The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

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Beliefs about Language Learning: A Study of Post-secondary Non-Native Learners of Chinese and Teachers of Chinese in North America

Tuesday, January, 28, 2014
1:00 PM
David Turpin building, A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Robert Anthony, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Supervisor)
Dr. Timothy Pelton, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Member)
Dr. Richard King, Department of Pacific & Asian Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Wei Cai, Department of Linguistics, University of Calgary

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Maycira Costa, Department of Geography, UVic
Abstract

Addressing learner beliefs is central to enhancing teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes. To date, most previous research has described beliefs of learners of related second/foreign languages. In this study, belief dimensions were examined using a standardized survey of beliefs, BALLI, which was completed by 218 post-secondary beginning learners of Chinese and a modified BALLI completed by 62 teachers of Chinese at North American universities. Dimensions were identified using Exploratory Factor Analysis and a model of the relationship between dimensions developed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a statistical technique for estimating and testing causal relations using a combination of statistical data and qualitative causal assumptions. A theoretical framework was established that integrated cognitive and metacognitive domains. The learner beliefs were described and compared between three sub-samples of learners, non-Asian students, Chinese-origin students, and non-Chinese Asians.

The research used a mixed-methods design: quantitative data from the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with six Chinese language students and six Chinese language instructors. Quantitative data analyses identified four belief dimensions: Motivation for learning Chinese; Formal language learning strategy (FLLS); Communication-oriented learning strategy (CLLS); and Difficulty of language learning. Learners overall reported high motivation to learn Chinese while concurrently acknowledging a language difficulty hierarchy. Both Chinese-origin and non-Chinese origin Asians reported more agreement with beliefs in FLLS than non-Asians. In contrast, non-Asians reported stronger support for CLLS than their Chinese-origin counterparts. Overall, teachers exhibited comprehensive knowledge about language learning. Comparisons between teacher and learner beliefs overall found more mismatches than matches. Compared with learners, teachers reported less agreement with beliefs in FLLS, but more support for CLLS. A hypothetical learner belief model, derived from the BALLI and based on the theoretical framework, was constructed and tested using SEM. Within the model, learners who were highly motivated to learn Chinese tended to believe in FLLS whereas learners who believed in FLLS
rejected CLLS. In addition, beliefs in difficulty of language learning in general and Chinese learning in particular also led to rejection of CLLS. The model was tested against the results from the student and teacher interviews and the model was confirmed. These results provided insight into teaching practices. The role of cultures in shaping learner beliefs and the mismatches between learner and teacher beliefs need to be addressed.

**Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships**

2009-2010  *Language Learning* Dissertation Award
2009-2010  Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Fellowship
2009-2010  UVic President Research Scholarship
2010  UVic Department of Curriculum & Instruction Graduate Student Research Award
2007-2009  University of Victoria Fellowship
2001-2002  China Scholarship Council Fellowship

**Presentations**


Publications