

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Following the Sun from China to Singapore: A Chinese Student's Journey from EFL to ESL

Yoke Sim FONG^{1,2}

¹*Yoke Sim FONG, Singapore, Singapore* ²*FONG, Yoke Sim, Singapore, Singapore*

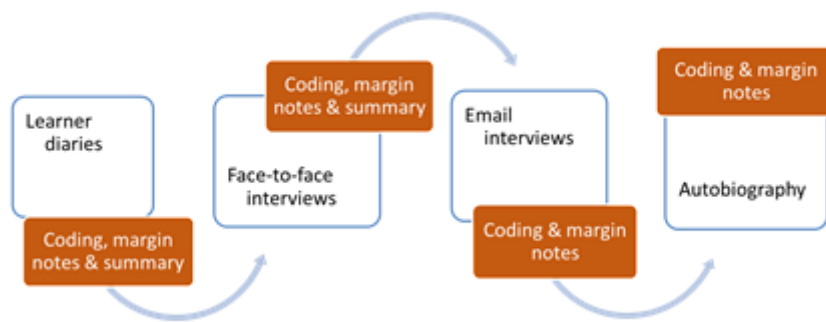
Research Domain: Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

Abstract: When Sun travelled from China to Singapore to attend university, she moved from EFL to ESL academically and socio-linguistically. In a longitudinal case study, I followed the transitions in Sun's motivation, beliefs, strategies, affective domain, and identity as well as the influences of culture and context. The data were collected via learner diaries during Sun's bridging course, a face-to-face interview during university, an email interview pre-graduation and another one post-graduation. The research surfaces a learner with a strong foundation in the Traditional Chinese Culture of Learning (TCCL) but also one unlike the TCCL learner depicted in literature. While she remains stable in her beliefs, strategies and motivation, through her new L2 context, she has grown in her identity, competence and confidence in using English. Based on this case study on [Sun \(and similar ones of her peers\), I offer some reflections on supporting Chinese learners in international higher education.](#)

Paper: After nearly a decade of teaching PRC students, among other international ones, I decided to research their English learning journeys. I eventually followed seven focal participants, including Sun (pseudonym), as case studies spanning 5 years. They were among one group of students enrolled in a bridging course and then matriculated in an undergraduate degree programme at National University of Singapore (NUS). My research questions were

1. What are some key learner characteristics of PRC students and what transitions, if any, do they make in their English learning as a result of studying in NUS?
2. What pedagogical implications can I draw from the findings?

The following figure represents my methodology for data collection and analysis.



Seven themes emerged from the analysis of the data:

1. Traditional Chinese Culture of Learning (TCCL) (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998)
2. Learning Context/Experience (Dörnyei, 2010; Teng, 2008)
3. Motivation ([Dörnyei, 2010](#); Gardner, 2001)
4. Beliefs (Chamot, 2001; Lo Bianco, 2009)
5. Strategies (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2001)
6. Affective Domain (Larsen-Freeman, 2001)
7. Identity, Agency & Investment (Norton, 2000; Norton, 2001)

The findings around these seven themes can be summarised as follows:

1. The traditional Chinese culture of learning is foundational but not all-encompassing.
2. The ESL/EIL learning context provides the learners with opportunities and empowerment.
3. Beliefs and strategies are interconnected; enlarging the vision also fuels the action.
4. Their motivation and identity underscore the power of real and imagined communities.
5. Affect matters; the learners are propelled by the trajectory of their emotions.

In this paper, we focus on Sun, who travelled from Shandong, China to Singapore for university after *Gaokao*, hence moving from EFL to ESL academically and socio-linguistically. The following is a snapshot her journey. With a strong foundation in the Traditional Chinese Culture of Learning (TCCL), Sun believes in effort for the mastery of knowledge and finds joy in exertion; her learning strategies include recitation, memorisation, repeated practice. But, unlike the typical TCCL learner in literature, she is active and independent; she reflects on, adapts and expands her [beliefs and strategies](#). While she remains relatively stable in her beliefs and strategies, she grows in her identity, competence and confidence in her new L2 context.

The new L2 context obviously has a strong impact on Sun's English learning journey; she makes progress through the learning opportunities provided by the bridging course (BC), university and Singapore society. But her motivation and agency are crucial too: she seizes the opportunities as well

and seeks to exploit the rich resources around her. The result is the transition in her identity and language proficiency; she reports her autonomy and confidence. The affective and social domains are also crucial in Sun's journey. Congenial classroom settings and friendships enhance her enjoyment of life and learning. She has grown towards a more integrative orientation and as an active and critical learner/user of English.

Based on Sun's journey (and those of her peers), I offer some reflections on supporting Chinese learners in international higher education. BC/EAP teachers could adopt a two-pronged approach. We need to initially accommodate our PRC students' exam-centred, text-driven approach and memorization/recitation strategies. On the other, we need to encourage them to expand their beliefs and learning strategies.

TCCL students have entrenched expectations of teachers. Be prepared for requests for help beyond class; otherwise, they may see us as being "too busy and uncaring" (Edwards and Ran, 2009, p. 194). Experience teaches me to guide students to learn appropriate etiquette for their new L2 context while research informs me that teachers' affirmative feedback brings encouragement. Aim to provide a positive L2 learning experience, with expert-novice and novice-novice scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978).

We can leverage PRC learners' instrumental motivation and belief in effort for achievement. Initiate discussion on goal setting and self-monitoring of learning activities which should extend from vocabulary and grammar towards authentic communication. Encourage them to become independent and self-motivated users of English, like Sun, and to develop an integrative orientation and an Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2010). Facilitate on-going conversations about agency and investment towards their identities in their real/imagined community (Norton, 2000; Norton, 2001).

The students also need 'linguistic and cultural bridge building' (Teo, 2008 as cited in Lam, 2011, p. 413) to connect with the world. Leverage the support of the local university community, previous cohorts of BC students, local students, virtual community, etc. Initiate them into the "Western" culture of learning with sensitivity as they have a background in Chinese academic learning. Besides communicative competence, the PRC students need to develop intercultural competence.

References: