

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology: Division of Humanities/Center for Language Education

HUMA 1000: Cultures and Values: **Cover sheet for final essay**

<b>Full name</b>	
<b>Student ID</b>	
<b>Writing workshop section number</b>	
<b>Writing workshop instructor</b>	
<b>Title of essay (please copy and paste from the document on Canvas)</b>	<p>Mauro, an Italian, married May, a Chinese woman from Beijing when both of them were studying and working in the U.K. Barely knowing anything about each other's language, they have been speaking English between themselves. They started a family in London, where their son, Luka, was born about three years ago. Mauro speaks only Italian with Luka, holding that this is the language of their cultural heritage, and insists that May speak purely Chinese with him. However, for the convenience of communication in the neighborhood (such as, with Luka's kindergarten teachers and parents of other kids), and the strong belief that English would be the dominant, mainstream language in their life in the U.K., she would most of the time opt for English to talk with Luka. And now, Luka would only be willing to speak Italian and English in the house, but never Chinese, unless forced to. This worries Mauro very much, as he feels it is vital for his son to also master Chinese, language of an emerging economic superpower in the world.</p>

**Declaration:** The attached essay represents my own work. I have read and understood the University's policies on academic honesty and I confirm that the attached work conforms to these policies.

Please type your name:

**Response to feedback: note here the comments from your instructor you have responded to (you can copy these from your feedback sheet).**

**1. My instructor's comment: the scope seems too broad for 1000-word essay.**

Thus I focused on arguing on mandarin Chinese and excluded the part of advocating using Chinese dialects in addition to mandarin as family languages in my introductory paragraph and my whole essay.

**2. My instructor's comment: rather than focusing on the reasons why Chinese people's high English proficiency level is a myth, focus on what overseas Chinese such as Luka should do.**

In response to this, I changed the counter argument to that overseas Chinese such as Luka can grasp Chinese cultural elements with ease without actually learning the language, with examples like Chinese festivities and their related customs. However, this point was rebutted since the reasons behind the customs or the hidden implications require adequate knowledge of the language for a fuller understanding.

**3. My instructor's comment: (Body paragraph 1) The data about endangered languages does not seem relevant.**

Since the data would be out of scope now, so it was removed from the essay.

**4. My instructor's comment: The essay is quite well-written other than the fact that it is over-length by 21 words.**

The word count is now reduced to less than 1100.

**5. My instructor's comment: (Body paragraph 1) Problematic for "You refer to course materials appropriately" and (Body paragraph 3) Out of syllabus for "You refer to course materials appropriately".**

I tried my best to avoid misunderstandings by adopting the proper APA format for citing the assigned readings and secondary sources such as citations made in the lecture slides.

Today, there are over 50,000,000 overseas Chinese, with the population spread all over the world. With the United Kingdom alone, there are over 430,000, as in 2008. Under interracial marriages between Chinese and locals of their countries of residence, more cases like Mauro and May's family would arise, causing confusion on adoption of family languages. This essay will argue that Mauro's and other overseas Chinese families should adopt mandarin Chinese in addition to the non-Chinese parent's mother tongue, so as to keep the overseas Chinese culturally attached to China, promote a sense of identity as a Chinese and share benefits from China's rise. Mauro's family's case will be extended to all overseas Chinese families and three aspects will be discussed: the inheritance of Chinese culture and languages, ethnic identity, and China's global influences.

First, adopting mandarin as family languages in overseas Chinese families facilitates the inheritance of Chinese culture and retention of languages. According to Schieffelin and Och (1986), children's acquisition of language has a strong correlation to their acquisition of culture. Through communicating with family members in their heritage language, children can discover the values and beliefs, and a variety of aspects around the cultural contexts, such as politeness in East Asian cultures. (Park, 2003). For instance, the Confucian values of “仁”, “義”, “孝” (roughly translated to benevolence, righteousness and filial piety respectively) are often taught by Chinese parents in Chinese instead of other languages; parents would always remind children not to offer clocks as gifts, since it resembles death in pronunciation in both mandarin and Cantonese. Speaking Chinese as a family language, therefore allows children to pick up the cultural elements which can be introduced to future generations.

Second, using Chinese language as a family language may promote the younger generation's ethnic identity as a Chinese. One's ethnic identity is a combination of one's self-perception of an ethnic group and others' views on one's identity (Yep, 1998. as cited in Yu, 2015). By letting children like Luka speak both mandarin and other existing family languages from a young age, the increased exposure to the languages trigger their innate template to sift through what they are exposed to, i.e. conforming to universal grammar (Jo Napoli, D & Lee-Schoenfeld, V., 2010). Thus, the future Chinese proficiency of children like Luka can be enhanced, and they can better communicate with overseas or even local Chinese communities, therefore facilitating more in-depth communication and exchanges of ideas that are exclusive to non-Chinese speaking groups, fostering a sense of attachment to the Chinese community as a whole. In fact, one's expertise in a language serves a passport to the specific language community (Block, 2014. as cited in Pan, 2016). In addition, with reviews on more than 70 studies, Phinney's 1990 study (as cited in Yu, 2015) discovered that after blending into their host culture, ethnic minorities who would like to preserve their cultural heritages found it difficult to develop their identities. This could be the case for young overseas Chinese children if their families pursue English or languages of their residing states as their family languages. As a result, speaking Chinese in overseas Chinese families help building ethnic identities for descendent of migrants, thus uniting the Chinese communities worldwide.

Third, proficiency in Chinese languages allow generations of overseas Chinese be benefitted from China's increasing global significance. China as one of the oldest

civilizations in the world, is now the second largest economy in the world, the second largest trading partner of the European Union, where Luka resides, and the largest for the United States in 2015. China is also being increasingly active in world affairs, by collaborating with 5 other states in reaching an agreement on the Iranian Nuclear issue, establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank with 56 more founding members, many of which are leading developed and developing economies in the world, including the United Kingdom. This proves China's global ambition and influences. Meanwhile, mandarin Chinese has most native speakers worldwide: 960 million as in 2010, which is roughly 14% of the world's population in the same year. However, the general English proficiency for the Chinese citizens is not ideal. Wei, R. & Su, J. (2012) analyzed the "*Survey of Language Situation in China*" approved by the State Council of China and published by the Steering Group Office for Survey of Language Situation in China (SGO) in 2006, only about 21% of the respondents who has studied English before are able to conduct daily conversations. The remainder can either say some greetings or utter a few words only, which would be inadequate for usual business communication. As a result, being proficient in Chinese may make children like Luka more successful in being benefitted from China's rise as a global power since most potential Chinese trading partners may still prefer social interaction in Chinese.

There may be people who argue that learning the Chinese language is unnecessary for the inheritance of Chinese culture since many of the elements and ideas can be expressed in English. For instance, during Chinese New Year, "紅包" or "利是" equal red packets in English, and "年糕" as new year rice cake can also be easily understood. However, by probing into the overtones of the cultural elements

themselves, an entirely different conclusion can be drawn. One may know having rice cakes is a common practice during Chinese New Year, but what is the reason behind? New Year cake, or “年糕” in Chinese actually resembles “年高” in pronunciation in mandarin, and this implies growth and every success in the new year. Without adequate knowledge of Chinese, these hidden implications could hardly be understood directly. When children receive red packets from their seniors, greeting the seniors in a proper way is usually expected. Chinese culture values family relationships, thus different roles in the family are clearly segregated: one’s mother’s mother is “姥姥” (*laolao*) while one’s father’s mother is “奶奶” (*nainai*). Thus the over-simplification of addressing relatives in English, grandma for instance, might cause unnecessary offences and embarrassment in Chinese families. All in all, the above examples illustrate the high interdependence between Chinese language and culture.

In conclusion, from the perspectives of cultural heritage inheritance, enhancing the ethnic identity of the overseas Chinese and sharing benefits from China’s rise as a global power, mandarin Chinese should be considered as a family language of overseas Chinese families like Luka’s, especially at a young age during which children can acquire the language with ease.

## **References**

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