
Birds of a Feather Flock Together?---A Case Study on Socialization Experiences of Chinese International Student in an American University

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Abstract

This article reveals the socialization and interaction patterns of a Chinese international student in an American university. The findings show how an attempt to integrate into a community is complicated by levels of one's language proficiency and familiarity with the target culture. Contrary to most language learners' expectations, the availability of access to a wider community does not always guarantee successful integration. The sense of marginalization, attributed to one's lack of cultural and sociolinguistic capital, can significantly decrease international student's willingness to invest in the target language and socialization into the local community. We conclude that international students would benefit from linguistic, cultural, and social support facilitation of their socialization. Institutions need to identify means for them to gain access to institutional resources and opportunities.

Keywords: Chinese international students; language socialization; language investment; language community; identity

Introduction

In the 2016-2017 academic year, over 350,000 Chinese international students have been enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities, representing 32% of the international student population (Institute of International Education, 2017). Most establishments

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of higher education in the U.S. have set English language proficiency standards as one of the admission requirements to ensure international students have a sufficient level of language proficiency to participate in academic settings. Although most of the international students meet the English language standards set by their universities for admission, many of them are still in the process of attaining the level of English proficiency needed for their college's academic context. In classrooms, instructors may encounter Chinese students with different proficiency levels as well as different levels of familiarity with American culture or culture of learning. From the international Chinese students' perspective, the adjustment to be made when studying and living in the USA is more multi-faceted and complex than they may have expected it to be (Henze & Zhu, 2012). With the increasing diversity of student populations in higher education, there has been a growing concern about the availability of various social resources that enhance target language acquisition and development of teaching materials that promote full participation not merely in classrooms, but also in the wider community (Bista & Forster, 2016; Mavondo, Tsarenko, & Gabbott, 2004). However, the challenges Chinese international undergraduate students face in their freshman year and the effect of these challenges on learner identity renegotiation have not been fully addressed.

Another area that has received little published attention is how students' English educational background and their expectation toward the target language culture may affect their socialization experience, language development, or academic performance in an American classroom. In China, the goal of English education in high schools is examination-oriented; thus, classroom teaching emphasizes rote learning, mechanical exercises, and memorization; sociolinguistic competence and communicative competence are not the foci of English language teaching (Butler, 2015; Wu, et al., 2009). It is of no surprise that many international students encounter intercultural communication problems when they are exposed to a context where English is used for genuine communication and social purposes.

Many international students assume that studying and living in an English medium context and interacting with the local native speakers of English guarantees an automatic acquisition and mastery of the English language (e.g. Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Yang & Kim, 2011). However, often times the communities that students join

are not the ones they aspired to be part of. In the study conducted by Amuzie & Winke (2009), one participant reported: "If I knew there would be so many Koreans like this, I would have not come here. [...] We all speak Korean all the time because it is easier for us. It is funny to speak English to them. Students from other countries also hang out with their friends and speak to each other in their own languages" (p. 373). Without a doubt, substantial immersion in the target language culture plays a determining factor for achieving higher second language (L2) proficiency (Davidson, 2007). However, what remains unclear is (a) to what extent the power relationships of social interaction between international students and local members of the target language community may have an impact on second language learners' socialization experience, and (b) what possible influence the international students' expectations toward the target language community, culture, and people might have on subsequent challenges in their socialization experience.

In this study we explore the socialization experience of an international undergraduate student from a sociocultural perspective applying Norton's (1995; 2000) constructs of imagined communities, learner investment, and learner identity construction. We adopted a case study approach considering the fact that each individual learner's socialization experience is complicated with context-bound activities that he or she is involved in. The in-depth studies on an individual case will help to illuminate how situated nature impacts an individual learner's socialization experience. We document a Chinese international student's attempts and failures to access the target language community in the USA, analyzing how this individual's past and the future she envisioned affected her choices of learning investment in the present language community. The case reveals the patterns of communication that a Chinese student experienced with native-speaking and non-native-English speaking peers in three language communities at a large mid-western university. We believe the results of this study will help higher education educators understand Chinese international students' social behaviors and will help administrations examine if they are adequately meeting the needs of and offering support for their international students.

Review of Literature

In this study, we take a post-structuralist stance that language is contextualized within social, cultural, political, or historical factors and the use of language is complicated by the power relation of interlocutors (Norton, 2010). A learner's language socialization is closely related with his/her language development, learner identity, and academic achievement (Atkinson, 2003; Duff, 2008). Based on this perspective, the following sections provide an overview of the concepts that serve as a framework for analysis in this study.

Second Language Development, Learner Identity, and Investment

Much research has been dedicated to examining how language learning and how using a second language can influence L2 learners' identity construction or reconstruction. Identity has been theorized as a multiple, complex, and dynamic process, which involves learners and the social contexts in which the target language is used to negotiate meaning with the target community (Norton & Toohey, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Pennycook, 2001; Weedon, 1997). Norton (2000) defines identity as the way "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). When learners are practicing the use of the target language, they are "constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world", which means that they are "engaged in identity construction and negotiation" (Norton, 1997, p.410). It is noted that identity is not in reference to a static or uni-dimensional status existing in learners' minds. On the contrary, identity is "multiple, a site of struggle, and changing across time and space" (Norton, 2015, p. 376). In other words, it involves the constantly changing language learners and their constantly changing context.

In her seminal work, Norton (1995) introduced the concept of *investment*; learners invested in learning a language for the purpose of acquiring symbolic and material resources. She had found that high levels of motivation did not always result in the expected language learning. Similar to the dynamic nature of identity, learner investment is "complex, contradictory, and in a state of flux" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p.37). "In order to claim more powerful identities from which to speak, language

learners can challenge unequal power relations by reframing their relationship to others. This reframing depends, to some extent, on [...] learner's investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community" (Norton, 2015, p. 377). Awareness of such power relations and the willingness to invest in language practices can help determine a learner's success in a target language community. According to Norton (2000), "if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (p.10). Based on interview data from three female adult immigrants, Norton (1995) argued that learners' social identity is constantly changing over time and space. Identity is far more complex than a fixed personal trait such as motivation; instead, it reacts and interacts with the relations of power in the community. She further claimed that even if learners had low motivation, the conscious investment in the target language created opportunities for learners to speak. In a later research focusing on learner investment and communities, Chang (2011) conducted a case study on two international NNES graduate students situated in an English-medium institute in the United States. Chang discussed how they exerted their agencies to selectively invest in areas that would benefit them in the present and future community.

Language Socialization and Second Language Learners

Researchers have pointed out that language socialization is a complex and individualized process, in which within the same social settings, individuals may experience different socialization journeys. Duff (2007, p.310) defined language socialization as:

"the process by which novices or newcomers in a community or culture gain communicative competence, membership, and legitimacy in the group. It is also a process that is mediated by language and whose goal is the mastery of linguistic conventions, pragmatics, the adoption of appropriate identities stance...or ideologies, and other behaviors associated with the target group and its normative practices."

Language socialization of L2 learners is complicated by the fact that L2 learners join the target language community with the existing language and cultural conventions of their first language (L1). Studies on language, gender, and ethnicity by Norton and

other researchers posit that when language learners are interacting with members in the target community, learners are not just searching for linguistic expressions to get their intended meaning across; instead, they are attempting to gain access to communication and to enter the community (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Ricento, 2005). Therefore, language acquisition is more than the cognitive process of developing a linguistic system; it is more of an interactive practice. It involves not only the learners themselves, but also other speakers and the community in which the target language is applied. In a more recent article, Norton (2010) elaborates on language learning as a socializing process, stating that L2 users connect the “self” to a larger world when using language to negotiate. During the negotiating process, characteristics such as one’s gender or ethnicity are also involved. In addition, research has found that better acculturation to the target language community leads to better language acquisition. For instance, learners who had more smooth socialization experiences were found to have more native-like L2 pronunciation (Lybeck, 2002).

In contrast, many factors may result in L2 learners’ resistance to socialization. Language proficiency has been commonly reported as the main barrier for socialization in former studies. Poor/low language proficiency of L2 learners can lead some native speakers from the target culture to form a negative impression of the nonnative speaker’s intellectual inferiority. This in turn can lead nonnative speakers to experience lower self-esteem and feelings of marginalization in a target language community (Pellegrino, 2005).

Besides language proficiency, international students in their first year at a university in the U.S. may lack numerous privileges that are not experienced by non-ESL students. Vandrick (2015) provides a tentative list of such privileges that includes, but is not limited to, knowledge about the institution’s structure, classroom conduct, and norms of social interaction with peers and the larger community. The students may also be considered “underprepared” due to language background, feel uncomfortable to ask questions in class due to fear of misunderstanding or making mistakes, or have roommate issues due to communication issues caused by language proficiency (Vandrick, 2015, pp. 57-58). The ways in which the lack of such privileges influence international students’ socialization into the university environment have yet to be examined.

Language Community and Imagined Community

Identity, investment and socialization have to be situated with respect to the practices in which language learners engage to gain access to the target language community. An understanding of these practices in turn requires an understanding of how the target language community is conceptualized in the minds of the learners. Norton (2001) proposes the concept of imagined community, arguing that learners often are driven by the imagination of future success and the sense of belonging to a certain group. She argues, “Different learners have different imagined communities [that] are best understood in the context of a learner’s unique investment in the target language and the conditions under which he or she speaks and practises it” (Norton, 2001, p. 165). Moreover, learners’ affiliation with imagined communities can affect their language learning, their investment in the target language, and also their learner identity (re)construction.

Gaining access to the target language community has to be a reciprocal process. Despite the fact that being in a second language context automatically provides access to language learning affordances (input) (Aronin & Singleton, 2012), learners do not have equal access to the target community. In Wang’s review article (2010), she pointed out that substantive interactions with native speakers rely partially on whether native speakers are willing to play the role of supportive interlocutors in the process of communication and interaction with nonnative speakers. Thus, the process is influenced not only by the language learners’ investment and identities, but also by those with whom they interact.

The Current Study

This study examines linguistic, cultural, and socio-cultural factors that affect the communication and interaction patterns of a Chinese international student with other native and non-native English speakers in three discourse communities. Specific research questions that guided this study include:

1. What roles do identity, investment, and the target language play in international students’ socialization and participation in their target language communities?

2. What language communities do international Chinese students attempt to join and how do they gain access to them?

3. What are Chinese international students' expectations and attitudes toward their imagined communities before arriving to an American university, and how do these expectations change over time?

Method

The case study reported in this article is a part of a larger ethnographic research project on Chinese international undergraduates' socialization experiences in a U.S. university. The university where the research is conducted is a mid-western public university with one of the largest populations of international students in the United States. Using a qualitative case study approach (Duff, 2008; Stake, 1995), we documented the experiences and perceptions of living and studying in the United States from 10 international Chinese students with F1 visas throughout their first semester of their freshman year.

This article presents the case study of one of these participants, whose case could help university faculty, staff, and the larger community to reexamine the common socialization experiences that many international Chinese students face. The data were collected over an academic semester through multiple sources. The primary data included collections of the participant's writing samples, six classroom observation notes, and eight semi-structured interviews with the participant. Each interview lasted for 30 to 45 minutes which invited the participant to reflect on her in-school and out-of-school academic and social activities, her interaction with domestic students and international students, and her perceptions of as well as attitude towards communities in which she was involved. Because the interviews were conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the academic semester, the researchers attempted to track possible changes of the participant's socialization experience, especially at the onset of her studying and living experience in the target language community.

The Participant—Lin

Lin, an 18-year-old, female international student originally from a small province of southern China, had never been to any other English-speaking countries prior to arrival in the United States. During her first semester, she enrolled in several courses, one of which was a first-year, four-credit compulsory composition course for international students. The student population in this writing class was heterogeneous. Fifteen students represented six ethnicities, including Mexico, Thailand, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, and China. One of the researchers was the instructor for the composition class. At the beginning of the semester, Lin actively approached the instructor after classes with her concerns about her developing English proficiency, and her academic and social life. Because of the willingness to share her experiences, the researcher invited her to participate in the study. In addition, the fact that the instructor shared the same background as an international student with Lin possibly helped to build a rapport. Lin was very open and was not hesitant to share her struggles as an international student in an American university and the adjustments she made to fit in with the target language community.

Data Collection and Analysis

Collections of writing samples consisted of the participant's writer's autobiography, and other writings composed for the class. The writer's autobiography revealed the experiences learning to write in English prior to the participant's arrival in the United States, thus providing important information on the participant's learning history in China. The six classroom observation accounts were collected and analyzed with a focus on how the participant interacted orally with other multilingual international students in class, and any communication strategies or problems she displayed during interpersonal interaction. Finally, the eight interviews were conducted at 1-2 week intervals and recorded. Semi-structured interviews included a list of questions to elicit information about the student's social and academic life in and out of classrooms, self-evaluation of English language proficiency, and investments in language learning. Since the researcher shared the same L1 background, Mandarin Chinese, with the participant, the researcher was able to offer her options of having conversations in

either Chinese or English. The participant chose to be interviewed in English and occasionally code-switched between Mandarin Chinese and English.

The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed inductively. The researchers identified responses regarding the participant's types of in-school and out-of-school socialization experiences, attitudes towards people with whom she interacted, any communities in which she participated, and her self-positioning in different communities. The interview data was also triangulated with classroom observation accounts in order to understand the participant's social and interactional patterns.

Findings

Lin arrived at the school two weeks before classes began in order to prepare to adapt to the campus environment. In the first few weeks of the first-year composition class, she behaved as a diligent and attentive student who followed the instructor's guidance and participated in the learning activities as requested. She was quiet and did not ask questions in public (Observation note #1). Her reticence in class may partially be attributed to her personality for she described herself as having an "*inward character*" and being "*a sensitive girl with a few words in the eyes of others*" (Interview #1). It was found that her developing English speaking ability became a major barrier for her socialization process into the target language community. The following sections presented her investments, struggles, and challenges as an international Chinese student who attempted to adjust to the mainstream culture of the target language community.

Lin's Path to Learning English and Her Language Learning Investment

Lin received English education through formal schooling, which started from the first year of junior high school. In addition, she had a unique English learning background which demonstrated strong personal dedication and commitment to English learning. During her high school years, she studied at a boarding school and was hosted by a private tutor on the weekends, who was a retired English teacher from the same school. Lin was requested by the teacher to write a short composition every week and to have short conversations in English as practice. Lin's parents wanted her to have

extra training on English because they had decided to send her abroad for higher education. Lin was an obedient child who accepted the education arrangement from her parents and did not seem to question anything.

In addition to receiving English training from a private tutor, Lin attended an intensive after-school language program for three months to help her with the TOEFL examination. She also revealed great enthusiasm for American culture and English learning. In her free time, she watched American soap operas and listened to pop songs in English. She made all these efforts because she was hoping to get admitted into an American university. Additionally, she believed that the investment in the language learning would better prepare her with the cultural knowledge so that she could have more social contact with American peers in and out of the classroom.

Regarding her English language proficiency, Lin displayed different levels of proficiency in terms of the four sub-skills. In her diagnostic writing test, she was able to produce an approximately 500-word, four-paragraph-essay with clear organization, main points, and adequate grammar knowledge. Throughout the semester, it was observed from the writing samples that she was making steady and noticeable progress in terms of composing clear themes, increasing the variety of syntactic structures, and fulfilling the requirements for different genres of writing. Her listening and speaking proficiency, however, did not seem to be at the same level with her writing proficiency, which hampered her performance in the writing class. She never asked questions, nor did she respond to the instructor's questions in class (Observation note #1). Instead, she approached the instructor after class several times with her questions about assignments. The instructor had to repeat announcements or rephrase the main points of lectures with a slow rate of speech to her personally after class. When doing group activities or pair work in class, her accent and intermediate listening skills also hindered the communication with group members. It was noted that when she talked, her partners kept asking questions for clarification of meaning. When she interacted in English with another Chinese student, the partner would code-switch between Chinese and English to achieve better communication with Lin. Nevertheless, in small group activities, Lin did not shy away from her opportunities to speak; she appeared to be persistent in expressing her opinions even when her partners were not paying equal attention to her (Observation note #2).

When asked to reflect on her progress in English, Lin believed that she had made improvement in her listening ability since she was immersed in an English-speaking educational context. All courses were lectured in English.

Interviewer: So, after starting your study in the states, so far do you feel any changes or improvement in your English competence?

Lin: *At the first few weeks of class...when professors are giving lectures, I did not understand most of the content. I felt lost....after three months, I would say...I could understand 60% of the lectures.*

Nevertheless, she felt disappointed for not seeing any improvement in her speaking ability, which, as we mentioned before, is a common expectation among nonnative speakers who study in an ESL setting (e.g. Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Yang & Kim, 2011). The classroom setting provided her with plenty of affordances on subject matter knowledge as well as academic language; it also became the most critical source of English exposure. Interestingly, even in her other courses with peers who are native speakers of English, several factors have hindered her chances to interact with peers and professors in the academic community. For instance, the following conversation revealed that factors such as the nature of learning for subject matters, Lin's insufficient social competence, and her discomfort with the inquiry learning style altogether seemed to prevent her from actively participating in the academic context.

Interviewer: Tell me about classes you have enrolled in.

Lin: *Usually, we have very big classes, unlike composition class. Classes are held in auditorium...about like...100 students? Students just sat there and listened to the lectures...*

Interviewer: How about small group activity, pair work, or group discussion? When do you talk or have interaction with other classmates or with professors or lecturers?

Lin: *No. We don't have the chance to talk in class. Usually, we have professors giving lectures. If you have questions, you could raise your hands and propose questions.*

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- Interviewer: Have you ever raised questions in class?
- Lin: *No.*
- Interviewer: Is that because you understand everything in class?
- Lin: *No, I dare not to raise my hands in class. When I have questions, I asked my friends in private. Or I ask senior Chinese students who had taken the same class for assignment or examination information.*
- Interviewer: If you have questions regarding assignments, why don't you go to talk to your professors?
- Lin: *I don't know... It is easier to ask Chinese students.*
- Interviewer: Then, do you have the chance to have a conversation or chit chat with other classmates, like during or after class?
- Lin: *I don't.*
- Interviewer: Why not? Is it because it is not allowed? Have you seen other students chatting?
- Lin: *I saw other students chatting. But I don't know how to chat with them....I usually sit with my Chinese classmates.*

The exposure to the English language from an academic context did enhance Lin's listening ability; however, the lecture type of learning did not seem to encourage further interaction among peers. What Lin reported seemed to suggest in fact that the language mode she was exposed to was mainly for academic purposes, but there was no room for her to use English for social purposes.

Attempts to Access to the Target Language Community

At the time of the study, Lin was starting to adapt to her new academic, social, and cultural environment. However, the data showed that the transition to an English-medium context was not as smooth as she expected it to be. Her short-lived experience in the United States, which was approximately five months long, seemed

to be conflicting with the imagined academic and social communities she had pictured prior to her arrival in the USA. She also expressed her frustration of not being able to gain access to the target language community, which she had assumed would take place naturally and effortlessly.

Interviewer: So far, how do you feel about your life in the United States? Is this the American life you had expected before you came?

Lin: *Not really...I just studied here. I don't have...chance to know many American classmates... I don't make any American friends. They just take off after class. Everyone seems to be busy with his thing.*

Except for the academic setting, Lin did not engage in any other activities or communities. Lin was living on the periphery of the target language community, having very limited or nearly zero interaction with the local people or the culture. In addition, from follow-up interviews, several of her experiences living in the USA along with her intentions to become engaged in the target language group showed that she had been trying to gain access to the local community, yet she had been denied by the people she interacted with. The following are three major events that might have had a negative influence on her socialization experiences.

Welcoming activity for newcomers. A week before the semester began, Lin joined a traditional welcoming activity for freshmen, organized by the university and led by senior students to welcome new students to campus. It provides newcomers with an opportunity to become familiar with the environment and build connections with other freshman students. However, for Lin, it turned out to be a negative event that changed her perception of an imagined community that she had wished to enter. When attending the welcoming activity, Lin was grouped with other English-speaking peers. In fact, she was the only international student in this group. Unfortunately, Lin was not able to engage in the group activity and felt overwhelmed by the behavior of her peers. She felt excluded from the group because most of the time she did not fully understand what the others said, did not understand the punch lines of their jokes, and thus could not react properly as one would expect of a member in that small community.

Interviewer: Tell me about your experience joining the welcoming activity. What did you do in the activity? Did you make any friends?

Lin: *They [Senior students] showed us around the campus...I don't like that activity...it is horrible...*

Interviewer: Why is that?

Lin: *They [other group members] are all Americans. They speak very fast....they act differently...they laugh loudly....I don't understand what they were talking about...They don't talk to me.*

Interviewer: Did you talk to them?

Lin: *No, I don't know what to talk...When they tell jokes, I don't even know when to laugh...sometimes I just don't know why the jokes are funny...*

Interviewer: Then, how do you react when you did not understand them?

Lin: *I just keep quiet...I pretend I understand...I am the only Chinese...*

Interviewer: How do you feel?

Lin: *I don't belong to this group. They Americans are too wild. We Chinese students are not like that.*

Interviewer: Wild? What do you mean?

Lin: *I don't know how to explain... They are different from us...*

Interviewer: Did you make any friends from that activity? Do you still keep in contact?

Lin: *I friend two or three group members on Facebook, but I never have any interaction with them after the activity. I just check their status or pictures occasionally.*

When Lin registered for this welcoming activity, she was excited that she was about to make her first American friend. However, despite her desire to engage and

participate, this activity further exacerbated a sense of marginalization from the target language community and decreased her willingness to network with other native speakers of English. Lin's still developing English competence, along with her unfamiliarity with standard behaviors, singled her out from the community.

Dorm living experience. As soon as Lin received the admission letter from the university, she made the decision to live in the dorm. Despite that many of senior Chinese international students had suggested her live off-campus with their own ethnic circle of friends, Lin believed that she would have more chances to make friends with native speakers of English in a school dorm. However, living in a single room Lin seldom had the chance to interact with other residents. When she met people every day in the hallway, she did not know how to start a conversation. Neither did she know how to extend conversation topics beyond daily greetings.

... I don't know how to talk to other people at the dorm. I meet them every day, but I just don't know how I can start a conversation with them. They would nod at me and I also nod at them...I saw people chatting on the hallway...I hear their conversation...they don't know each other, but they are chatting. (Interview #3)

Even though Lin was eager to connect with others, Lin reported herself waiting passively, hoping that someone would just come to her and initiate a conversation. But eventually, she ended up going straight back to her room and stayed alone every time when she went back from classes. When she locked the door, she had completely blocked herself from the English world outside. Interestingly, she started to listen to Chinese songs and watched Chinese TV programs because of nostalgia. Gradually, she stopped making any attempt to socialize with other residents.

Interviewer: So, after two months staying at the dorm, do you have the chance to talk to any of your floor mates or make any friends?

Lin: *No, I wish they could come talk to me...One of my Chinese friend has an American roommate. It's lucky for her to have someone to talk to in English... I feel tired after classes, so I went straight back to my room after classes...I don't expect people would come talk to me... It's fine. I am too busy with my studies.*

Interviewer: Do you have a roommate? What do you do in your room?

Lin: *I don't have roommates...I am alone. Usually, I do homework. I listen to Chinese songs and watch Chinese TV shows because I miss home. I feel relaxed when hearing Chinese... I can understand jokes...*

Throughout the dorm experience, initially, Lin did not intend to segregate herself from others. On top of the busy academic schedule, the frustration of not connecting to the dorm community had made her suffer from isolation. In the middle of the semester, Lin had decided to move off-campus to an apartment, where she found other Chinese peers to live off-campus with her the following semester.

Part-time working experience. After three months in the United States, she realized that she did not make any improvement in her oral proficiency since she did not have many chances to get connected to the new setting. She then decided to take a part-time job at the food court at school; she was hoping to create more chances to interact with native speakers from the workplace. This part-time job, four hours per week, ended up to be another frustrating experience and was seen by Lin as another failure to enter the community. Lin had a difficult time communicating with an American colleague in the workplace, who was a female undergraduate from the same university; she did not understand the language of the colleague and vice versa. Lin recalled that the colleague spoke too fast for Lin to comprehend her messages or react promptly.

Interviewer: Tell me about your interaction with your American coworker at the school dining court.

Lin: *At first, I was excited to work with an American...I do not have many chances to interact with Americans at school...I thought we would become friends so that I would have plenty chance to practice my English at work.*

Interviewer: So, how's your interaction with that American girl?

Lin: *We don't get along well with each other. She gave me an attitude.*

Interviewer: What happened?

Lin: *You know Americans speak very fast. At first, I did not understand what she said and I always say, "Excuse me?" After several times, she was very impatient to me. She even did not smile at me.*

Interviewer: When you have to communicate for work, how's the conversation going? Did she slow down the speed?

Lin: *No, she did not talk to me. She asked Xiao (pseudonym) to pass the message to me. I feel embarrassed and I am frustrated....Maybe it is because my English is not good enough. Or maybe it is because I am a Chinese?*

Interviewer: You said she did not talk to you because you are a Chinese? Why do you think so?

Lin: *I don't know. I just know she doesn't like me.*

Interviewer: How did you react to her behavior?

Lin: *Nothing. I am upset. I don't know why she doesn't like me. We no longer talk to each other...I decided to quit the part time job.*

When interacting with the American colleague, Lin needed longer time to process the information, so she always asked for clarification during the first few attempts. Yet, her colleague did not have much tolerance for her developing language proficiency. After several breakdowns in communication, the colleague stopped talking to her. When they needed to communicate, the colleague turned to a third person to bridge the communication gap. Usually, it was another Chinese girl whose English speaking ability was better than Lin's. Lin was "silenced" when the American colleague showed an attitude toward her language proficiency by refusing to have direct communication. Lin expressed her frustration and also cast doubts on whether her colleague's unfriendly attitude was due to her identity as a Chinese international student. Lin felt she was denied the opportunity to speak and felt inferior to her

colleague. She was upset, not knowing how to deal with the interpersonal relationship. Eventually she refused to make any attempt to interact with the American colleague.

This rejection from an American colleague eventually made her to join a small group, consisting of first-year international Chinese students. The members in this group not only shared the same L1 background, but also similar lived experience with Lin (Interview#4). During weekends and in other free time, Lin felt more confident and comfortable socializing with the same circle of friends, and she grew a strong affiliation with this group. She expressed a stronger sense of belonging to this group and noted:

I felt safe when hanging out with other international Chinese students...At first, I did not want to join the group...they are all Chinese...I want to make more American friends...

We shared studying experience and exchanged information on courses and assignments... (Interview #4)

In the last interview conducted during the last week of Lin's first semester, Lin expressed her unwillingness of trying to reach out to people of the target language community.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you are adapting to the school life or social life here?

Lin: *...I am accustomed to the environment and study now...I feel less afraid of everything...*

Interviewer: Do you make more new friends?

Lin: *...I know more Chinese friends through my friends...We hang out together on weekends...*

Interviewer: Do you make friends with any international students or American students?

Lin: *No...I am too busy with my studies...I am tired to join activities...I just hang out with the same group of Chinese friends.*

Changing Perceptions of Imagined Communities: Dreams and Reality

When studying in China, Lin displayed very strong instrumental motivation for language learning; that is, to pass the language examination that would allow her to obtain acceptance into an American university. Lin was also a highly motivated learner, who showed positive feelings toward the target language, culture, and people. Her vision of the future was to be able to “*live like a native speaker of English*” and to integrate into every aspect of the target language community.

Interviewer: Before you come to the United States, how did you picture your life here?

Lin: *I used to think that the local American people will be very nice to me. American people are very friendly. They will invite me to their home. They will invite me to join any activities...I will make friends with many American classmates.*

Interviewer: Have you met any Americans before you come to the United States? How do you get the impression that American people are nice and friendly?

Lin: *This is my first time coming and staying in the USA...I got the impression mostly from soap operas...Americans seem to be very open-minded and free...*

Interviewer: Have you expected to meet so many international students and international students from China and from many other countries in the world?

Lin: *No, I thought there will be Americans. I wish I could speak and live like Americans one day.*

She made an attempt to familiarize herself with the American culture and community by watching American soap operas and news. Before arriving, Lin had a rosy imagination about studying and living in the USA, where “*local American people*” would be very nice and friendly to her; they would invite her to gatherings and community activities, and welcome her wholeheartedly to enter the country. In

addition, although she had prepared herself linguistically and culturally before she went abroad, she also believed she could fully master the English language effortlessly by merely immersing herself in an English-speaking context and by interacting with the local people.

Another change in occurred at the very beginning of Lin's American experience. Upon arrival in the USA, in order to adapt to the new setting at school, Lin took part in the welcoming activity, hoping to be accepted as a member of the small group. This activity, however, reminded Lin of her position as an outsider of the community. Lin frankly expressed her ambivalent feelings toward the activity by making a comment that "*American students are too wild. WE Chinese students are not like that.*" Lin was unable to clearly describe those "wild" behaviors from the English-speaking peers she met in the welcoming activity, but was sensitive to her differences from others (Interview #2). She also attributed her sense of marginalization to the cultural differences among different language groups.

Conclusion

This study documents the socialization trajectories, language investments, and attempts of access to the target language communities of a Chinese international student in an American university in her first semester of the freshmen year. The observations and interviews reveal that while studying and living in a target language environment may suggest open access to the language and the community, learners and the universities they are attending need to take a more active role in seeking opportunities to connect with the community in order to become an active member and receive affordances through interaction. While Darwin and Norton (2017) asserted that "In the age of mobility, learners are able to move fluidly across spaces where ideologies collude and compete, shaping their identities and positioning them in different ways" (p. 232), this case study demonstrates that such "fluid movement" is not inherent for every learner. The findings emphasize the need for learners to acquire this flexibility and for institutions to provide the needed support. We acknowledge the limitation of generalizability of socialization trajectories from a single learner, yet we believe that this case helps us better understand the complex and fluid nature of

language socialization through the lens of attempts and failures made by an international student in the English-medium context.

The Roles of Identity, Investment, and Positioning

The connections between identity, investment, and positioning in this case study demonstrate the complexity of language learning. We viewed positioning as synonymous with ideologies, which was defined by Darvin and Norton (2015) as “dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion” (p.72). Lin’s positioning towards her target language community, which composed of “*the Americans*” and was perceived by her to be narrow-minded, adversely affected her investment in social interaction and in turn limited her opportunities to interact with multicultural and multilingual communities. It was interesting to observe how her initial positioning has changed due to her experiences. Prior to her arrival to the United States, Lin imagined her target language community to be supportive and welcoming. This image revealed Lin’s positive positioning toward the language and the people of the target culture. It had motivated Lin to invest in English learning because she believed the investment would help her smoothly integrate into American culture and life. However, after the welcoming event, Lin indicates the change in her perception of the target language community and the transformation of her positioning and identity. This change also demonstrates the transformation identity can endure in a short period of time (Norton, 2015). By excluding herself from the community she had been yearning to enter, Lin’s investment in the socialization process and in language learning has declined over time and decreased her ability to move fluidly across the surrounding communities.

The changes in Lin’s positioning were also evident from the shift in her circle of friends. Lin’s changing identity has created a sense of segregation from the target language community; as a result, she developed a stronger sense of belonging with other first-year international Chinese students. Her behavior demonstrates learner agency as she is “choosing what [she perceives] as beneficial to [her] existing or imagined identities, by consenting to or resisting hegemonic practices and by investing or divesting from the language or literacy practices of particular classrooms

and communities” (Darvin & Norton, 2017, p. 233). Marginalizing herself from the target community, Lin started to count on her circle of friends to survive in her first year; most of her time outside of classes she spent speaking Chinese. While we did not observe the long-term effect of this change, in the short-term, the participant expressed having less interest in learning and practicing English. The long-term effects of this change would require further investigation.

Accessing Communities: Implications for Program Directors

The socialization process is complicated by the levels of one’s language proficiency and familiarity with the target culture and people, which have a direct impact on the quality of interaction and the pattern of socialization. This, however, seems to be contradictory to Lin’s expectation toward studying in an English-medium context. Like many international Chinese students, Lin had anticipated improving her English proficiency through the interaction with native peers and through the participation of various social activities. She imagined acquiring English abilities effortlessly when immersing herself in an English-medium environment. In reality, the insufficient language proficiency not only influenced her patterns of social integration in class, but also limited her ability to interact with members of a larger community, such as in the dorm and at the working place.

Lin’s case reveals important implications for programs and institutions regarding the need to support students in developing necessary competences in order to participate in a new culture. Studies on socialization suggest that instructors, disciplinary advisors, or activities could serve as effective mediators for socialization practice (Casanave & Li, 2009; Duff, 2010; Morita, 2004). We believe that socialization will be more efficient if learners are scaffolded with explicit supports on the oral communication skills, discourse knowledge, and social skills for them to gain fuller participation in the target language communities they enter. Courses based on community service activities could help students develop communicative competences and connect with local communities (Swacha, 2018; Kassabgy & Salah El-Din, 2013). Such courses can also make language programs and universities more attractive as they target the language needs of students as well as provide resume-building extracurricular activities.

Dealing with Expectations and Attitudes: Implications for Teaching

Although it may appear that the reticence of Chinese students in English-medium academic contexts is a culture-related behavior, Chinese students frequently separate themselves from local students or from students of different nationalities mainly by choice. Nevertheless, through the lens of this case study, we were able to reveal some of the difficulties and challenges when an outsider wishes to enter a community in which the language used and the social ritual practiced are different from one's native culture.

Newcomers may experience a sense of marginalization if they merely passively wait for the community to accept them. This is in line with the discussion by Duff (2010) that learners' frustration was not merely attributed to their own perceptions towards the people and communities, but also affected by how they were positioned by a larger target community. In addition, learners' perceptions of and attitudes toward the target language and the community all seem to shape their ways of learning and also influence the ways they practice their knowledge of the language in real world communication.

Language socialization is a long and interactive process which is inextricably bound up with linguistic, cultural, and social adjustment. Better understanding changes in motivation, identity, and attitudes can help educators address these changes appropriately in class and through a variety of assignments. We suggest that educators develop inclusive courses (i.e. courses that do not isolate international students) that include a variety of group projects that can promote two-way socialization practices, for the language learners and for the target language community. Bhowmik and Kim (2018) offer a number of strategies for consideration (see also Costino and Hyon (2007) for student identities in writing classes, Cheng, Myles, & Curtis (2004) for language support for graduate students, and Flowerdew (2013) for needs analysis strategies).

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