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On Learning a Language in Transformation: Two final year students' experiences in Chinese complementary education

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with Chinese-Dutch children's experiences with learning Chinese in the Netherlands. The paper presents basic facts about the Chinese language and its changing position in the world, a brief history of the Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands and the context of Chinese complementary education. It analyses two written accounts of final year students' experiences with learning Chinese, focusing on the ways of speaking about Chinese in relation to identity and education. In conclusion, it is argued that the students' experiences urge us to consider Chinese as a polycentric language – i.e. as a language with multiple and competing centres of gravity – and as a language in transformation.[1]

What's in a name?

It is a commonly recurring theme in general discussions about language, that Chinese is the biggest language of all. Indeed, when measured by numbers of native speakers, the Chinese language is world's most widely spoken language. With a population of 1.4 billion people in China and millions of diasporic Chinese scattered in cities and towns across the world, most of the world's people are indeed speakers of Chinese. However, it is not all that clear what is meant with Chinese in such discussions. Concurrently, the term 'Chinese' is used to refer to Classical Chinese, the language of the Mandarins, the modern standard spoken variety, the written language, or as an umbrella term for a whole cluster of Chinese language varieties.

According to Ethnologue (2009), there are 292 indigenous *languages in China*. Ethnologue recognises Chinese in their list of languages of China not as *a* language, but as a macrolanguage, i.e. 'multiple, closely related individual languages that are deemed in some usage contexts to be a single language'. As a macrolanguage, Chinese has thirteen 'member languages', listed alphabetically as

[1] This paper has been written in the context of a HERA-funded project on discourses of identity and inheritance in four multilingual European settings (see http://www.heranet.info/idi4mes/index). It has been submitted for publication in Francesco Grande, Jan Jaap de Ruiter and Massimiliano Spotti, Eds. (forthcoming) *Mother Tongue and Intercultural Valorisation: Europe and its Migrant Children*. Milan: Franco Angeli.

Gan, Hakka, Huizhou, Jinyu, Mandarin, Min Bei, Min Dong, Min Nan, Min Zhong, Pu-Xian, Wu, Xiang and Yue.

The official discourse in China, however, is that there is only *one Chinese language* that comprises variation in the form of many *fangyan* or dialects (see Wang, 2011 for a critical discussion of these terms in the Chinese context). However, this variation only exists or is supposed to exist on the level of spoken language varieties. The Chinese language is unified by a homogeneous writing system that enables communication across a wide geographical area and among speakers of widely varying and mutually largely unintelligible vernaculars. This unification has a long and complex history, dating back to 246 BC when Qinshihuang, the first Chinese emperor passed a series of major economic, political and cultural reforms, including the unification of the Chinese writing system (DeFrancis, 1984).

Further, since 1913, considerable means have been invested by the Guoming and PRC governments in creating a standard or common spoken language based on the northern, Beijing variety of Chinese, coupled with simplified characters and a new romanisation system, *pinyin* (see Dong, 2010). This standard was spoken by officials and the educated elite in China during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties (Coblin, 2000), and is internationally still referred to as Mandarin, but is in China itself, currently referred to as Putonghua. Thus, 'Mandarin' represents a Western (orientalist) discourse about the Chinese language, and Putonghua represents an official Chinese discourse on Chinese.

Linguists traditionally divide Chinese fangyan into seven or eight major language/dialect clusters. DeFrancis (1984: 67) recognises eight 'mutually unintelligible regionalects' that make up Chinese. Ramsey (1987: 87) identifies seven 'dialect groups'. These include Mandarin (官) as the language/dialect of the north (also the most widely spoken language/dialect) and Wu (吴), Yue (粤), Xiang (湘), Hakka (客家), Gan (赣) and Min (闽) as languages/dialects of the south and coastal southeast. Shanghainese and Wenzhounese, for instance, are varieties of Wu. Yue is often used interchangeably with Cantonese, the language/dialect spoken in Hong Kong and the Guangdong province. Min – the *fangyan* of Fujian, Taiwan and Hainan – is the entity with the largest internal variation and is sometimes split up in two or more varieties using the cardinal directions east and west and/or north and south.

In Chinese, the most general terms for 'Chinese' are *Zhongwen* (中文) or *Hanyu* (汉语), whereby *Zhong* (中) refers to the country (as in中国 *Zhongguo* 'China') and *Han* (汉) to the ethnicity (as in the Han Chinese, 汉族). In Malaysia and Singapore *Huayu* (华语) and in Taiwan *Guoyu* (or *Kuo-yü* in Taiwanese romanisation, 国语) are more commonly used to refer to 'the Chinese language' (cf. Bradley, 1992). A more specific term than *Zhongwen* or *Hanyu* that is used in particular on the Mainland, is *Putonghua* (普通话, literally 'common speech'). *Yu*, *wen* and *hua* all mean language, but *hua* (话) is primarily for spoken language or speech, *wen* (文) for written language and *yu* (语) for language in general.

So, what's in a name? One of the most powerful myths about language includes the idea that there is a scientific distinction to be made between what is *a* language and what is *a* dialect. Such distinction, as five decades of critical sociolinguistic research has attempted to demonstrate, has little to no empirical basis (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007). It is indeed one of the truisms of sociolinguistics that a standard language is nothing more but a dialect with an army and a navy. What distinguishes languages from dialects is the entrenchment in individuals and institutions of powerful ideas of the following reasoning: language variety X is a language while language variety x is only a dialect, in some cases a dialect *of* X.

Chinese is such a language with an army and a navy, and a particularly powerful one as it groups a higher number of people, a vaster geographical area, and a larger continuum of variation than any other language in the world. This is increasingly the case now that Chinese has become a global language on a par with English and Arabic, and is being spoken and learned by a growing number of people all over the world, including speakers of other languages. The rise of Chinese as a global language is an effect of at least three factors: (1) China's long history of emigration and diaspora formation within Asia as well as to Europe, America and Australia, and increasingly to the rest of the world as well; (2) the interests of companies, institutions and governments in doing business with Chinese partners – in particular from The People's Republic of China (PRC) for its productive and competitive manufacturing industry; and (3) the symbolic (re)centring of China on the world map as a result of recent global events such as the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and the Shanghai 2010 World Expo. These three phenomena of globalisation have imported English into China (Orton, Lo Bianco and Gao, 2009; Pan, 2010), but have certainly also exported Chinese into the world (Liu and Lo Bianco, 2007).

As Chinese language is globalising, questions of norms, standards, and diversity have become increasingly important in a variety of domains, including the business of language teaching and learning. Given the increasing diversity in terms of migration trajectories and ethnolinguistic identities of the Dutch-Chinese diaspora under conditions of globalisation and superdiversity (see Li and Juffermans, 2011), what it means to be or to speak Chinese is being renegotiated. This negotiating of norms about what counts as (good) Chinese finds place in everyday discourse in both implicit and more explicit claims regarding the status of varieties of Chinese. Depending on one's political and social association vis-à-vis a particular centre, particular varieties and accents are considered to be more or less useful, standardised, comprehensible, refined, etc.

In this paper, we are concerned with two Dutch-Chinese students' experiences and identities as learners of Chinese in the Netherlands. More specifically, we focus on their ways of speaking about or referring to Chinese, i.e. on the metalinguistics of Chinese and the power relations it reveals. The paper is structured in four sections. We first sketch a brief history of the Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands and outline the context of Chinese complementary education in the Netherlands. We then analyze two accounts of final year students' experiences with learning Chinese, and conclude with arguing that Chinese be seen as polycentric language in transition.

The Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands

The Chinese are one of the oldest established immigrant communities in the Netherlands. The first Chinese immigrants came to the Netherlands as seafarers at the end of nineteenth century. The current composition of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands varies both linguistically and in terms of its history of migration and socio-economic position (Li, 1999).

Figures of the number of Chinese residing in the Netherlands vary a lot depending on the source and on the particular definition of 'Chinese'. Only some of them have migrated directly from Mainland China. Others are from Hong Kong and Macau that have only more recently been integrated (in 1997 and 1999 respectively) as Special Administrative Regions into the PRC, or from the island of Taiwan, the government of which recognises itself as the Republic of China. Yet others are re-emigrants from the former Dutch East Indies (now the Republic of Indonesia) and Suriname (the former Dutch colony in northern South America) as well as from Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.

Chinese immigration to the Netherlands happened *grosso modo* in three stages. The first stage took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Chinese pioneers began to immigrate to the Netherlands for a variety of reasons. As a push factor, there was the Taiping Rebellion against the ruling Qing dynasty between 1850 and 1864, a civil war that cost the lives of 20 million people. As a pull factor, there was the economic opportunity of being hired by Dutch shipping companies to break the Dutch seamen's strike of 1911. The Chinese pioneers who came directly from mainland China to the Netherlands were mainly from the provinces of Guangdong and Zheijiang. More precisely, the majority of them came from the Wenzhou and Qingtian districts in Zhejiang and Bo On district in Guangdong (Pieke, 1988; Li, 1999; Pieke, 1992).

This initial flow was followed in a second stage in the 1950s to 1970s by Chinese of various ethnic and regional backgrounds that had previously migrated to Java, Sumatra, Suriname, Vietnam, Taiwan and Hong Kong. These immigrants were mostly engaged in the catering business, i.e. in exploiting Chinese restaurants. The Hong Kong Chinese became the largest group of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands.

A third stage in the immigration of Chinese immigrants to the Netherlands is marked by a sudden rise of immigration from Mainland China after 1976. The reason behind this phenomenon was the political and economic transformation in mainland China. Also, the social position of emigrants has shifted from being 'betrayers of the motherland' to one of admiration (Li, 1999). Since the pursuit of material well-being was no longer considered taboo in mainland China and since the Chinese government has softened its severely defined emigration policies, potential economic betterment in wealthy countries has effectively pushed many Chinese into going abroad. As a result, in the final quarter of the twentieth century, the Chinese emigration was far greater than anything experienced during the first three-quarters of the century.

This third stage is also characterised by the so-called group of *liuxuesheng* (Chinese students abroad). Since 1979, it has become very attractive for Chinese university students to study in a Western country (especially the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, but also continental Europe). The term *liuxuesheng* originally referred to Chinese people studying in a foreign country, but now also commonly includes those who finished their studies and are working abroad, and even applies to their family members. According to Neso China, the Beijing office of the Netherlands Agency for International Cooperation in Higher Education, the number of Chinese students in the Netherlands has subsequently risen from a few hundred in 1980s to more than 10,000 in 2005.

By the 1990s, there were close to 40,000 ethnic Chinese in the Netherlands consisting of 39 nationalities (Zhao, 1992). In 2010, there were 75,000 Chinese in the Netherlands according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The ethnic minority organisation IOC (*Inspraakorgaan Chinezen*) estimates the number of Chinese in the Netherlands to be between 45 and 100 thousand. The flow of Chinese migration to the Netherlands is so complex and multi-layered in terms of individual motivations and family trajectories that we can speak of the Chinese diaspora as a 'superdiverse' group (Vertovec, 2007).

Chinese complementary schools in the Netherlands

In all major cities in the Netherlands and in all twelve provinces, there is at least one community-run Chinese school offering complementary education in Chinese language and culture. The *Stichting Chinees Onderwijs Nederland* (the umbrella organisation for Chinese complementary schools in the Netherlands) lists more than 40 schools.

The research reported here takes place primarily in a Chinese complementary school in Eindhoven in the Dutch province of North Brabant. The school was initially established in 1978 by the Chinese Protestant Church of Eindhoven and initially provided Cantonese lessons to an odd twenty children of Cantonese immigrants in a café restaurant. The school has grown significantly since and with the changing composition of Chinese immigrants in The Netherlands, lessons have gradually shifted to Mandarin. Since 2006 there are only Mandarin classes left.

At the time of our research (i.e., two months before and three months after the school summer holiday of 2010), the school had around 290 students and rented space from a sizeable mainstream secondary school. Classes start from kindergarten and progress from level 1 through level 12. The lower grades typically have up to twenty pupils whereas the higher grades usually have less than eight pupils. In addition, there are four levels of adult language classes on offer to non-Chinese speakers who wish to learn Chinese. There is also a Dutch class for speakers of Chinese that is attended, among others, by teachers that are not yet proficient in Dutch. Students are mainly from the area of Eindhoven, but some students also travel considerable distances to attend the school, including from towns across the border in Belgium. Altogether there were 25 teachers, including teachers for calligraphy, music and Chinese martial arts (kung fu). Many of the teachers are long-

term residents in the local area. Both teachers and students at the school come from a wide range of social and linguistic backgrounds. Some of the teachers are well-paid professionals working at the High Tech Campus or for one of the hospitals in the city. Others are housewives or househusbands or work in the catering business, manage or employed in a Chinese restaurant. Yet others are researchers or doctoral students who recently arrived in the Netherlands from Mainland China. Recruitment of teachers is mainly from the community through personal introductions, and the school website. Student recruitment, likewise, is through word of mouth, the website, and advertisements in local Chinese supermarkets and restaurants.

Since the classes have gradually changed to Mandarin, the school no longer uses textbooks prepared in Hong Kong but by Ji Nan University in Mainland China. The textbooks, donated by the Chinese embassy in The Netherlands, were originally targeted for children of overseas Chinese in the United States and Canada. Therefore, the language of instruction in the textbooks is English. In our fieldwork sites, some teachers speak English in addition to, or sometimes instead of Dutch, and flexibly switch in an out of Chinese, Dutch and/or English in the classroom (cf. Creese and Blackledge, 2010 for similar findings in UK complementary classrooms).

Classes in the Chinese school in Eindhoven are on Saturday morning when students and teachers are free from their daily education and/or work, and when the school premises are available to be rented. Classes are from 9.15 to 11.45 a.m. and include a 20 minute break, during which there are regular staff meetings for the teachers.

Two students' self-reported experiences with Chinese

We will now turn to examples of discourse collected during ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in and around the Chinese complementary school in Eindhoven as part of a PhD project at Tilburg University and a larger research project on multilingual practices in complementary schools in four north-western European settings. The first author had been working as a language teacher in the school for four years before returning to the school as a researcher, and had well-established rapport with the teaching staff and the school as whole.

The data presented here are essays written by students of grade 12 that were obtained as voluntary homework. At the time of our research at the end of the school year 2009/10, the class consisted of five students: Wendy, Tongtong, Esther, Xiaoxia and Weimin and one regular class teacher, Mr Zhou (all pseudonyms). Three of the students and the teacher were of Cantonese and the other two students of Wenzhounese background. Key information about this class is provided in Table 1 below. We had observed this class and discussed the general purpose of our research with Mr. Zhou. In a conversation with him, the idea emerged to ask the students to write their personal experiences with learning Chinese in an essay. The teacher supported the idea because this way the students could practice with writing in the form of voluntary homework while at the same time providing useful data for our research.

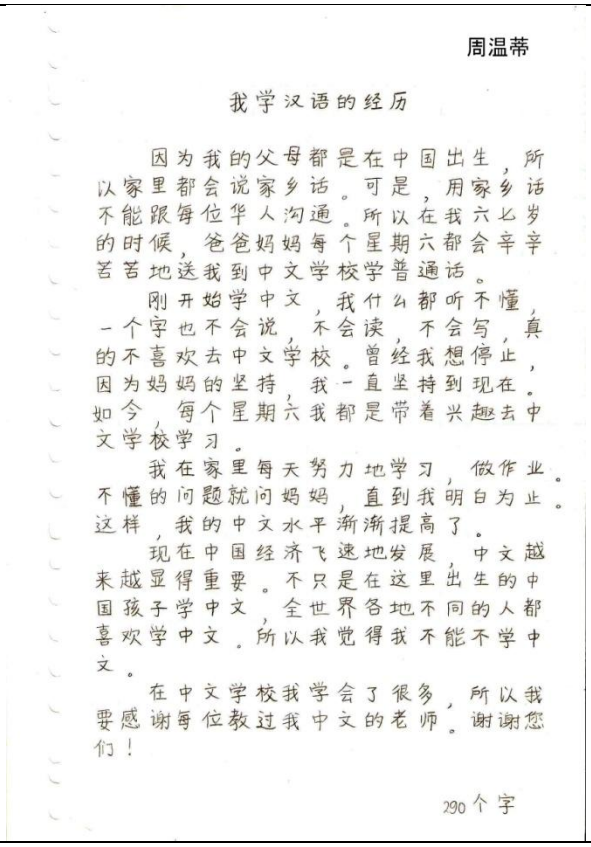
Table 1. Grade 12 class (in June 2010)

Role; Name	Gender	Age	Country of birth	Ethnolinguistic background
Students				
Wendy	F	17	Netherlands	Wenzhounese (Wenzhou)
Tongtong	F	17	Netherlands	Cantonese (Hong Kong/Guangdong)
Esther	F	17	Netherlands	Cantonese (Hong Kong)
Xiaoxia	F	18	Netherlands	Cantonese (Hong Kong)
Weimin	M	18	China	Wenzhounese (Wenzhou)
Teacher				
Mr. Zhou	M	50s	China	Cantonese (Guangdong)

Three of the five students returned their essays to Mr. Zhou who passed them on to the first author. Copies of the essays were made and the originals were given back to the students. Wendy was the first to hand in her voluntary homework. Tongtong and Esther handed in theirs a few weeks later, just before the summer holidays. Esther, however, wrote her essay not about her experiences with learning Chinese but about what she wanted to become later in life. The other two students in this class, Xiaoxia and Weimin choose either not to write or not to hand in their homework. With Wendy and Tongtong contact was continued outside the school, also after their graduation (online on the social network sites Facebook and Hyves, but also in the 'real world' – see Varis, Wang and Du, 2011 for a critique of a reality vs. virtuality opposition). With the other three students in class, no further relation was developed. In this paper, we will focus on Wendy and Tongtong's essays and compare their experiences with learning Chinese.

Let us start by introducing Wendy's essay in its original version on the left accompanied by a translation in English on the right.

Example 1: Wendy's homework



周温蒂

我学汉语的经历

因为我的父母都是在中国出生，所以家里都会说家乡话。可是，用家乡话不能跟每位华人沟通。所以在我六七岁的时候，爸爸妈妈每个星期六都会辛辛苦苦地送我到中文学校学普通话。

刚开始学中文，我什么都听不懂，一个字也不会说，不会读，不会写，真的不喜欢去中文学校。曾经我想停止，因为妈妈的坚持，我一直坚持到现在。如今，每个星期六我都是带着兴趣去中文学校学习。

我在家里每天努力地学习，做作业。不懂的问题就问妈妈，直到我明白为止。这样，我的中文水平渐渐提高了。

现在中国经济飞速地发展，中文越来越显得重要。不只是在这里出生的中国孩子学中文，全世界各地不同的人都喜欢学中文。所以我觉得我不能不学中文。

在中文学校我学会了很多，所以我要感谢每位教过我中文的老师。谢谢您们！

290个字

Zhou Wendy

My experience of learning Chinese

My parents were born in China, so we speak home dialect at home. However, by speaking home dialect we are not able to communicate with all the Chinese immigrants. So when I was about 6 or 7 years, my parents sent me to the Chinese school to learn Putonghua.

In the beginning of learning Chinese, I could not understand anything. I could not speak a word, could not read and write. I really disliked going to the Chinese school and even thought about quitting. But my mum insisted on sending me to the Chinese school. And now, I start to like going to the Chinese school.

I study very hard every day and do my homework carefully. If I encounter difficulties in learning Chinese, then I would ask my mum until I understand completely. So, my Chinese is getting better and better.

Nowadays, the economy in China is growing very fast, and Chinese is becoming more and more important. Not only are the children of Chinese immigrants learning Chinese, but also people from all over the world like to learn Chinese. Therefore, I cannot stop learning Chinese.

I have learned a lot at the Chinese school, so I want to thank every teacher who has taught me.

The text, in simplified characters, is superscribed with Wendy's name and a title and is organised in five paragraphs of three sentences each and one paragraph of two sentences. Sentences vary in length from simple ones of less than fifteen characters to compound sentences of more than thirty characters. The text is written on special large-squared apprentice paper for intermediate and advanced learners. From a normative, schooling perspective, Wendy's style is clear, well-structured, grammatically transparent, but rather colloquial and is exempt from complex stylised lexical items. In general, her style is indexical of an advanced, motivated and self-disciplined learner of Chinese outside of China.

The first paragraph identifies Wendy's parents as first generation immigrants from China and as dialect speakers, and mentions the limit of using dialect in the Chinese community. So she was sent to the Chinese school to learn Putonghua at the age of 6 or 7 by her parents. The second paragraph is about her initial experience with and (negative) feelings about learning Chinese, and the parental pressure to continue, and her present (positive) attitude toward her complementary schooling. The third paragraph is about the efforts she makes in learning, the help she gets from her mum and the results obtained so far. The fourth paragraph is about the changing position of China and Chinese in the world as a motivating factor for to continue learning Chinese. The fifth paragraph is the coda of the story and expresses gratitude to her teachers.

Let us now introduce the second essay, by Tongtong. Again, the original is on the left and our translation on the right.

Example 2: Tongtong's homework

我學漢語的心路歷程

我从四岁开始就学中文。一开始我学了两年粤语，后来我妈妈把我转到国语班了。我一开始还真的不喜欢国语，因为我一句也听不懂。我从小在家里就说广东话，对国语的了解也很少。我妈妈会说一口流利的国语，以前我妈妈说国语的时候，总觉得她是在说另外一个语言，这让我对国语有了好奇心。从我学国语的那一年，我妈妈就开始教我拼音，还叫我怎么发音。一开始是真的很难，我还觉得我会永远学不会，因为我每星期只上一堂中文课，而且练习的机会也不多。大概从六年前开始我的国语进步的特别快，因为那一年我妈妈把家里的唯一说广东话的电视台 TVB 删了，而中文台只剩凤凰卫视，也就是只说国语的电视台。这样的话，如果我想看中文电视，就只能看说国语的电视台。本来我真的很不习惯，后来慢慢的听，慢慢的学，我的国语开始进步了。 那一年中文学校也换了学习教材，而因为这个新的教材，让我特别想学中文。新的教材的内容特别丰富，比以前的好多了。以前那些书本只会教你怎么写生字，怎么发音，而词语的意思和怎么运用就没有教。现在这些书本除了教你怎么写之外，每一课还有学不同的文章，所以学到很多关于中国的历史、地理和文化。这对我们生长在外国的中国子弟很重要，因为可以学到很多关于祖国的事以及让我更了解我的父母成长的地方。除了这些以外，现在的课本也教怎么运用词语，怎么造句，反义词，作文 。。。因为内容丰富的教材让我更有恒心地学习中文。这么多年的学习让我会听会说国语，而且更会写中文。慢慢的我也开始看中文报纸，而且也看中国和台湾的电视剧。就这样让我的国语进步神速。

2006 年我和中文学校的几位同学参加了回中国的夏令营，接触了真正的中国文化，还有跟中国的青少年交流，2007 年我还参加了朗诵比赛，虽然当年没有的任何名次，但经过这次的朗诵比赛，让我学习到朗诵的技 巧。参加了这些活动也让我了解了很多中国的文化。

现在每当有关于中文的测验和比赛我都踊跃参加，

My experience of learning Chinese

I started to learn Chinese when I was four years old. I had two years of Cantonese lessons in the beginning, and then my mum sent me to Mandarin classes. At first, I really did not like Mandarin, because I could not understand anything. At home, we speak in Cantonese, so I do not know much about Mandarin. My mum speaks Mandarin fluently. In the beginning, when my mum spoke in Mandarin, I got the feeling that she was speaking a foreign language, which made me curious about Mandarin. In the first year of learning Mandarin, my mum taught me *pinyin* and the pronunciation. At first I felt it was very difficult and thought that I would never master it, because I only had Chinese lessons once a week and I did not have much chance to practice. ◆ About six years ago, my Mandarin started to make remarkable progress, because my mum deleted the Cantonese television channel TVB, there was only Phoenix channel left, so there was only a Mandarin channel. In this way, if I wanted to watch television, I could only watch Mandarin channel. I was not used to it at all, but later on, I listened slowly and learned constantly, my Mandarin started to make progress. ◆ In the same year, the school textbooks were also changed. The new textbooks made me really want to learn Chinese. The content of the new textbook is much richer than what we had before. The old ones only emphasise how to write characters, how to pronounce the words, but no explanations for the words and the context of using the words. The new textbooks not only teach us characters and the pronunciation, but there were also different articles in which I learn about Chinese history, geography and culture. This is very important for those Chinese children who grow up in foreign countries, because we can learn a lot about China, and also the place where my parents grew up. Beside this, the new textbook also teaches us how to use the words and how to make sentences and how to write compositions… Because of this textbook, I want to continue with Chinese learning. ◆ After so many years of learning, I can understand Mandarin and even more importantly, I can write Chinese. As time progresses, I can also read Chinese newspapers and watch Chinese and Taiwanese televisions. In this way, my Mandarin progresses remarkably.

In 2006, my classmate from the Chinese school and I participated in a summer camp to China, and communicated with the Chinese youth in China. In 2007, I participated in a reading contest. Even though I did not win, because of the contest, I learned the reading skills. All these activities make me know more about the Chinese culture.

Nowadays, I participate in all the Chinese tests and contests that occur, because I want my Chinese

因为我想让我的中文更好。 今年是我学中文的第十三年了，也是我在中文学校毕业的最后一年了，虽然很开心但也有舍不得。开心的是我终于不用每星期六早上起床上学，舍不得的是我会想念中文，因为在荷兰用中文的机会太少了，如果不接触就会生疏。不过现在中国的经济起飞，会说国语也对以后的工作很有帮助，就在这一点我就不用愁啦!!	to be excellent. This year is my thirteenth year of learning Chinese, which is also my last year at the Chinese school. I am happy about it but at the same time I am also reluctant. I am happy because finally I do not need to get up so early every Saturday. I am reluctant because I will miss Chinese, because there are not so many chances to speak Chinese in the Netherlands. If I do not practice it, my Chinese will be less fluent. However, the economy in China is growing very fast; Speaking Mandarin will be very helpful for my job later, so I do not have to worry on this point!!

Tongtong's text, also in simplified characters (however with the title in traditional characters)[2], is also presented on a single A4-sized page, but is about three times as long as Wendy's essay (852 vs. 290 characters). Tongtong's text is organised in one very long and two shorter paragraphs consisting of twenty, three and three sentences respectively. Sentences vary in length from simple ones of one or two constituents and twenty characters or less, to complex ones with four or more constituents and over fifty characters. The text is, like Wendy's, without obvious mistakes on word-level. When we look at Tongtong's text from a normative, schooling perspective, we see peculiar punctuation and organisation of the text in sentences and paragraphs. Her style is, like Wendy's rather colloquial and indexical for a hardworking Chinese-speaking learner of Chinese outside of China.

The long first paragraph can be divided in four blocks. The first block is about Tongtong's earliest period of being a learner of Chinese. Tongtong mentions that she started learning Chinese at the age of four and describes that she has undergone a shift from Cantonese to Mandarin education after two years of learning Chinese. She also writes about the initial difficulties as a result of this shift. She also names her mum as a key agent in her learning process ('my mum sent me to Mandarin classes', 'my mum speaks Mandarin fluently', 'my mum taught me pinyin and the pronunciation', 'my mum deleted the Cantonese television'). The second and third blocks provide explanations for what she describes as 'a remarkable progress' in her learning about six years ago (i.e., at the age of 11). The first explanation for this sudden progress is ascribed to her mum deleting the Cantonese television channel so that she was exposed more to Mandarin. The second reason is the changes in textbooks and teaching and learning style from a traditional grammar and pronunciation-based approach to a more socio-cultural, contents and usage-based approach. In the fourth block she concludes with the observation that the results obtained so far are satisfactory (although not complete, as she emphasises progress and a continuous learner identity). The second paragraph recounts two events

[2] The title of Tongtong's home work is 我學漢語的心路歷程; in simplified characters this would be 我学汉语的心路历程, whereby the second, third, fourth and eighth characters have fewer strokes than in the traditional version. Simplified Chinese is used in mainland China since the language reform of 1956, while traditional characters continue to be used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and by some of the Chinese communities overseas. The use of traditional characters indicates that Tongtong has been exposed to Cantonese and traditional Chinese through schooling and Cantonese/Taiwanese television that is often subtitled.

that further motivated her learning and improved her Chinese, i.e., participating in a summer camp and in a reading contest. The third and final paragraph reflects with a sense of ambivalence on the fact that her Chinese education has come to an end: she fears that her Chinese may become less fluent without routine opportunities to practice, but puts this in perspective with the prospect of a job for which proficiency in Chinese may be an asset.

Analysis and discussion

We will now comparatively analyse the two essays with a focus on the metalinguistics of Chinese, i.e. on the ways of speaking about and referring to 'Chinese' in relation to identity and education in the two texts described above. Our findings are summarised in Table 2 below.

Wendy uses three different terms for 'Chinese', *Jiaxianghua* (家乡话), *Putonghua* (普通话) and *Zhongwen* (中文) and uses a fourth term, *Hanyu* (汉语), in the title of the assignment. The title was literally copied from how the class teacher formulated the assignment and not part of Wendy's personal narrative. Her education is presented as a struggle ('really disliked', 'thought about quitting', 'my mum insisted'), but with a harmonious and satisfying result in the end ('and now I start to like going to the Chinese school'). The trajectory takes her from nothing to something, i.e. from not understanding anything and not being able to speak a word, to a positive self-identification as a speaker and learner of Chinese ('my Chinese is getting better and better'). The satisfactory results of her education are brought in connection with the rapid economic developments currently undergoing in China and its changing geopolitical position in the world.

What is metalinguistically remarkable about this short text, are the changing terms of reference for Chinese. In the first paragraph, Wendy constructs an opposition between (an unnamed) 'home dialect'/*jiaxianghua* and *Putonghua*, an opposition that is resolved by her education. We know that her parents are from Wenzhou and that their home dialect/language is *Wenzhouhua*, but this is not explicitly mentioned in the text. She chooses to leave the respective dialect/language unnamed and to contrast this with *Putonghua* only once. From the second paragraph onwards, Wendy no longer uses the term *Putonghua* for what she is learning, but uses the generative *Zhongwen*. *Zhongwen* is made synonymous with *Putonghua*. She simply refers to the object of her education as *Zhongwen*. The unnamed (Chinese) dialect that she speaks at home is thus disqualified as being *Zhongwen*/Chinese.

This is not a discursive construction made locally and individually by Wendy here, but is something that also exists on a higher scale level. Wendy's disqualification of the home dialect as being (a part of) Chinese, has of course much to do with the micropragmatics of the word for Chinese school (中文学校 *Zhongwen xuexiao*), which carries *Zhongwen* rather than *Putonghua* in its name. To an important extent, Wendy voices a larger Chinese ideology of language that sees the Chinese language as an exclusive, monoglot, homogeneous entity, and discards the diversity existing underneath it.

Tongtong in her essay uses four different terms for 'Chinese', i.e. *Guangdonghua, Yueyu*, *Guoyu* and *Zhongwen*, and a fifth term, *Hanyu*, in the title given by her teacher. She starts using the term *Zhongwen* in the first sentence of the text. In the second sentence she divides the term *Zhongwen* into two: *Yueyu* and *Guoyu*. *Yueyu* is the dialect/language spoken in Guangdong Province and the Hong Kong and Macau special administrative regions in the south of China, and is used as a synonym for *Guangdonghua* and is usually referred to as Cantonese in English, after the old name for the province and the capital, Canton. (Yue is, like Han, an ethnonym and is also the one-character identification for the Guangdong Province, e.g. on car number plates.) Guoyu literally means 'national language' and was used until 1949 to refer to the standard northern variety of Chinese, but is now associated with the Republic of China (Taiwan) since the new Maoist government proposed a language reform and introduced *Putonghua* ('common speech') as a name for the and standard variety of Chinese spoken. Both *Guoyu* and *Putonghua* (and *Huayu*) correspond to 'Mandarin' in English.

Tongtong's trajectory of learning starts from learning *Yueyu* (Cantonese) to a struggling with learning *Guoyu* (Mandarin) and the trajectory ends with an enthusiasm in learning Chinese ('Participate in all the Chinese tests and contests', 'will miss Chinese'). In the beginning of her learning trajectory, she considered *Guoyu* as a foreign language, i.e., 'really did not like Mandarin', 'could not understand anything', 'a foreign language', 'very difficult', 'thought that I would never master it'. She mentions her home language is *Guangdonghua* (Cantonese) in the fourth sentence, and she did not know much about *Guoyu*. In her learning trajectory, her mum is the crucial factor ('my mum sent me to Mandarin classes', 'my mum deleted the Cantonese television channel').

From a metalinguistic point of view, Tongtong starts using the term *Zhongwen* in the first sentence as the object of her education. From the second sentence onwards in the first paragraph, she constructs an opposition between *Yueyu*/*Guangdonghua* (Cantonese) and *Guoyu* (Mandarin). *Zhongwen* corresponds with *Yueyu* in first years of Tongtong's Chinese education. Then, after two years, *Zhongwen* is synonymous with *Guoyu*. The object of her education has shifted from Cantonese to Mandarin. From the second paragraph onwards, Tongtong no longer uses the term Cantonese, but uses the term *Zhongwen* and *Guoyu*. The satisfactory result of learning *Guoyu* is mentioned in the end in connection with the fast growing economy in China. Tongtong's learning trajectory goes through a few stages, marked by different metalinguistics.

The text written by Tongtong reflects more than a local and individual discursive construction, but voices a discourse at a higher, institutional scale level. In an interview with Tongtong's mother, who has been educated in China and has worked as an editor at a television station in Guangzhou before her emigration in the late 1980s, she stresses the importance of speaking Putonghua for educational and general success in life.

Table 2: Wendy and Tongtong's metalinguistic lexicon

Wendy's metalinguistics				
汉语	*Hanyu*	'Han language'	1x	In the title.
家乡话	*Jiaxianghua*	'home language/ dialect'	2x	In the first paragraph, with reference to her parents and the home situation.
普通话	*Putonghua*	'common speech'	1x	In the first paragraph, with reference to the language of instruction in the Chinese school, in contrast with 'home dialect'.
中文	*Zhongwen*	'Chinese (language)'	7x	From paragraph 2 onwards. In collocation with 'learning' and 'school' (Chinese school is *Zhongwen xuexiao*). Used independently in paragraph 3: 'my Chinese'.
Tongtong's metalinguistics				
汉语	*Hanyu*	'Han language'	1x	In the title.
粤语	*Yueyu*	'Yue language' (Cantonese)	1x	In the first paragraph, in collocation with 'lessons', thus referring to Cantonese as school language.
广东话	*Guangdonghua*	'language of Guangdong' (Cantonese)	1x	Here used in collocation with 'at home', thus referring to Cantonese as home language.
国语	*Guoyu*	'national language' (Mandarin)	14x	Occurred 13 times in the first and once in the third paragraph, with reference to the language of instruction or as (national) variety of Chinese.
中文	*Zhongwen*	'country's language' (Chinese)'	16x	Occurred 9 times in the first paragraph; 3 times in the second paragraph; 4 times in the third paragraph. Used in collocation with 'learning', 'channel', 'school' and 'newspaper'.

Conclusions

The educational experiences of Tongtong and Wendy raise a number of questions with regard to language teaching and learning. For instance, what is the object of their Chinese complementary education? If it is essentially language teaching and learning they are engaged in on Saturday mornings, what language then is being taught and learned? The briefest possible answer here would be that they are learning Chinese, and this is indeed how Tongtong and Wendy refer to the object of their education in translation. However, there is a multitude of terms for Chinese available in Chinese

– *Zhongwen*, *Hanyu*, *Putonghua*, *Guoyu* etc. (see Table 2 above), each with very specific denotational and connotational properties. Saying that Tongtong and Wendy learn Chinese or that Chinese schools teach Chinese does not tell us much about what is exactly being taught and learned in Chinese complementary schools.

Both Wendy and Tongtong *are* Chinese, or more correctly, they have inherited a Chinese cultural and language family background (see Li and Juffermans, 2011 for a discussion of Dutch-Chinese youth identities in relation to Chinese-, Dutch- and Asianness). For neither of them, however, it is the exact same language of their heritage or their mother tongue in any straightforward sense that they are learning. Wendy, who is of Wenzhounese background refers to her local variety of Chinese, i.e. Wenzhounese, nondescriptly as 'home dialect' and disqualifies it as a language. Tongtong, who is from a Cantonese language background started her complementary educational career learning Cantonese, but changed on her mother's initiative to Mandarin after two years.

So what is going on here? Are we witnessing language shift from one (variety of) language to another (from Cantonese and Wenzhounese to Mandarin) or are things more complicated than that? Terms such as mother tongue and heritage language may be misleading here for this compartmentalises Chinese language into many Chinese languages ('Chineses') and discards a sense of linguistic unity ('harmony') which is sociolinguistically very real in China as well as in its diasporas. What we need to account for, is how this unity is realised and what macropolitical order it reveals (see Dong, 2010 for an account of processes of linguistic homogenisation; and Wang, 2011 for processes of subaltern contestation).

We suggest that we need to consider Chinese as a polycentric language, i.e. as a language that operates on various scales and has multiple centres of gravity. To say that a language is polycentrically organised is to say that is has multiple, more or less powerful centres that compete with each other. In essence, every language in the world is polycentric but due to the large size and global scene in which Chinese operates, this is more obvious for Chinese than for smaller languages. Polycentricity is not entirely the same as pluricentricity as used by Clyne (1992) because the latter term emphasised plurality of varieties within a language, i.e. plurality of relatively stable self-contained linguistic systems that together make up a language. Polycentricity emphasises the functional inequality between such varieties and the simultaneous links to the various centring powers language practices are simultaneously subject to. Whereas a pluricentric language is the sum of its varieties, a polycentric language is a dynamic, socially ordered system of resources and norms that are strongly or weakly associated with one or more centres.

Chinese is a polycentric language and one with a particularly powerful army and navy as we stated in the beginning of this paper. As a polycentric language, Chinese is undergoing considerable transformation with a clear direction towards the standard variety of the PRC, i.e. Putonghua. We see evidence of this transformation perhaps most clearly in the diaspora. In the Dutch Chinese diaspora, we witness a gradual shift from Cantonese as a lingua franca, to Putonghua as the most

common language of the Chinese diaspora. This shift is most visible perhaps in educational institutions, such as the complementary school in Eindhoven studied here, but is evident also in other sectors of the Chinese community. This has to do with what Dong (2010) has called 'the enregisterment of Putonghua in practice', or what we may term as the Putonghuaisation of Chinese. Increasingly, Chinese is becoming an exclusive, monoglot, homogeneous entity that erases the diversity existing underneath it. This process of Putonghuaisation is not (only) language shift in the sense of a shift from Cantonese as one language to Mandarin as the other language, but are shifts within a language (Chinese) as well as shifts that extend far beyond language – shifts that are more generally demographic and sociological in nature. We are dealing here with what we may call, adapting from Silverstein (1998), local transformations of a global linguistic community.

It is important for language teachers to realise the scope and depth of diversity existing within a language such as Chinese as well as the transformations the global Chinese linguistic community is undergoing. Teachers need to be aware that Chinese is not a homogeneous, monoglot language, but that it serves as a language of wider communication for a highly diverse student population that is learning the language for a variety of motivations (cf. Francis, Archer and Mau, 2009). It is equally important for teachers to be aware of the implicit ideologies of language that (dis)qualify particular varieties as (good) language, as well as of their role in (re)producing such ideologies in the classroom and the potential harm this may do for students' valuations of their linguistic and cultural heritage.

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