is useful, but you don't want to....

L (interrupting me) No! I don't agree.

J (smiling) you don't agree. OK. Do you do your homework by yourself?

L No. My mum.

J How? How does she help you with your homework?
L Ask her, (pointing to his mum) I don't know.
J What do you do when you have difficulties? Do you ask your teacher or ...
L I ask teacher.
J Do you speak Chinese at school?
L No.
J Are there many students speak Chinese?
L Never.
J Are you allowed to speak Chinese?
L Yeah.
J Do you have many friends?
L Yeah. . . no. I have a friend. His name's Paul.
J Does he speak Chinese?
L He's from Chinese (China). He's from Hong Kong. Hm...His birthday is (in) June.
He has blond hair. He's born(was born) in Canada. He plays hockey. . .
J What activities do you do after school?
L Hockey. I mean going to the club, going down the gym, doing arts. There're 2
hockey tables. One was like 3 years old. There was a new one. It was beautiful.
They used to have poor tables. The oldest one was still there. There's a small
one...
J I noticed that you are very good at e-games.
L Yeah, yeah.
J Can you tell me, do you understand the English instruction?
L Yeah. I sometime(s) learn from my brother.
J This time tell me seriously . . .
L (interrupting me) What does that mean?
J What do you want to do in the future?
L I want to be . . . (Thinking) My mum and dad was (were) letting me to do (be) a
doctor.
J OK. Thanks, Ling. This time it is good.
L Okey.

Appendix 7

对 Xian 的采访

(文字记录)

- J 到加拿大之前，你学过英语吗？
- X 在学校学过，上中学高中的时候都学的。
- J 学了多久？学到什么程度？
- X 有 5, 6 年了吧，离开中国到加拿大之前，我还上过 3 个月的突击培训课。
- J 到加拿大之后，有哪些地方迫切需要用到英语？
- X 和学校和老师联系，学校发回来的材料(都是英文的)，和老师交流，因为一开始什么都不知道。
- J 现在有在学英语吗？如果有，正式还是非正式学？
- X 断断续续咯，有时候自己看看书。有时候不懂的单词就问她(指 Kate, 笑)。
- J 你会继续学习英语吗？为什么？
- X 如果有时间的话(会的)。我在 VCC 上过 ELSA。从二级开始，现在上完是五级吧(应是三级)。中间有回国，前后学了一年多。我现在时不时还在自己学英语，读点东西。
- J 能请你描述一下你的日常生活吗？(常去的地方，用什么语言，需要用到文字的事情)
- X 送孩子上学咯，做做家务活，买东西，烧烧饭咯，晚上他们回来就看孩子复习功课，做家庭作业。
- J 用到英语的有哪些地方？
- X 很少。超市吗到丽晶广场，大统华。外国人超市也就打打招呼这样。银行我们到汇丰银行，也是用中文。
- J 家里谁负责对外的联系？(接电话，付帐单)
- X 有时候我，有时候他(先生)。我在家电话我接。在外面他(接)。帐单各付个的咯。家庭开销是我(付)。他工资给我的。他自己付像手机, visa, 他有个 visa 卡, 油费呀什么的。
- J 在这儿朋友多吗？都是中国人吗？
- X 有，98%(中国人)。(笑)

- J 你是否帮助孩子学习？怎样帮？
- X 很少。像叫她做国内的数学，她有时不会就给她讲讲。英语刚来的时候教教她单词怎么拼，有时语法错误告诉她。现在很少，做作业就是天天盯。
- J 你是否为孩子念书？还是他/她自己念？
- X 小时候有过。上幼儿园晚上回来都给他们念书。现在他们自己看。有英文书，也有中文(书)。他们自己看。
- J 她最喜欢的书是什么？
- X 故事(书)。那个叫什么。 . . .有中文也有英文的，对吧？(问 Kate)。她从图书馆借的。
- J 你的孩子多久看一次电视？最喜欢的节日是什么？
- X 不每天看。应该说每天有接触电视，但看的时间很短。做完作业，她动作慢嘛，就没时间看了。经常就是和她妹妹一起看卡通片，国内带来的。有时候也看英文录象带，从图书馆借来的，刚来的时候看的比较多，英文的。
- J 你对你的孩子的英语学习满意吗？为什么/不？
- X 当然不满意咯。她不够认真。像我们花钱为她请家教，都好象是 push 到她在学，不 push 她就不学。说实话，应该来说，感觉一年下来，她进步蛮大，但是不满足吗，总是希望她更好一点，对不对？
- J 其他方面的活动还有哪些？
- X 当然咯，学语文(中文)，数学。还有钢琴，溜冰咯。
- J 你为孩子选择了什么样的课外活动？选择是出于什么样的考虑？
- X 反正就是像让她，像溜冰，就是健身娱乐咯。让她什么都接触一下。中文吗继续学，数学是想让她提高，这次刚刚报。上课。以前都是在家我们让她自己做，习题呀，操练什么的。
- J 你觉得他的学校怎么样？你认为学校满足了你孩子的需求吗？
- X 太慢，速度慢。而且太简单。但是对孩子的教育，怎么说，能力(培育)蛮好，但是教学质量，内容，就是慢，太简单。不象我们国内那种，喔。但像做 project 很好，自己去搜索，找资料。什么东西表达不清楚用画画表示。我女儿这一年画画提高好多。
- J 你和你的孩子谈他/她学校发生的事吗？
- X 聊，一直都聊。从她上幼儿园一直到现在。和同学之间呀，学校发生了什么事呀，和老师之间呵。

- J 都是用中文?
- X (笑) 她现在反正就是这样. 大概 80%中文. 但有些她都不知道该怎么翻译, 她就用英文跟我说.
- J 你和老师有联系吗? 多久一次?
- X 之前有联系. 现在也就开家长会才去.
- J 你对学校的期望是什么?
- X 首先我觉得, 就是我有期望, 跟他们也表达不清楚, 对吧? 还有就是希望老师给他们像作业呵, 再加强一点. 你看, 作业, 就这么一张纸. 总之, 这边学校老师怎么教就怎么教咯, 我自己觉得不够就自己在家给她补咯, 是不是? 跟学校你也没办法跟老师说, 对不对? 像上次我们去跟老师说给她加强语法, 老师来一句 “我们不教语法”. 你说怎么跟她说呀? 反正我们自己给她教咯. 像现在我们这个家教老师, 就给她教教语法. 对吧?
- J 你的孩子上业余中文学校吗?
- X 是, 还有数学. 数学是用英语教的. 中文, 你知道吧, 就在 VCC. 周六就给国际中文学校上中文课, 大概也是私人的那种(私校). 教的挺好的. 很广.
- J 中文现在能到什么水平?
- X 呵, 我估计她的写作, 那天去报名的时候, 老师给她测试了一下, 她的读写(阅读)应该是到五六年级的水平. 写作吗, 因为她出来到现在一直都没有写, 所以. . . (差些).
- J 你认为保持流利的中文对你的孩子有多重要? 你能就这点谈谈你的感受吗?
- X 那首先自己是中国人吗, 中文应该会咯. 也说不定以后回国发展. 另外这边现在华人这么多, 中文市场. 听说现在这边考大学需要一个第二语言的吗. 先天优势吗, 让她学中文.
- (Interrupted by a phone call.)
- J 我们还有最后几个问题. 你和当地华人社区有多少联系?
- X 我好象没有多少时间参加什么华人的活动, 最多就是 Chinatown 那种活动, 最多看看而已. 我真的那种加入到里面, 成为一分子那种, 我从来没有, 真的没有时间.
- J 作为一个华人生活在英语环境中, 你的感受是怎样的?
- X 挺累的, 挺不容易, 真的好辛苦. 你知道英语不好吧, 很多信息搞不清楚, 找工作也有局限性.

- J 你对你的孩子最关切的是什么？
- X 学习咯，就是学习咯。将来有出息点。像我想象的一样。
- J 你的想象。你对你的孩子的未来有什么期望？
- X 女孩子吗，乖巧一点，听话一点。然后最后一点，将来能读 UBC 咯，好一点的话。上大学。专业吗，将来他们自己选，能给他们建议就(提点建议)。但是最好是这样。上了 college 就没出息。
- J 你自己对将来有什么打算？
- X 能在这里安居乐业咯。孩子有个好的出路。我自己事业能做到什么样，我自己心里也没有底，也不知道会怎么样。现在是想最好有好的结果。但是有些事真的不敢想象的咯。反正就是像我现在这样，如果能把生意做起来，把房子买起来，把孩子上大学供起来。其他看条件再说。
- J 我的问题就大致这么多。谢谢！

Appendix 8

对 Lian 的采访

(文字记录)

- J 到加拿大之前，你学过英语吗？
- L (摇头) 没有。
- J 到加拿大之后，有哪些地方迫切需要用到英语？
- L 我觉得就是日常生活用语。买东西还好，都是中国人超市。
- J 到加拿大之后学过英语吗？如果有，正式还是非正式学？
- L 上过一个月吧。
- J 就是 ELSA 吗？
- L 唉，唉。效果不是太好。
- J 现在你会考虑继续学习英语吗？
- L 我想吗，如果有时间，总是想学点的咯。
- J 能请你描述一下你的日常生活吗？(常去的地方，用什么语言，需要用到文字的事情)
- L 现在一般，像我们这样，去超市咯，都是去华人超市，都是中国话。外国人超市，也不(需)要讲话。现在关键是什么，寄来的东西啊，信啊，学校发来的东西，就比较麻烦。
- J 家里谁负责对外的联系？
- L 就是我们家老大(大儿子)咯，老大帮咯。有时候他要不在家了，是蛮麻烦的，对吧？蛮麻烦的。有时候信呵，帐单呵，什么的，真的。．．．有时候要有个急事，整个就是(没有办法)．．．我们来这么长时间，一点用都没有。不学英文，英文不懂，很多东西局限，整个就把你箍死了。包括出去，看有些路，经常走的，熟悉了，没有问题。那到了一些新的地方，就没办法了。没方向了。反正条条路都通。．．．
- J 家里电话一般谁接？
- M 主要都是老大咯。他要是不在家，就跟他(打对话者)讲“不懂英文”。没有办法。
- J 在这儿朋友多吗？主要是。．．
- L 不太多。主要就自己家人咯。

J 你是否帮助孩子学习？怎样帮？

L 主要就看他做。我现在呢，还有个呢，我主要想呢，毕竟他现在小吗，养成个看书的习惯，将来大了，就不要我们烦了。我们等于是帮不上忙，一点都帮不上。

J 培养他一个好的习惯。

L 唉，唉。就是培养一个好的习惯。就是督促。有的时候他做作业，默单词，他有图片吗。就把图片给他，叫他把单词写出来。单词写出来了吗，我一般之前叫他把对的写出来。我叫他和对的(单词)核对。

J 你是从他很小的时候就给他念中文书的哦？

L 对。

J 现在还每天为他念书吗？

L 现在吗，就是他每天读给我听，他读英文给我听。中文有的时候还是读。最近不太读了。

J 每天读多长时间？

L 每天都要读大概半个小时。

J 他喜欢的书/故事有哪些？

L 喜欢的他，就是象什么，木乃伊啦，这些东西啦。然后还有，他昨天告诉我，最近借了好几本有名的写儿童书的人，他把他们拿回来了。他告诉我都是加拿大写书最有名的。唉，这里书真多得不得了！

J 他经常看电视吗？

L 多。二十五频道。

J 看不看中文电视？

L 中文电视，有时候有了电视剧了，我们看他也跟到看。但他不太喜欢看。他主要就是二十五频道。

J 其他还有两个频道？

L 他不知道。不喜欢。他就是(看)二十五频道。就喜欢二十五频道。

J 你对他到加拿大以后的英语学习满意吗？

L 那他现在这个英文呢，怎么讲？因为我们不懂，那他现在到底(怎样)。我们也搞不清楚。那我现在看他跟小朋友的一般的对话是没有问题。那他究竟，在学校里面，究竟到什么程度，我们心理也没底。一点底都没有，到底到什么水平。

J 你有没有采取措施促进孩子的英语学习？

- L 我现在有的时候呢，他的英文，我拿“快译通”翻译。有时候电脑上也有，就在电脑上查。但有的时候跟他读的不太一样。
- J 你为孩子选择了什么样的课外活动？选择是出于什么样的考虑？
- L 因为我现在感觉到他呢，就是什么，学校抓的也不是太紧，也没什么课外作业。再加上象出于减肥(的考虑)，因为他毕竟在家跟我们接触多，都是讲中文。那我想就叫他去参加一些这样的活动，一方面给他跟小朋友接触接触，还有就是习惯啦，主要就是习惯。那还有到了这边以后我听讲了一些，还有吸大麻啊，或者是怎么样。这些如果我们在中国都不可能会有，在这边。．．这个小孩特别强调独立性，所以我们平时讲他他也不听。那我就希望从正面的教育多一些，到了他青春发育期，他不至于走弯路。主要就是这些。因为到了这边，我们真的帮不了他什么东西。让他参加一些健康一些的活动，他自己也比较喜欢。
- J 你觉得他的学校怎么样？你认为学校满足了你孩子的需求吗？
- L 还可以。
- J 你和你的孩子谈他/她学校发生的事吗？
- L 他有时候高兴，会跟我讲，昨天就跟我讲他们学校里头什么什么，跟我俩讲一讲。
- J 你和老师有联系吗？
- L 不太多。有的时候我叫他哥哥去问一下。有些事情如果搞不懂啦，叫他哥哥去问问。去吗，老师都讲还可以。
- J 多久一次？
- L 一个学期就两三次啦。
- J 你对学校的期望是什么？
- L 我就希望吗，就象这边的教学，到底培养什么，我们也不太了解。象我们这些不太懂英文的家长，我就希望一个学期，能够通过 ESL 的老师，给我们详细地讲一下学校的情况，然后我们平时在家里面给他。．．(辅导)。去找老师，时间也蛮紧的，就匆匆忙忙的，每次就几句话，唉。象我们上次也去找过学校，就是有一次他犯个什么错误，我们去找过校长。校长总的来讲还是不错的。专门安排的 ESL 的老师，跟我们一起坐下来，在旁边翻译。
- J 你的孩子上业余中文学校吗？
- L 上了(想)…上了两个学期。现在他不肯去。回来还要作业什么的。哎哟！你要他单独念还可以，学字，他不愿意。

- J 你认为保持流利的中文对你的孩子有多重要？
- L 我当然希望。但是这个小孩现在他有时候不肯说中文。上次跟你说过的。
- J 你和当地华人社区有多少联系？
- L 他们很多都是广东人，我们又不懂广东话。
- J 作为一个华人生活在英语环境中，你的感受是怎样的？
- L 主要是语言，其他都没什么。还有一个，对外交流吗，现在成了我们的一个主要问题。
- J 你对你的孩子最关切的是什么？
- L 就是怕他以后长大了，不听我们话了。学习我们倒不太担心。主要就是人品。其他倒是没什么问题。
- J 你对你的孩子的未来有什么期望？
- L 那我希望他将来学习成绩好呀，学个什么医呀，商科，学学这些东西。将来能有一个稳定的工作。
- J 你自己对将来有什么打算？
- L 如果他将来成人了，我们就回国了。我肯定回去。
- J 我的问题就大致这些。谢谢你！

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