# Culture and Identity in the Learning of L2 Pragmatics during Study Abroad:

# A Longitudinal Narrative Study of Five Chinese Students Sojourning in the UK

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# Academic Publications Arising from This Thesis

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**Conference Presentations:**

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Liu, X. (2021, February). *Identity Challenges in L2 Pragmatics: A Longitudinal Case-Study*. [PowerPoint Presentation]. Postgraduate Forum on Applied Linguistics, York St John University (Online).

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**Invited Speeches:**

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Liu, X. (2021, November). *Research Methodology: Culture and Identity in the Learning of Pragmatics during Studying Abroad*. [PowerPoint Presentation]. Undergraduate Module: Research Methods, University of Leeds (Online).

Liu, X. (2021, June). *Using Diaries and Interviews in a Longitudinal Case Study: Culture and Identity in the Learning of Pragmatics during Study Abroad*. [PowerPoint Presentation]. TESOL Forum, University of Leeds (Online).

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# Abstract

This doctoral project investigates how five Chinese students in the UK develop L2 pragmatics throughout their year of study abroad, and how pragmatics learning relates to the learners' development of identity and intercultural awareness. It is motivated by my personal awareness of the challenges international students face when negotiating interactions in a second language and within a new sociocultural context. With qualitative data generated through interviews and learning journals over one academic year, this study identifies moments when students tend to notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge and learning strategies. Findings also indicate a bidirectional influence between L2 pragmatics learning and development of identity and cultural perspectives: learners' noticing, interpretation and use of L2 pragmatics are influenced by identity-related factors, including internalised cultural values, desired interpersonal relationships, and perceived foreigner and ELF identities. In return, exposure to new L2 pragmatic features can prompt learner reflection on the sociocultural significance underlying different pragmatic use, which may then lead to development of identity and intercultural awareness. This research makes an original contribution to the existing work on L2 pragmatics learning by viewing learners studying abroad as rounded people and expanding the focus of SLA research within the study context from how learners develop L2 linguistic proficiency to how L2 learning fosters learners' development in more holistic terms. It also generates insight into how ESL/EFL instructors and higher education institutions might help international students find their place in their adopted communities through providing pragmatic-specific support.

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| DCT | Discourse Complete Tasks |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| ELF | English as a Lingua Franca |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| HE | Higher Education |
| L1 | First Language |
| L2 | Second Language |
| NS | Native Speaker |
| NNS | Non-native Speaker |
| SA | Study Abroad |
| SLA | Second Language Acquisition |

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Under-Noticed Difficulties Faced by Study Abroad Learners

This study is motivated by my personal awareness of international students' difficulties and their feelings of being excluded in the study-abroad (SA) environment. In 2016, I came to the UK for the first time and started my postgraduate study here as a SA learner. With a relatively high level of English and fair grades achieved during a 10-week pre-sessional EAP course, I was confident in smoothly adapting to both my new academic and social lives during the master's programme in the SA environment. However, it turned out that I frequently found myself struggling in daily communication. For example, I frequently spent more than one hour drafting a short email to a lecturer to avoid potentially impolite language use; I was unsure whether and when people expected a detailed answer for 'How are you?'; I tended not to interrupt people during discussions but at the same time worried others might regard me as a passive, incompetent group member. During my SA year, I frequently felt awkward and powerless in different social situations and felt trapped inside a sense of inconsistency; I hoped to be polite, friendly, and collegial, but I was unsure whether those were the images of myself I delivered through my behaviour and language use.

In my personal experience, I became aware of the importance of second language (L2) pragmatic competence for SA students and the challenges it causes, especially for international students from countries where English is a foreign language (EFL) and not usually used in daily communication. In some pedagogic contexts around the world, English can be regarded more as a classroom subject than a communicative tool. With less experience in negotiating real-life interactions and relationships, classroom learners might find expressing themselves and establishing connections in L2 challenging. When they find themselves in an L2 community, interactions can be surprisingly problematic. Such

challenges may raise awareness of their lack of pragmatic knowledge, but available support from the universities is mainly related to their academic subjects. The frustrations of daily L2 communication remain under-noticed, and SA students have to deal with the confusion using their own resources.

Previous research has also recognised learners' pragmatic-related anxieties, even among high-level L2 users, and the potential imbalance between their L2 linguistic proficiency and pragmatic competence (e.g. Tajeddin and Moghadam, 2012). Pragmatic development entails the management of linguistic forms and social and cultural knowledge, which do not necessarily develop conjointly (Taguchi, 2012). Learners' pragmatic competence is not just about achieving transactional goals; it could influence their abilities 'to do things with words and to function as a person' (Benson et al., 2012, p.183). Unlike grammatical flaws, which might portray sojourners as less proficient L2 users, pragmatic failure may lead to judgement about a person's moral character, such as being impolite, arrogant or insincere, hindering them in achieving social and interpersonal goals (McConachy, 2018).

Moreover, unlike other linguistic aspects (e.g. grammar and vocabulary) with systematic rules to follow, the boundary of pragmatic appropriateness is contextually fluid and even controversial at times among native speakers (NS) (Blommaert & Backus, 2013). Pragmatic conventions, such as how proficient speakers adjust politeness levels or indirectly propose requests, are not easily observable in daily interactions without explicit instructions (Taguchi, 2012). It can therefore be time-consuming and challenging for learners to notice, learn and adapt to L2 pragmatic use, even in a SA environment with rich L2 input (ibid.).

Based on the considerations above, I decided to focus this project on L2 pragmatic encounters and the development of SA learners. On the one hand, I investigated the pragmatic-related

struggles learners face and how they notice, analyse, reflect on, and adopt new pragmatic forms. On the other hand, I was curious about whether L2 pragmatic development has any broader impacts on learners. Do their struggles and sense-making process trigger exploration of deeper cultural and interpersonal meanings behind the language? Are learners nudged to reflect on and even change their self-perception and the values shaped in their previous communities? Answers to these questions might change the way in which learners themselves begin to appreciate what it means to 'learn' a language. It may also provide pedagogical guidelines for ESL/EFL practitioners regarding teaching pragmatics. Moreover, understanding the process of learning and SA adaption might shed light on how institutions and tutors in higher education might help an international student find their place within their adopted communities, gain a stronger position, and have their voice heard by providing pragmatic-specific support.

## 1.2 Understudied Issues in L2 Pragmatic Development and Aims of this Study

With these broad ideas in mind, I reviewed existing research on L2 pragmatic development in the SA context, from which I identified three tendencies. First, previous studies have tended to focus on learners' improvement in one specific speech act or pragmatic phenomenon within a chosen context. One example is Shively's (2011) study, which investigated requests made over a year by SA learners of Spanish during counter service, with conversation data collected from recordings. Second, most researchers in this field have assessed learners' pragmatic improvement in simulated situations, such as Discourse-Completion Tasks and role plays, in which learners' progress is usually evaluated by comparing their performance with native-speaker norms. For instance, Ren's (2019) project focused on requests from SA learners of Chinese. Role-play data were collected from L2

Chinese speakers and compared to Chinese native speakers' performances in the same tasks. More details of the current research tendency will be covered in Sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 in the literature review chapter.

However, it should be pointed out that what researchers find interesting might not necessarily be what learners consider significant during their sojourning experience. Therefore, limiting data collection to specific pragmatic features and social occasions may prevent researchers from seeing critical moments related to L2 pragmatics that learners themselves notice, that they struggle with, that trigger sense-making and reflections, and that are regarded inspirational by SA learners themselves in their holistic development. Moreover, learning L2 pragmatics not only involves acquiring linguistic norms but also how learners interpret the sociocultural meaning of language, and how they employ L2 pragmatic knowledge to manage social relationships and express desired identities more flexibly and freely (McConachy, 2018; Ishihara, 2019; Ishihara and Cohen, 2022; McConachy and Fujino, 2022). However, merely focusing on learners' approaches to NS conventions may disguise learners' inner struggles during L2 pragmatic use, their interpretation of meanings behind the form, and their identity investment in language choices (Li and Gao, 2017; McConachy, 2019; Ishihara, 2019). Some empirical studies have also suggested that L2 learners sometimes intentionally reject native-speaker pragmatic norms, especially when the form is inconsistent with their sense of self. One example is Kim's (2014) research focusing on L2 pragmatic use among Korean SA learners sojourning in the United States. Some learners in that study refused to respond to compliments with the phrase 'thank you', even if they reported noticing such use by local American students, as they felt it conflicted with the humility emphasised in their home society.

The third tendency in the current field includes the small number of studies investigating the connection between learners' development of L2 pragmatics, intercultural competence, and identity. Through probing and analysing reasons behind adoptions and intentional deviations from NS standards, a small group of researchers have learned about how L2 learners' identity and existing cultural values affect their L2 pragmatic use and learning (See Sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4 for details). Similarly, limited attention has been paid to the reverse influence – how the learning of L2 pragmatics could potentially foster learners' identity shifts or intercultural awareness, especially not from a longitudinal perspective. Such mutual influence has been discussed in relation to general L2 learning, but it has not been adequately discussed and exemplified in existing empirical works on L2 pragmatic development.

This study, therefore, approaches L2 pragmatic development during SA from a different perspective, aiming to expand existing knowledge in this field through shifting the focus in three ways: (1) from forms or contexts chosen by researchers to moments of pragmatics learning noticed by learners themselves in L2-mediated interactions; (2) from whether learners approach native-speaker standards to how they present themselves through the language and their understanding of the cultural meanings behind the language; and (3) from learners' improving their linguistic knowledge to how they develop comprehensively as learners with an evolved sense of self and intercultural awareness. With this in mind, this study aims to access the views and experiences of international students sojourning in the UK to explore the following research questions:

- In what moments do students notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK study-abroad environment?

- What learning strategies related to pragmatics do participants report using in L2-mediated interactions?
- How does their pragmatics learning relate to the students' evolving senses of self and their intercultural awareness?

## 1.3 Narrative Approach in Data Collection and Analysis

The study is based on the interpretivist paradigm, adopting an exploratory stance and highlighting learners' experiences and understandings of the investigated topic. As explained earlier in Section 1.2, this project is not focused on learners' improvements towards achieving a pre-established standard but their noticing, sense-making, and reflections regarding L2 pragmatics. In other words, the 'reality' sought here is largely individually constructed, which naturally fits in the interpretivist ontology. In response to the questions above, I attempted to approach SA learners' pragmatic development from an emic perspective. The idea of narrative is central here, as it informs key stages of this research, including data generation and analysis. To be more specific, narratives regarding SA students' learning and use of L2 pragmatics were collected as data, including but not limited to encounters that raised interest, caused confusions or difficulties, and triggered sense-making or reflections in daily communication.

The research participants were five Chinese postgraduate students sojourning in the UK, none of whom had sojourned outside mainland China before arriving in Britain. Even though all the participants majored in subjects related to the English language during undergraduate study, they all reported a lack of opportunities to use, and especially to speak, English in daily life before studying abroad. Their stories serve as a lens to understand the experiences of international students in the UK, especially those from EFL backgrounds.

The instruments used in this study to generate data were online chat and semi-structured interviews, with the data collection lasting more than 12 months, across one academic year (October 2019-December 2020).

In the next stage, I employed individual narratives to synthesise, analyse, and present data collected from each participant. The story form allows the analysis to focus on the individual (Cleaver, 2009), in which each pragmatic-related encounter reported by the participants is contextualised in the protagonist's unique development trajectory particularly in relation to three key factors mentioned in the research questions: L2 pragmatics, intercultural awareness, and learners' senses of self. The narrative sections are followed by a cross-individual, paradigmatic analysis to identify patterns shared between the participants, consolidate findings from their individual stories, and provide systematic answers to the three research questions

## 1.4 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, including this introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 introduces the context of this study. It firstly outlines the background and current research trend of second language acquisition (SLA) studies and the significance of investigating language learning in terms of learners' identities and the intercultural context. The chapter then describes the rationale behind the gradual shift from quantitative investigations to individual-centred qualitative inquiry in the SLA field, laying the theoretical framework for the longitudinal narrative approach used in this study. The chapter also provides a preliminary sketch of Chinese learners sojourning in the UK for higher education,

including their EFL education backgrounds, the language (especially, pragmatic-related) challenges they might face, and the support available for them during study abroad.

Chapter 3 situates this research in the context of existing literature concerning the learning of L2 pragmatics, learners' identities, and their development in intercultural competence. This chapter first explains how the three key concepts (culture, identity, and language) are closely intertwined, before moving on to how pragmatics lie at the intersection of the three constructs, serving as a lens through which we may observe how they interact during study abroad. This chapter also synthesises previous research concerning the development of L2 pragmatics, points out limitations in the ontologies and epistemologies of existing studies, and introduces the research gaps in the field.

Chapter 4 introduces the research questions and describes the research methodology. It firstly outlines the interpretivist philosophical stance underpinning my research design, before moving on to narrative inquiry and longitudinal research as theoretical frameworks. This chapter also describes the procedures of data collection and analysis in detail, as well as how I have addressed ethical concerns while designing and conducting the research.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of this study, in which data generated from five SA participants through semi-structured interviews and learning journals are analysed across two dimensions. Chapter 5 consists of biographical narratives, focusing mainly on the development trajectory of each participant in L2 pragmatics and their perception of identity and cultures related to pragmatics. These narratives are then used in Chapter 6 for paradigmatic analysis to configure the story accounts into themes and categories. The two modes were combined here to balance the idiosyncrasies of human experience and

inductive reasoning, thereby providing more comprehensive answers to the research questions.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings of this study and its theoretical and methodological contributions to research in L2 pragmatics development, followed by a discussion of the limitations and implications for both pedagogy and future research.

# Chapter 2: Context of the Study

This chapter aims to introduce the context of this study. Section 2.1 will first give an overview of the background and current trend of research in the study abroad (SA) environment, primarily focusing on second language acquisition (SLA) studies and the way L2 learning is connected with the intercultural context as well as learner identity. This section also introduces key considerations behind the gradual shift of research approaches in the field from quantitative studies to individual-centred, qualitative investigations, laying the theoretical foundation for this study. Section 2.2 will move on to Chinese learners, the protagonists of this research. It will cover a general introduction to Chinese international students in UK higher education, their EFL education backgrounds, and pragmatic-related challenges they may encounter, together with the support available for them in the SA context.

## 2.1 Study Abroad

Study abroad (SA) refers to a 'temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes' (Kinginger, 2009, p.11). It is usually categorised into three types – studying for a degree or qualification in the host country; dual degrees involving both home and overseas universities; and studying in exchange programmes – and it usually involves learning and living with a second language (Kinginger, 2009). Under the context of globalisation, cross-border education has been greatly expanded over the past half-century (ibid.). With a greater range of courses and programmes available, an increasing number of students travel abroad to pursue education worldwide. Taking the UK, a popular SA destination as well as the context of this research, as an example, its higher education institutions hosted 458,490 international students in 2017 and 2018. The number accounted for 19.6 percent of the total student population of the whole country and demonstrated an

upward trend (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2019). Institutions and policymakers have increasingly highlighted inclusion of international students, and the situation motivated more researchers and practitioners to investigate how students adapt themselves to their new environments. The following section will first give a brief background to research on how SA influences SLA and how it may improve intercultural communicative competence, before dealing with the shifting focus and rationales for SA research in recent years.

### 2.1.1 SA Studies concerning Second Language Acquisition

Both learners and practitioners tend to assume that going abroad provides the best environment to accelerate language improvement (Sanz and Morales-Front, 2018), and classic psycholinguistic theories in SLA have also suggested an abundance of L2 learning resources in the SA context. For example, in Krashen's input hypothesis (1985), the immersive environment offers a significant amount of meaningful L2 input, through which learners naturally acquire L2. Sojourners constantly need to produce language and negotiate breakdowns in conversations to achieve communicative goals, which nudges learners to notice and fill gaps in L2 learning according to Long's interaction hypothesis (1996) and Swain's output hypothesis (1985).

Studies related to the development of language skills were the first to be explored in the SA field and have been investigated in a large and growing amount of literature. In recent years, although research interests in the SA context have expanded multidimensionally, second language acquisition (SLA) remains one of the core topics (Sanz and Morales-Front, 2018). Among various domains of language learning, the improvement of abilities related to social interaction seems to be the most obvious during the sojourning period, such as awareness of registers and genres and pragmatics competence (Schauer, 2009). The reason

could be that learners have to manage new subject positions appearing in new social and cultural contexts and relationships, through which they reflect on the meaning, function and use of the L2 (Block, 2009). However, these are aspects of language use which they would have found difficult to learn in their home country classrooms (ibid.). In recent years, there has been a large volume of research regarding the development of L2 pragmatic ability in SA programmes, which will be covered later in Chapter 3, the literature review.

### 2.1.2 Intercultural Communication and Learner Identities in the SA Context

When the topic of SA is brought up, many people would also naturally think about intercultural communication. The word 'culture' appears in familiar collocations such as 'culture shock', 'culture difference' or 'culture adaptation', all of which typically refer to cultural practices at the national level and suggest clear divisions between mindsets of different ethnic groups (Hofstede et al., 2010). However, the concept 'culture' is not merely limited to differences between countries but shared values of communities of different scales, as people unavoidably embody multi-layered cultures, such as religious groups, companies and circles of families and friends (Hofstede et al., 2010; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2016). The essentialist paradigm, which regards countries as basic units with which to categorise individuals' behaviour patterns, has been widely criticised for its oversimplification of complex realities (Holliday, 2011). Instead of being labelled as a representative of certain regional cultures, each person is a unique, sophisticated entity, carrying values and beliefs accumulated from and filtered by their experiences in the numerous cultures they have encountered (ibid.).

Nevertheless, I am not trying to deny the impact of national cultures on people. As Holliday (2011) illustrates in the 'Grammar of Culture' model, when negotiating intercultural interactions, individuals draw on different cultural resources, including cultures of small

cultural groups (e.g. families, interest groups, and work communities) and wider social and political structures (e.g. nation, language, religion). Cultures at the country level can influence individuals' understanding of selves and the world through a range of shared means, such as history, traditions, economic and political settings, and language. Therefore, entering a SA environment with significantly different codes and conventions from the previous 'taken-for-granted' settings may lead to constant re-negotiation of identities (Aveni, 2005). When students undertake new social roles (e.g. foreigner, international student, ethnic minority) in the new sociocultural space, their prepared positions and values are likely to be challenged (Aveni, 2005; Block, 2009; Blommaert, 2010). At the same time, sojourners might encounter identity issues caused by limited language proficiency, which hinder them from expressing a desirable self, understanding other speakers, or even integrating into new communities in the environment (Benson et al., 2012).

What has been mentioned above could be an essential reason why migrants and SA students are common participants in research concerning culture- and identity-related topics. 'Culture' and 'self', although being pervasive in life, typically go unnoticed for most people, yet they become visible, and even prominent, in an environment where differences frequently emerge, nudging participants to reflect on, re-negotiate, and even reconstruct their identities in the new cultural environment (Agar, 2006; Nunan and Choi, 2010). The process is not necessarily pleasant; instead, it is likely to be a struggling state for sojourners. Some of them might feel alienated by new communities, where people are unfriendly or even hostile (Jackson, 2008), or feel stuck in the gap between two cultures and unheard by either side (Ryazanova, 2019). For L2 speakers, identity challenges could be even more obvious, such as the language barrier and unfamiliar conventions in interpersonal communication possibly hindering them from expressing themselves and forming relationships in the way they want (O'Reilly et al., 2010; Benson et al., 2012).

However, the struggle sojourners experience is usually accompanied by self-enhancement and overall development. Mathews (2000) used a 'supermarket' metaphor to explain this process; people moving from their original society to an intercultural zone are like those going from local shops to supermarkets. More types and sizes of goods are available, which stimulate them to compare their initial options with new possibilities. There seem to be two possible consequences: consumers either change their minds, or stay with their original choice. For SA students, the case may be more complicated than the either/or situation; they might form unique perspectives to interpret cultures and languages and develop a communication style without fully conforming to conventions from either home or host societies (Blackledge and Creese, 2017). The process could also trigger intercultural awareness, tolerance and empathy (Kinginger, 2013a), all of which together contribute to the maturation of selves, while SA students in turn contribute to the richness of cultural diversity in the host country (Ryazanova, 2019).

### 2.1.3 Shifting Rationales for SLA Research in the SA Context

In the past decades, research concerning language learning in SA contexts has been dominated by quantitative studies focusing mainly on learning effectiveness or results during the sojourning period (Kinginger, 2013a). Language abilities, in this case, are regarded as products that could be measured through comparisons between learners' interlanguage and native-speaker norms in tests of specific linguistic units (ibid.). However, there has been a gradual shift of research approaches in the field, with more individual-centred, qualitative investigations appearing (Benson et al., 2013). Narrative and ethnographic approaches based on situational experience have been increasingly employed to explore the learners' perspectives and the process of language learning (Isabelli-Garciá et al., 2018). The shift has been motivated by four primary considerations: 1) awareness of

prominent differences between individuals; 2) complexity of context factors; 3) the mobile nature of SA; and 4) attention to learners' holistic development. The four points together lay the foundation for this study.

**(1) Individual Differences**

Behind the emergence of qualitative studies is the concern that generalised predictions could lead to oversimplification of human characteristics and misleading conclusions. A number of studies have suggested salient individual differences in learning outcomes among SA learners; some of them greatly extend their L2 repertoire, while others do not show significant improvement, or even score lower in the L2 proficiency post-test (Kinginger, 2013a). Models and patterns summarised through large-scale surveys and experimentation usually describe 'an average person' while disguising variations between individuals (Ushioda, 2009). Ushioda (2011), therefore, suggests the necessity of moving to a more dynamic 'person-in-context' system:

> By this, I mean a focus on the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, with goals, motivates and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective agent, and the fluid and complex web of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves and is inherently part of. (pp.12-13)

**(2) Contextual Factors**

As proposed by Ushioda (2011), individual-centred investigations require researchers to consider learner agency as well as contextual elements. However, much outcome-based research has only paid attention to some pre-established categories of difference between individuals (e.g. personality, attitude, motivation) while having underestimated the

influence of the environment on L2 learning (Kinginger, 2013a). Examples of contextual factors include, but are not limited to, whether learners have multiple access to L2 communities, whether they are welcomed or warmly hosted, and whether they receive corrective feedback on L2 inaccuracies from speakers at a higher level (ibid.). In terms of language learning context, I tend to agree with sociolinguistic researchers who see it as 'fundamental, not ancillary, to language learning' (Zuengler and Miller, 2006, p.37). In other words, language use lies in a 'dynamic, dialectical relationship obtaining between persons and their social environment' (p.158), and language learning should be regarded more as a course of socialisation than acquisition (Kinginger, 2009). Therefore, to investigate L2 learning in the SA environment, researchers need to focus on not only individuals' efforts, aptitude, and willingness to learn, but the support they receive (or lack thereof) from the context, and how that affects the learning process.

One example of contextual influence is Morita's (2004) case study research on the classroom experience of L2 learners in a Canadian university, in which Nanako, a SA student from Japan, explained the different meanings behind her silences in different classes. In one module, where the instructor legitimated her silence, she was inspired to consider her outsider perspective as a strength when viewing the SA environment. She remained quiet but still felt she was adjusting to the SA life in an active way through observation, even though her approach did not follow her perceived conventional North American interactional style. In another module, however, Nanako perceived the teacher's careless attitude and felt marginalised by other students. In this case, as a powerless member of the group, her silence was more of a reluctant choice.

**(3) Mobility in the SA Context**

The word ‘mobility’ here not only refers to the geographical movement of sojourners but the course where ‘new connections and practices are established, activated and maintained’ in the SA environment’ (Badwan and Simpson, 2019, p.2). The ‘mobile’ nature of the SA experience is co-constructed by the aforementioned interaction between contextual elements and individual agencies (Coleman, 2013). To be more specific, each individual is involved in different conversations, practices and relationships. Nanako’s case in the last paragraph has illustrated how different communicative settings provide sojourners with different experiences and opportunities. At the same time, SA students’ reactions to emerging linguistic and cultural phenomena largely depend on their agency and social positions (Davies and Harré, 1990; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). Through reviewing two cases where SA students faced intercultural conflicts, Kinginger (2009) pointed out these sojourners’ different responses to similar situations had either hindered them from socialising in L2 or provided more L2 learning opportunities through conflict negotiation. Such multifactorial interaction has encouraged researchers to shift analytical attention from seeking generalisable regularities to investigating the unpredictability, fluidity and discursiveness of language use and learning (Badwan and Simpson, 2019).

**(4) Learners’ Holistic Development**

Another motivation behind emerging individual-centred ethnographical research in the SA context is a new rationale that views learners as rounded people instead of acquisition systems doing language input and output (Benson et al., 2013). As noted by Kramsch (2006), most of the attention among SLA scholars has been focused on learner’s achievements in language proficiency, rather than the learners themselves, who are feeling, thinking and doing the learning. When studies limit participants’ identities to their role as L2 learners, what is more significant to students could be excluded: how L2 learning enables them to change and develop holistically as a person (Coleman, 2013). Examples include how learners

manage their identities and relationships in L2, how they understand the cultural meaning behind the language, how they establish connections in their L2 community, and how they reflect on their L2 experience (McConachy and Fujino, 2021). Researchers, therefore, need to pay attention to not only the amount of language use or the extent to which learners approach a specific L2 standard (e.g. native-speaker norms) but how they apply language as a tool to socialise in new sociocultural contexts, and how they relate L2 to their senses of self (Kinginger, 2013b).

In Section 1.1, I have discussed pragmatic-related difficulties SA students face as the motivation behind this research. The next section will focus more specifically on Chinese SA students in the UK higher education (HE) context.

## 2.2 Chinese Learners in UK Higher Education and their Pragmatic-Related Challenges

In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese learners have chosen to study abroad to pursue higher degrees, with the UK as one of the most popular destinations. According to data from the Higher Education Statistic Agency (2021), Chinese learners have become the largest cohort among the UK's international students, with 143,820 studying there in the 2020/2021 academic year. For higher education sectors in the UK, Chinese learners carry increasing financial, academic and cultural significance (Gu, 2016). At the same time, internationalising higher education sectors face increasing challenges in meeting Chinese as well as other international students' needs in social, educational, cultural, and psychological aspects (Jin and Cortazzi, 2017). Jin and Cortazzi (2017) stressed the importance of 'cultures of learning', in which all the participants in HE, both students and staff, learn 'about, from, and with' each other to acquire and practise different cultural approaches (p.248):

> When students understand that teachers learn from them, there are elements of their feeling valued, developing greater self-esteem, dignity and confidence. When teachers are seen to learn from students, there is an appreciation of reciprocal learning and cultural synergy.

The concept 'cultural of learning' echoes the aim of this thesis, which is to enhance such mutual understanding by unpacking SA students' struggles and development process from an emic perspective, through the lens of L2 pragmatics. This section will provide an intimal portrait of Chinese SA students in the UK higher education (HE) context and the pragmatic-related challenges they face. It will focus specifically on potential reasons underpinning these challenges, including cross-cultural pragmatic differences between English and Chinese and the lack of pragmatics teaching and communicative English teaching in the Chinese ELF system. The discussion will be based on studies investigating Chinese and English pragmatics, English language education in China, Chinese SA students, and my personal experience being an EFL learner and teacher in China.

### 2.2.1 Pragmatic-Related Challenges Faced by Chinese SA Learners

According to large-scale surveys conducted by Cebolla-Boado et al. (2018) and Gu (2016), Chinese international students' choice of the UK universities is primarily driven by their academic prestige, followed by the cultural and language experience that the UK context offers. On the other hand, new cultural and educational environments can bring transitional and adaptive challenges to the students, as what is considered intuitive in previous communities might not be conventional or appropriate in the SA context (Gu, 2016). Language proficiency has been suggested as another difficulty perceived by Chinese students. For example, Cranwell et al.'s (2019) research investigating the transition of

Chinese learners from four HE institutions shows that while the students generally reported growing confidence in subject-related English, their conversational language confidence declined after arriving in the UK. In a survey including 257 Chinese students sojourning at Scottish universities, Zhou et al. (2011) found that the frequency of encountering language-related problems had not declined significantly after six months of the students' SA lives.

#### 2.2.1.1 Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Differences between Chinese and English

L2 pragmatics lies at the intersection of language and culture, the two challenges faced by SA learners mentioned above (Taguchi, 2012). For Chinese students who learn English, studies in cross-cultural pragmatics have pointed out that some general pragmatic norms are universal and can be transferred between Chinese and English languages. For example, English users adjust the extent of directness in the conversation based on factors including the degree of imposition and the social distance with the interlocutor, which also applies to Chinese speakers (Rose, 2000). Moreover, the majority of speech acts, such as greetings, apologies, expressions of gratitude and requests, are common across cultures (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). However, researchers have also identified significant differences in both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic conventions between Chinese and English languages. Although studies based on nation-level comparisons have been criticised for encouraging stereotypes, the differences between pragmatic conventions countries should not be denied entirely, nor should potential miscommunication and challenges in SA transition led by first language (L1) transfer. Here I review some of the cross-cultural pragmatic differences referred to in the literature that involved Chinese EFL learners, including terms of address, small talk/conversational routines, and request forms.

(1) Terms of address

Status and intimacy are considered essential factors underpinning the choices of address forms in both Chinese and English, yet the usages vary significantly in the two languages (Qin, 2008). Different from English, Chinese has two singular second-person pronouns – '你 ('you' in the plain form)' and '您 ('you' in the polite form)', similar to 'tu/vous' in French and 'du/Sie' in German (Gao, 2013; Li Wei, 2011). Another point frequently mentioned by cross-cultural pragmatics researchers is the use of fictive kinship addresses in Chinese. Compared to English speakers, Chinese tend to employ kinship terms (e.g. '叔叔 - uncle', '奶奶 - grandma', '姐 - sister') much more frequently to address older non-relatives (Qin, 2008; Gao, 2013; Geng, 2015). It could be interpreted as a way to foster harmony and intimacy, and to show humbleness and respect following the age hierarchy (Geng, 2015). Similarly, official titles, such as '经理 – manager' and '校长-headmaster/ress', are frequently employed to address people at higher levels with management responsibilities in the workplace to imply deference (Gao, 2013). Moreover, by comparing academic upward request emails of Chinese and English speakers, Zhu (2017) pointed out that more Chinese speakers use polite salutations combined with a formal address form in their emails (e.g. '敬爱的老师 - respected teacher') and emphasise their student identities in signing off (e.g. '您的学生' – 'student of yours (honorific)').

(2) Request Forms

When making requests, English users adjust the extent of directness in the conversation based on factors including the degree of imposition and the social distance with the interlocutor, which also applies to Chinese speakers (Rose, 2000). However, researchers have identified significant differences in pragmatic conventions between the two languages.

One example is the lexical choice for the request: Chinese speakers frequently use '我要 - I want' and '我想要 – I think [that I] want' to express their intention in various scenarios, such as counter services at banks, cafés, and restaurants, and some students even use the expression to ask for a reference letter from their tutors (Wang, 2011). English speakers, however, might interpret these expressions as blunt and coercive (ibid.). Another example Wang (2011) provided was the usage of bi-clausal structures: it is common in English to indicate indirectness with bi-clausal requests (e.g. 'I wonder if', 'Would you mind if'), while Chinese speakers may not associate these structures with politeness. The finding was supported by Lee-Wong (1994), Zhang (1995), and Zhu (2017): compared to English-speaking postgraduate students, Chinese learners tend to rely more on external modifications (e.g. request justifications, expressing compliments/promises) to maintain rapport instead of internal modifiers at the syntactic level.

(3) Small Talk and Conversational Routines

Small talk is considered by Cui (2015) a 'missing skill in the Chinese communicative repertoire' (p.3), which explains the small number of cross-cultural pragmatics research comparing small talk strategies between Chinese and other languages. According to the survey results from 80 Chinese professionals working in Australia, small talk was a significant problem they encountered in social interactions: more than 60% felt awkward, unnatural, and difficult to find common topics and sustain the conversation (ibid.). Cui (2015) considered different sociopragmatic expectations an important reason: while Australians tend to consider small talk an indispensable part of a pleasant work atmosphere, Chinese feel less obliged to engage personally in relationships at the acquaintance level. A similar observation was reported by Scollon and Scollon (2001) in the context of counter service: compared to English speakers, Chinese customers tend to apply more straightforward and

instrumental strategies, and a friendly small talk is not as common. As for expressions applied to start an informal conversation, Liu (2016) compared questionnaires collected from native speakers of Chinese and English and reported that three questions – 'Have you eaten?', 'Where are you going?' and 'What are you busy with?' – are used much more frequently in Chinese (p.2344). There seems to be a connection between Liu's (2016) results and Cui's (2015) explanation of Chinese speakers' awkwardness and unaccustomedness in small talk. Compared to weather-related topics or general greetings (e.g. 'How are you?') commonly used in English to start small talks, the three questions Chinese people frequently use seem more personal. It is likely to be one of the reasons why Chinese speakers perceive small talk as more appropriate between close friends.

Pragmatic differences between Chinese and English languages have been widely investigated, and there have also been rich studies focusing on other speech acts and pragmatic phenomena, such as apology (e.g. Guan et al., 2009; Wu and Wang, 2016; House and Kádár, 2021), refusal (e.g. Chang, 2009; Guo, 2012), compliment (e.g. Tang and Zhang, 2009; Haixia, 2019), and complaint (e.g. Chen et al., 2011). However, instead of general connections between language structure and cultural elements, this study focuses more on individuals' reflections of language use. Since cross-cultural pragmatics comparison is not the core of this study, this section has only covered a small number of the studies in a few areas to present readers with examples of differences that might cause miscommunication and confusion in Chinese students' SA journey. I will now move on to introduce studies introducing Chinese SA learners' pragmatic difficulties in English speaking countries.

#### 2.2.1.2 Chinese SA Learners' Pragmatic Difficulties in English Speaking Countries.

Sone general difficulties language learners face in learning and using L2 pragmatics in the SA context have been introduced in Section 1.1 and will not be repeated here. In studies

focusing on Chinese learners, interaction with tutors and maintaining teacher-student relationships have been noticed as one of the common pragmatic-related challenges. Investigating Chinese learners' classroom participation in UK universities, Zhu and O'Sullivan (2020), Jin and Cortazzi (2017), and Wu (2015) identified pragmatic gaps as one of the reasons contributing to learners' silence. Examples include feeling unsure whether asking questions is considered an interruption for the class and whether publicly challenging the teacher is deemed appropriate. Similar findings are shared in Ai's (2017) research focusing on Chinese students in Australian universities: influenced by the hierarchical teacher-student relationship in mainland China, some students were afraid to communicate with their teachers when they needed support. Halenko and Jones (2011) offered observations from the lecturers' perspective, pointing out that Chinese international students in the EAP context sometimes struggle with simple speech acts, such as making requests in a pragmatic appropriate manner. The discussion here consolidates the importance of 'cultures of learning' mentioned above in understanding different values and interpretations underpinning noticeably different intercultural practices aspects (Jin and Cortazzi, 2017).

Difficulties with L2 pragmatics can also hinder SA students from expressing themselves and establishing and maintaining interpersonal connections in their social lives. For example, Spencer-Oatey (2018), in their study investigating participants' unsettling SA experiences, found that students struggled with basic greetings in various social contexts such as 'How are you?' and 'Are you all right?' (p.307). Some Chinese students attributed the difficulty to different patterns commonly used or taught in their home country. Moreover, tracking a Chinese speaker's experience sojourning in Canada, Lin's (2009) case study reveals how the student struggled with greetings and day-to-day exchanges that seemed to be taken for granted by NS interlocutors. The perceived clumsiness in daily communication limited the student from participating in social activities or expanding interpersonal connections in

English; instead, she chose to keep silent and only talk with other Mandarin speakers. Although Lin's research was based in the North America HE setting, the findings still shed light on the context of this study, since both deal with English-speaking countries as SA destinations, higher education contexts, and adult learners speaking Chinese as L1. Zhou et al. (2011) and Gu (2011) reported similar observations; although some Chinese students fit in well socially in the SA context, many of them still prefer to establish co-national friendships and find it difficult to communicate with English speakers. However, Zhou et al. and Gu have generally attributed the social patterns observed to learners' perceived closeness of cultural and educational backgrounds rather than L2 pragmatic difficulties.

### 2.2.2 Pragmatics in EFL Teaching in China

These challenges faced by Chinese SA learners could be traced back to English education in their home setting. Being Chinese myself, I have completed most of my degrees, from primary school to undergraduate level, in mainland China. I have also worked as an EFL teacher in three different cities, focusing mainly on SA preparation and university-level courses. Reflecting on my experience, I became aware that pragmatics has been undervalued in our English education, and it can hardly be acquired naturally as most learners have limited opportunities to use English for communicative purposes in China. In the school I worked for, which was one of the most prestigious providers of private English educational services in China, pragmatics rarely received tutors' attention, even in courses to prepare learners for studying abroad. Moreover, English-language education in the public education system is still generally grammar-focused and teacher-centred. In 2017, I was working on my MA thesis and conducted classroom observation in a public high school in Qingdao, a first-tier city in China with relatively plentiful education resources. Although the school was known by locals for its cutting-edge, student-centred pedagogy, I observed very few communicative tasks during the English sessions. The teachers themselves admitted the

difficulties in conducting communicative language teaching due to the exam-oriented syllabus, large class sizes, and lack of training.

My personal observations are consistent with descriptions in recent studies of EFL teaching in the Chinese context. While pragmatic proficiency has been included in English education syllabi in China, teaching and testing mainly focus on linguistic proficiency, and Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge and skills generally lag behind (Liu, 2007). A questionnaire survey involving 237 Chinese university students showed that most students received mainly teacher-centred English education (Yuan et al., 2015). Tutors emphasised vocabulary and linguistic knowledge explanation, and learners were not allowed much time for communicative practice (ibid.). Students expressed willingness to improve pragmatic competence, yet felt the English courses provided by the university failed to support them (ibid.).

### 2.2.3 Potential 'Vicious Circle' for L2 Pragmatics Learning during SA

Previous studies have suggested that a period of study abroad (SA) is potentially a fruitful period for L2 pragmatics learning (e.g. Schauer, 2009; Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler, 2019; Devlin, 2019). One possible factor contributing to such improvement is learners' increasing exposure to L2-mediated interactions, which provides contextually appropriate language input to foster acquisition (Jackson, 2019). SA learners also need to manage new subject positions appearing in new social and cultural contexts and interpersonal relationships, which can raise learners' L2 pragmatic awareness (Block, 2009). Researchers have suggested there is a correlation between L2 pragmatic development and the intensity and diversity of learners' L2 exposure during SA (e.g. Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler, 2019). Experiencing communications in different situations and contexts, SA learners are more likely to acquire or learn various pragmatic forms and strategies (Devlin, 2019).

However, researchers (e.g. Vidal and Shively, 2019) have pointed out that pragmatic development is not guaranteed within the SA context. Lin's (2009) study, mentioned in Section 2.2.1, provided a vivid example of how some learners might enter 'a vicious circle' in L2 learning: social awkwardness led by knowledge gaps in L2 pragmatics might prevent them from proactively participating in L2-mediated interactions, and in turn, the lack of L2 exposure limits learners' development of knowledge in L2 language and culture. Nevertheless, support for SA learners from the universities is generally academically focused in many HE institutions. The frustrations of daily L2 communication are largely neglected, leaving most SA students to deal with any confusion independently.

This chapter has described the context of this study from two aspects. The first section describes the background and rationales of qualitative, individual-centred SLA studies in the study-abroad context, laying the foundation for the research questions and methodologies. In the second section, I attempted to provide an initial picture of Chinese students sojourning in the UK universities for readers. However, as pointed out by Wu (2015), the terms 'Chinese learner' or 'Chinese student' themselves can sometimes be problematic, and one should not expect a generalised picture to accurately summarise learners from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, even if they are from the same country. Overgeneralisations that reduce cultural complexity to a few essential characteristics might also prevent us from approaching the 'mobile' nature of learning and learners explained in 2.1.3. Therefore, although helping familiarise readers with the learners researched, the second part of the context chapter should be viewed with caution. Chapters 4 and 5 of will provide more detailed background information of the participants of this study and their SA contexts.

Rather, the concept leads to an attitude of open-minded enquiry about particular individuals and groups of students (and teachers) to ascertain how people are used to learning and what they expect of each other in international contexts in which cultures of learning brought to the situation may be adapted, changed and developed. The

# Chapter 3: Literature Review

## 3.1 Introduction

It is difficult to dissociate language, culture and identity, the three key constructs involved in the study. Culture, a 'a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values' (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p.3), is shared by members within a given community and affects how people behave and how they interpret the 'meanings' of social acts of others (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2016). Identity, defined by many authors as the way people understand their position in and their connection with the social world (Weedon, 1987; Norton, 2012), seems to be closely related to one's 'recognition of cultural belongings' (Nunan and Choi, 2010, p.3); as a shared phenomenon, culture enables individuals to identify with similar people as well as distinguish themselves from different ones (Weeks, 1990). Language, then, could be viewed as a tool to present one's identity, most of the time unconsciously, as well as receive information from others (Blommaert, 2015). The way we express ourselves and interpret others' language, as mentioned earlier, is influenced by cultural knowledge and expectations.

Pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics, can be broadly defined by the way in which individuals manage social relationships through language construction and interpretation (Bachman, 1990). It is this aspect of language use which enables us to manage our identity while traversing different cultures. I would, therefore, argue that pragmatics lies at the intersection of the three concepts introduced above — language, culture and identity – and that such a relationship is visualised in figure 3.1. Studies of pragmatics usually follow paradigms that regard language as a form of social action conventionalised by linguistic norms as well as contextual factors (Kasper and Rose, 2001). One's pragmatic choices,

therefore, depend on both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, including the perception of interpersonal relationships and linguistic conventions followed in certain relationships (Taguchi and Roever, 2017). Both are largely influenced by cultural assumptions accumulated in current and previous communities (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2016). Apart from sociocultural frameworks, human agency also plays a significant role in pragmatic choices. Language acts as a channel through which people 'give off' information about themselves (Blommaert, 2005, p.204), and every conversation can be seen as an opportunity for individuals to negotiate their identities in the social world (Norton, 2010). One's pragmatic choices, therefore, are tied to the way they position themselves in the interpersonal relationship and the self-image they hope to project to others (van Compernolle, 2014).

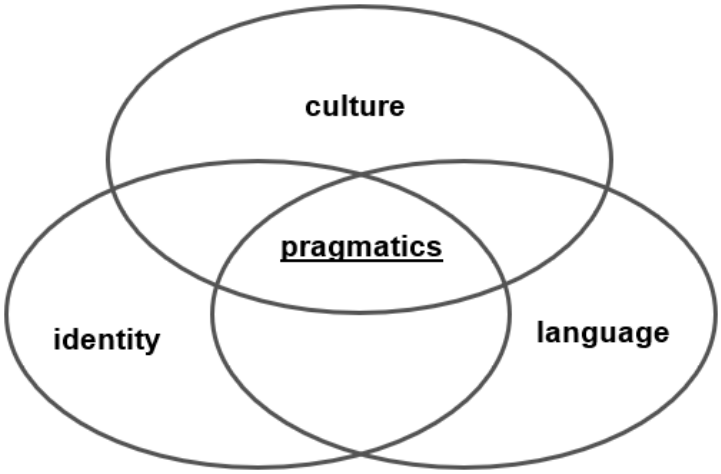


*Figure 3.1: A Simple Representation of Pragmatics and Relevant Concepts*

Pragmatics, therefore, serves as a lens through which we might observe how language, culture and identities interact. This literature review will firstly introduce the two key constructs in this study: culture and identity. I will then discuss their connections between

each other and how they are linked to the language and language learning. Pragmatics will then be introduced as the intersection of culture, identity and language. Through briefly reviewing previous studies related to pragmatics learning in the SA context, the last section will elaborate how this doctoral research will address the knowledge gap in this field, and how it might contribute a deeper understanding of how sojourners develop as L2 users as well as rounded persons through learning L2 pragmatics.

## 3.2 Culture

### 3.2.1 Culture and Intercultural Communication

Culture is defined as a shared phenomenon, a fuzzy set of signs, assumptions and behavioural norms shared by members in a specific group (Kramsch, 1998; Spencer-Oatey, 2008) including all the non-instinctive human features acquired through socialisation and transmitted between generations (Deutscher, 2011). Culture also suggests social affiliation; people identify with those similar to them while differentiating themselves from those who are different (Weeks, 1990). The influence between culture and individuals is mutual. On the one hand, pre-constructed conventions of communities serve as reference points for individuals, guiding, influencing and sometimes restricting one's decisions, actions and judgement (Kramsch and Uryu, 2012). On the other hand, individuals engaged in social activities, as agentive and reflective beings, may disagree with or disobey existing norms and raise alternative practices, which in turn reshape cultures (Fairclough, 2006).

When the phrase 'intercultural communication' is brought up, most people think of interactions between individuals from different nations (Scollon et al., 2012). Underpinning such intuition is sometimes an essentialist or neo-essentialist cultural approach. Essentialists tend to interpret humans as 'fully centred, unified individual[s]' possessing a stable essence

throughout their existence (Hall, 1996, p.597). Phillips (2010) identified four features of essentialism, and Bradley (2018, p.3) illustrated them with examples in culture related discussions:

> 1. Attributing specific characteristics to all members within a particular group or category. (“All Japanese are polite.”) 2. Attributing these specific characteristics to the category itself, thus naturalizing and reifying what has been socially constructed. (“He is polite because he is Japanese.”) 3. The creation of a collective which is presumed to be a homogenous block. (“We Japanese . . . / You Japanese . . .”) 4. The ‘policing’ of the collective category in a way that non-adherence undermines a member’s claim of membership within the group. (“He is not really Japanese because he is not polite.”)

Echoing Bradley’s (2018) examples, Holliday (2011) pointed out that essentialists rather commonly associate cultures with a nation or a language, with the belief that the background culture guides people’s behaviours, and thus there are behavioural patterns to follow when meeting individuals from certain cultures. Neo-essentialism maintains the fundamental unit of essentialism but admits the existence of diversity as exceptional and exotic (ibid.).

Although the (neo-)essentialist approach seems neat and convenient for intercultural communication theorists, it has been criticised for its overgeneralisation and oversimplification of complex cultural realities. Cultures are shared in groups of different sizes and forms, ranging from small circles such as families and companies to broad groups like countries and ethnic communities (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2016). Holliday (1999) defined the former as ‘small cultures’, differentiating it from the macro-level concepts (e.g. ethnicity and notion) that more people tend to associate with when discussing culture. The

small cultures do not necessarily subordinate to larger cultures, and individuals carry 'culture residues' (p.249) from their previous social experience in not just national units but different communities (e.g. family, company, classroom) (ibid.). Therefore, it could be said that all types of communication are more or less intercultural, as it is unlikely that interlocutors share exactly the same social network.

Research investigating intercultural communication was once attached to asymmetrical relations of global power and language proficiency, focusing mainly on how immigrants and sojourners adopt to inner-circle, native-speaker conventions (Kramsch and Uryu, 2012). This research ontology, however, has been gradually shifting to more poststructuralist perspectives in recent years. The tendency is especially obvious in the context where English is employed in more intercultural communications as a lingua franca, and the aforementioned power gap between native and non-native speakers (NS and NNS) has been gradually narrowed. It used to be that powerful inner-circle English countries dominated the economy and politics and imposed their language on people in NNS countries. In recent years, however, many groups of speakers of other languages, such as Europeans, Latin Americans, and East Asians, have stronger economic and international status, which drives the shift of recognition of English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2007). There are also significantly more transactions conducted in English between NNS in international contexts than between NS in English-speaking countries (House, 2009). With an ELF background, research interests and ethics in SA and SLA fields have been redirected from how marginal communities integrate into the mainstream society towards issues of inclusivity: how different forms of English are legitimised, and speakers together transform and adapt in the contact zone (Kramsch and Uryu, 2012).

### 3.2.2 Intercultural Third Space

The concept of ‘third space’, also called ‘third place’ or ‘third culture’, is a metaphor widely used by researchers in the fields of language and intercultural communication. In the discussions following the longstanding paradigm of binary cultures, the terms are usually used to ‘draw our central focus beyond the entities that interlocutors are conceivably “locked into” towards a new site opened up between interlocutors’ (Zhou and Pilcher, 2019, p.1). It could be considered as the contact zone where ‘disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other’ (Pratt, 1992, p.12) with intercultural miscommunications and misunderstandings; it can, however, also be a state of ‘hybridity’, where meanings of cultures are open to be ‘challenged, appropriated and resignified’ (Kramsch and Uryu, 2012, p.213). Kramsch and Uryu (2012) believe ‘third space’ is also a ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p.84), where interlocutors from different backgrounds collaborate to negotiate meaning and transform breakdowns into meaningful communications and even creative intercultural products. In this process, the interlocutors may develop an ‘intercultural style’, communicating in a ‘third, hybrid way’ which does not conform to the monolingual conventions they observe (House, 2003, p.573).

### 3.2.3 Liquid Approach and Critical Cosmopolitanism

The ontology of viewing cultures as negotiable and co-existing constructs has been supported by Dervin (2011) and Holliday (2011). Dervin (2011) called for investigating intercultural communication through a ‘liquid’ rather than ‘solid’ approach: the former viewing culture as a set of dynamic and fluid systems and the latter as static, resolute, pre-structured frameworks. Similarly, Holliday (2011) adopted the critical cosmopolitanism approach, considering diversity not as an exception but normality, and boundaries between cultures as blurred and fluid. Under this paradigm, individuals are regarded as critical and agentive beings, and it seems natural to flexibly transcend cultural structures rather than habitually following a particular set of rules. Researchers supporting this paradigm, including

Holliday himself, have criticised essentialist and neo-essentialist views for encouraging stereotypes. Although they might help establish initial understandings in intercultural communication, stereotypes could lead to prejudice and hinder people from knowing 'others' as equally sophisticated beings.

Similar to the discussions about the third space, scholars holding the critical cosmopolitanism paradigm oppose hierarchies between cultures. Holliday (2011) argued that behind the clear boundaries between national cultures sits potential Western-centric chauvinism, which views non-Western others as being 'culturally deficient', needing help through learning from the West (p.79). In this case, internationalisation is likely to be oversimplified and reduced to Westernisation. The cultural identities of newcomers from other backgrounds could be undervalued as they are expected to adapt to and integrate into the western culture (Harvey et al., 2019). In reality, however, the image of sojourners is much more complicated than powerless newcomers who passively accept and struggle to squeeze themselves into existing social expectations. Instead, they are likely to engage with the cultural practices creatively and view them critically while taking or resisting the norms. The notions of 'mastery' and 'ownership' proposed by Wertsch (1998) could be applied here: mastery means 'knowing how' to apply cultural tools, while ownership refers to the 'appropriation' process of cultural tools that 'belong to others' (pp.50-53). In other words, sojourners could engage with and take a position in the new culture without necessarily adopting the agreed values of locals or native speakers (Holliday, 2011; Ryazanova, 2019).

One example provided by Holliday (2011) includes the experience of two Chinese students encountering seminars in British universities. Instead of accepting the imposed label of 'problematic Asian students who don't talk or contribute', the two learners started mini research into seminar strategies of students from different backgrounds. Through

observation, the two students realised the amount of speech does not always indicate the quality of content or thoroughness of preparation. They also identified themselves with some quieter British students who worked hard. The findings enabled them to further challenge the negative stereotype of Asian students and to turn their passive positions into positive ownership of cultural practices.

### 3.2.4 Criticism against Third Space

Despite similarities mentioned above, frameworks based on the third space are criticised by Holliday (2011) for their potential risk of 'cut[ting] off the possibility of the shared underlying universal cultural processes evident in the critical cosmopolitan picture' (p.164). Holliday illustrated differences between the two constructs with figure 3.2, pointing out that the concept of third space generally continues to follow the neo-essentialist paradigm, which retains traditional dichotomies between essential values of national cultures. According to Holliday (2011), although the model enables researchers to see creative intercultural activities and negotiations within the 'third space', the boundaries are regarded as fixed. In other words, cultures are still viewed as being mostly static and impermeable, allowing only a minimal level of fluidity. Ethnic groups, in this case, are viewed as mutually exclusive and values of different cultures are regarded as incompatible.

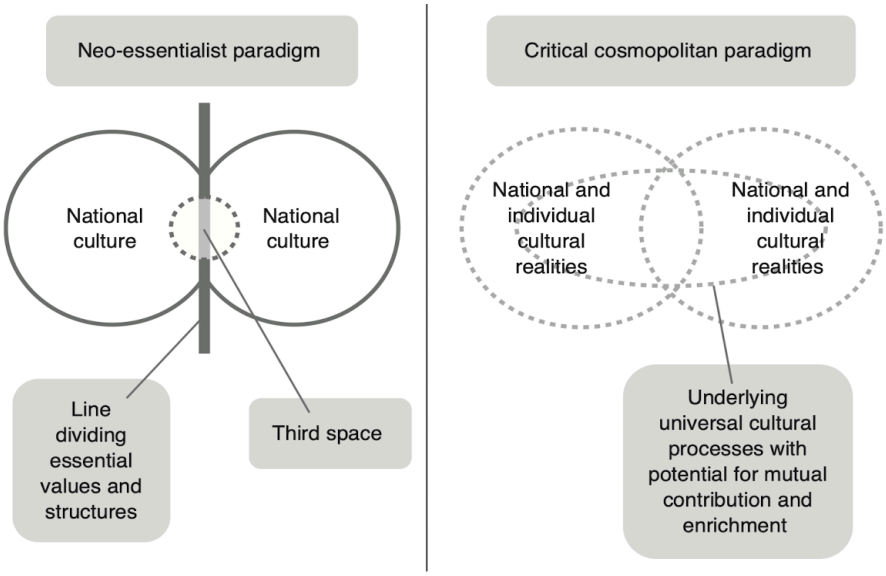


*Figure 3.2: Neo-Essentialist and Critical Cosmopolitan Paradigms*

*(Holliday, 2011, p.164)*

I am aware that the neo-essentialist stance might not be shared between all the researchers using the term 'third space', but there indeed appears to be a tendency in the intercultural field to view third space in a solidified manner, as Holliday (2011) pointed out. It could be seen from how third space is widely depicted as a 'site of confusion' where individuals struggle between different cultures, and how it is described as a free zone, where interlocutors are liberalised from their 'prior cultural roots' for open negotiation of different practices and values (Zhou and Pilcher, 2019, p.1). The tendency was also confirmed by MacDonald (2019) in their corpus analysis of 'third space' used in contemporary intercultural studies. The results showing that the term appears to be used to consolidate 'the aspect of spatialisation' (MacDonald, 2019, p.105) – in the 'third space', individuals reside more than one cultures or travel in between them.

The criticism from Holliday is also shared by Blommaert (2015), that the third space oversimplifies realities within the globalisation context, where mutual influences frequently

happen across regional boundaries through the Internet and immigration and 'create diverse cultural and social features sharing a number of fundamental assumptions and characteristics' (Blommaert, 2005, p.22). Culture today is permeated with ideologies and values shared and manipulated through not just local but cross-border communities, such as scholars involved in the same academic area, fans of specific books/movies or sports clubs, and potentially, students on university campuses (Blommaert, 2005; Kramsch, 2011). Blommaert (2015), therefore, challenged the categorial function of culture in the traditional view:

> Contemporary 'cultures' are best seen as characteristics of social 'niches', arenas we pass through on an everyday basis, and in which we have to deploy specific cultural resources in order to be 'normal', 'integrated', and so forth (cf. Agha 2007). Any living individual would be expected to have access to a terrific multitude of such 'niches' and would therefore be tremendously 'multicultural' (or, if you insist, 'superdiverse'). Naturally, in such a condition, the classical notion of 'culture' becomes meaningless. (p. 24)

Holliday (2011) and Blommaert (2005, 2015) were not denying membership in national groups but emphasised individuals' capabilities to negotiate and operate between cultures and draw on different cultural resources. These include national social and political structures, small cultures such as family and work groups, and cultural products such as artefacts and conventional social practices (Holliday, 2011). Consequently, a person can have different 'statements of culture', depending on how they hope to position themselves in intercultural communication. Similar ideas could be seen from the term 'symbolic competence ' first proposed by Kramsch to broaden the understanding of the significance of language learning and use (2006, 2009, 2011). L2 learners, Kramsch (2006) argued, not only learn to exchange information and solve problems with the target language but to

understand and negotiate the values and ideologies behind the words in interactions. Such competence also involves the ability of learner to react flexibly to different semiotic systems and challenge established structures when necessary (Kramsch, 2009, 2011). In this sense, the concept 'third space' seems to imply that minds are rather static, neglecting the tendency of individuals to transcend pre-defined social structures, and the possibilities that cultural values change and their choices to belong to different cultural communities at different times.

Similar interpretive acts in intercultural communication have also been termed differently by other scholars. For example, Liddicoat (2014) used 'intercultural mediation' to refer to learners' 'critical comparison of cultural phenomena, recognition of the relativity of cultural concepts, and the negotiation of meaning within and across cultural frames' (p.260). Liddicoat specifically highlighted the importance of the ability to 'to decentre from existing cultural perspectives and to see cultural phenomena both from an external and an internal perspective' (p.261). Baker (2011b) conceptualised the process as 'intercultural awareness', which will be further elaborated in Section 3.2.5. 'Intercultural awareness' is also the term adopted in this thesis.

### 3.2.5 Connections between Culture and Language

The exploration on the connection between culture and language could be traced back to the 1940s, when Whorf (1940, no pagination) defined culture as 'agreement that holds throughout the speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language'. The influential Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis was later proposed, arguing 'the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation' (Sapir, 1949, p.69). However, Whorf's theory has been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

Theoretically, the hypothesis has been criticised for going against the widely accepted view that underlying culture is a universal cognitive foundation, a set of shared principles affecting how people perceive the world (Holliday, 2011; Reiger and Xu, 2017). Empirically, replicated linguistic research concerning the connection between language and mind has shown inconsistent results, and the hypothesis is not always firmly supported (Kann, 2019). A milder version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, known as the Neo-Whorfianism Hypothesis, was later proposed, arguing that our minds are 'subtly influenced by grammatical structures' of one's native language (Kann, 2019, p.1). People from the same speech community are assumed to share some similar thinking patterns and perceptions of the world; culture, as a collection of minds, is therefore considered influenced by the language. In other words, language surely affect one's views, but individuals are capable to perceive the world in various ways without necessarily being restricted by specific language(s) they speak (Baker, 2011b).

However, both theories seem to be challenged under the new context of globalisation and multilingualism, where increasing intercultural communication blurred the traditional 'one language/one culture' framework. Many speakers today employ not just resources from their home language or culture but hybrid repertoires collected in various intercultural experiences (Blommaert and Backus, 2013; Pérez-Milans, 2016). The complex sociocultural reality is particularly obvious in English. Although the influence of inner-circle norms cannot be fully denied, with non-native English users considerably outnumbering native ones, it is too simplistic to correlate the language to the cultures of the inner-circle countries (House, 2009; Baker, 2011b; McConachy, 2018). Instead, the English language is connected to something bigger, with the dynamic speaker community carrying diverse cultural resources accumulated in various backgrounds and encounters.

Moreover, the influence does not seem to be unidirectional from language to cognition among its speakers as proposed in the two hypotheses. Language, as the most common means to transmit values and meaning, is considered significant in the construction of culture (Jackson, 2014), through which people present their attitudes, either positive, neutral or negative, to certain beliefs and conventions. In return, the choice of language and the interpretation of the social meanings behind linguistic forms are affected by one's cultural assumptions shaped by experience in previous communities (McConachy, 2018). Language acquisition, as socioculturalists believe, is not just about building up a system of linguistic structures internally but a process to 'transform socially formed knowledge and skills into individual abilities' (Hall, 2002, p.66). In other words, while learning a language, individuals are also learning cultural meanings attached to its speech communities. It could therefore be concluded that linguistic experience is inherent in intercultural communication, and language itself could be seen as a manifestation of culture difference (McConachy and Liddicoat, 2016).

Considering the fuzziness of the 'one language/one culture' connection in the ELF context, Baker (2011) pointed out the traditional definition of 'intercultural awareness' should also be reviewed. As mentioned earlier, learning and using a language require not just linguistic knowledge but an understanding of sociocultural contexts. However, as English nowadays is linked to a community consisted of speakers from various backgrounds, the sociocultural reference seems more complex, fluid and diverse than ever before. Baker (2011) believed intercultural awareness in the ELF context highlights one's ability to 'compare and mediate between different cultural norms present in intercultural communication' (p.200) and 'put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context-specific manner' (p.202). Based on such understandings, he conceptualised intercultural awareness with the following three-level model:

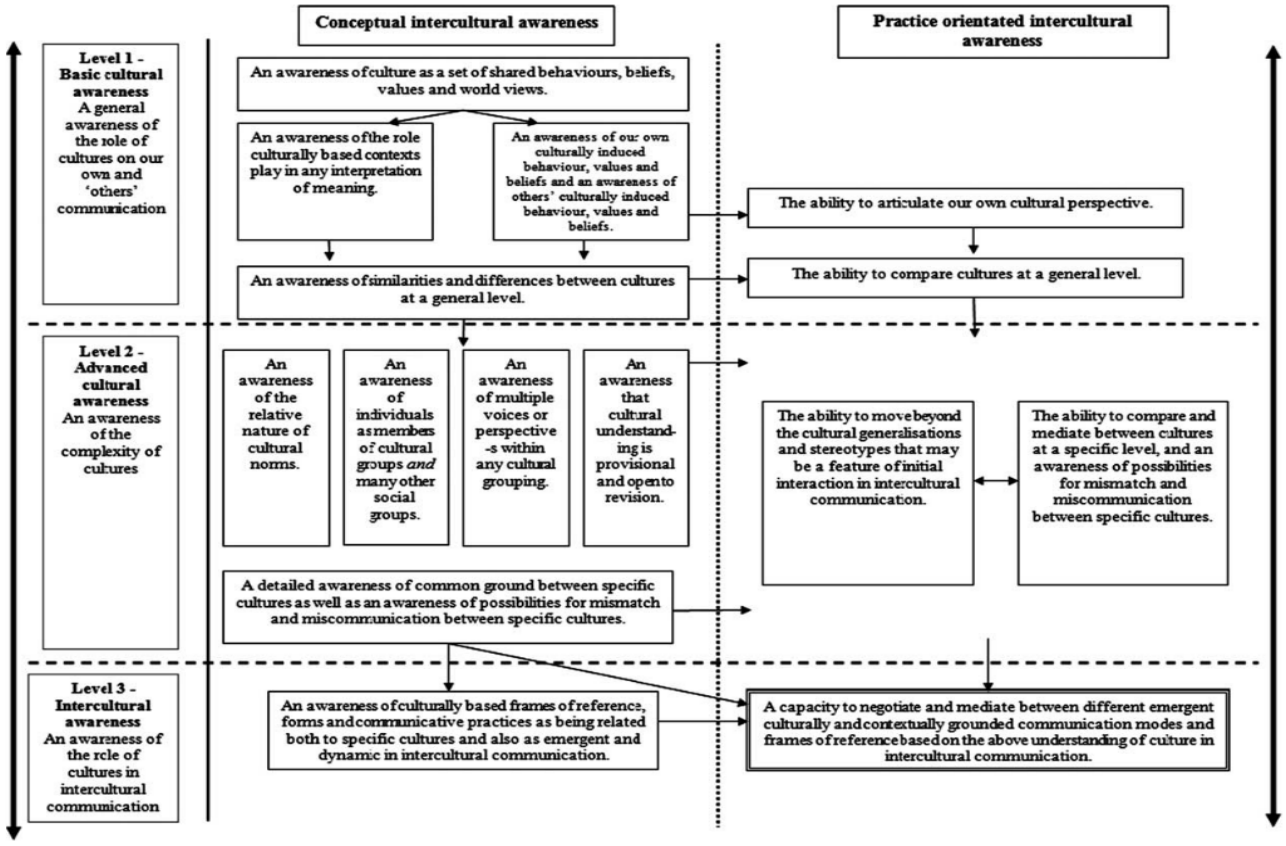


*Figure 3.3: Model of Intercultural Awareness Development (Baker, 2011, p.203)*

As shown in figure 3.3, Level 1 represents a basic-level awareness in intercultural communication, finding expression in participants' broad generalisations of different cultures without considering much about particular contexts. Level 2, on the other hand, involves an awareness of avoiding stereotyping and an attempt to analyse culture in more specific situations. At Level 3, individuals move beyond cultural dichotomy, show understandings of the fluid and emergent nature of culture and intercultural communication through ELF, and possess the ability to flexibly transcend and mediate between different cultural contexts. It is not hard to notice how Baker's definition of cultural awareness at Level 3 shares considerable similarities with two notions mentioned above: the 'symbolic competence' proposed by Kramsch (2006, 2009, 2011) as well as the critical cosmopolitan paradigm supported by Holliday (2011) and Blommaert (2005, 2015).

### 3.2.6 Researcher's Stance on Intercultural Communication and Learning

As an intercultural researcher, I tend to take the critical cosmopolitism paradigm, viewing boundaries between cultures as blurred and fluid (Holliday, 2011; Dervin, 2011), intercultural individuals as agentive beings carrying their own repertoires collected from various big and small cultures they have experienced (Holliday, 1999; Holliday, 2011; Blommaert, 2015), and practices to transcend perceived structures and draw upon different cultural resources as conventional rather than exceptional (Kramsch, 2009; Kramsch, 2011). In this thesis, I will not attempt to draw boundaries between cultural groups; however, I am aware that the approach I take might not be adopted by every researched participant. Neither do I hope to overlook the essentialist and neo-essentialist categorisations which are rather commonly used by intercultural individuals when attempting to structure social worlds, possibly as a taken-for-granted and the most accessible frame (Pizziconi, 2021). For example, Pizziconi (2021) analysed how a Japanese learner frequently adopted 'Asia' and 'West' as categorisations to rationalise the different practices she observed and negotiated her sense of belonging and estrangement (e.g. 'I'm too westernised to have Turkish friends', p. 70), despite her awareness of potential overgeneralisations the dichotomy might cause.

Moreover, I do not expect the development of intercultural awareness to follow a linear order, progressing irreversibly from Level 1 to Level 3 in Baker's model mentioned earlier. Instead, as Baker (2011) has pointed out, the double-headed arrows suggest dependency between levels and the 'porous nature of the distinctions' (p.204). This has been supported by Collins and Delgado's (2019) empirical research, in which development of cultural understandings is described as 'an ongoing process of self-reflexivity' (p.547). In their study, students from two universities with different national backgrounds were asked to share via email their personal experiences around travelling and sojourning, and the dialogues were

analysed to investigate learners' views regarding cultural practices. The results showed the students' capacity to reflect on the complexity of culture through a critical cosmopolitan perspective and development of an intercultural, globalised sense of self, while the same essentialism remains the central focus of their conversations.

For instance, a participant in Collins and Delgado's (2019) research generalised the Greek bus culture as 'aggressive' (p.548), which represented an essentialist tendency. On the other hand, she managed to avoid intuitive judgement and rationalise the cultural pattern that she observed in the specific context: '…this happens not with hatred or out of meanness, it's just something (almost) everyone does and you're not supposed to feel bad about it' (p.548). In this case, it seems the participant, in the same narrative, was swinging between Levels 1 and 2 in Baker's (2011) intercultural awareness model. The same participant, in another political discussion, adopted generalised terms, such as 'some Westerners' and 'immigrants' (p.549), when describing her sense of the xenophobic trend, which suggests a neo-essentialist perspective. At the same time, she highlighted the importance of open-mindedness and countering racism in multicultural communication, demonstrating a critical cosmopolitan position as well as her attempt to break the dichotomy between 'our culture' and 'their culture' (Level 3 in Baker's model).

This section has so far reviewed theoretical frameworks concerning intercultural communication and a gradual shift in the research paradigm, from the essentialist cultural ideology towards critical cosmopolitanism. It has also discussed L2 learners' potential to transcend established structures and negotiate transcultural identities, especially in the ELF context, wherein the 'one language/one culture' relationship has become blurred. At the end, it reveals my stance as an intercultural researcher: despite following the critical cosmopolitanism paradigm, I acknowledge neo-essentialist categorisations as commonly

adopted perspective to rationalise intercultural encounters and negotiate identities, and potential inconsistencies in individuals' intercultural reflection. Intercultural learners may move towards a more liquid understanding overtime, but it is likely they move between different (neo)essentialist and critical cosmopolitanism approaches during the process. The following section will move to another essential construct in this research programme – identity – and discuss how it relates to one's cultural perspectives and language use.

## 3.3 Self and Identity

### 3.3.1 Definitions and Categorisation

When 'identity' is discussed, most people intuitively come up with group labels (e.g. nationality, gender and occupation), but the question of 'who am I ?' is more complicated than these tags (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). Norton (1997) defined identity as the way 'people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future' (p. 410). While the same notion has been explained in slightly different ways by other scholars, most definitions of 'identity' highlight the connection between 'self' and the social world.

The influence of social context on one's 'self' construction could be traced back to paradigms of consciousness development proposed by Bakhtin (1981) and Vygotsky (1978), whose theories have been viewed by some writers as irreconcilable (Matusov, 2011; White, 2014). Vygotsky (1978) regards the process of cognitive maturation as inward-oriented; according to the sociocultural theory he proposed, cognitive development emerges from internalisation and reflection of social interactions and relations. Bakhtin (1981), on the other hand, inclined towards a more outward-oriented theory, highlighting the significance of contacting external voices in social dialogues, through which individuals 'selectively

assimilate the words of others' to advance the "ideology becoming"' (p.341). In other words, while Vygotsky views the sense of 'self' as being mainly developed from one's inner speech, Bakhtin argues the main location where development happens is conversations with others, as 'the word is always half someone else's and there is no one truth to be sourced as a conceptual whole' (White, 2014, p.226).

However, while Bakhtin and Vygotsky follow oppositional approaches towards cognitive development, the fundamental role of social 'others' in shaping the sense of 'self' has been suggested by both. Identity is not a ready-made construct people are born with, but something shaped through perceiving and interacting with others in the community, whereby individuals establish and adjust their positions in the world, defining themselves, and at the same time being positioned and defined by others (Gee, 2000; van Lier, 2004). The inseparability of 'self' and the social context sets the foundation for different categorisations of identity. For example, the two terms mentioned frequently in the last two paragraphs — self and identity — have been regarded as the same construct by some scholars and used interchangeably (Burck, 2005). Burck (2005), however, differentiated between them by defining 'self' as people's subjective perception of themselves, and 'identity' as the projection of one's internal 'self' in some identifiable behaviours within the social environment to other individuals. A similar inner/outer distinction has also been adopted by Benson et al. (2013) in their more sophisticated categorisation of identity, which includes:

a. Reflexive identity: 'the self's view of the self' (p.19), similar to the concept 'self' proposed by Burck (2005)
b. Projected identity: 'the self semiotically represented to others' (p.19), termed by Burck (2005) as 'identity'

c. Recognised identity: the self perceived by others in social interaction
d. Imagined identity: the self's prospect of its future image and possibilities
e. Socially-validated identity categories: established group-level categories to represent 'self'

Benson et al. (2013) illustrated the categorisation with an example of SA, whereby low proficiency in L2 might hinder sojourners in self-expression (facet b), which could affect how they perceive themselves (facet a), how they are recognised (facet c), and how they depict a future image of themselves (facet d). All these facets are usually mediated by established identity categories in the previous experience and SA sociocultural environment (e.g. 'SA student', 'foreigner', 'L2 learner'). This five-point categorisation will be revisited in the later section on pragmatics. With an awareness of the inner/outer distinction proposed by previous scholars, I focused this project mainly on the 'identity' from the learners' perspective, focusing on their perception of themselves and their relationship to the world, and how they shape it through the negotiation of relationships.

### 3.3.2 Identity as a Fluid Construct

The understanding of human subjectivity, in recent years, has been gradually shifting from the essentialist assumption that each person has fixed and consistent 'core' natures to a more poststructuralist point of view which depicts individuals as fluid beings (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Attempts to define an individual as 'a certain type of person' were criticised by Sfard and Prusak (2005), as they believed it is impractical to detect an unchanged pattern that perpetuates one's behaviours. Such an essentialist paradigm could also do harm through acting as an overpowered 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (p.16), which might stereotypically impose undesirable labels on individuals (ibid.). The new context under the

trend of globalisation and population mobility has also encouraged new interpretations for identity. Categories that used to be seen as fixed and unitary, such as one's gender and ethnicity, are now recognised as impermanent and negotiable (Delanty, 2005).

Therefore, rather than a static feature, identity should be recognised as more of an unfinished and never-to-be-finished process being constantly negotiated and reshaped with life experience is accumulated (Dervin, 2011). Willey (1994, cited in van Lier, 2004, p.131) interpreted the process of identity formation as an ongoing self-interpretation, during which the present 'I' reflects on the past 'me' in order to guide the future 'me'. In other words, with new experience, knowledge and social relationships being introduced, one's self-consciousness is continuously adjusted, reconstructed and updated. In this sense, voices arguing that the nature of identity is one's life story seem reasonable; the trajectory one has experienced in life, following a certain order, within specific situations, involving particular people, composes a unique human being (Kanno, 2000; Gee, 2000). A more specific projection of viewing identity as a fluid construct is to replace utterances about 'being' or 'having' with 'doing' when describing one's identity (Sfard and Prusak, 2005, p.16). An example Sfard and Prusak (2005) provided involves unpacking the description 'She is an able student (has a gift)' into 'In the majority of school tests and activities so far, she has regularly done well and attained above-average scores' (p.16).

The example of Lisa in Morita's (2004) case-study research about learners' identity in L2 academic community illustrated identity as a state of flux. When first participating in the study group, Lisa positioned herself as a weak group member with limited L2 language competence and subject knowledge, and she was afraid to make mistakes in front of others. However, she had a great desire to contribute to the classroom as a competent student. After analysing the situation, Lisa worked hard to improve her communicative skills in

English and tried harder to participate in activities. During the process, Lisa gradually felt herself becoming a more active contributor accepted by others. It could be interpreted that she had guided the new future 'her' to improve L2 communication and class participation through analysing difficulties the past 'her' had experienced. Her sense of self, then, was transformed from a less powerful participant to a legitimate and accepted member in the group.

### 3.3.3 Connections between Identity and Culture

The link between 'identity' and 'culture' could be seen from how they have been used to define each other in previous publications. As mentioned in the 'culture' chapter, identity is partly an awareness of membership of certain cultures; through the mediation of culture, people identify themselves with those similar to them and distinguish themselves from those who are different (Weeks, 1990). Nunan and Choi (2010) attempted to interpret the two constructs by connecting one to the other, defining culture as 'a construct outside of the individual' and identity as 'inside the individual' (p.5). The former is 'artifacts, ways of doing, etc. shared by a group of people', while the latter is 'the acceptance and internalisation of the artifacts and ways of doing by a member of that group' (p.5).

Although the definition of identity introduced earlier highlights the way people interpret and negotiate their positions in the world, the understanding of 'self' and 'others' is never entirely autonomous (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). The influence of cultural context on individuals' beliefs and behaviours has been discussed in the Widdowson-Fairclough debate concerning critical discourse analysis. Fairclough (1996) held the view that individuals, as social subjects, are constrained by established regulations and conventions, and thus identities are more of a culturally constituted construct than a process of voluntary development. Widdowson (1996), on the other hand, highlighted individuals' initiative and

engagement, that although people are not completely free agents under social and cultural restrictions, there is always space to negotiate, to manoeuvre, or to reject established structures. While their opinions are divided on the degree of cultural influence on individuals, Fairclough (1996) and Widdowson (1996) agreed that individuals are unavoidably regulated, normalised and influenced through the dominant cultural ideologies of the group in which they reside. In Wenger's (2000) words, identity is 'an experience of multi-membership' and 'an intersection of many relationships that you hold into the experience of being a person' (p.242). Individuals, like social actors, take up various positions in social practices (Ushioda, 2009), and 'inevitably see the world from the vantage point of positions they take' (Davies and Harré, 1990, p.47). On the other hand, constituted through subjective perception and interpretation of community members, culture has its individualistic nature, being constantly re-constructed in the voices of individuals (Jackson, 2014).

The close connection explains the growing discussion around identity topics in studies related to intercultural communication and study abroad, which has been introduced in detail in Sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3. In short, different conventions and codes encountered in the new sociocultural space might nudge individuals to reconstruct their sense of self and to constantly 'assert, define, modify, challenge and/or support their own and others' desired self-images' (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p.217), and sojourners acquire cultural meanings through emergent new positions and new understandings gained from these positions (Davies and Harré, 1990). Such experiences could encourage SA students to form unique perspectives from which to interpret cultures and trigger intercultural awareness, tolerance and empathy, all of which together contribute to the maturation of the selves of SA students. (Kinginger, 2013a; Blackledge and Creese, 2017).

### 3.3.4 Connections between Identity and Language

As introduced earlier, identity is constructed through social activities and relationships, which are mediated mainly by language use (van Lier, 2004). Through language, individuals learn about the world and others, develop self-consciousness and manage their 'self-image' through language expression (Liddicoat, 2017). Language use, therefore, is not just about following pre-established linguistic systems but represents one's evaluation of interpersonal relationships and social positions of self and others (Kasper and Rose, 2001). The following section will review four main topics concerning identity and language: (1) Norton's 'investment' theory; (2) second language identities; (3) different self-perceptions in different languages; and (4) translanguaging.

**(1) Investment in language learning**

A foundational work on the connection between language learning and identity is Norton's (2000) case study of five immigrant women in Canada, within which she proposed the term 'investment', arguing that changing identities influence how learners invest in language learning activities (Norton and Toohey, 2011). 'Investment' was first proposed to challenge theories of learning motivation, most of which, at that time, assumed motivation as an important personal trait of individual learners impacting on their commitment to the learning process. However, Norton found that engagement can be also affected by, amongst other things, relations between learners and other speakers, and such connections explain cases where motivated learners are still reluctant to participate in learning activities. In Norton's (2012) view, learners invest in a language to acquire resources in the community, either symbolic ones – such as language, knowledge, and social relationships – or material ones, including money and capital goods. Therefore, learners' investments shift according to the specific social purpose, and the social positions people take in particular time and space will partly determine the levels of investment in L2 interaction (ibid.).

Norton (2000) used Saliha's experience to exemplify the abstract concept of 'investment'. As an immigrant worker, Saliha wished to hold a longer conversation with her NS manager Madame Rivest, yet she simply smiled and uttered a very short sentence. She worried that carrying on talking would be an inappropriate behaviour that might annoy Madame Rivest, who had control over the material resources — Saliha's wage. She also felt she had less symbolic power in this relationship, considering Madame Rivest knew local culture better and was a native speaker of the language they were using. Her investment in language was hindered at that moment by several factors in this situation: her awareness of her identity as a less-fluent speaker and an immigrant employee; the power gap she perceived between her and Madame Rivest; and the possible conflict between her willingness to talk and to present a positive self-image in her evaluation of the relationship.

**(2) Second language identities**

On the other hand, identity development has also been investigated as an outcome of L2 learning. Intensive contact with L2, especially in the SA context, is usually accompanied by new social relations and settings, the engagement with which could 'destabilise' identities established in learners' previous communities (Benson et al., 2013, p.9). A case in point is Benson et al.'s (2012) project, in which narrative data collected from SA learners was used to identify two dimensions of identity closely related to second language use: identity-related L2 proficiency ('the ability to function as a person and express desired identities in an L2 setting') and linguistic self concept ('sense of self as a learner and user of the L2') (p.173). In their study, two students explicitly articulated that improvement in English allowed them to make friends and express themselves better; most students pictured themselves as more confident English speakers, and some sensed an identity shift from a pure English learner to a user.

Evidence supporting the two facets could also be found in other studies. Beth, a participant in Aveni's (2005) study, reported difficulties about 'identity-related L2 proficiency'; she held a self-image as being witty and cool but failed to articulate those characteristics in L2 encounters. Brown's (2013) research showed the different attitudes sojourners in Korea held towards the foreigner identity, which was closely linked to 'linguistic self concept' by Benson et al. (2012). While one participant in the study took advantage of the foreigner identity and challenged the age hierarchy suggested in the patterns of honorifics use, the other one was offended by locals' unconventional use of honorifics and interpreted that as a sign of being positioned as an outsider by Koreans.

**(3) Different Sense of Self in Different Languages**

Studies have suggested bilinguals and multilinguals perceive themselves differently while using different languages. In Burck's (2005) study, for instance, a participant reported that she could be aggressive in the English language while feeling obliged to be modest while using Chinese, her first language; another student from Poland felt English enabled her to develop intimacy more easily. Burck (2005) tried to explain this phenomenon:

> Learning to live in a different language had been experienced as a freedom from constraints, individual, familial and/or cultural, and had allowed them to develop alternative narratives of self. Away from familiar ways of being, doing and talking, individuals drew on new linguistic practices, and constructed themselves anew. (p.79)

Apart from the influence of proficiency mentioned above, factors that could lead to divergent self-perceptions have been summarised by Pavlenko (2006) from data collected through online questionnaires. Through analysing participants' answers to an open-ended

question – 'Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different language?' – three factors were summarised as influential, including cultural differences behind speech groups (elaborated earlier in Section 3.2.5), different emotionality behind languages (e.g. unpleasant memories in childhood that could be triggered by L1), and language proficiency (see Beth's example in the last section).

**(4) Translanguaging**

Different languages, as well as emotions and cultural meanings attached to those languages, become resources for multilinguals to draw on in different contexts (Li, 2011). Translanguaging happens when people 'make meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages' (Baker, 2011a, p.288). It is, however, more complicated than a mere combination of linguistic structures ('code-switch') but involves shifts between values, identities, relationships and more other factors attached to different languages (Li Wei, 2011). An example provided by Li Wei is his observation of the participants' (three Chinese youths in Britain) use of second-person pronoun. When speaking Chinese, all of them addressed the researcher, for them an elder, as '您' (the polite form of 'you') instead of '你' (the plain form of 'you'), following the Chinese pragmatics norms, while at the same time consciously avoided the direct use of 'you' while speaking English to the researcher. Translanguaging, in this case, finds expression in the way they tactfully adopted the English language but retained Chinese conventions of politeness while speaking with a senior Chinese scholar. Another case is Ballinger's (2017) classroom observation of how learners switch between English and French in Quebec immersion classrooms. Some students intentionally deviated from the language of instruction to enhance their 'rule-breaker' identity, to accommodate the dominant language of their

partner to maintain or invest in the relationship, or to avoid revealing their language incompetence to a more proficient partner.

The two cases bring us back to the concept of symbolic power of language proposed by Kramsch (2021): the use of language means much more than literal meanings of words and phrases in the dictionary, but has its power to 'affect, move and motivate people' and 'manifest itself through its effects' in everyday practices (p.6). The connection between translanguaging and identity could also be linked back to Norton's (2012) theory of investment: language is invested with specific purposes in different contexts to acquire either symbolic or material capital. In the two examples mentioned above, translanguaging was employed more as an investment in desired relationships or self-images rather than just a more accessible tool to deliver literal meanings of words. Therefore, when observing such complex language practice, one is also inspecting how individuals 'perform or play with linguistic signs of group belonging, and how they develop particular trajectories of group identification throughout their lives' (Blommaert and Rampton, 2012, p.5).

So far the review has introduced culture and identity, the two abstract constructs involved in this study, and their close connections with language and each other. The following section will move to 'pragmatics' and discuss how it serves as a lens to investigate learners' holistic development on intercultural awareness and identity in learners' L2 learning and use.

## 3.4 Pragmatics

### 3.4.1 Pragmatics as the Intersection of Culture, Language and Identity

Pragmatics is a commonly mentioned notion in the field of linguistics, yet the precise definition has proven to be challenging to determine (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). It is mainly concerned with how meaning is interpreted and constructed in communicative contexts and how language is employed to achieve social purposes and manage social relationships (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; LoCastro, 2012). Canale and Swain (1980) were the first to include sociolinguistic competence in the model of communicative competence of using a language, which refers to the ability to use appropriate language in related situations. Bachman (1990) later proposed the term 'pragmatic competence' as one of the factors to evaluate the communicative competence of language users, parallel with one's grammatical and textual abilities. However, unlike syntax, which could be explained with written standards, pragmatics somehow resembles the 'secret rules' of a language, which are rarely articulated explicitly but act as a tacit agreement between the majority of members in a community (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). For language learners, syntactic failure might suggest a lack of L2 proficiency, whereas pragmatic misunderstandings might reflect negatively on one as a person, hindering them from interpreting others and expressing desired self-images (O'Keeffe et al., 2011).

The connection between linguistic and cultural knowledge forms the core of pragmatics (Taguchi and Roever, 2017), which could be seen in the widely accepted distinction between the two components in the field: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Thomas (1983, p.101) positioned the two notions at the two ends of a continuum from being 'language-specific' to 'cultural-specific'. The former refers to specific linguistic forms 'conveying pragmatic meaning (illocutionary and interpersonal)' (p.77), while the latter is concerned with one's evaluation of sociocultural conditions where the conversation resides, such as social distance between participants and cultural conventions of a community (Marmaridou, 2011). One's sociopragmatic judgement, therefore, is usually mediated by cultural meanings

and understandings of social relationships accumulated through experience in previous communities (Kesebir and Haidt, 2010; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2016; McConachy, 2018).

Such interdependence could also be observed in the two major diversions of studies that conceptualise culture in relation to pragmatics: cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural pragmatics. Cross-cultural pragmatics compares the linguistic acts of people across different languages or different national varieties, with the presumption that pragmatic choices reflect the underlying values and beliefs shared by the speakers from the given cultural background (Taguchi and Roever, 2017). The context chapter (Section 2.2.1) covered some cross-cultural pragmatics literature that involves Chinese EFL learners. Research in this field emphasises the comparison of generalisable patterns of conventional language use in different speech communities rather than idiosyncrasies at the individual level (House and Kádár, 2021). Intercultural pragmatics, a field that appeared more recently, focuses on how people from different cultural backgrounds communicate with a shared language (Taguchi and Roever, 2017). It focuses more on the process of co-constructing meaning – how speakers negotiate the meaning, bridge the differences, and achieve mutual understanding. An example is Björkman's (2011) study investigating how L2 speakers support each other through face-saving pragmatic strategies in classroom discussion to co-construct meaning and maintain rapport (more details in Section 3.4.2). Intercultural pragmatics is thus considered by McConachy and Spencer-Oatey (2021) as a 'domain of intercultural communication that focuses specifically on pragmatic phenomena' (p.733).

The bond between pragmatics and identity also seems clear. Pragmatics serves as a device for interpersonal evaluation on the moral dimension, as the way individuals speak could present them as certain types of people (e.g. sincere/insincere, polite/impolite, friendly/unapproachable, humble/arrogant) (McConachy, 2018). This echoes Benson et al.'s

(2013) five-point categorisation mentioned in Section 3.3.1; learners' projected identity and recognised identity are largely mediated through L2 pragmatics, and struggles in self-expression could in turn affect their reflexive identity and imagined identity. Moreover, studies concerning pragmatics tend to view language as a social action, whose forms and functions are mobile in ever-changing social contexts and emerging relationships (Kasper and Rose, 2001). The use of language involves the assessment of the specific context, including social distance, power relations, and appropriateness in both meaning and form in the particular situation (Niezgoda and Röver, 2001; Mesthrie and Bhatt, 2008; Young, 2011). Therefore, one's pragmatic choices are largely determined by the way language users position themselves and others as well as the self-image they hope to reveal in social interactions (van Compernolle, 2014). Each conversation could be viewed not just as information exchange but an opportunity for individuals to negotiate identities and shape/maintain relationships in the social world (Norton, 2010). Research investigating SA learners' pragmatics learning and use in relation to identities will be reviewed in Section 3.4.3.

Based on what has been discussed above, pragmatics is introduced in this study as lying at the intersection of culture, identity and language, and it will later serve as a lens to observe how the three factors interact in SA learners' development not only in terms of L2 skills but as holistic people. The way in which pragmatics is connected to language, culture and identity in this research is illustrated in figure 3.1, which has been described earlier in the introduction chapter.

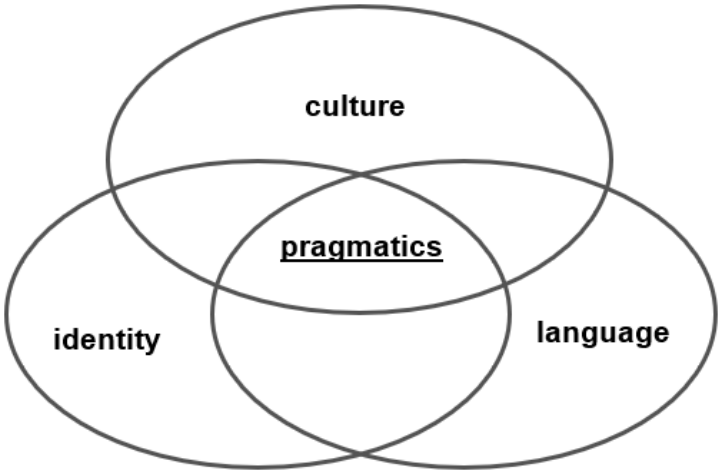


*Figure 3.1: A Simple Representation of Pragmatics and Relevant Concepts*

It could be concluded that the development of pragmatic competence suggests not only the learners' increasing linguistic proficiency but also their evolving perspectives regarding culture and identity in daily interactions. In a synthesis of literature concerning L2 pragmatics utilisation and language socialisation, Diao and Maa (2019) categorised pragmatic development into three themes, including learners' growing ability to select appropriate forms for specific contexts, to flexibly present themselves in desired ways in L2, and to interpret the cultural ideologies underlying linguistic forms. Similarly, learning pragmatics is not simply a process of acquiring linguistic norms; it involves how learners 'interpret the significance of particular ways of speaking in relation to aspects of sociocultural context' (McConachy, 2018, p.150).

### 3.4.2 Existing Studies on L2 Pragmatics Development in the SA Context

As mentioned in previous chapters, L2 pragmatics competence plays a significant role in SA students' daily communication, as it reflects not only L2 users' language proficiency but also their abilities 'to do things with words and to function as a person' (Benson et al., 2012,

p.183). The SA environment has also been considered an ideal context to develop pragmatic knowledge, as daily interactions mediated by the L2 can provide students with contextually appropriate L2 input (Jackson, 2019). Additionally, the new subjective positions and relationships emerging within the new socio-cultural context can raise learners' L2 pragmatic awareness (Block, 2009). However, despite the aforementioned advantages of SA settings for L2 pragmatic acquisition, research has suggested learning outcomes could vary significantly between individuals (Vidal and Shively, 2019). As mentioned in Section 2.1.3, both individual and contextual factors could lead to such salient differences. The former includes aspects such as learners' motivation, personality, identity, history and cultural background; the latter incorporates language input and support received from others in the L2 community. More specifically, insignificant improvement in L2 pragmatics could be a result of deficiencies in three different areas: contact with other L2 speakers, exposure to specific pragmatic features, and explicit feedback from more proficient speakers (Vidal and Shively, 2019). SLA and sociolinguistic researchers have investigated L2 pragmatics development in the SA context in a growing body of literature.

Before moving on to the research questions and methodology, the following two sections will synthesise studies concerning L2 pragmatics learning in the SA context, summarise patterns and key findings emerging from previous research, and identify knowledge gaps in the current field.

#### 3.4.2.1 Development of Speech Acts and Specific Pragmatic Phenomena

Existing studies have explored L2 pragmatic development in the SA contexts of foreign language learners of various target languages (e.g. English, Spanish, French, German, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian, and Mandarin Chinese) and different sojourning length (from four weeks to two years). Research in this field was first established in the 1990s and has

been mainly focused since then on learners' development in speech acts (Ren, 2018). Among speech acts, requests have gained the most attention and have been investigated across a large body of literature (Barron, 2003; Ishihara and Tarone, 2009; Schauer, 2009; Halenko and Jones, 2011; Shively, 2011; Woodfield, 2012; Li, 2014; Alcón-Soler, 2015; Halenko and Jones, 2017; Alcón-Soler, 2017; Ren, 2019), followed by refusals (Barron, 2003; Ishihara and Tarone, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2013), apologies (Warga and Schölmberger, 2007), suggestions (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993; Matsumura, 2003) and compliments (Ishihara and Tarone, 2009; Jin, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer and Hasler-Barker, 2015). Some studies have also investigated learners' development of specific pragmatic phenomena such as honorifics (Siegal, 1996), ending particles (Masuda, 2011), discourse markers (Liao, 2009) and address terms (Hassall, 2013, 2014). Among these studies, the discourse completion task (DCT) and its varieties are used most widely for data collection, followed by role-play simulations and naturalistic methods (e.g. field notes and recordings), through which learners' pragmatic performances are observed and sometimes evaluated.

Despite differences in research focus, design and results, the following patterns could be observed from the aforementioned studies. Relevant literature is attached after each point for readers to seek additional information:

(1) With accumulated SA experience, sojourners show movement towards NS norms regarding pragmatic features (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993; Barron, 2003; Warga and Schölmberger, 2007; Shively, 2011; Masuda, 2011; Woodfield, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer, 2013; Li, 2014; Félix-Brasdefer and Hasler-Barker, 2015; Ren, 2019) as well as development not aligned with NS conventions (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993; Barron, 2003; Woodfield, 2012; Ren, 2019).

(2) During the SA period, sojourners present improved L2 pragmatic awareness, including recognition of NS pragmatic routines and inappropriate uses (Matsumura, 2003; Schauer, 2009; Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler, 2019).

(3) Within the same speech act or pragmatic phenomenon, sojourners' changes towards NS norms regarding some pragmalinguistic features tend to be more significant than others (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993; Warga and Schölmberger, 2007; Schauer, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2013; Li, 2014; Ren, 2019).

(4) Sojourners present various learning trajectories, and few homogeneous patterns of pragmatic change can be observed. Many factors have been considered as influential on the L2 pragmatic development during SA, including the desire to integrate/acculturate into the target language community (Jin, 2012; Hassall, 2014; Alcón-Soler, 2017), L2 exposure and interaction intensity (Matsumura, 2003; Schauer, 2009; Woodfield, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer and Hasler-Barker, 2015; Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler, 2019; Xiao et al., 2019), environmental factors and sociocultural adaptation (Schauer, 2009; Jin, 2012; Hassall, 2014; Taguchi, 2015; Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler, 2019), different interpretation of sociopragmatic meanings of the same pragmalinguistic form (Shively, 2011), and L2 proficiency (Li, 2014; Hassall, 2014).

(5) Explicit instructions can facilitate pragmatic appropriateness, although the result might not be noticeably sustained over time (Halenko and Jones, 2011; Woodfield, 2012; Hassall, 2014; Alcón-Soler, 2015; Halenko and Jones, 2017; Alcón-Soler, 2017).

#### 3.4.2.2 Criticism against Current Ontology and Epistemology in Speech Act Research

Nevertheless, from the viewpoint regarding pragmatics as a social and moral practice, the ontology and epistemology of current research need to be revised. In terms of data collection methods, the validity and authenticity of DCT and its varieties have been

challenged. In these tasks, participants are usually required to make linguistic decisions based on a brief description of a scenario, and some researchers have argued that authentic social interactions could be simulated as learners are assigned imagined identities and communicative purposes (Ishihara, 2019) - see the example below.

> 'You have a small test in Professor Smith's class, but you realised that you have your cousin's wedding on the same day. You want to take the test at some other time. What do you say to Professor Smith?' (Taguchi, 2012, p.88)

The method is considered problematic when assessing L2 pragmatic competence for a few reasons. First, while DCT results can indeed capture how sojourners believe L2 pragmatics should be used in a given context, their performance in the task might not be consistent with how they speak and act in real life (Golato, 2003). This gap has been observed by Brown (2013) through comparing quantitative data collected from DCT with qualitative data from recordings of participants' natural conversations. The result shows that learners who employed native-like Korean pragmatic conventions in DCT used the language differently in real life. For example, one learner possessed a decent knowledge of honorifics in the Korean language but chose not to employ them in conversations to avoid being involved in the hierarchical relationships.

Second, DCT bears the risk of oversimplifying the complex social reality. People's linguistic choices in real life are based on comprehensive evaluations of fluid, multi-layered contexts and relationships, which could hardly be simulated through a simple description within a few sentences (McConachy, 2019). Taking the task provided above as an example, in a real-life situation where a student hopes to defer a university test, they might consider factors such as university regulations, the personality of the professor, a more subtle student-

lecturer relationship, and the feasibility of the professor delaying the test for an individual student (imposition involved). However, none of these background clues is accessible from the simple description of the task, which diminishes the authenticity of it (Weseliński and Wełna, 2013). Role plays as a means for data collection, in this case, could be considered as a slightly more authentic imitation of real-life conversations, while still bearing the concerns mentioned above.

Moreover, McConachy (2019) pointed out that expressions considered problematic in DCT might not necessarily cause offence or discomfort in real life. Elements such as the speakers' facial expression, intonation, identity as a foreigner, and low-level language proficiency could all compensate for their unconventional pragmalinguistic choices in daily communications and help avoid misunderstandings. A case in point is Taguchi's (2012) longitudinal case study of Japanese EFL learners' pragmatic development. Although students involved in the research did not show conventional politeness when communicating with NS instructors, and some even used imperatives such as 'you should' or 'you must', most teachers reported that they were not offended and did not point out the unconventional usage to students. Instead, they believed directness helped them understand students better and expressed tolerance of learners' lack of English proficiency and awareness of pragmatic conventions in native English-speaking countries. Another example is Björkman's (2011) analysis of recordings of students' classroom discussions in a Swedish university where English was used as the medium of instruction. The result suggests that L2 speakers support each other through face-saving pragmatic strategies, such as friendly laughter, backchanneling and even excessive cajolery. Although linguistic features that departed from NS standards appeared frequently, it seems the L2 users constructed meaning together and successfully reached rapport and mutual understanding with very few communication breakdowns. Nevertheless, these strategies and non-linguistic factors are not likely to be

captured in DCT and are therefore neglected by some researchers as an essential component of L2 pragmatic competence (Weseliński and Wełna, 2013).

In terms of ontology, most existing studies define pragmatic success in terms of learners' approximation of NS norms and simplify L2 pragmatic development into a process where learners continually approach NS standards (McConachy, 2019; Ishihara, 2019). Nevertheless, without widely adopted systematic rules for pragmatics, differences in pragmatic strategies and usage can be considerable, even between native speakers in some cases (Blommaert and Backus, 2013). The feasibility of formulating a fixed set of rules of NS pragmatic uses is therefore questionable. Moreover, as it has been stated in Section 3.4.1, learning L2 pragmatics means not only acquiring linguistic norms but involves how learners interpret the sociocultural meaning of particular ways of language use (McConachy, 2018, p.150), and how they employ L2 pragmatics to manage social relationships and express desired identities more flexibly and freely (Benson et al., 2012). During this process, learners negotiate their translingual identities, and the self-image they hope to deliver can sometimes conflict with the NS norms of their target languages (Kinginger, 2009, 2013a). Therefore, development of pragmatic awareness and competence should not be simply construed in terms of how well L2 learners passively adopt and adapt to native-like pragmalinguistic features but how they actively and flexibly interpret and co-construct meaning of sociocultural community practices (McConachy and Liddicoat, 2016; Diao and Maa, 2019).

The rationale of applying inner-circle NS linguistic systems as the criteria to assess pragmatic development seems to be especially problematic in the ELF context, as the learning purpose of many English learners today is not only to communicate with inner-circle native speakers but a wider community (Seidlhofer, 2005). ELF distinguishes difference from deficiency and

does not assume features departing from NS conventions necessarily to be errors, especially when mutual understanding is achieved (Jenkins, 2007; House, 2009; Ishihara and Cohen, 2012). In fact, it has been argued that sticking to pragmatic conventions influenced by learners' home language is sometimes preferable in ELF circumstances where participants are from similar backgrounds and share resembled cultural values (Cohen, 2016; Nogami, 2020a). Therefore, considering NS pragmatic norms as the only legitimate form has been subjected to considerable criticism in ELF research. The NS-based pragmatics evaluation system also bears ethical concerns, when considering divergences from NS conventions as a sign of insufficient competence in English could grant and enhance NS supremacy and at the same time weaken and marginalise NNSs by positioning them as less competent speakers (Bond, 2019). If language use is only analysed and defined from the perspective of the 'authority' (inner-circle English speakers in this case), voices from other groups are likely to be undervalued and neglected (Pratt, 1991). These issues will be dealt with in the next section.

### 3.4.3 L2 Pragmatic Choices Influenced by Cultural and Identity-Related Concerns

Simply judging learners' pragmatic success based on NS standards also neglects learners' identity-related concerns in the adoption or rejection of specific L2 forms. Some applied linguists have explored the role of identity in learners' adoption of NS pragmatic norms in the SA context. For example, in Hassall's (2014) study, a SA learner showed striking changes in their use of address terms in L2 Indonesian after a four-week sojourn. Although some initial discomforts were reported due to the differences between the L2 and the participant's native language (English), such as addressing the host parents 'bapak/ibu (dad/mom)', he soon adopted the new forms willingly. From the learning diaries and

interviews, it seems what drove the change was his growing sense of belonging to the target language community and the affection he wished to express to the hosts by adopting the NS address forms. A similar finding was reported in Brown's (2013) study focusing on SA learners' use of honorifics in Korean. Patrick, an L1 German speaker, reported that he always tried to use honorifics as Korean native speakers do and felt offended when others did not address him in deferential language, thereby properly considering his foreigner identity. He believed that by adopting NS forms, he presented himself as a competent language learner and claimed 'an identity of equal status to Korean native speakers' (p.292).

In addition, a bigger number of studies have focused more, or even solely, on how identity-related factors lead to deliberate divergence from NS pragmatic conventions (Gomez-Laich, 2016). From the previous research, one important reason is the cultural values L2 learners have internalised in previous communities that are inconsistent with L2 pragmatic conventions (e.g. Ishihara & Tarone, 2009; Kim, 2014; Siegal, 1996). For instance, Kim's (2014) research investigated L2 pragmatic development of Korean SA students studying in the United States. Having noticed that Americans usually respond to others' compliments with 'thank you', some of them still felt uncomfortable adopting the form, as they felt accepting compliments with a simple 'thank you' goes against the humbleness highly valued in their L1 culture. Some of the students felt obliged to add expressions after 'thank you' to show their modesty, such as 'you're so kind to say that to me' (p.96). Moreover, learners' perception of themselves as 'foreigners' or 'outsiders' in the target language community, either deliberately or unwillingly, could lead to an intentional violation of NS conventions. For example, in Brown's (2013) study, a SA learner in Korea believed his foreigner identity exempted him from always following NS norms and thus intentionally avoided using honorifics in order to establish and maintain flat, horizontal interpersonal relationships. Hassall's (2013, 2014) research into Australian SA learners in Indonesia suggested that

feeling positioned as foreigners and outsiders by the target language community hinders them from adopting L2 address terms. With few connections with the NS community, some learners find it unnecessary to follow NS pragmatic rules (ibid.).

With the awareness that existing studies have mainly focused on interactions between learners and NS speakers, Nogami (2020a) pointed out a lack of investigation into how identity-related factors inform learners' pragmatic use in an ELF context involving speakers from different linguacultures. Analysing Japanese English users' DCT choices and their English learning experiences recorded through diaries, Nogami (2020) identified multifaceted impacts from learners' ELF identities on their pragmatic choices. Examples include deviating from NS conventions out of the consideration that the ELF interlocutor might not hope to follow such norms, avoiding unnecessary exchanges due to lack of confidence in language proficiency as a L2 learner/non-native speaker, and applying different pragmatic strategies (e.g. different levels of directness) to ELF speakers from Europe and those from Asia due to different levels of perceived cultural closeness and similarities.

## 3.4.4 Metapragmatic Awareness and Intercultural Learning

### 3.4.4.1 Noticing, Comparing, Reflecting

The increasing attention to learners' subjectivity in L2 pragmatic use echoes the definition of pragmatic learning provided at the beginning of this section (3.4.1): it is not simply a process of acquiring linguistic norms; it involves how learners 'interpret the significance of particular ways of speaking in relation to aspects of sociocultural context' (McConachy, 2018, p.150). Such interpretation does not always approach the conscious level, but learners, especially adults, do sometimes develop 'metapragmatic awareness', engaging explicitly and analytically with language use and its links with interpersonal relationships

and values shared in certain cultural groups (ibid.). Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) developed the following model (figure 3.3) of intercultural learning practices, which was later applied by McConachy (2018) to deconstruct the metapragmatic analysis involved in intercultural language learning. Four stages are involved in the development of intercultural and metapragmatic awareness, including: noticing, comparison, reflection, and interaction.

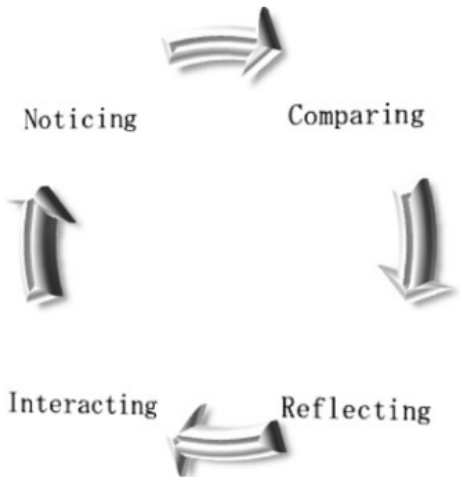


*Figure 3.4: Interacting processes of intercultural learning*

*(Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013, p.60)*

According to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), the process starts with noticing, the focal awareness or attention learners raise when new language features 'challenge their current assumptions, spark interest, raise questions, or provide points of connection' (p.60). This echoes with the influential 'noticing hypothesis' in SLA proposed by Schmidt (1995). Counter to what Krashen (1981, 1985) suggests in their input hypothesis, that second language acquisition is largely a subconscious process happening when learners are exposed to comprehensible listening or reading, Schmidt (1995) holds the view that learners must be aware and pay attention to new features to fill the gap between their interlanguage and the target language. The attention aroused, then, might trigger learners to compare knowledge accumulated in previous experience and the new features. The process may start with

unanalysed stereotypical comparisons between L1 and L2, ‘our culture’ and ‘their culture’, and later more complex and complicated reflections could be provoked (McConachy and Liddicoat, 2016), where learners ‘make personal sense of experiences’ and ‘understand the experience from multiple possible perspectives’ (p.61). Interaction provides opportunities for learners ‘to communicate those meanings, to explore those meanings, and to reshape them in response to others’ (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013, p.61). Such communication then in turn provides resources for noticing, comparing and refection (ibid.).

The framework of pragmatic development consisting of noticing, comparison and reflection is supported by the empirical research of McConachy (2018) and McConachy and Liddicoat (2016). McConachy (2018) observed classroom activities based on English speech acts, where group discussions provided a context for L2 learners to articulate their interpretation of linguistic forms. It turned out students not only developed awareness of new pragmalinguistic norms but presented critical analysis of possible contextual and cultural meanings behind the language. An example is a learner’s shifting view of different conversation patterns of customer-service interactions in Japanese and English. Although initially labelling Japanese customers as generally rude due to their lack of greetings and responses to the server, the student generally moved beyond the primary judgement by rationalising the different interpersonal expectations through reflecting on their own experience: ‘Yeah, I think social distance is actually correct in Japan because at Gap, ah, my elder ask[ed] us to communicate with customers … but most of them feel uncomfortable…embarrassed’ (McConachy, 2018, p. 103). Similar patterns appeared in McConachy and Liddicoat’s (2016) study, which collected qualitative data from learners’ classroom discussions and reflections on their language use while sojourning abroad. While some reflections did not seem fully developed – with only stereotypical comparisons of daily practices in national units – others moved beyond superficial analysis and demonstrated

learners' interpretations of cultural meanings behind specific contexts and pragmatic differences. McConachy (2018) specifically highlighted the importance of experience previously accumulated in other languages and cultures in the learning process as reference points, based on which learners judge new pragmatic encounters as typical or salient. Previous knowledge also serves as a foundation where learners develop more sophisticated cultural and linguistic understandings through comparisons and reflections (ibid.).

Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) model also presents similarities to Baker's 3-Level framework of intercultural awareness, mentioned in Section 3.2.5. Both frames present how learners could gradually deepen interpretation of intercultural communication differences, from general and stereotypical comparisons to more context-specific, in-depth analyses of cultural meaning behind practices. Baker (2011b) placed emphasis on the stages that learners pass through on their learning journey, while Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) tried to explain the cognitive mechanics of learning: how learners draw on existing knowledge and experience as the basis to interpret and construct meaning.

#### 3.4.4.2 Metapragmatic Awareness in the Development of Intercultural Understanding

The discussion so far has presented how learners draw on existing cultural schemata (e.g. social conventions, interpersonal expectations) when interpreting L2 pragmatics. In return, the attempt to justify unfamiliar pragmatic practises or resolve miscommunication can decentre learners from their familiar cultural structures (Liddicoat, 2014) and open space for interpretation through multiple cultural perspectives (Liddicoat, 2017). Liddicoat (2014) exemplified the process with a learner's rationalisation of the differences between family interactions in French and English. Noticing the French family in a sitcom talked to each other more directly (e.g. 'they were giving each other orders while they did things and no one was saying please of thanks or anything like that', p.267) but still maintained a

harmonious dinner atmosphere, the learner realised that her previous cultural perspective does not explain her observation, and pragmatic differences could be a consequence of different expectations in family relationships. During this process, the student positioned herself outside the familiar culture, sought to understand the different social values underpinning the new pragmatic form, and developed intercultural awareness.

I therefore agree with the scholars who highlight the role of metapragmatic awareness in intercultural learning in both research and teaching. Through learners' reflection on contextualised language use, intercultural researchers could observe the 'specific ways that learners mobilise cultural concepts, assumptions, normative knowledge, and perceptions of self and other' (McConachy, 2022, p.782). Attention to metapragmatic analysis also helps bridge the gap in existing intercultural research, which generally tends to marginalise the role of language by viewing it as a tool to communicate culture rather than a part of the culture (McConachy and Liddicoat, 2022). In classrooms, tasks based on meta-pragmatic comparisons and reflections can provide a pathway to the development of intercultural competence (Liddicoat, 2014). The fuzziness nature of culture makes it a notion not easily teachable, but speech acts or other pragmatic features provide lenses for learners to observe and approach the concept (McConachy, 2018).

### 3.4.5 Research Gaps in L2 Pragmatics Development

With the studies listed above, it could be argued that the paucity of mainstream research based on NS standards has been partly addressed, and the connection between pragmatics, cultural values and identity has drawn the attention of researchers. Nevertheless, the number of empirical studies exploring such connections is still relatively small, with even fewer investigations based on the SA context, and research related to L2 pragmatic development is still generally approached from a positivistic perspective (Ishihara, 2019).

Moreover, existing works are mostly confined to SA learners' choices to accommodate to or resist specific NS pragmatic norms (e.g. honorifics, discourse markers, address terms). Through probing and analysing the reasons behind intentional deviations from NS standards, researchers get to know about how L2 learners' identities and L1 cultural backgrounds affect their L2 pragmatic use and learning. However, the following knowledge gaps in the field could be identified from existing studies:

First, in probing and analysing reasons behind adoptions and intentional deviations from NS standards, existing studies are mostly confined to how L2 learners' identities and previous cultural backgrounds affect their L2 pragmatic use and learning. Nevertheless, less attention has been paid to the reverse influence – how learning L2 pragmatics could potentially foster learners' identity shifts or development. Such mutual influence has been discussed in relation to general L2 learning (e.g. in Benson et al.'s study mentioned in 2.2), but it has not been adequately discussed and exemplified in existing empirical works on L2 pragmatic development from a longitudinal perspective. As discussed earlier, one's pragmatic judgements are mediated through assessment of sociocultural backgrounds and interpersonal connections (Kesebir & Haidt, 2010; McConachy, 2018; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2016). It can thus be assumed that, in return, being exposed to new pragmatic features can present learners with different ways to negotiate relationships and identities, encouraging reflection on their current perceptions of selves, interpersonal connections and cultural values in the long run (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013).

Second, the new social and linguistic realities today require researchers to move beyond the essentialist perspective when probing sociolinguistic phenomena. In previous studies, the influence of L1 culture has been analysed and considered important in terms of one's L2 pragmatic choices – more specifically, in one's accommodation or resistance to NS norms.

However, echoing the liquid cultural approach and the rationale of critical cosmopolitanism reviewed in 3.2.3 and 3.2.4, I would argue that the clearly depicted boundaries between L1/L2 cultures and languages in many existing studies largely remain from a dichotomous, essentialist perspective. Such a paradigm may fail to explain the complex realities in today's globalisation context, where cultural and linguistic boundaries between national units are dissolving with populations and information becoming increasingly mobile (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011). Furthermore, it bears the risk of oversimplifying the meaning of 'culture' by seeing it as a national-level package rather than an individual-level collection of social realities in different sized communities. Moreover, a clear cut between L1 and L2 cultures might undervalue intercultural individuals' competence to transcend existing structures and flexibly mediate between cultures and languages. In other words, learners' pragmatic choices could go beyond the dichotomy between L1 and L2, adoption and rejection; instead, their interpretations and use of pragmatics can be an experience of shaping speech within the cultural and linguistic resources they collected in multiple communities. During this process, the speaker can form a unique style with which to present themselves which does not necessarily fall into any pre-structured system. The transcultural and translingual practices during the process of meaning generation, however, have not been addressed enough in previous research.

Lastly, most existing studies are focused on L2 learners' performance with specific pragmatic phenomena (e.g. requests, honorifics) or in specific social situations (e.g. counter service, emails). However, it is worth mentioning that what researchers take interest in might not necessarily be what learners consider important in their learning and sojourning experiences. I would therefore argue that the limited scope of data collection bears the risk of restricting researchers to the prescribed agenda, while at the same time neglecting critical moments related to L2 pragmatics that learners themselves notice, that cause

confusions or difficulties for them, that trigger sense-making and reflections, and that are considered meaningful and influential by learners in terms of self-development.

## 3.5 Summary

To summarise, this literature review first introduced the inseparability of culture, identity and language and explained how pragmatics lies on the intersection of these three constructs. The remaining part of this chapter synthesised existing studies concerning the development of L2 pragmatics in the SA context and described the limitations of DCT, the most widely used data collection method, and criticism of the ontology that adopts NS standards as criteria to assess learners' pragmatic development and competence. Previous literature also shows attempts by researchers to investigate the role of cultural and identity perspectives in L2 pragmatics learning, although empirical studies focusing on such connections are still under-represented and have previously mentioned limitations. In the chapter that follows, I will first describe how this research will address the aforementioned knowledge gaps in the field of L2 pragmatic development and propose my research questions. It will then describe the research paradigm, design and methodology.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

## 4.1 Research Aims and Questions

As outlined in the previous discussion of L2 pragmatics research in Chapter 3, this project aims to fill some current gaps in our understanding of L2 pragmatics by investigating the following: (1) L2 pragmatic phenomena that are noticed and considered important by learners themselves in L2-mediated interactions during SA; (2) how learners' sense-making, reflections, and actions are triggered by critical moments concerning L2 pragmatics; and (3) learners' development not only in linguistic knowledge but also holistically as learners with evolved senses of self and cultural knowledge. Following these aims, I formulated three research questions:

- In what moments do students notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK study-abroad environment?
- What learning strategies related to pragmatics do participants report using in L2-mediated interactions?
- How does students' pragmatics learning relate to their evolving sense of selves and their intercultural awareness?

To address these research questions, this project adopted longitudinal narrative inquiry as the research design guided by the interpretivist paradigm. It tracked the experiences of five Chinese postgraduate students sojourning in the UK over 12-15 months. Qualitative, narrative data were generated through semi-structured interviews and learning journals in the form of online chat and were analysed in two phases. I first drafted biographical narratives for each participant following their personal development trajectory emerged from the data (see Chapter 5); the narratives were then used for cross-case, thematic analysis to provide systematic answers to the three research questions (see Chapter 6).

This chapter will first introduce the interpretivist philosophical stance that guides the design of this research. It will move on to theoretical frameworks supporting the research design and procedures of data collection and analysis. A short section will then focus on issues that emerged in the pilot study and adjustments I made that led to the current research design. The last part of this chapter addresses concerns regarding research trustworthiness and ethics.

## 4.2 Philosophical Paradigm: Interpretivism

Paradigms, or philosophical stances, refer to 'set[s] of assumptions about the social world, and about what constitutes proper techniques and topics of inquiry' (Punch, 1998, p.28). Each paradigm inherently incorporates different ontological and epistemological perspectives – what constitutes reality and how it is communicated and acquired by researchers – and offers different rationales that explicitly or implicitly guide the design of research (O'Donoghue, 2007; Scotland, 2012). In L2 pragmatic studies, there have been different paradigms employed to investigate learners' language development. Following the positivist stance, which regards reality as objective and independent from knowers, researchers take the role of 'an observer of social reality' and attempt to 'discover the universal laws of society within it' usually through quantitative analysis (Cohen et al., 2007, p.10): for example, cross-sectional studies with data collected in two or more aspects (e.g. pragmatic proficiency, the length of stay in the host country, and L2 exposure) to investigate the statistical correlation between L2 pragmatic development and specific variables (Taguchi, 2018a). Another common type of research under the positivist branch includes instructional studies which, through quasi-experiments, compare the L2 pragmatic

performance of a group of learners who receive instructions with a control group who do not, in order to test the effectiveness of pedagogical instruction (ibid.).

This project, in contrast, is based on the interpretivist paradigm, which lays more emphasis on the interpretation of participants' experiences, world views and consciousness (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Counter to positivists seeking objective reality through statistical and predictive generalisations, interpretivists see human engagement with the world as natural and unavoidable, and reality as being 'constructed' through subjective consciousness – observer-dependent rather than simply being 'discovered' as objective facts (Duff, 2008). L2 pragmatic research employing an interpretivist paradigm usually adopts an exploratory stance, highlighting in-depth understanding of how personal and contextual factors interact in a naturalistic environment and influence learners' pragmatic development in a dynamic way (Taguchi, 2018a). It is worth noting that the adoption of the interpretivist stance in this project does not suggest the superiority of this paradigm over the former but is based on the belief that each paradigm generates different types of truth and addresses different research questions. As explained earlier in Chapter 3, this project is not focused on learners' improvement towards a pre-established standard but their noticing, sense-making, and reflections regarding L2 pragmatics. In other words, the 'reality' sought here is largely subjective, individually constructed, and can vary from person to person, which naturally fits in the interpretivist ontology. Epistemologically, it is important for the researcher who attempts to reach this type of reality to approach the topic from an emic perspective.

## 4.3 Methodological Framework: Longitudinal Narrative Study

Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, this project adopted a longitudinal narrative approach. This section will first introduce the definition of narrative inquiry and discuss the importance of 'storytelling' in both data collection and analysis stages in this research. It will then move on to the rationale of the longitudinal design.

### 4.3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Storytelling is a primary cognitive instrument through which people draw together experiences that affect their thoughts and behaviours (Polkinghome, 1988) and 'make sense of the events in the lives they have lived or they imagine living' (Barkhuizen, 2014, p.10). Narrative inquiry can be loosely defined as a qualitative approach that brings storytelling into research to describe and understand human actions (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Here I adopt Polkinghorne's (1995) categorisation of two principal approaches to narrative inquiry, namely 'analysis of narratives' and 'narrative analysis': the former refers to 'data consist of narratives or stories', while the latter means studies 'whose analysis produces stories' (pp.5-6). This study combines the features of both, with learners' autobiographical life stories collected as data and drafting individual narratives as a crucial stage in data analysis.

#### 4.3.1.1 Narratives Collected as Data

One advantage of using participants' narratives as data is that researchers gain access to experiences that are not directly observable (Benson et al., 2013). The narrative method is thus considered by Barkhuizen et al. (2014) as the only methodology able to trace learning that happens in real-life contexts across time and multiple settings. It is worth noting that storytellers experience the world from their standpoints and perspectives, and therefore

the self-narrative is not an objective reflection of what has precisely happened and might not be complete or exactly accurate. However, for the same reason, narrative data enable researchers to investigate the way storytellers perceive the world and understand their experiences from an insider's perspective (Webster and Mertova, 2007). To perform a story, individuals need to organise experiences and interpersonal connections coherently and plausibly (Brown et al., 2008). The storytelling process itself is also reflexive, which encourages learners to take an external observer perspective when reviewing these experiences to make further sense of them (Finlay, 2003). The story thus enables researchers to understand what attracts the storytellers' attention during the experience, what they consider important, and how they perceive and interpret encounters.

The wide access to participants' experiences in different contexts together with the emic perspective that stories provide establish the reason for using narrative data to answer the first two research questions. In this research, narrative data were generated through both semi-structured interviews and participants' learning journals. First, autobiographical narratives effectively capture learners' noticing of pragmatic gaps in different life contexts. Moreover, as mentioned in Section 3.4.3, one's L2 pragmatic use is not only mediated through their linguistic knowledge but their interpretation of the sociocultural conditions, interpersonal relationships, and self-image they hope to project in specific contexts (van Compernolle, 2014; Taguchi and Roever, 2017). Through reflexive storytelling, learners are likely to introduce contextual and personal factors that affect the sense-making process underpinning their pragmatic-related learning strategies.

Moreover, participants' narratives play a significant role in answering the third research question regarding learners' identity development. Learner identity is impossible for

researchers to observe directly; neither is it an easily articulable topic for research participants. The definition of identity for most people might be obscure, and one's identity construction can be subtle and unintentional without necessarily coming to consciousness. Life stories, on the other hand, are more concrete and much easier to share and acquire. Most importantly, the narrative method echoes the way identity in which is defined earlier in Section 3.3: (1) the connection between 'self' and the social world; (2) an ongoing self-interpretation and adjustment; and (3) a fluid construct influenced by contexts and others. The stories and the way they are told reveal how the narrator interprets, situates and adjusts themselves in specific cultural and situational contexts and how these might change (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). It is thus considered a valuable approach when addressing the identity-related part of this research. Procedural details of data collection will be introduced later in Section 4.4.

#### 4.3.1.2 Narrative and Paradigmatic Analysis

At the data analysis stage, I adopted the concepts of narrative and paradigmatic analysis proposed by Bruner (1986) as two distinctive yet complementary paths to construct reality. In narrative analysis, stories are used as means to organise and interpret data and to communicate findings with the audience (Benson et al., 2013). Here, the role of the 'storyteller' shifts from the participants to the researcher, who collects diachronic data and develops plots that link a series of incidents together in order to create a 'coherent development account' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.15). The way data are synthesised in the story form allows the analysis to focus on the person (Cleaver, 2009); each part of their stories is interconnected, contextualised in and contributes to the protagonist's unique growth trajectory (Polkinghorne, 1995). The narrative method is thus considered appropriate in explaining human behaviours and addressing research questions concerning 'changes' and

'development' over time. More specifically in this research, these include participants' learning of L2 pragmatics and their development of identities and cultural awareness. The in-depth, comprehensive description and investigation of each participant's experience also lay the foundation to understanding the interaction between the three key concepts involved in the research questions – pragmatic development, identities, and cultural awareness – which are known to be intertwined in a complex manner (See also Section 3.4.1).

Unlike the narrative analysis, whose nature is a synthesis process that brings fragmented elements into an organised whole, the paradigmatic analysis configures the story accounts into themes and categories, aiming at discovering general concepts and knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1995). In this study, I employed a paradigmatic analysis after drafting the individual narrative sections and inductively derived themes shared between the five participants' stories. The two modes were combined here to balance the idiosyncrasies of human experience and inductive reasoning and provide more comprehensive answers to the research questions.

### 4.3.2 Longitudinal Design

The two definitional characteristics of the longitudinal study are its long time span and multi-wave data collection (Ortega and Iberri-Shea, 2005), through which researchers trace the same group of learners over time in order to capture their changes and development and explore the reasons behind the changes (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Taguchi, 2018a). The significance of longitudinal design in research regarding the learning of L2 pragmatics has been highlighted by many researchers. As introduced in Section 1.1, some linguistic and sociocultural norms are indirect and not easily observable in social interactions (Bardovi-

Harlig, 2001); it takes time therefore for learners to notice and acquire L2 pragmatic features, and the learning process requires researchers' long-term attention (Taguchi, 2012). Moreover, a longitudinal selection of data allows adequate time for participants to develop insights into the other two important concepts involved in the research questions: culture, and sense of self. Previous research (e.g. McConachy and Liddicoat, 2016) has indicated that learners' noticing of patterns and salient usages of language sometimes lead to intercultural comparison, reflection on interpersonal relationships, and sociocultural meaning behind the language forms. The cognitive process involves constant interpretation of emerging social interactions and synthesis of pre-existing knowledge and new experiences (McConachy, 2018; Tullock, 2018). It is therefore necessary for this research to prolong the data collection window to capture the complicated cognitive development process and participants' development. Another consideration behind the long time span of data collection was a potential quiet period after the learners' arrival. With overwhelming information in both academic and non-academic contexts, it could take some time for SA learners to adapt to the new environment and expectations and to start to establish new social connections. During this period, the participants might not have many experiences to feed into this research, which largely relies on them reporting pragmatics learning episodes in different social settings. Therefore, a long-term data collection allowed me to investigate the development of learners at a variety of paces and avoid premature conclusions.

## 4.4 Data Collection

### 4.4.1 Overview

As introduced earlier, this research traced L2 pragmatics-related experiences of five SA Chinese postgraduate students over 12-15 months. The period covered three academic semesters, the Christmas and Easter holidays, and the time the participants spent in the UK

between the end of study and their return to their home country. Data were generated through individual, semi-structured interviews and learning journals initiated by the participants themselves. Before moving to the details of the design, an overview of the data collection procedure is illustrated in Table 4.1.

| | **Time** | **Research Activities** |
|---|---|---|
| **Semester 1** (September-December 2019) | Induction Week | - recruiting participants |
| | Week 1 - Week 2 | - the first interview |
| | Week 3 - Week 12 | - collection of learning journals on WeChat<br>- two face-to-face interviews in the middle and the end of the semester |
| | Christmas Holiday | - collection of learning journals on WeChat |
| **Semester 2** (January-May 2020) | Week 13 - Week 24 (Easter Holiday in between) | - collection of learning journals on WeChat<br>- one online interview in the middle of the semester |
| **Semester 3 and later** (June-December 2020) | Week 24 - Participants leaving the UK | - collection of learning journals on WeChat<br>- one online or face-to-face interview before participants leaving the UK |

*Table 4.1: Data Collection Timetable*

The plan presented above was a slightly adjusted version to cope with the unexpected outbreak of COVID-19. The initial plan only covered 24 weeks over two semesters and Christmas and Easter holidays (September 2019 – May 2020). I had expected that learners would have sufficient opportunities to access English-mediated interactions in academic and non-academic contexts: attending lectures, tutorials, workshops and other activities in the university; and access to social events outside the classrooms. This was indeed the case for the first few months – most of the participants proactively sought new connections, and they attended various activities in and outside the university (e.g. church gatherings, volunteering projects, dancing classes, debating groups). However, due to the COVID outbreak in the UK in February 2020, the university moved all the teaching activities online, and most face-to-face social events were suspended. As the result of the tension caused by the pandemic and significantly reduced access to face-to-face social interactions, participants were much quieter in the second semester as they had few new experiences to share. This situation seriously disrupted the data collection of this study, which heavily relied on learners' participation in L2-mediated interactions and their noticing, reporting and reflection on their experiences. To cope with the situation, I changed the interview format from face-to-face to online, and extended the study for another four months with participants' consent. The intention behind the extension was to provide participants with enough time to adapt to the influence of the pandemic on their SA life and re-establish online or offline social connections. I was also hoping that more data could be collected to compensate for the quiet period during Semester 2.

### 4.4.2 Participants: Sampling and Recruitment

Like most longitudinal research in the educational field, this study faced a trade-off between research length, sample size and data amount (Ortega and Iberri-Shea, 2005). A small

number of sample size allows researchers to manage thick, detailed data from each participant and conduct comprehensive analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018), echoing the nature of the narrative inquiry approach mentioned in Section 4.3.1. It also permits a thorough and in-depth study of participants' history, personality, beliefs and experience. All of these together can help constitute a holistic picture of an individual, laying a solid foundation for the researcher to understand the person and acquire the emic perspective, the importance of which for this research has been stated in Sections 4.1 and 4.2. With these considerations, I decided to focus on three to six cases at the planning stage. With the awareness that some participants might drop out during the one-year data collection period, I set out to recruit 10 volunteers at the beginning of the study to allow a fair number to remain. As expected, five of them left the research during the first two months but the other five stayed until the end.

In order to find responses to the research questions, I was aiming to recruit SA students in the UK as participants. Learners in one-year or longer courses were preferable to fit into the longitudinal data collection design. Based on these fundamental considerations, the sampling scope was then further narrowed down to students in TESOL-related one-year taught postgraduate courses at a large university in the north of England for three reasons: accessibility to the group, similarities shared between the researcher and potential participants, and feasibility of recruitment:

(1) Accessibility: Through my personal and professional network, I was supported by the colleagues in the TESOL-related course of the chosen university and was able to approach the potential research participants easily. The taught-postgraduate group was big enough in the 2019-2020 academic year (over 200 students) and could therefore guarantee a sufficient number of respondents to the research invitation.

(2) Similarities: As the researcher, I shared a similar background with my potential participants; we were all postgraduate international students sojourning in the UK, and we worked in the same academic and professional field (TESOL). Moreover, I completed my MA in a TESOL-related subject in 2017. I believe a shared background is valuable in building rapport, fostering dialogical conversations in interviews, and understanding participants' situations and perspectives.

(3) Feasibility: The decision to focus the sampling scope on TESOL students was also based on an intention to enhance participants' commitment by recruiting people who could potentially benefit from this research. This consideration was essential in this study for two reasons: a.) the quantity and quality of data greatly depended on participants' motivations to share their learning experiences; and b.) the longitudinal design required participants' long-term cooperation and commitment. For TESOL students, participating in doctoral research in the same field would be an academic-related experience and learning opportunity, considering the fact they would be expected to design and carry out their own research for their MA dissertations in a year's time. Moreover, recording and discussing their learning experiences can nudge the participants to pay more attention to and reflect on their language and cultural learning during SA, which might in turn facilitate their long-term personal development in both language learning and teaching. Making these potential gains explicit in the recruiting stage, I expected to find volunteers who were intrinsically motivated to participate and more likely to stay active during the data collection.

Participants were recruited during the programmes' induction week in September 2019. With the programme leaders' permission, I gave a short presentation about my PhD project in an induction session to over 200 taught-postgraduate students. In the presentation, I briefly introduced my research focus as 'learning language and culture during studying

abroad' and told my audience that I was looking for participants. I intentionally used layman language and avoided too much detail in order to give the audience a clear impression within a very short time, especially considering some of them had just arrived in the UK and were probably struggling with English listening comprehension. Then, I briefly introduced participants' responsibilities and the potential benefits volunteers might gain from this research, including how participation in PhD research could be an academic-related experience, and how this research might prompt reflections on language and culture learning during SA and facilitate their long-term development as both learners and teachers (See Appendix 2 for the slides).

Compared to sending an email to recruit participants, presenting during the induction session avoided some potential barriers, in that some students might have been reluctant to read a long email, been too busy in the induction week to notice the email, or failed to check emails regularly, especially when they had not realised emails are used as an important communicative tool in the UK university context. A presentation also allowed me to introduce myself as a researcher and a peer student, to start to build up a rapport with potential participants, and to give them the opportunity to raise questions and concerns about participation. Sixteen volunteers contacted me after the presentation, expressing their interest in participating in the research; ten were selected as participants, and five of those dropped out soon after the data collection started, as mentioned at the beginning of this section. The selection criteria and process were designed in response to the issues arise in the pilot study, which will be elaborated on in Section 4.5.

The five research participants (pseudonyms: Hanguang, Tina, Win, Mary and Chloe) included four females and one male, with ages ranging from 22 to 32 years old. The pseudonyms

contain a mix of languages: Hanguang is a Chinese name, Win is Thai, and the other three are in English. I do not mean to confuse readers; in fact, I encouraged the participants to pick names for themselves, as it might give a simplistic portrayal of their senses of self. All the participants were mainland Chinese and used Mandarin as their first language; they had learnt English for more than ten years in schools and universities and reached C1 advanced level (IELTS 6.5-7.5). Two of them were working as English teachers before studying abroad.

According to the background information survey conducted in our first meeting, none of the five participants had sojourned outside mainland China before arriving in the UK. Moreover, even though four participants (Hanguang, Win, Mary, and Tina) majored in subjects related to the English language during the undergraduate study (e.g. English literature, English linguistics and English education) and some were teaching English, they all reported a lack of opportunities to use – and especially to speak – English in daily lives before SA. Reasons seemed to include the fact English classes in most schools and universities in China rarely involve communicative tasks, and English is not used as a dominant language in China. Therefore, they had regarded English as more of a classroom subject than a communicative tool before arriving in the UK. Chloe studied Chinese Education during her undergraduate career but spent years learning English in a private institution, where the language was taught communicatively by mainly NS English teachers. She was the only participant who reported having rich opportunities to speak English before SA with not only other Chinese learners but teachers and students from other cultural backgrounds.

As for participants' nationality, I was not planning to recruit participants from a certain area. The recruiting was open to all the students involved in TESOL-related programmes, who came as a group from a mix of various language and geographical backgrounds. However, all the volunteers were from mainland China, possibly because Chinese students greatly

outnumbered students from other nations. The lack of diversity restricted this research from reflecting the learning experiences of a wider group, while at the same time bringing some advantages. Similarities between the researcher and participants play an important role in understanding participants' perspectives. During the research, my native proficiency in Mandarin and familiarity with Chinese society allowed me to relate to the communication gaps they mentioned and understand the comparisons they made between languages and cultures, which unquestionably offered me a vantage point in both data collection and analysis.

It is also worth mentioning that TESOL students as participants in this research have their particularities. With academic backgrounds in English linguistics, English literature or language education, and some of them with EFL teaching experience, their professional requirements and interests could lead to stronger awareness of language learning, pragmatics and cultures. Pragmatics was also involved in the syllabus of one of the compulsory modules in the TESOL programme, which allowed the possibility for participants to link what they learned in the class with their daily encounters. With this awareness, I discussed the participants' English learning histories and knowledge of pragmatics with them in the first interview. Their background and available resources were then taken into consideration during data analysis as part of the research context.

### 4.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews and Learning Journals

The research design was informed by the noticing hypothesis proposed by Schmidt (1995). Counter to Krashen's (1981, 1985) suggestion that acquisition is largely a subconscious process whereby learners are exposed to comprehensible L2 input, Schmidt (1995) highlights the importance of consciousness, holding the view that noticing the new linguistic

features, although not necessarily guaranteeing learning or acquisition, is the prerequisite for L2 development. For L2 pragmatics learning, noticing involves awareness of pragmalinguistic features and the associated sociocultural contexts (Schmidt, 2010). Noticing is also considered an essential cognitive step in the metapragmatic analysis, during which learners might investigate the sociocultural meaning behind the language and make personal sense of specific pragmatic terms (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). The gathering of narrative data was also inspired by the 'critical moment analysis' proposed by Li Wei (2011), a research method which 'redirects the focus to such critical and creative moments of individuals' by capturing learners' behaviours at specific points and inviting them to reflect on and make sense of that moment (p.1224). Through sharing the experience, learners retrieve moments that are important, or at least noticeable, for them and become more conscious of pragmatics learning. Identity development occurring alongside language learning is also believed to be a continuous but uneven process, either fostered or suppressed by these critical incidents (Benson et al., 2013). Multiple moments from the same individual illustrate together what this person is like, and how contextual factors and learner agencies interact in their case. Each critical moment also serves as a reference point; through comparison within and across multiple moments and cases, generalisable patterns sometimes appear through accumulation (Li Wei, 2011). This study combines learning journals and interviews to capture the 'critical incidents' in the participants' SA experience, and this section will rationale my choices of the two methods to generate data and elaborate procedures in each.

#### 4.3.3.1 Learning Journals

Diaries and learning journals are usually employed as data collection methods in qualitative studies to provide introspective and autobiographical records of people's behaviours, feelings and perspectives over a period of time (Barkhuizen, 2014). One of the advantages of

keeping logs for this study is its immediacy; participants can record their encounters right after they happen. This is crucial in capturing learners' noticing of L2 pragmatics learning in order to answer the first research question, as participants might partially forget these experiences or not be able to describe as much detail if they are not recorded in a timely way. Moreover, compared to some other methods used widely in L2 pragmatic research, as introduced in Section 3.4.2 – like observing learners in the classroom or recording their conversations in specific contexts (e.g. counter service) – journals give access to learners' activities within a wider scope of naturalistic contexts and interactions that cannot be directly observed. This consideration was later confirmed by journal data collected from the five participants covering their daily conversations across a wide range of social relationships and situations. Examples include, but were not limited to, one-to-one academic tutorials, greetings from strangers, arguments with friends, and dates with strangers they met on dating apps. Journals are therefore considered the most preferable tool to capture learners' noticing of pragmatics learning in this study in order to answer the research questions.

Aware that regularly keeping learning journals can be a demanding and perhaps tedious task for participants, I suggested a more convenient and interactive alternative to traditional journals. Participants were required to share their stories and reflections with me on WeChat (the most widely used online chatting app within the Chinese community). Whenever they felt like sharing a story, they could use any mobile device available and drop me a message. The form of audio-recording was recommended as it usually costs less time, but written texts were also welcomed. Moreover, the genre of online chat encourages casual language use and accommodates texts of different lengths, and this was likely to reduce any burden among participants of modifying language or feeling that they must

write long, complete paragraphs. Researchers' responses or follow-up questions sometimes triggered further conversations, and the whole process was designed to imitate casual daily exchanges with a friend, with the hope that the informality would help construct a comfortable conversation environment and enable participants to externalise their thoughts freely.

Instructions were provided during one-to-one, face-to-face meetings with the participants (see Appendix 5 for the slides). To ensure relevant data would be collected, I first introduced the three terms 'pragmatics', 'sociopragmatics' and 'pragmalingusitics' with layman language and straightforward examples. I then invited participants to share with me their daily encounters involving pragmatics learning, and their feelings and reflections about them. These could be any experience that they found interesting, stimulating, confusing, or even awkward. The content could either relate to linguistic choices, such as the use of specific words and sentence structures, or cultural aspects, such as social conventions, people's expectations or ways to communicate, or an overlap of both. Bearing in mind participants might find the notion 'pragmatics' abstract and vague, slides including definitions and examples were sent to participants for future reference. They were encouraged to clarify the definitions with the researcher whenever they felt it was needed or to share cases of uncertainty and leave them to the researcher to judge the relevance. Three journal samples developed from my own learning experience were also provided to offer inspiration and loose guidance to the participants at the start.

Participants were also told that the frequency of sharing was decided by them; it could be either one message each day or one every two weeks. I also dropped them messages occasionally to ask about their lives and new experiences. Through the loose agenda, I

hoped participants would enjoy the sharing process instead of regarding it as a burden or demanding task, as forcing reluctant participants to provide data would be ethically inappropriate and might lower the quality of the data. Some of the shared stories fed into our interviews, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### 4.3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews are one of the most common means for the researcher to elicit narrative data from participants about significant moments in their lives. Interviewees are assisted by interviewers through explanations and elaboration, with prompts, probing, and requests that help facilitate the narrative and co-building and interpretation of knowledge. For example, with questions such as 'Why did it happen?' or 'Could you give an example?', the researcher can nudge the interviewees to develop a simple statement into a story, which gives more private meaning to the general description and establishes more concrete relevance to the answer and the research questions (Mattingly and Lawlor, 2000). Multiple interviews in a longitudinal study may also collect stories in chronological order and reveal learners' development of the researched topic.

This research includes five interviews. The first interview aimed to gather background information on the participants related to the context of this research. The following interviews were to complement the learning journals in collecting pragmatic-related learning incidents, further discuss the experiences shared in the journals, and trace the participants' changes during the data collection period with regard to the research questions. The interview schedules are attached in Appendix 6, with a table showing the aims/research questions different prompts were designed to address.

All the interviews in this research were semi-structured. In this type of interview, themes and questions are prepared to make sure the conversation follows the research agenda. Nonetheless, participants are encouraged to express their thoughts freely or bring up topics that interest them without feeling constrained by the structure set by the researcher. Compared with the structured interview, the semi-structured interview is more flexible and more likely to create a friendly and relatively informal environment for the researcher to co-construct knowledge with participants, rather than to merely 'excavate' data from them (Mason, 2017, p.112). Employing semi-structured interviews also avoids the possibility that participants stray from the research topic when too much freedom is allowed in the unstructured interview (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013).

The first interviews were arranged for Week1/Week2 in the first semester (October 2019), right after participants had been recruited. The theme was to get to know about the participants and their backgrounds, as they related to the research. Topics included, but were not limited to, language learning history, motivation to study in the UK, willingness to interact with a broader community, awareness of self and identity, and their knowledge of pragmatics. The information served as a starting point to familiarise me with the participants and a foundation to understand their thoughts and behaviours in the co-construction of their SA narratives.

Participants were later invited to four more interviews, three of them during the academic year, and one final meeting after they completed their study and before they returned to their home country (between September and December 2020). These interviews were

designed to further probe into participants' perspectives related to the three research questions and changes happening to them during SA. Some questions in the first interview were repeated for comparison, and some were individualised questions developed from the stories they shared in journals. These interviews were also opportunities for me to ask follow-up questions about stories participants mentioned in journals, and for them to share more pragmatic-related encounters. The question 'Are there any new stories you hope to share with me today, which you haven't mentioned in WeChat?' was asked at the end of each meeting, which turned out to be a very helpful prompt. Understandably, the participants were not always prioritising this research during their studies or reporting their encounters right after they happened, while they were usually happy to share during our conversations if anything came to mind. During the interviews, the researcher sometimes used prompts and clarification requests to facilitate expression or encourage interviewees to expand their points.

#### 4.3.3.3 Language Use in Online Chat and Interviews

The participants were encouraged to use the language, either English or Chinese, they felt comfortable with or wished to practice in online chat and interviews. It turned out that Mandarin was used in all the interviews and most learning journals; only one participant occasionally shared journals in English with me. The translation of the interview and online chat clips from Mandarin to English took some time, but allowing participants to use their L1 greatly benefited this research, as they could express their thoughts more clearly, freely and in-depth in a language at a higher proficiency level.

## 4.5 Pilot, Reflection and Adjustments

During July and August in 2018, I tested the data collection methods in a pilot study before the formal data collection started. Pilot participants for the questions in the first interview and online journal were students in the pre-sessional academic English course who had just arrived in the UK. Prompts for the later interviews were tested on two MA students who had almost finished their one-year courses in the UK, as the questions were mostly related to participants' development and changes during SA. The pilot generally went well, and relevant data were collected through both interviews and interactive logs. This section will mainly focus on problems I encountered in the pilot and how I adjusted my data collection methods to deal with these issues.

### 4.5.1 Interviews

After the interviews, I asked the pilot participants for feedback about interview questions and their feelings about participation. It turned out that they generally felt comfortable with the interview process and found the questions easy to understand. However, they mentioned that a few questions involved privacy, and they were hesitant before they shared their answers. For example, in response to the question 'Have you experienced any misunderstandings or even conflicts in English communication?', one participant described a communication breakdown between her and a tutor we both knew. Before talking about this experience, she looked at my phone, which was in recording mode. She then frowned and asked me to confirm again that the conversation would not be leaked because she did not want others to feel she disrespected the tutor or talked negatively behind others' backs.

I expected the hesitation shown in the pilot would not be such a concern in the formal data collection, as the frequent interaction during online log-keeping would allow more time for my participants and I to build rapport and trust. With a friendly relationship established,

they would feel more comfortable sharing this type of experience with me. Moreover, to ease the possible concerns of my participants, before the formal data collection started, I specifically highlighted the confidentiality of this research in our first meeting. I also reassured them before every interview that all data would be well protected, and information would only be used anonymously.

## 4.5.2 Online Journals

### 4.5.2.1 Situation of No Response

For the pilot of online journals and the first interview, I recruited six volunteers from the pre-sessional course (five Chinese and one Thai). However, only one of the six participants proactively shared her SA experience with me during the agreed period; others were generally silent, either replying to my messages with only a few words or even ignoring them. I tried to empathise with them through relating their passive responses to my personal experience as a SA student; at the same time, I sought advice from one of those quiet participants. I then realised that many of them spent most of their time with peer students from their home countries during the pre-sessional period and thus did not have much access to English-mediated interactions. Consequently, they had few sources for journal keeping.

I realised the no-response situation could be a major challenge in the coming data collection. To avoid this potential situation, two adjustments were made. First, as mentioned earlier in 4.4.2, 10 participants were recruited at the beginning of the study to allow a reasonable number to remain until the end of the data collection. It turned out that five dropped out, but the other five, despite short silent periods at different times

throughout the year, all contributed to this research with interesting and relevant data. Second, instead of recruiting all the SA students who volunteered for this research, 10 of the participants were chosen from short, informal interviews before the data collection started. During the face-to-face, one-to-one interviews, I asked the volunteers to describe their motivation to do an MA in the UK and their expectations regarding their SA life. By doing this, I was hoping to recruit people with the desire to improve their English and to use English to socialise and expand their friend circle – in other words, those who were less likely to go completely silent during the study due to very limited use of the target language.

#### 4.5.2.2 Use of Long-Term Follow-up Questions

Through the pilot, I realised that many learning activities had not been completed when they were shared, which needed to be marked and followed up by the researcher in the longer term. For example, a pilot participant mentioned he hoped to talk with people, but he did not know how to start a conversation naturally with strangers in English; he also felt unsure about how to respond to the daily greeting 'how are you?', perceived as a commonly used expression in the UK but not in his home country. At this stage, it seemed the participant had noticed the communication gaps related to L2 pragmatics but had not yet gained enough knowledge to close them. The one-month pilot did not allow enough time for such changes to happen, although this encounter did provide me with inspiration for the formal data collection. Before every interview, I read through stories shared earlier by the participants to follow up on cases where further learning might have happened. To be more specific, I reminded them of our earlier conversations (either in logs or interviews) and invited them to share their progress on the same topic, if there had been any (e.g. 'You've mentioned you weren't sure about how to start a conversation with other English speakers. Do you find it easier now?').

### 4.5.3 Researcher's Intervention

Another concern arising from the pilot was the researcher's intervention. Even though many qualitative educational studies aim to investigate learning in a naturalistic context, learners' participation in research and interactions with the researcher are very likely to influence their learning process. For my participants, remaining part of the research itself was likely to influence their SA life because journal keeping, interview discussions and the researcher's continuing involvement might have unavoidably fostered noticing and reflection on issues related to L2 pragmatics, culture and identity. During data collection, some pilot participants proactively sought advice from me concerning either research-related questions, English learning, and their SA lives. My responses might have affected their thoughts and actions. Moreover, although I attempted to avoid asking questions that could subtly prompt the respondents to answer or act in a particular way, I could not guarantee that my questions were not interpreted as pedagogic guidance. For example, the question mentioned in the last paragraph (e.g. 'You've mentioned you weren't sure about how to start a conversation with other English speakers. Do you find it easier now?') might lead learners to start paying attention to English conversational skills.

These concerns prompted me to reconsider which type of researcher-participant relationship I should seek in this study. As mentioned earlier in Section 4.6.1, the interaction between qualitative researchers and participants is a process where the two parties exchange ideas and co-construct knowledge (Holliday, 2016). Therefore, the data collection should not aim to maintain an environment untouched by the researcher in order to provide purely objective observations; it would also be unrealistic to eliminate the intervention. Instead, I considered my presence and activities as a researcher as part of the participants'

learning context. With this in mind, I realised that the close researcher-participant relationship was a resource for both researcher and participants. For the researcher, a supportive and empathetic attitude seems necessary for building rapport and collecting data in this study, without which some participants might find it uncomfortable to share their personal experiences. An example has been mentioned in Section 4.5.1 about a pilot participant who hesitated to talk about her communication breakdowns with her tutor. A friendly relationship can also benefit participants; a relaxed conversation environment that encourages sharing and provides meaningful discussions can potentially prompt in-depth learning and reflections on their SA experiences. Sharing interesting stories or difficulties in life with a supportive listener might be an enjoyable experience that makes participants feel their stories are important and that their voice was heard (Creswell, 2005).

## 4.6 Data Analysis

Table 4.2 presents the amount of data collected from each participant. Here, I would like to clarify the way 'noticing episodes' are counted. Since learning journals were collected via a messaging application, learners' description of and reflection on one incident are sometimes broken into a few voice/text messages. Some participants also tended to collect and report a series of events at one time rather than sharing right after they happened. Instead of counting the number of messages or times participants shared their life stories, I recorded each event as a noticing episode in order to better illustrate the scope of data gathered. As easily observable from the table, some participants were more active in online chat than others. The main reasons seemed to be the differences in learners' commitment to the research, desire to share, and their level of exposure to L2-mediated communication. Regardless of word quantity or frequency of sharing, each research participant contributed rich and relevant data.

| Participants | Interviews | Learning Journals (Online Chat) |
|---|---|---|
| Chloe | 4 times, 191mins in total | 47 noticing episodes, about 12,400 words |
| Tina | 5 times, 174mins in total | 43 noticing episodes, about 37,000 words |
| Win | 5 times, 232mins in total | 15 noticing episodes, about 2,700 words |
| Hanguang | 5 times, 228mins in total | 21 noticing episodes, about 3,300 words |
| Mary | 5 times, 168mins in total | 13 noticing episodes, about 2,400 words |

*Table 4.2 Qualitative Data from Online Chat and Interviews*

### 4.6.1 Inductive Method and Researcher Reflexivity

Data analysis in this study generally follows the inductive method, which is commonly adopted in qualitative research. The core of the inductive method is to develop themes and theories from data rather than using data to test pre-established hypotheses (Silverman, 2014), guiding researchers to interpret the researched phenomenon from participants' perspectives (Charmaz, 2006) and echoing the interpretivist paradigm which regards fact as subjective and socially constructed. Through studying and comparing data, researchers immerse themselves to the fullest extent in the contexts and cultures in which participants are situated in order to expand their understanding of the researched topic (Chen, 2000).

Nevertheless, I have realised that pursuing a purely emic perspective in analysis is neither achievable nor desirable. First, the qualitative data are not transmitted from one party to the other but co-constructed in the conversations between the participants and the

researcher, each of whom bring their respective cultures and exchange ideas, which results in new understanding for both parties (Holliday, 2016). Moreover, just like the participants, researchers are human beings with unique experiences and knowledge. They would not be able to claim that they approach the topic without any bias or pre-established hypothesis, even if they study the data intensively and attempt to relate to the participants.

Nevertheless, the point here is not that the researcher's presence contaminates data, or that such influence should be eliminated in interpretive studies. Instead, I took the view that the researcher's involvement needs to be regarded as a part of participants' learning context and kept this in mind during the analysis process. Sealey and Carter (2004) also reminded social researchers that participants' views of the world are inevitably partial and might not always be reliable. Researchers are therefore expected not only to listen to the participants but also deploy their expertise and read data with a critical and reflexive mind in order to analyse how external forces (e.g. cultural background, L1, social position, researcher-participant relationship) may affect their words and understanding about the investigated topic (Bourdieu et al., 1991).

### 4.6.2 Transcription and Translation

Data collected through journals and interviews were transcribed chronologically. I established separate files for the five participants, each including a word document for interview data and another one for learning journals. While transcribing, I realised that the gist of the utterance would suffice in answering research questions most of the time. Therefore, a turn-by-turn, content-focused transcript was adopted; linguistic details, such as hesitation, repetition and redundancy, were mostly skipped to avoid unnecessary time consumption (Duff, 2008). As the amount of data collected from logs and interviews turned

out to be huge, most were analysed in Chinese and not translated into English immediately after transcription; data clips presented in this thesis were later translated during writing. About 10 percent of the original and translated data were randomly selected and checked by two Chinese English-language teachers with high proficiency in both languages. The translation was considered generally accurate, in their opinion, apart from a few details, which were later discussed and resolved between us (see Appendices 8 and 9 for transcript samples).

## 4.6.3 Data Analysis

Employing narrative inquiry as the theoretical framework, as introduced earlier in Section 4.3.1.2, the data analysis process was divided into two stages: narrative and paradigmatic analysis. This section will describe the process for both and provide detailed rationales for each step.

### 4.6.3.1 Narrative Analysis

While organising and transcribing data, I noticed that experiences shared by the five SA learners varied significantly. I then decided to start with immersing myself in the participants' contexts by reading interview and journal data closely and repeatedly and making notes and memos. At this stage, I went from one case to another, without making systematic comparisons between different cases. Conducting this process, I specifically paid attention to links between the learning incidents shared by the participants, which included similarities, potential causalities, changes in attitudes and perspectives, and development of cultural or linguistic knowledge. Patterns and connections between incidents across time and space then appeared in each participant's experiences. Following the intense study of each case, I started drafting biographical chapters on each participant, in order to construct

a ‘coherent developmental account’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.15) of each individual in L2 pragmatics and their perception of identity and cultures related to pragmatics (presented in Chapter 5).

The writing process played a significant role in data analysis, during which I first judged the relevance of each piece of data. As mentioned in Section 4.4.3.1, the definition of pragmatics could be abstract or blurred, and there were situations where the participants confused the term ‘pragmatics’ with cultural differences or other linguistic phenomena. These data were transcribed and stored during the data collection process, and, although they did not seem directly relevant to the research questions, it was too early at that point to conclude these experiences would not later cross with participants’ pragmatic development. Therefore, the first step of drafting the narrative chapters was to give a holistic view of the data and eliminate the clips showing weaker connections with the research aims and questions.

The second step was to select data clips to present and categorise the chosen data clips. Each individual chapter began with a ‘background information’ section briefly introducing the participant, then they developed into different themes identified from their journals and interviews. Each chapter was therefore structured differently according to the patterns and connections that emerged from that specific participant’s data, and these themes were generally organised in a chronicle, developmental order. When many data pieces could fit into one theme, I followed Holliday’s (2016) criteria for data selection and presentation, presenting those that added contextual variety or contained as much information as possible within a short space. Contradictions also appeared during this stage, such as one story that does not fit into the behavioural patterns of the participant (e.g. Hanguang’s attitudes to ‘Ey up’ in Section 5.2). I chose not to exclude them to make the writing easier or

the narrative ‘cleaner’, but rather I saw these ‘irregularities’ as valuable entry points through which the complexity of learning and learners could be understood. To address such complexity, I revisited relevant data, re-considered the interaction between contextual and personal factors in that specific story, and sometimes asked the participants themselves to try to clarify their thoughts. While analysing the chosen data pieces, I also started to establish initial connections between the findings and relevant literature. Through drafting the chapter, I not only organised learners’ narratives in a systematic manner but also gained a more comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the data.

#### 4.6.3.2 Paradigmatic Analysis

Following the drafting of individual chapters, I conducted a cross-case, thematic analysis, during which I compared and contrasted the individual narrative chapters by reading them repeatedly and simultaneously revisited relevant literature. With detailed familiarity with every participant’s story, I sketched an outline of preliminary patterns and categorisations in response to the three research questions (see Appendix 7 for the outline for RQs One and Two as examples). Then, I re-read the individual narratives as well as data not included in these chapters with the outline in mind, looking for evidence supporting, complementing, or contrasting existing categories. Through this process, I modified the outline by restructuring existing categories, combining overlapped ones, eliminating idiosyncratic ones with evidence from only one participant, and adding in new points not covered by the existing summary. The re-reading stage was again repeated a few times until I had no new changes to make. These finalised categories later became sub-titles in Chapter 6. Lastly, the themes were linked back to the literature to identify the results supporting or contrasting with existing findings.

## 4.7 Ethical Considerations

I obtained ethical approval before I started my pilot and data collection from the Social Science, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee at University of Leeds (see Appendix 1). Some ethical concerns have been discussed in different parts of this chapter, and they are summarised as follows.

### 4.7.1 Informed Consent

An information sheet concerning the research and a written informed consent form were handed to each participant to make sure they understood the purpose of the study and the investment their agreement to participate entails (see Appendices 3 and 4). The consent form also covered the anonymity and confidentiality of data and their right to withdraw. These documents were written in English, with the expectation that all the participants, who were taught-postgraduate students with a relatively high level of English (IELTS 7 or above, according to the courses' requirements), would be able to understand without much effort. Participants were encouraged to ask questions, raise concerns or discuss anything they found unclear with me. Potential participants were allowed enough time to reflect on the information provided and come to a decision. In the end, every participant gave written informed consent, including those who dropped out in the first few months.

### 4.7.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

To ensure confidentiality, I transcribed data collected from interviews and online journals promptly. Transcripts, chat history and recordings were stored and encrypted in OneDrive and deleted from the mobile devices used. Pseudonyms

were incorporated for all the participants and other information that could reveal their identities (e.g. institutions, tutors and friends).

### 4.7.3 Benefits for Participation and Participants' Workload

As proposed by Norton (2000) and Lamb (2018), researchers should consider not only how participants may contribute to the research but how educational studies bring them positive impacts and assist them in developing as learners. The decision to restrict the sampling to TESOL students potentially benefits the participants in various ways. First, participating in a PhD-level project in the same subject field would be an academic-related experience and learning opportunity for the participants. The potential benefits were introduced in the presentation to recruit participants. Moreover, it was hoped that recording and discussing their learning experiences would prompt the participants to pay more attention to and reflect on their language and cultural learning during SA, which might in turn facilitate their long-term personal development in both language learning and teaching.

To avoid overburdening the participants, I replaced the traditional diary with online chat, a more convenient and interactive tool for journal keeping, in data collection. Journals in audio form were recommended, as it takes less time for participants to record their stories in that way. Participants were also told they could suspend the journal keeping task during holidays, before assignment submissions or any time when they needed to have a break.

## 4.8 Research Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this research will be assessed following three criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1985) for qualitative research: credibility, transferability and confirmability.

### 4.8.1 Credibility and Member-Checking

Credibility refers to the extent to which the results of qualitative research are credible. In this research, participants are the most legitimate people to judge its credibility, as the aim of the study is to explore learners' noticing of pragmatics learning, their adoption of communicative strategies and their evolving senses of self and cultural perspectives – all of which are closely dependent on learners' subjective consciousness. Implementation of credibility, according to Guba and Lincoln (1985), consists of two parts: 'to carry out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced'; and 'to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied' (p.296). For the former, the research included an attempt to create a supportive and friendly conversational environment; participants were also reassured that the data would be stored with confidentiality and presented anonymously. Both practices were intended to build trust and encourage participants to share their stories and honest feelings with the researcher in a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere.

For the latter, this study employed member checking, the process of 'taking ideas back to research participants for their confirmation' (Charmaz, 2006, p.111). The biographical narratives for each participant in Chapter 5 were finished not long after they returned to

China, which included experiences they had shared, quotations from interviews and logs, and the researcher's analysis and interpretation. These narratives were then sent to the participants for member-checking, with the guide questions listed below:

(1) While reading this chapter and revising your experience, do you feel you disagree with some parts in my writing (e.g. You think I've misinterpreted your meaning, thoughts or intention)?

(2) Do you feel this chapter has left out some SA experience that you consider very important or meaningful in your personal development?

(3) Do these themes and stories remind you of other relevant experiences you would like to add that were not mentioned earlier?

(4) Revising your SA experience after being back in China for three months, do you feel you have experienced changes or have new reflections about the content covered in this chapter?

(5) Any comments or thoughts about this chapter are welcome. Please do not feel hesitant to share.

The five participants were encouraged to add brief comments while reading and then invited to a one-to-one online interview to discuss their chapters. The purpose of this member-check process was mainly to confirm accurate description and interpretation of data with participants themselves. Apart from accuracy, questions (2) and (5) were designed to further foster the emic perspective in the analysis by focusing on critical incidents that mattered the most to learners themselves in their SA lives and personal development. Question (3) had the aim of further gathering materials to elaborate on existing themes in each chapter.

A major concern before sending chapters to participants was that the long-written material might bore and be a burden for participants, and they might not be willing to check it thoroughly or discuss it further. The feedback I received about the member-check process, however, was more positive than expected. Three of the five participants (Mary, Chloe, Tina) told me they intrinsically enjoyed reading their chapters, as they felt the writing walked them through those good memories and personal development throughout the SA year. Hanguang did not comment on the member check process itself, although he read the chapter carefully and contributed detailed comments concerning the guide questions. All of them confirmed my description and interpretation of data were generally accurate, which indicates the trustworthiness of this study.

### 4.8.2 Transferability

Small numbers of cases allow researchers to manage thick, detailed data from each case and conduct thorough and comprehensive analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018). For this reason, findings from this type of research are considered by some scholars as anecdotal and lacking predictability and generalisability. However, as Richards (2003) pointed out, 'human beings are wonderfully adept at confounding the sort of predictions that operate in the natural world' (p.9). Patterns generalised through quantitative survey and experimentation usually describe 'an average person', while disguising variations between individuals in different contexts (Ushioda, 2009). This explains the necessity and authenticity of person-centred inquiries in human sciences.

It is also imprudent to assume the results of this type of research are ungeneralisable or lack practical relevance; instead, they need to be viewed and generalised in a different manner.

The term transferability has been suggested as a replacement for 'generalisability', one of the important criteria for judging the trustworthiness of quantitative studies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Unlike predictive generalisations from statistical analysis, the process of transferring knowledge for readers of qualitative research is more private and subjective (Melrose, 2009). It requires readers to view the research more reflexively and critically and gain insights by connecting the research cases to their life contexts and consider whether the findings and conclusions apply (ibid.). Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted that, to enable readers to transfer the knowledge back to their own experience, researchers must provide thick descriptions of the research context. In this research, I provided detailed information about both the participants (e.g. backgrounds, L2 learning experience and learning motivation) and their learning contexts (e.g. accessibility to L2-mediate conversations, friend circles and detailed contexts for conversations) as resources for readers to make sensible judgement about the extent to which the results are transferable.

### 4.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the result of qualitative research can be confirmed by others (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As researchers hold their unique perspectives when collecting and analysing the data, their subjectivity can sometimes cause bias. It is therefore necessary for others to confirm my data selection and interpretation. To achieve this, I have provided a detailed description of how data has been collected and generated. I will also attach some original data – samples from transcripts of learning journals and interviews – in Appendices 8 and 9.

This chapter started with re-introducing the aims of this study and proposing the three research questions. It has also discussed the philosophical paradigm and methodological framework underpinning the narrative research design, and has described in details and rationalised the procedure of data collection and analysis. The next two chapters will focus on data analysis and the presentation of findings.

# Chapter 5: Individual Narratives

This chapter presents individual biographical narratives, focusing mainly on the development trajectory of each participant in L2 pragmatics and their perceptions of identity and cultures relating to pragmatics. Each story begins with a 'background information' section, which briefly introduces information relevant to the research questions, such as the participant's English learning history, educational and occupational background, expectations for the year of SA, and socialisation in English. This section aims to provide readers with a preliminary image of each student. The narratives then develop into the different themes identified from the log and interview data collected from each participant and do not follow exactly the same structure. For example, Chloe came to the UK with great enthusiasm about 'Western culture', and she was keen to include topics like culture comparison and intercultural communication in her learning journals and interviews. Therefore, the themes in her chapter generally aligned with her developing understanding of culture-related topics along with L2 pragmatics learning. Another participant, Hanguang, frequently talked about his passion for Chinese traditional literature, and therefore a section in his chapter focused especially on that literature's influence on his learning and use of L2 pragmatics. There are also similarities shared between the participants; some themes, such as 'struggles in L2 pragmatics', turned out to be prominent in most cases and thus appeared in more than one story section.

Under each theme are relevant experiences reported by learners themselves. This section usually consists of a brief introduction to the context, participants' descriptions of their encounters and their reflections (quotations from learning journals and interviews), and one or two paragraphs of the researcher's analysis. The analysis aims to establish links between the quotation and research topic, to introduce knowledge from relevant academic fields,

and to connect the data clip with the background and other stories the participant shared. As mentioned in Section 4.6.2, a turn-by-turn, content-focused transcript was adopted; linguistic details, such as hesitation and repetition, were kept only when they influenced meaning. Table 5.1 summarises the transcript symbols involved in this chapter.

| **Symbols** | **Meaning** |
|---|---|
| R | Researcher |
| … | Irrelevant information omitted |
| [ ] | Information added by the researcher to foster comprehension |
| (pause) | Hesitation or pauses in the conversation |

*Table 5.1 Transcript Symbols*

# 5.1 Tina

## 5.1.1 Background Information

Before sojourning in the UK, Tina majored in English literature during her undergraduate study in China and taught English to young learners for three years after she graduated. Apart from the UK's reputation for higher education, an important reason why Tina chose this country for her master's study was her belief that English originated in the UK and she could therefore learn the 'purest' English and English culture there (Interview: October 2019). As she reported in her first interview, her primary motivation for improving English was the demanding requirements of the job market as well as the expectations from parents and students. She chose the pseudonym 'Tina' for herself as it is the English name of an experienced teacher whom she admired and regarded as a role model in her career.

Tina described her English contact before coming to the UK as 'fake', as she was 'either learning or teaching the English language as a subject but never used it to communicate' (Interview: October 2019). She hardly had opportunities to speak English in the university because the class was mostly teacher-centred without many speaking tasks involved, and there were few other English speakers around. In the workplace, although part of her job responsibilities as an English teacher was to collaborate with foreign teachers from English-speaking countries to deliver class and fulfil administrative duties, she did not feel much improvement in her communication skills:

> **Tina:** We exchanged similar information with foreign teachers all the time. I think they were adapting to our routines and our language. We [Chinese teachers] also made similar language mistakes when speaking English, so they could easily understand our incorrect/inappropriate expressions after spending some time in China.
>
> (Interview: October 2019)

We had our first interview at the beginning of the academic year, her first month in the UK following her move from China. During the meeting, she also shared with me her general expectations for her year abroad. It seemed she had identified herself as a bit of a 'rebel' in relation to the values shared by her previous communities; she expected this part of herself to be confirmed, supported or encouraged and her mind to be broadened during SA:

> **Tina:** I am not a resolute person, and I sometimes swing between choices. I had some plans but failed to try them out for different reasons. After this year, I hope I can be braver and more determined in my choices.
>
> **R:** Why do you think studying abroad might make you a more resolute person?
>
> **Tina:** When you live in China, people around you are from similar backgrounds, and any advice you get from families and friends follows very similar patterns. They think in similar ways. In that environment, if what you think is not consistent with mainstream values, you might feel uncertain about your choices. However, when you leave that environment and meet different people with different mindsets, you have more options than before.
>
> (Interview: October 2019)

During the first semester, Tina prioritised her study and assignments over other things in her life. She sacrificed time for socialisation to focus on academic reading and writing tasks after the class. By the end of the first semester, she had used English mostly with her classmates and teachers, though she eagerly hoped to find more time to socialise and meet friends from different cultural backgrounds. During the Christmas holiday, Tina travelled to France and was invited to Poland to spend Christmas with the family of her Chinese friend and their Polish husband. In the second semester, she signed up for an online host-family website and spent a weekend with a British woman. She also volunteered to teach Mandarin in a

primary school and to help refugees in the UK. Unfortunately, these voluntary activities and her other social plans were suspended with the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK.

Before leaving the UK, Tina felt she did not have enough opportunities during the year to practice daily communicative English, especially after the lockdown. Nonetheless, she shared with me a significant number of her reflections on pragmatic encounters (43 noticing episodes, about 37,000 words in her learning journals), far exceeding the amount shared by the other four participants. She described the sharing as enjoyable and considered it a way to take a break from intense academic tasks.

### 5.1.2 Struggles in English Pragmatics within the Academic Context

In the first semester, Tina mentioned pragmatic-related struggles in her academic life concerning communication with tutors several times:

> **Tina:** We have a Chinese teacher, and she doesn't mind staying and answering students' questions after class. Today I asked another tutor [non-Chinese] if I could ask a question related to the assignment after class. He said, 'We should book an appointment, or you can write me an email because I need to leave now.' I felt a bit embarrassed. I know I proposed a request for when work time was over, but some other teachers are happy to stay and answer them.
>
> **R:** When he said that, did you feel you had done something wrong?
>
> **Tina:** I was worried whether he considered my behaviour inappropriate. Maybe he thinks it is only appropriate to book an appointment by email?
>
> (Interview: November 2019)

In the case above, Tina was not sure about the sociopragmatic conventions regarding after-class questions, and the inconsistent behaviours of different tutors confused her. It seems that she linked her experience to possible differences in sociopragmatic norms at the country level between the UK and China, as she mentioned the Chinese teacher's willingness to help. It is also quite common for teachers to stay after class for questions in the Chinese classroom context. A similar situation, then, crossed her mind during the conversation above:

> **Tina:** When we were hiking in the Lake District, a tutor told us about a nice butcher's in the market. I went there but couldn't find it. I wanted to send her an email to ask about it, but I don't know if that's OK. Usually, we send emails to teachers only to ask academic questions.
>
> (Interview: November 2019)

Similar to the last case, Tina's concern was again related to sociopragmatic norms in the teacher-student relationship within the UK university setting, or to be more specific, topics considered appropriate for the email genre. Apart from the content, Tina also mentioned the difficulty in drafting emails with appropriate language (pragmalinguistic aspect), sharing with me several emails she sent to the tutors and her concerns while writing them.

For instance, Tina started an email with '*Dear Professor + Tutor's Surname*':

> **Tina:** First, I wasn't sure how I should address him. Actually, I call him Gavin face to face, but it's the first time I had written him an email. I was worried 'Gavin' would be too casual and not respectful enough. I didn't want to risk it; so, I picked 'Professor + Surname' to start with. At least he wouldn't find it offensive. I mean, it was a safer choice.
>
> (Original Text from Tina's Email/Learning Journal: November 2019)

She then wrote down '*I am Tina from TESOL*' as the first sentence:

> **Tina:** I introduced myself at the very beginning. I thought about starting with 'I hope you are doing well', but I feel it's too casual for lecturers, so I decided not to use this sentence and go to my point directly. There was some hesitation here.
>
> (Original Text from Tina's Email/ Learning Journal: November 2019)

When proposing requests, she put some of her words in brackets:

> *I hope sincerely to learn your advice concerning my ideas about the essay, thus I could structure the essay as soon as I can. (If it wouldn't disturb you, I would book an appointment with you at your available time to further specify my ideas about the essay).*
>
> (Original Text from Tina's Email: November 2019)

> **Tina:** I made two requests in the email: I sought advice about my essay structure and I hoped to book a meeting. I think the first one was not a big ask; so, I expressed it directly. As for the meeting, I think that was also a reasonable requirement, but I don't know how I could have expressed it more gently. I wanted to say I wanted to meet with the lecturer, but I didn't want to disturb him.
>
> (Learning Journal: November 2019)

While writing emails, Tina was evaluating the social distance, power gap and degree of imposition involved in her requests. From her retrospective journals, it seems she made fair estimations about these factors and the general situation but struggled to find appropriate expressions to fulfil her communicative intention. Although being very cautious to be polite, Tina made wrong assumptions about the functions of some expressions, including the examples above and some other uses in emails not shown here. Some of her judgements seem to be intuitive, with no clear reasons apparent from our conversations. Her assessment of the formality of 'I hope you are doing well' and indirectness shown in the use

of brackets, for example, appear to be influenced by neither the L1 nor L2 knowledge she acquired from natural input.

While frequently experiencing ambiguities and confusion, Tina rarely received feedback on her email-writing from lecturers. In the interview, she mentioned she would sometimes ask her native-speaker classmates to read her drafts before sending them out. She also proactively sought advice from me, a more experienced sojourning student, about the appropriateness of language used in her emails.

### 5.1.3 Struggles in English Pragmatics within Non-Academic Contexts

During the Christmas holiday, Tina shared her pragmatic encounters with me more frequently than before. She travelled to France and Poland with a close Chinese friend who had been living in Europe for years with her Polish husband. This journey provided Tina with rich opportunities to use English with people from different backgrounds. Her friend, a more proficient English speaker as well as a local citizen, offered Tina advice on her language choices. Two examples below feature explicit corrective feedback Tina received from her friend:

> **Tina:** I want to tell you a little story about a restaurant in France… I said to the waitress, 'Excuse me, lady. I want to have…' My friend told me it's wrong to order food in this way. First, people don't use 'I want'; instead, I should use 'May I have', which is more polite according to their language habits. She also told me it is not appropriate to call that waitress 'lady'. It's better just to use 'hi'. 'Lady' is too formal in this situation. It was the first time I went to a restaurant with a person familiar with the culture, and I learned about politeness and some rules.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

Although ‘I want’ is used frequently by Chinese speakers to order food or request services (Wang 2011), neither ‘excuse me’ nor ‘lady’ represent conventional lexical choices for customers in Mandarin. Therefore, Tina’s inappropriate language choice is not entirely a result of L1 transfer. It seems that Tina was aware in this restaurant scenario of the differences in sociopragmatic conventions between Chinese and Western cultures/languages. She did try to show politeness to the waitress with her language choices (‘excuse me’ and ‘lady’); however, her attempt failed to conform to the pragmalinguistic conventions in this context. Indeed, ‘excuse me, lady’ might even be considered rude if said with a certain intonation and might deliver a completely different attitude and emotional content. Tina’s conversations with her friend’s Polish mother-in-law provided another very similar example:

> **Tina:** I didn’t know how to address her when I first arrived. I asked my friend, and she told me I could call her ‘Helen’. However, I felt Polish people are relatively conservative, and it would be too blunt if I just called her Helen. My friend calls her ‘Mom’. So, I also called her ‘Mom’. I didn’t mean that she was actually my mom. For me, it’s like we in China call older people ‘Aunt’ to show politeness and respect, but my friend told me I couldn’t call Helen ‘Mom’; so, I started to use her name again. I felt more comfortable and not that embarrassed after two days calling her ‘Helen’.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

Tina elucidated her meta-pragmatic analysis process more clearly in this case. Her initial assumption of modes of address, which later proved to be inappropriate, was based on the fusion of her knowledge about different languages and cultures. The use of ‘mom’ illustrates her attempt to show respect to the senior in this context, which she believed is appropriate

within East European society, and she borrowed and adapted expressions used in similar situations in her L1 to achieve her communicative purpose. In other words, her language choice was influenced by both pragmalinguistic conventions from her L1 culture and her general impression (or perhaps stereotypes) about the sociocultural background of Eastern Europeans.

### 5.1.4 L2 Pragmatics and National Identities: Being a 'Chinese Representative' and 'Foreigner'

In our interviews, Tina has mentioned several times that when living abroad she considered herself a representative of China. When expressing herself in English, she would take into consideration not only how to present herself but how people in the L2 community would view the Chinese as a group from her behaviour and language use. This topic was brought up more frequently during the first few months of the COVID-19 outbreak, seemingly triggered by frequent news reports about Chinese students being treated unfairly and even attacked abroad over that period of time and about the different voices about the Chinese and Chinese government in and outside China.

Before the pandemic reached the UK, Tina shared with me an email that she sent to a host family she was planning to visit, which illustrates how Tina's Chinese identity underpinned her use of L2 pragmatics. In the first paragraph of the email, Tina gave her name, the details of her university and the course she was doing but intentionally avoided her nationality:

> **Tina:** I didn't include my nationality in the first paragraph, although they should have known it from my profile. COVID is very serious now in China, and people might not find the idea of a guest from China very pleasant… but I mentioned the situation later in the

> email after all the arrangement details. Although I haven't been back to China recently, I think they deserve a reminder at such a sensitive time.
>
> (Learning Journal: February 2020)

Possibly influenced by the critical voices against China at the start of the pandemic, Tina was concerned about the possible adverse effect of her Chinese identity on the interpersonal relationship with the host she had met. Avoiding mentioning nationality at the beginning of the email was a conscious strategy she employed, with the hope to build up a rapport and avoid casting a negative first impression.

Around the same period, Tina shared with me a story of a lecturer from Africa about how he was discriminated against for his skin colour while travelling, and she extended the topic to the prejudice that Chinese people face in international society:

> **Tina:** There are people holding prejudices against us [Chinese], and these bad impressions take effort from us to turn around. We need to show people how we really are not simply by saying things but by doing things. During COVID-19, China assisted other countries in the crisis by sending protective equipment as well as medical teams. It has established a responsible image as a big country, and we, as individuals, should know how to defend our country in the international society.
>
> (Learning Journal: March 2020)

Tina then provided an example, an experience relayed by a classmate about two female Chinese students sharing a table with two strangers (white/male) in a cafe. According to the friend's description, the two girls were acting over-enthusiastically, complimenting the two men on their physical appearance. Tina disapproved of such behaviour because of its possible negative effect on the reputation of Chinese females as a whole:

> **Tina:** I feel uncomfortable about the encounter. As a bystander, I feel the two Chinese girls are rather naive. I don't think they realised that they were probably enhancing the 'easy girl' stereotype some Western guys hold about Chinese girls. These guys think we flock to any white guy we meet. The two girls in this story probably didn't realise that every action and sentence of theirs would influence how the world sees our country.
>
> (Learning Journal: March 2020)

Meanwhile, Tina was also negotiating her identity as an international student studying, living and travelling within a multicultural environment. To some extent, the sense of being a foreigner/L2 speaker allowed her to relax during English-mediated interactions and eased her concerns about speaking inappropriately and unintentionally offending others. For example, she found email-writing more manageable at the end of the first semester, which contrasted with the earlier section's description of how she struggled:

> **Tina:** In the very beginning, I really didn't know how to write a polite email. It took me a very long time to draft one. Now I feel it's easier… I think teachers are very tolerant of international students about email writing. There was also no breakdown in previous email communications. If it worked before, then it'll work in the future.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

She showed similar attitudes while talking about the experience being corrected on her L2 pragmatics choices by her friend in France and Poland:

> **Tina:** Sometimes I feel I don't have to follow her advice. There are a lot of travellers today everywhere around the world, and locals understand that you have different language habits; so, normally they won't interpret your different use of language as a lack of respect,

> or judge you in a negative way. They would think that you are a foreigner and you don't know the conventional way to express what you mean in that country. However, if someone tells me how locals say something, I would like to follow that way within that specific culture.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

It seems Tina gradually reached a comfortable balance in the four months of her SA life. She was still willing to learn about the cultural and linguistic norms followed by locals or native speakers, while at the same time positioning herself a foreigner/L2 speaker outside the L1/local community who is not usually expected to follow the group's pre-structured patterns.

### 5.1.5 Exploration of Sociocultural Meanings behind Pragmatics Norms

In terms of pragmatic encounters that captured her attention, Tina tended to go beyond superficial comparisons between languages or behavioural norms to explore deeper sociocultural meanings. This could be observed in the length of her learning journals, most of which were five-to-ten-minute voice messages, and sometimes even longer, which focused on one specific experience related to L2 pragmatics. A case in point is her analysis of the frequent use of the apologetic language of people around her, triggered by a small accident when Tina unintentionally jumped the queue for the water machine and bumped into a stranger:

> **Tina:** He said 'sorry' to me. I feel he was actually more surprised than sorry. He probably wondered why someone would go before him when he was obviously going to use that machine in the next moment. I also said 'sorry'. I should have used it after him, but I was thinking about my essay and wasn't paying attention. My 'sorry' was sincere. Then, I

> realised people here, no matter where they are from, say 'sorry' a lot. It's a habit. For example, if you walk into someone, even if it's your fault, they'll still say 'sorry'. I feel it's a kind of politeness, and it also shows people's respect for space between each other. In China, if two people walk into each other, and if you are the one to blame, the other person most likely won't say 'sorry'. They might even ask you, 'Why don't you pay attention when you walk?', angrily and aggressively. But here, when this kind of small conflict happens, the first thing to consider is not who should take responsibility. They apologise first, and this will usually resolve the conflict immediately. I'm impressed.
>
> (Learning Journal: December 2019)

Tina linked the man's apology with her past experience and concluded that the habitual use of 'sorry' in the British context does not necessarily mean a sincere apology. Instead of attributing her new discovery to general cultural difference, she went into greater depth about the impact of language on interpersonal relationships. Tina interpreted the use of apologetic language not merely as a sign of an admission of guilt or regret but respect for personal space as well as an efficient strategy to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

The Christmas Eve that she spent with her Chinese friend and the friend's Polish family provided another example. Observing the Christmas routine, Tina noticed the Polish family expressed affection to their loved ones very explicitly, while such behaviour is displayed less commonly by the Chinese around her:

> **Tina:** They are more direct when they express their feelings. Before dinner, each of us had a pancake on the table, and we walked around, took pieces from each other's'pancakes, kissed and hugged each other and said Christmas blessings. I feel this is impossible in a traditional Chinese family. We tend to express ourselves more implicitly. I think it has something to do with our traditional arts. We [Chinese] like the beauty of being implicit

> and hazy. In garden design, for example, we like those kinds of designs where people are surprised by nice views when looking through a door, rather than letting everything be exposed explicitly. For them [Polish], it seems more important to be direct about expressing their feelings.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

Similar to the last case, Tina's meta-pragmatic analysis was first triggered by the noticeable sociopragmatic difference between her home and SA cultures. She then tried to rationalise this difference creatively by explaining the consistency between pragmatics conventions and aesthetic preference. This encounter also nudged Tina to reflect on family relationships, and how she would like to present herself in such relationships:

> **Tina:** I prefer their way to express love. The Chinese family doesn't always express love explicitly, but it does not mean we don't love each other. I believe the caring and goodwill people have for their families are the same in both countries. If we have these feelings, why don't we simply tell our loved ones? I feel sometimes we are too implicit, and it causes unnecessary misunderstandings between families and partners. It's like: I love you, but I fail to let you feel it.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

Apart from reflections on personal experience, a session on 'pragmatics' in Tina's compulsory module also raised her consciousness on pragmatic use in daily life and provided her new perspectives in her meta-pragmatic analysis. Following is an example of a clip from a long voice message she shared about an unpleasant conversation with a friend, who found Tina's request ('Is it convenient for you to send me the photos before shower?') too polite:

> **Tina:** This reminds me of a class on 'pragmatics' we had last semester… We do 'risk assessments' before we choose our language, which means we assess how likely it is we might offend others. If two people are close, and your request is about a little thing, you don't have to worry too much about the risk when you speak… However, I still feel I am generally that kind of person who prefers to be indirect and protect others' face, even if I know we are close, and sending photos was just a little thing to ask. Probably my politeness made her feel there was a distance between us, or feel that I wasn't sincere enough. Several friends [Chinese] told me l'm too polite sometimes when I speak, and they feel we are not close enough. However, I noticed the British prefer to speak in an indirect way [e.g. proposing requests in the form of questions]; so, my style is actually more acceptable here.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

In her reflection, Tina referred to terms in pragmatics like 'negative face' and 'risk assessment' to analyse how language use and interpersonal distance are mutually impacted, including assessment of the relationship (close friends), impositions involved (a small request), the intention behind her language use (to provide a buffer) and the reason for her friend's reaction (positive face threatened). However, even if Tina had realised her indirect way of speaking projected a less approachable image of herself to her Chinese friends, she showed no intention to change as she identified herself as 'that kind of polite person'.

### 5.1.6 Learning of L2 Pragmatics and Development of Identity and Intercultural Awareness

At the end of the year, Tina was invited to review the SA experience of learning L2 pragmatics as well as her personal development in general. In this section, I will present the three most noticeable changes Tina experienced that emerged from our conversation:

**(1) Becoming a 'Braver and More Resolute Person' than Expected**

When asked about changes as a person during the sojourning year, Tina revisited an experience shared earlier in her learning journals about developing trusts and opening up in interpersonal relationships:

> **Tina:** I feel the distance between me and others is narrower. Or, putting it another way, it's much easier for me to trust others after spending one year in the UK. I think it's because my classmates here are more open in their communication. One example is my experience talking about dating apps in the common room with a British guy. He shared his views about relationships and sex. I wouldn't normally be open to these sensitive topics in China. Our culture is more conservative, and I would be worried that others would judge me. However, now I feel my concerns were not necessary after a few conversations like this with my friends here. I trust others more and find establishing an intimate relationship easier.
>
> (Learning Journals: April 2020)

Moreover, Tina brought up in the last interview her goals to become a braver and more resolute person, which she believed she had achieved during her year studying abroad. Another example follows of her sharing about how she was inspired in her English-mediated interactions with her classmates:

> **Tina:** They would sometimes say and do things that I was not brave enough to do, and it seems nobody feels it's inappropriate. Later, I feel I can also say and do these things… For example, a British classmate likes to propose gatherings in our WhatsApp group. In the past, I would feel embarrassed about doing that. I would think, 'I'm not a representative or something elected by other members'. However, I noticed everyone in that group is fine

> with that. Now, I also frequently initiate things in that group, like sharing learning materials that I find useful with others... It is just a sincere gesture; so, why not?
>
> (Interview: September 2020)

In both cases, it seems Tina's change as a person had been fostered (at least partly) through reflections on the new sociopragmatic practices in the L2 community. It is possible that her readiness to challenge her past self, which was mentioned in the background section, had prepared her for noticing and accepting new practices consistent with her desired qualities. The experiences enabled Tina to see alternatives in ways to act and present herself to others, as well as to reflect on her recognised identity — how she is likely to be perceived by others. Tina's different perception of her identity, therefore, contributed to her change of pragmatic strategies in L2, which, as she commented later, transferred back to her L1 usage as well.

Her change could be observed in the email she sent to a host family. The landlady had turned down her application earlier, but Tina decided to make another attempt by expressing her strong interest. She believed such courage was partly a result of inspiration she had gained while interacting with new friends in the L2 community:

> **Tina:** Before, I rarely made a second attempt after failing, as I thought it'd be embarrassing and I'd lose face. However, I've changed quite a bit during my year in the UK. Now I feel it is nothing to worry about, really, in that striving for a thing you really want and achieving the goal is much more important than so-called 'saving face'.
>
> (Learning Journal: September 2020)

**(2) Repositioning Self in Senior-Junior Relationships and 'New Versions' of Pragmatic Strategies**

At the end of the year, Tina told me she had developed different versions of the pragmatics strategies. This could be seen in Tina's meta-pragmatic analysis of modes of address in English and Chinese, which was a topic she frequently brought up throughout the year. It seems her understanding of this topic was gradually developing with emerging new experiences, as demonstrated in Tina's reflection on the online conversation with her language exchange partner, a British woman in the same MA programme who wanted to improve her Chinese:

> **Tina:** My language partner is in her 50s. I was supposed to address her as '您' [the polite form of 'you'] in Chinese, but I just naturally transferred the 'you' from English into Chinese and used '你' [informal 'you'], because we were communicating a lot in English beforehand. I feel the age gap was greatly eliminated through the use of '你'. In Chinese, I usually feel I'm obliged to show respect to the elder in my language. However, as I viewed her as a peer, I could just communicate freely, openly and more comfortably with fewer concerns.
>
> (Learning Journal: April 2020)

Tina has also reported similar experiences in her conversations with her host family and a doctor (Interactive Log: August/September 2020), which are not covered in this thesis to avoid content repetition. Typically, Tina attempted to explore the meaning behind pragmalinguistic forms of address through analysing the impact of pragmatic choices on interpersonal relationships:

> **Tina:** I prefer the way that they don't differentiate between informal and polite forms of 'you' in English, through which I feel mutual respect in the conversation. I now think showing respect to someone's age is unnecessary. When I use the polite form, I feel the interpersonal distance is suddenly lengthened, and I feel we can never become friends. It's a pity that we [Chinese] push others away without even knowing them first through the way we address people.
>
> (Learning Journal: April 2020)

Through meta-pragmatic analysis, Tina saw new possibilities in negotiating senior-junior relationships, a genre she had been familiar with but negotiated differently in her L1 community before studying abroad. Tina also developed a new ideal position in such relationships; as the junior, she hoped to present herself and be identified by the interlocutor as an individual with an equal voice and social status without being constrained or distanced by a socially defined, age-related hierarchical social structure. Tina also applied her new understanding of forms of address in her reflection on her relationship with one of her best friends, who is three years older than her:

> **Tina:** I call her 'elder sister', and many kids that we grew up with address her as 'elder sister'. Although we see each other as very close friends, I still sense some distance between us. Because I call her 'elder sister', she probably feels she should act as a role model and cannot expose her bad sides. She is always scrupulous and sometimes feels depressed. I think being called 'elder sister' is part of the reason. She was 'elder-sistered'; so, she cannot fully be herself or do crazy things… I don't think this sort of 'respect' necessarily leads to happiness to the one who receives it.
>
> (Learning Journal: September 2020)

Tina's encounters with L2 forms of address provided her with a new dimension when reviewing her previous experience. In the conversation with the language partner, Tina observed the conversation as the younger speaker, but in this case she approached the same topic from the senior's perspective. Realising how the senior could also be restricted and positioned uncomfortably by the use of honorifics, she gained a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of different address terms on interpersonal relationships, fuelling her preference for more egalitarian modes of communication.

Experiences and reflections included in this section are collected from Tina's learning journals over different months and presented chronologically, which shows how she gradually developed new and more comprehensive understandings of L2 pragmatics in emerging encounters. The process of metapragmatic analysis also appears to foster Tina's intercultural awareness and competence, which could be seen from her developing flexibility when applying linguacultural resources in identity negotiation in different contexts. Although Tina expressed new pragmatic preferences, she regarded the new forms as 'a new version of communication' that added to her cultural and language repertoire rather than a replacement of her previous choices: 'If you also like it, I'll use it with you, or I can still switch back to my old way' (Interview: September 2020).

**(3) Developing Cultural Inclusiveness**

Tina also shared with me her shifting perceptions on culture and her cultural identity. The following are excerpts from a long reflection Tina shared about different counter-COVID measures taken between China and the UK:

> **Tina:** I think my identity, I mean from the cultural perspective, has changed a bit. First, I'm not viewing cultures as binary oppositions. I used to make general comparisons and reach

> conclusions like ‘Culture A is better than culture B on a certain aspect’, but I’ve realised there are deeper things under the surface, under our intuitive good/bad evaluation.
>
> (Learning Journal: September 2020)

Tina was not referring to a specific pragmatic-related encounter when making this comment, but her words remind me of her analysis of L1/L2 pragmatics mentioned earlier. One example is Tina's understanding of diverse styles of expressing love to family; she personally hoped to express affection explicitly as her Polish friends do, while rationalising the implicit expression of affection from her Chinese family members by linking their pragmatic strategies with traditional aesthetics. Another case is her reflection on a conflict with her close friend. Tina preferred to propose requests in the form of questions to avoid imposition; at the same time, she showed understanding of her friend’s expectations that she be more direct, as directness suggests intimacy and trust in a friendship. Examples like these have shown Tina's capability to go beyond the surface of linguistic/behavioural differences to investigate more in-depth contextual reasons and cultural values behind both. Therefore, it seems the development of Tina's cultural awareness and inclusiveness is to some extent mediated by learning L2 pragmatics, although the link was not mentioned explicitly by Tina.

> **Tina:** [following the last citation] My attitude to UK/Western culture has also changed. When I first came here, I used to look up to them and feel ashamed about Chinese culture. We are a developing country; so, I just assumed the developed country would surpass us in all aspects. Now I realise we are actually doing quite well with many things. I’m more objective about our position and our advantages and disadvantages.
>
> (Learning Journal: September 2020)

Tina made a similar comment about her shifted attitude to ‘the purest English in the UK’, which she mentioned in her first interview:

> **Tina:** I had this misunderstanding. Only native speakers’ English is authentic. Now I feel English does not belong to native speakers. This idea was also mentioned in our classes. Non-native speakers also use this language to communicate, and we use the language in our way. We [non-native speakers] might speak differently, but it does not mean our English is not authentic. Our languages are just different… I still think I can learn a lot from native speakers, not because I think British English is the purest, but because they have been speaking this language since they were very young, and thus they are more proficient and experienced speakers.
>
> (Interview: September 2020)

Having been sojourning in the UK for four years myself, I find Tina's lack of confidence at the very beginning quite understandable. Entering a new environment as a 'student' and a 'foreigner', it seems quite natural to feel obliged to learn, accept, and make efforts to integrate into the local communities. However, Tina's identity shifts could be observed quite clearly from the two excerpts above. In terms of language, Tina's perception of herself has changed from a 'borrower' to an 'owner' of the English language, and her ELF speaker identity seems to be enhanced. This echoes the last section, in which Tina viewed ways of communication learned in the UK as a 'different version' rather than 'the correct version' of communication. In terms of culture, a broader concept, it seems Tina had also re-negotiated her position within the SA context, from being a passive learner to a transcultural individual who views cultures more critically and interacts with cultures more flexibly.

Tina’s narrative has presented how perceptions of identity and culture can be mediated through reflections on L2 pragmatics. Such a connection was further confirmed in Tina's

answer to my last question in her last interview about whether she felt participating in this study made any difference to her year abroad:

> **Tina:** I feel the world is like a big picture. The parts you've thought through are just clear, but those you haven't thought about are blurry, like covered by mosaic. Through talking with you, the clear area is expanding. To some extent, I feel I'm thinking more wisely, knowing better about both myself and others.
>
> (Interview: September 2020)

## 5.2 Hanguang (含光)

### 5.2.1. Background Information

Before studying abroad, Hanguang majored in English language education in his undergraduate studies, during which he also worked as a part-time EFL tutor, teaching English to Chinese students from different age groups. He worked particularly hard on reading English and used to spend one to two hours every day browsing English news and simplified English novels. His reading skills, therefore, were well developed, and he achieved full marks (9) in IELTS reading before sojourning abroad. However, with minimal opportunities to converse with other English speakers, Hanguang considered his listening and speaking skills relatively weak.

Hanguang was passionate about both Western and Chinese classical literature and frequently initiated related topics in our interviews. He told me that 'Hanguang (含光)', the pseudonym he picked for himself, derives from the ancient Chinese philosophy of 'Han Guang Wu Xing (含光无形)', which means 'to soften the glare and unify with the mundane' and encourages humility. In the first interview, Hanguang left me with an impression of being very polite, perhaps even slightly over-polite, in his way of speaking. He used hedging language frequently and insisted on using '您' ('you' in the polite form) instead of '你' (informal 'you') to address me, even though I had suggested that we both use the latter.

Hanguang saw British English as the most 'authentic' English globally, and before study abroad, his understanding of British English was 'a language whose speakers are always elegant, formal and polite' (Interview: September 2019). This motivated him to come to the UK to study: 'English originated from the UK, and I feel this country has a rich cultural and

historical foundation' (Interview: September 2019). He believed that 'the beauty of a language lies in its most original and classical form' (Interview: September 2019). Such language ideology had noticeably influenced Hanguang's pragmatic choices and preferences, which will be elaborated in later sections.

At the beginning of the year, Hanguang told me he hoped to improve listening and speaking skills specifically and acquire a British-like accent, and he wanted to know about local culture so that he could share his stories with his future students. Despite demonstrating strong motivation to improve his English communicative skills and cultural knowledge at the beginning, he did not actively seek out opportunities to do so. As Hanguang reported, he spoke English mostly in academic settings and in necessary daily interactions (e.g. to order food or check out) and spent social time mainly with his Chinese classmates. English was used even less after the outbreak of COVID-19 in February 2020.

> **Hanguang:** I expected that I would be able to talk like a native speaker after SA, but I didn't improve much… There are only one or two non-Chinese students in each class, so I don't have many chances to speak. I talk with Chinese students more. It's more convenient. It's also about my personality, and COVID; so, I don't speak with foreigners much.
> **R:** You are not into things like societies or other social activities, right?
> **Hanguang:** No, I feel uncomfortable when there are a lot of people.
>
> (Interview: December 2020)

Through our daily conversation and his social media, I learned that Hanguang spent a great amount of leisure time reading literature, both in and out of his academic subject. Out of his interest in the Bible and British culture, he joined a Christian group, which was one of the few English-mediated social activities Hanguang participated in during the year. Before the

outbreak of COVID-19, he went to church regularly, although he was not a Christian and was not planning to become one:

> **Hanguang:** I read that Classical Mythology, Shakespeare and the Bible are the three pillars of Western literature, of which the Bible is the most accessible one for me as an English learner. Almost every family has a Bible, and I'm curious about this wide-spread culture full of love.
>
> (Interview: December 2020)

### 5.2.2. Deliberate Awareness of L2 Pragmatics

Hanguang was very self-aware when speaking English and paid deliberate attention to language use of other speakers and implicit feedback received in conversations. This could be illustrated by his experience in the Bible group:

> **Hanguang:** Once I asked a man 'How should I address you?'. That man was surprised, and other people around were also very surprised. A person next to him said, 'Look, he thought you are a king!'.
>
> **R:** How did you react?
>
> **Hanguang:** I was thinking, 'Am I wrong?'
>
> **R:** Did you ask them about it?
>
> **Hanguang:** No, I didn't. I got it from their reaction. I realised the sentence should be used with people with in a higher [social] position, like some kind of political position. It's better not to use this [question] with a friend, but I still don't know how I should say it.
>
> (Interview: October 2019)

In the conversation above, Hanguang picked up the implicit negative feedback from the interlocutor's response, through which he realised his pragmalinguistic choice could be

considered too formal in casual conversation. Six weeks later, I brought up this topic again in our interview:

> **R:** Do you remember the story you shared about you asking 'How should I address you?' How do you ask people about their names now?
>
> **Hanguang:** 'What's your name?' Actually, usually, others ask me first, and I'll ask back: 'What's yours?'
>
> **R:** I see… Did you pay more attention to how people ask for names after that situation?
>
> **Hanguang:** Yes, I did.
>
> **R:** Was that because of the last time…?
>
> **Hanguang:** Yes. I noticed other people simply use 'What's your name?'
>
> (Interview: November 2019)

The two interview clips illustrate Hanguang's conscious effort to learn L2 pragmatics during study abroad. The first scenario, considered a little bit awkward by Hanguang, stimulated reflection on his pragmalinguistic choice and noticing of language use in similar contexts. Later, Hanguang adapted his language by observing and imitating other speakers in the Christian community, most of whom are British native speakers of English.

Another example of Hanguang's high awareness of L2 pragmatics is his attempt to predict and avoid potential offence and misunderstandings:

> **Hanguang:** If I'm not sure about the appropriateness of what I'm going to say, I would first say 'I'm not trying to offend you, but…'. This is my strategy to avoid being recognised as offensive.
>
> **R:** Could you give me an example?

> **Hanguang:** I say this in two situations. When I have questions about the Bible, I would say it. I feel that challenging people about the content in the Bible could be offensive to those who believe in it. I would say, 'I don't mean to offend you or anything, but could you explain to me why Jesus would do this?' The other one is probably influenced by the Chinese ideology that the young should respect the experienced and old. For example, sometimes when I stayed after the class to clarify unclear points in my draft comments, I would use this sentence to my tutor, especially when I did not agree with them.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

In the two situations, 'I don't mean to offend you' was employed as a linguistic buffer to avoid potential offence. It could be interpreted as a 'safe card' played by Hanguang; although such expression might be considered as unnecessary or over-polite, he could at least avoid projecting a negative self-image (e.g. rude, blunt, arrogant) in an unfamiliar sociocultural context.

However, his sensitivity to the English language sometimes leads to wrong assumptions and overgeneralisations, as exemplified below:

> **Hanguang:** I learned from the textbook that British people like to talk about the weather, but after I came here, no one has ever talked about the weather with me! … The custom is changing, and I'll keep it in mind. I may talk about this with my students in the future.
>
> (Learning Journal: November 2019)

To explain the gap between his previous knowledge and hands-on SA experience, Hanguang jumped to a not-exactly-accurate conclusion about weather-related topics within the British context. Such overgeneralisation is likely to be a result of his limited contact with British people or other English speakers.

> **Hanguang:** I learned in the textbook greetings 'Good morning' and 'Good afternoon', or we say 'Morning' or 'Afternoon' to simplify it, but I've never heard 'good morning' here. People simply say: 'How are you?'. I asked my friend [British from the Bible group] about this. They told me 'Good morning' is very old-fashioned.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

From the explanation of native-speaker friends, Hanguang concluded that 'good morning/afternoon' is an old-fashioned phrase that has been mostly replaced by 'How are you?', which does not appear to be very accurate in current UK society, especially not in formal situations. He did not seem to realise this could be the language preference of that specific individual rather than a linguistic norm widely accepted in the British social context.

## 5.2.3. Identity-Related Considerations and L2 Pragmatic Choices

When going through Hanguang's learning journals and interviews, it is not hard to notice that Hanguang's choices and preferences in L2 pragmatics were largely influenced by identity-related concerns. Despite his desire to learn 'pure' British English and culture, he would sometimes reject L2 pragmalinguistic expressions when he found they clashed with his subjectivity. These connections are categorised into three different aspects: influence of L1 language and culture, Chinese traditional literature, and family education.

### 5.2.3.1 Influence of L1 Language and Culture on L2 Pragmatic Choices

Hanguang's evaluation of interpersonal relationships and language appropriateness is largely influenced by values and conventions acquired in his L1 language and society, as exemplified below:

> **Hanguang:** I feel I can talk with peers in an 'English way' [being more relaxed and casual], but not to teachers; I still feel we are not equal in terms of age and social status, and when I talk, I jump back to my 'Chinese way of thinking'; it's important for the young to show respect to the old, and for [social] inferiors to respect their superiors. For example, when I write emails, I constantly worry about my phrasing: 'Can I use this word?'; 'Can I address them in this way?'
>
> **R:** How did you cope with your concerns then?
>
> **Hanguang:** I'm still not used to calling teachers by their first names. I would put 'dear and distinguished professor + their full name' in my email. I would also take different teachers' personalities into consideration. I would ask teachers who are more friendly 'Is it OK if I call you Gavin in an email?'. If the teacher looks serious and strict, I wouldn't even ask.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

From his expression 'I'm still not used to', it could be seen that Hanguang had realised addressing lecturers by their first names is considered normal within his academic context. The same practice, however, is usually considered extremely rude in Chinese teacher-student relationships within the higher education context. This explains why Hanguang felt uncomfortable adopting the new pragmalinguistic form:

> **Hanguang:** I don't know how to balance this … I feel I am here; so, I should follow their rules [to address lecturers by their first names], and I do like an equal relationship between students and teachers, but my Chinese mind tells me this does not feel right.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

Behind Hanguang's struggle on pragmalinguistic choice seems to be a conflict between his ideal and projected self. To be more specific, this presents a dilemma between his willingness to establish and maintain an equal relationship with his lecturers and his concern

about delivering a rude self-image to them. Such concerns were largely related to the cultural values shaped in his L1 society.

#### 5.2.3.2 Influence of Chinese Traditional Literature

Hanguang's struggle in the case above also appears to be consistent with the very polite and humble impression he left with me during our conversations. He believed his behaviours and values were also largely affected by his passion for traditional literature:

> **Hanguang:** I enjoy reading literature from Pre-Qin and Han Dynasties [221 BC - 220 AD], from which I've learned ancient philosophy, life principles, and governing strategies. These books do not explicitly teach you how to speak but implicitly emphasise 'morality', 'courtesy', 'elegance' and 'harmony'… I was attracted by the profound wisdom and treated it as guidance for my behaviour and language use.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

The guidelines from ancient literature impact both his L1 and L2 linguistic preferences. For instance, Hanguang reported noticing a person in the Bible group asking his friend: 'Where is your lady?':

> **Hanguang:** I like this expression more compared with 'Where is your wife?'. 'Lady' sounds like '尊夫人' (honorific of 'your wife' used mostly in ancient Chinese). I feel it suits my personality.
>
> (Learning Journal: November 2020)

As my understanding of this encounter is purely based on Hanguang's report instead of direct observation or recording, it is not clear whether 'Where's your lady?' was used as a

joke and how this sentence was delivered in context (e.g. the speaker's intention, intonation, attitude). What could be inferred from this clip is that Hanguang interpreted the use of 'your lady' as a polite, formal and elegant way to speak, found it authentic-to-self and was willing to adopt this expression in future conversations. Another example was a more general comment on contemporary British English triggered by his noticing of the use of 'cheers' as a synonym for 'thank you':

> **Hanguang:** British say 'cheers' a lot rather than 'thank you'. I feel I'm not used to it… It's too casual and informal… As I read in an article, Britons are losing their identity, and English is becoming degraded.
>
> (Interview: September 2019)

In this case, Hanguang considered 'cheers' an inferior linguistic choice compared with 'Thank you' to express gratitude, and it did not seem that he was planning to use the form in his L2, although he was aware that it is widely used among the British. Hanguang's comment here echoes his belief mentioned earlier in this chapter: 'the beauty of a language lies in its most original and classical form' (Interview: September 2020), and Hanguang considers 'cheers', as an informal replacement for 'thank you', an inferior linguistic choice, although it is widely used by British native speakers of English. Hanguang's negative comments on the language and identity of the British might suggest his disappointment at a mismatch between what he observed during SA and the 'ideal British community' of his pre-SA imagination, as a group of people who were 'always being elegant, formal and polite' (Interview: September 2019).

Apart from this aesthetic perspective, the use of 'cheers' did not seem to suit Hanguang's communicative style, which could also explain his rejection of the form. 'Cheers' is

employed as a causal form of ‘thank you’ among friends, acquaintances and strangers in informal situations. However, from the existing understanding of Hanguang, it is not hard to see that he values interpersonal distance and prefers to talk in a rather formal way, especially during first meetings with strangers. Therefore, for him, the use of ‘cheers’, under some circumstances, might suggest an uncomfortably close interpersonal relationship and thereby place him in an awkward position in the conversation.

However, another encounter reported by Hanguang about his adoption of 'Ey up' as a greeting seems to break the consistency of his language preference.

> **Hanguang:** … Like people who speak in Yorkshire accent, they don’t say ‘how are you?’; they say ‘ey up?’
> **R:** This phrase is a new to me!
> **Hanguang:** Yeah, they say it a lot. It is ‘E-Y-U-P’: ‘Ey up?’ I asked the guy working in the bookstore what it is. He told me it is like ‘Hi’.
> **R:** How do you usually respond to this?
> **Hanguang:** ‘Hi’ is good.
> **R:** So, you just say ‘Hi’?
> **Hanguang:** Or I say ‘Ey up’, too.
>
> (Interview: September 2019)

His behaviours appear to be contradictory, especially as he shared his negative attitude towards the use of ‘cheers’ and positive feelings towards learning Yorkshire dialects in the same interview. Nevertheless, such a contradiction seems reasonable when the complexity of and interactions between identities are taken into consideration. While being passionate about traditional literature, he was also an English teacher who hoped to share his SA stories and anecdotes with future students and a sojourner eager to know about local

language and culture and integrate into the host community. Both identities could contribute to his enthusiasm for learning casual local dialect.

Different viewpoints here should also be taken into consideration as influential factors in Hanguang's pragmatic choices and preferences. When discussing the use of 'cheers', Hanguang was more of a bystander commenting on a general trend of language use he observed from daily contact, viewing language use purely from an aesthetic perspective. However, in the case of 'Ey up', he was a participant in a conversation with a (probably) smiling, helpful and enthusiastic shop assistant. In this situation, the English language is not simply a neutral object but a communicative tool carrying emotions and reflecting interpersonal relationships. In other words, Hanguang's seemingly contradictory attitudes suggested a tension between language as an abstract, idealised and static aesthetic symbol – a language ideology acquired through his prior education – and his gradual engagement with language as social practice. Even though he still commented on the phenomena through the lens of his prior conceptions, his practice seemed to be sensitised into pragmatic competence as a situated action.

#### 5.2.3.3 Influence of Family Experience

In Hanguang's learning journals, he showed different attitudes to the terms shop assistants used to address him. However, Hanguang himself did not seem to notice the inconsistency, probably because of the long gaps in time between these scenarios:

> **Hanguang:** I just went to a burger bar, and the assistant called me 'honey'. I felt so weird. I didn't say anything to him, but I felt my brain was full of question marks.
>
> (Learning Journal: December 2019)

**Hanguang:** I had breakfast in Oxford today. The woman working there called me 'lovely' [likely to be 'love' and misheard]. I felt quite happy about how she addressed me.

(Learning Journal: February 2020)

It was not difficult for me to understand Hanguang's confusion when reading the first entry; addressing a stranger as 'honey' is not common in his L1 background nor does it seem a communicative style he would adopt, according to the polite image of Hanguang depicted earlier. I invited him to further explain his feelings in the second scenario:

**R:** Why would you feel being called 'lovely' is pleasant? Could you try to explain?

**Hanguang:** It's complicated. I feel I'm accepted by this culture, and I feel a shorter distance between me and the locals. I think it also has something to do with gender. My grandma raised me when I was young, and most close relatives I had in my family were female. I feel being called 'lovely' is like being treated as her younger brother or nephew. I don't think I'd have this positive feeling if it were a man.

(Learning Journal: February 2020)

Our conversation also reminded Hanguang of a similar situation he encountered, and he specifically emphasised the connection between his negative feelings and the gender of the speaker:

**Hanguang:** It was also in Oxford, a male waiter in a restaurant called me a 'good boy'. I didn't like it. I forgot to mention this one earlier.

**R:** Ha ha, why?

**Hanguang:** Feels he treated me like a kid.

(Learning Journal: February 2020)

It appears Hanguang's personal family experience played an essential role in his attitude to the modes of address. Facing similar situations, his reactions to similar pragmalinguistic units are varied influenced by his childhood experience and his affection for close female family members.

### 5.2.4. Reshaped Sense of Self through Learning L2 Pragmatics

Having discussed how identity factors influence Hanguang's pragmalinguistic preferences and choices, I will now move on to how L2 pragmatics learning during SA affected his sense of self. This could be illustrated by our conversations in the interview at the end of the first semester, the fifth month of his stay in the UK:

> **Hanguang:** I feel when I speak English, I can admit what I have and what I don't have. For example, when I receive compliments here in the UK, I would just say, 'Thank you'. However, when speaking Chinese, I used to say, 'No, no, it's not like that' to show modesty.
> **R:** Why? Do you behave differently in the two languages?
> **Hanguang:** Yes, or it's more accurate to say, I used to behave differently, but I feel they are mixing up. Now, if I think I am good at something, I will not try to hide it when others compliment me. I can't explain why. Maybe my mindset has changed somehow. I feel if it's true that I'm good at it, there is no reason why I can't admit it.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

It could be seen from the data clip above that Hanguang had been through different stages of the speech act of responding to compliments. Before studying abroad, he would use depreciatory expressions to deflect the praise and thereby show humility, as many people in his L1 community would do. Such behaviour is consistent with the meaning of Hanguang ('含光'), the Chinese pseudonym he picked for himself, which means to 'dim the glare and be

humble'. It could be assumed that responding to compliments with 'thank you' was merely an imitation of most NSs' linguistic choices, initially, probably with an intention to acculturate to the L2 community; however, it seems accumulated conversation experience in L2 regarding compliments encouraged Hanguang to analyse more in-depth values beyond pragmalinguistic forms. This process of analysis was not elaborated on systematically in the interview. Nonetheless, it seems that this reflection somehow reshaped Hanguang's sense of self and the identity he hoped to project to others in similar contexts — from being modest to being confident and frank. The new values and sense of identity, in turn, reflected not just on his L2 use but his changed pragmatic choices in L1. Hanguang continued the previous conversation with another example:

> **Hanguang:** And I feel I express myself more directly here [in the UK]. I want to share my opinions, and I don't think too much about whether it is right or whether it is appropriate in the situation.
>
> **R:** Could you explain why?
>
> **Hanguang:** I think it's about the atmosphere. Chinese people emphasise the hierarchy of age and social status. When there is a discussion, I would wait first to see if older people had something to say. After they had finished, or if they were not saying anything, it is then the young people's turn. I would then modestly raise my opinion like 'I'm thinking probably…' It's not the same here. And in China, teachers are authorities, and you have to respect them and protect their face [by not challenging them or doing it indirectly]. I don't think I need to do that here. I feel there is more freedom in Western countries. It is probably my stereotype though.
>
> **R:** Do you think this will also be transferred back to your first language?
>
> **Hanguang:** Yes, but it might not be as obvious, like how I accept compliments, because I won't offend others by responding to their compliments with 'thank you'. However, I might offend people if I challenge the age-related hierarchy in China. I think it also has something

> to do with the education I've received. My grandma's teacher [a Chinese] wrote a book [about Chinese politics] in the 1990s, and he was then banned from entering China again. My grandma constantly told me I have to be very careful with my speech. The consequences were bad because that teacher expressed things he was not supposed to say and because he did not express it mildly and indirectly. This is why I would like to be more careful in our culture.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

The change reported here seems to be very similar to the last example. Hanguang's reflection was not limited to behavioural or linguistic patterns but reached into social values and reflections on his ideal self in more depth. The new sociopragmatic practice in the L2 society enabled Hanguang to see a different way to present himself within a senior-junior interpersonal relationship, and to see how he could express himself more freely and make his voice better heard. However, Hanguang denied a back-transfer of such practices to his L1, as projecting himself to others in his preferred way could be offensive in the context of his home culture. The teacher's story and the education Hanguang had been receiving from his grandmother also affected his pragmatic choices, which again supports the point in an earlier section about how family education and experience can affect one's strategy with pragmatics.

### 5.2.5. Disruption of Essentialist Culture Interpretations

Hanguang's awareness of possible stereotypical conclusions in the conversation above also suggests a disruption of essentialist tendencies and a more sophisticated understanding of intercultural awareness, compared with his earlier overgeneralisations about weather-related topics and stereotypes about the British as 'always being elegant, formal and polite'. A similar tendency could also be seen in our conversations in the interview at the end of the

first semester, where Hanguang revisited his impression of the British before studying abroad:

> **Hanguang:** Since I came here, I have realised some parts of British culture and language are totally different from what we were taught in textbooks. Perhaps they have changed during time… The walls between cultures are not that thick, actually. People who spend three to five years [in the UK] don't appear that different to the British. They are assimilated by the British.
>
> **R:** You feel they are assimilated? What about the British?
>
> **Hanguang:** They are also assimilated, definitely. It is a mutual thing. People adapt to each other. British people have been assimilated by various races. Their behaviours and habits are going in a more multicultural direction.
>
> **R:** Could you give me an example?
>
> **Hanguang:** As I said before, British people use 'how are you?' instead of 'good morning' or 'good afternoon', nowadays. It is quite casual. I think they used to be less casual. They are also not as super-polite as I expected them to be.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

It could be observed from Hanguang's words that his attitude has shifted noticeably on changes in British English compared with his comments earlier, such as 'British are losing their identity' and 'English is being degradied' (see p.158). A rather positive attitude could be inferred from our conversation. Instead of regarding such changes as a contamination of the original and authentic forms, Hanguang seemed to interpret them more as a part of the natural development in the cosmopolitanising process. With a developed understanding of the fluid and mutually permeable nature of intercultural communication, he was also able to realise that his initial expectations of the British as 'always being elegant, formal and polite' could be stereotypical and problematic. However, the conversation above does not

provide evidence of Hanguang's awareness of subtle social distinctions in British society. His descriptions of British people, either those in the past who 'used to be less casual' or those in the present society who 'are casual and super polite', could hardly be validated as accurate generalisations of British individuals from various backgrounds in different contexts.

### 5.2.6. Influence of the Research

Before leaving the UK, Hanguang and I had our last interview to review his year of study abroad. Participating in this research, according to Hanguang, encouraged him to 'pay more attention to details in daily conversations, which could have been neglected if there was no need to report them as part of the research' (Interview: December 2020). However, Hanguang himself did not sense a noticeable improvement in his English communicative ability, considering the limited English exposure and practice he had outside the classroom.

## 5.3 Win

### 5.3.1 Background Information

Before sojourning abroad for her master's course, Win had just finished her undergraduate education in English-Chinese Translation and Interpretation. Before studying abroad, she occasionally talked with NS English teachers but generally did not have many opportunities to use English in communicative contexts in China. She could speak English confidently and fluently and was proactively seeking opportunities to practise: 'I browsed through the university website, searching for activities related to language learning' (Interview: November 2019). During her year studying abroad, Win regularly interacted with language-exchange partners from different countries, chatting with them online and had face-to-face meetings three to four times a week. She also participated in activities with the student union and volunteering programmes, such as helping refugees in the UK and teaching in local primary schools. These volunteering activities, unfortunately, were halted at the training stage because of the outbreak of COVID-19 in February 2020.

Win was keenly interested in topics relating to culture, ethnic minorities and politics. She enjoyed sharing her opinions with new friends from various language and social backgrounds and listening to their stories, through which she could 'observe how different cultures co-construct our society from others' perspectives' (Interview: October 2019). Win was especially attracted by Tibet, and she paid close attention to the relevant policies and social issues concerning ethnic minorities living there. In our first interview, Win mentioned her plan to work in Tibet with the hope of advancing mutual understanding between the Han Chinese (the largest ethnic group in China) and minorities. After graduation, she started working for a start-up company in Tibet, focusing on young learner education and a two-way cultural promotion between Han and Tibetan people. When I asked about her

motivation to learn English in our first interview, Win's answer was quite unexpected: 'to make the world better'. She captured my surprised look and added, 'Although teaching is a small thing, my ability will affect people I work with. I hope I can positively influence others' (Interview: October 2019).

Win adapted to the SA environment smoothly in both academic and social life. She barely mentioned cross-cultural barriers nor did she fall into essentialist overgeneralisations about national cultures. Her unique experience during her undergraduate period serves as a reasonable explanation for her quick adaptation. Unlike most universities in China, where most students are Han Chinese like Win, her undergraduate university focused on serving minority ethnic groups:

> **Win:** On the first day of my uni life, I found people in my dormitory were from five different ethnic groups. All of us were Chinese, but we had different customs, religions and even languages. Our university motto is 'to appreciate the cultures and values of others as we do our own'. In that environment, I started to explore different cultures with curiosity and respect.
>
> (Interview: October 2019)

During the four years, Win was gradually cultivating intercultural awareness, reducing biases against different ethnic groups and developing understanding and empathy towards various communities. She shared some of these stories with me. For example, she overturned her stereotype of Muslims being unapproachable by spending time with them dancing, chatting and eating; she started appreciating the value of fasting after learning the spiritual dimension behind it — to encourage empathy with the less fortunate. She saw Mandarin as 'a bridge connecting different ethnicities and breaking down barriers in-between'

(Interview: October 2019). It seems such intercultural competence transferred into her sojourning experience, and for her English acts as another bridge linking people from various L1 backgrounds.

### 5.3.2 Pragmatics-Related Struggles in Daily Communication

Despite Win's high oral proficiency and adaptation to intercultural communication, she still occasionally faced difficult moments in daily life, especially when encountering unfamiliar social situations or linguistic forms, with salutations in email writing being a case in point:

> **Win:** I started with 'Dear Gavin' [a lecturer], and I felt it was a bit strange. I then asked my language exchange partner how I should start an email to a male teacher, and she said she would put 'Sir Gavin'. Since then, I started using 'Sir' as the salutation to male teachers.
> **R:** Where's your language partner from?
> **Win:** She's half-Irish and half-Scottish. I only had experience writing to female teachers before this, and I used 'dear', or if the teacher used 'hi', I would also use 'hi'. Although Gavin wrote 'Dear Win' to me, I still felt it was weird, because the translation of 'dear' in Chinese is '亲爱的' [a title to show affection]. My language partner told me it was indeed weird; so, she usually uses 'Sir'. I'm not sure, but I followed her advice because she is a native speaker.
>
> (Learning Journal: November 2019)

In Win's understanding, the use of the Mandarin '亲爱的 (dear)' with members of the opposite sex usually suggests an intimate relationship, and even though Win noticed the male lecturer, also a native English speaker, started his email with 'Dear Win', she felt using the same expression placed her in an uncomfortable position within the teacher-student dynamic. 'Sir Gavin' is not a conventional salutation in the UK higher education context, and

it is not clear here why Win's English native-speaker friend would give her such advice. Although it is possibly just a peculiar linguistic habit of that friend, Win adopted it as a well-accepted usage without much doubt because of her friend's native-speaker identity.

Another example is Win's awkward attempt at small talk with a stranger before a training workshop in a volunteer programme:

> **Win:** Before the workshop, everyone in the room was chatting… I asked the Belgian guy next to me, 'Shall we talk? Everyone is talking. I feel a bit awkward.' He said he didn't mind remaining silent. He didn't feel awkward. His response made me even more awkward.
> **R:** Did you chat with him because everyone was chatting and you felt you were obliged to chat? Or did you really want to talk with him?
> **Win:** Yes, it was just because everyone was talking. I didn't know why they were talking. I would feel more comfortable just sitting there silently. I think I started the conversation with an awkward question.
> **R:** You would prefer to sit there and remain silent. Is that because Chinese people don't usually talk in this kind of situation?
> **Win:** Yes. I didn't know what to do when all of the people, who were total strangers to each other, just started talking… But now I feel I know how to join that. Last time I was doing handcrafts, and the people next to me were talking about Indian movies. I knew those movies; so, I just joined them naturally.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

Behind the failed attempt to imitate other speakers in the room was Win's lack of pragmatic knowledge about starting and holding casual conversations with strangers. It seems Win was not clear about either the sociopragmatic purpose of the small talk or the L2 pragmalinguistic resources suitable for that context. One reason, as Win has pointed out, is

that small talk happened less between strangers within similar contexts in her social experience with the L1 community, and therefore she had to refer to sociopragmatic skills or conventions for this spoken genre that she had only barely acquired. It also suggests she had received only limited instructions or support in daily conversation skills relating to daily communication in her English education. However, it seemed Win managed to develop her L2 pragmatics after this unpleasant first attempt by paying more attention to similar social encounters.

### 5.3.3 Ethnic Identity in Pragmatic Use

As mentioned earlier, Win was keenly interested in topics relating to ethnic minorities and politics, frequently initiating these topics in our conversations. She also discussed these with language partners, friends and strangers online, reflecting on how people construct their ethnic identity and form relationships with others through language. An example was an online discussion concerning a new policy introduced by the China government regarding Tibet:

> **Win:** I'm interested in Tibetan culture. I pay attention to what Tibetans say and how they act… However, when I talk with Tibetans, I usually feel they only focus on their own history. They even see cultural integration as a form of invasion. They think other cultures have tarnished their culture. It is weird.
>
> **R:** Do you mean they are not tolerant of other cultures?
>
> **Win:** Yes. I feel they are arrogant. I don't understand why. Several days ago I read a policy against cheating in online exams, and some Tibetans commented, 'Don't bring the bad policy from the Chinese mainland to our snow highland, thank you.' I felt like, we don't have to say 'mainland' or 'snow highland'. It's like we imposed something terrible on them. I wanted to talk with them about the policy, but they were not willing to talk.
>
> (Learning Journal: November 2019)

As a Han Chinese from ‘mainland China’, Win felt the unfriendly and unwelcome attitude behind the aforementioned language use. Through the use of the phrase ‘mainland China’, especially in contrast with ‘snow highland’, Win sensed the cultural and ethical boundary the speaker had drawn between the two communities. Behind the linguistic choices, in Win’s view, was not just an emphasis on Tibetan identity but also bias and a lack of mutual respect. Another experience Win shared was a joke she failed to catch immediately in an activity about learning the Welsh language:

> **Win:** I went to a Welsh Language Taster last month. Most people there were British. They noticed I was the only Asian there and asked, ‘Who is not from this country?’ Surprisingly, all the Welsh raised their hands. Others in the room burst into a laugh, but it took me a while to get it. It makes sense. Before that, the speaker was talking about the history of the English and Welsh fighting each other. I like the atmosphere [where people can make jokes like this]. I told my language partner Claire [British] most Chinese would be offended in that situation [e.g. when others support the independence of a region in China, or when other Chinese publicly claim a non-Chinese identity]. She didn’t quite understand why, and I told her we persist with the idea of an inseparable country.
>
> (Learning Journal: February 2020)

In the situation above, Win first drew on her existing knowledge that Wales is a part of the UK, and based on her L1 sociopragmatic norms, she assumed that Wales claiming a non-British identity in public would be inappropriate. The marked difference between the two countries’ tolerance of independence-related discussions triggered a deeper reflection for Win:

> **Win:** I do think being one unit is beneficial in the long run for the country's development. However, it seems less important in our country to let people express their voice. I think British care about their voice more. Once I asked Claire about her opinion on Welsh independence. She said she didn't want the Welsh to be independent, but she would respect the voting result.
>
> (Learning Journal: February 2020)

Instead of making a negative judgement about either side, Win rationalised beneficial values behind both practices with an empathetic attitude and open mind. I then asked if she believed the experience had more or less influenced her attitudes or behaviours:

> **Win:** These experiences have more or less reshaped me, yes. I used to think it's ridiculous to support an area becoming independent. Last time, I introduced Tibetan customs and languages in a presentation in the society of Asian cultures. Before that, I invited Claire to review the slides for me, and repeatedly checked my language choices with her. I didn't want to sound too formal. I mean, I personally don't support Tibet independence. Still, I don't want my audience to misunderstand my intention, to feel I am using this culture-sharing opportunity to advocate some political views or something. I was trying to convey the information that I can accept a different interpretation of how China's map should look, and I am just here to talk about cultures.
>
> (Learning Journal: February 2020)

Win's earlier reflections on both cases mentioned above seem to merge in this case. With reflection on the cultural values and ethical identities reflected in different pragmatic use, she overcame intuitive moral judgements and developed understanding and empathy for both cultures and language communities, which contributed to her growing intercultural awareness and sense of inclusion. Consequently, Win attempted to present her liberal

attitude to different political positions and at the same time avoid casting a self-image as being aggressive, obstinate or culturally intolerant by carefully checking her presentation language. This could also be a strategy Win intentionally applied to navigate a path between the potentially opposing viewpoints of the audience from different backgrounds.

### 5.3.4 Different Pragmatic Strategies in L1 and L2

Win reported using different communicative strategies in L1 and L2 at times, which can be illustrated by two cases:

> **Case 1:**
>
> **Win:** I had this language partner, but I thought we didn't share a lot of common languages. I considered the situation and said, 'I don't know how you see this meet, like whether we fit, but you can come to me if you have any problem with Chinese learning' [original sentence in English]. I learned this English expression 'I don't know how you see this meet, like whether we fit' from another native speaker. By saying that, I meant I don't really think we fit and I think we should stop our language exchange. I'd never encountered a similar situation in China, but I felt I could only naturally express 'we don't really have common language' in English… I could say that to my language partner because most English speakers are relatively direct. I can't just say no in Chinese to my Chinese friends.
>
> (Learning Journal: October 2019)

Win's different language choices in L1 and L2 seem to be influenced by her evaluation of levels of directness expected in both societies in the speech act of 'refusal'. The quotation Win learned from a native speaker ('I don't know how you see this meet, like whether we fit') suggests indirectness and her conscious attempt to avoid losing face. However, similar expressions are considered by Win as too direct and might project a blunt or

unapproachable self-image to speakers in her L1 community. Win would, therefore, avoid such explicit refusal, even if she hoped to do so.

**Case 2:**

**Win:** I sent a WeChat message to the supervisor of my last internship job, and I started with '秘书长，您好' ['Hello, secretary-general'; '您' refers to 'you' in the polite form in Chinese]. I felt awkward, so I added: '我想称呼您 Lucy, 但我不能 [translation: I want to call you Lucy, but I can't]'. She studied in America and was friendly to all the interns when we worked together, and she said we could call her Lucy, but I felt it was hard to do so.

**R:** Why would you find it awkward to address her as 'Lucy'?

**Win:** It's something about the Chinese language. I felt uncomfortable. In the UK, teachers and students usually address each other by first names. We don't use polite forms. You would feel awkward [when going back to the old way]. When she asked me how I am doing, I felt like I was reporting my work progress to her [instead of sharing life stories with a friend].

(Interview: December 2020)

From our conversation, it seems Win has developed a new ideal identity in relationships between elders and juniors, superiors and subordinates during studying abroad, and this change was related to her reflection on L2 pragmatics (which will be further elaborated in the next section). Her reflection on this case went beyond pragmalinguistic structures of address in L1/L2 to investigate its impact on interpersonal relationships, through which Win realised the absence of polite forms encouraged a more free and equal communication. The dilemma revealed in this example was similar to the last one; Win struggled between an ideal self and the social expectations she felt obliged to follow. To be more specific, Win hoped to address her former supervisor as 'Lucy 'and establish a more equal and casual

relationship but was concerned by the risk offending the supervisor and projecting an impolite self-image. Expressing such a struggle explicitly ('I want to call you Lucy, but I can't') could be interpreted as a tentative strategy which Win adopted to negotiate her ideal identity with the interlocutor.

### 5.3.5 Personal Changes Triggered by New L2 Pragmatics Features

The noticing of new features related to pragmatics triggered Win to compare L1 with L2 and explore the more profound cultural meanings existing behind the language. Such reflection sometimes drove shifts in her identity and values, as can be seen below:

> **Win:** I think the way I communicate with others has changed. Now I usually start an online conversation with 'hey', and I get to the point right after that. Before, I often put a nickname first, and that could be weird at times. For example, a female friend of mine used to call me 'Dad'. Now, I feel that's completely unacceptable. I'll tell her one day that she'll have to stop it.
>
> **R:** Could you explain why?
>
> **Win:** We used to spend a lot of time together, and she felt I was taking care of her like an older brother or sister; so, she gave me this nickname. I think for many Chinese, nicknames like that suggest closeness. After being here [the UK] for a while, I feel I don't want this nickname anymore.
>
> **R:** How did life here change your attitude to this nickname?
>
> **Win:** The Western culture makes me feel as though everyone should be independent. The nickname 'Dad' makes me feel like I will always need to take care of her, but I don't want to do that. It is like we sometimes address others as '哥' or '姐' ['elder brother' or 'elder sister'] when we need their help. I have a Tibetan friend named 'Zha Xi', and I used to address him as 'Brother Zha' when I asked for help. I don't do that anymore. Words like 'brother', 'aunt' and 'sister' are only used between family members in English, but Chinese

people use these to shorten the social distance with strangers or friends. I feel I want the distance to be there.

(Interview: December 2020)

It is perhaps useful to clarify that while 'Dad' may not necessarily be a typical nickname used between friends in Chinese, 'elder brother' and 'elder sister' are relatively common. Through observing people in her surroundings, Win noticed such nicknames are rarely used between non-family members in 'Western culture', in particular not as linguistic markers suggesting a close relationship. Behind different pragmalinguistic choices, Win realised, are new positions she could take in interactions and new ways to construct relationships between friends and strangers. In these positions she saw a new sense of self, who is more independent and whose choice of independence is respected. This identity shift then led to a L2 back transfer to Win's L1 pragmalinguistic choices. She provided another example concerning lecturers' language choices in the classroom:

**Win:** I feel that making my voice heard is more important, and I feel everyone is equal. I wrote a letter to the Chinese Ministry of Education not very long ago.

**R:** Would you mind telling me what that letter was about?

**Win:** It's about minority language studies. I think it should not be that minorities are only expected to learn Mandarin, but that Han Chinese should also learn minority languages. It might boost mutual understanding and symmetrical delivery of information.

**R:** Why would you think being heard is more important?

**Win:** I didn't feel this way before. I think it is the atmosphere here that changed me. I pay extra attention to teachers' language in the class because it'll be useful in the future in my classrooms. For example, Gavin today greeted all the classmates table by table, and he made me feel he was here not only to teach us things but also to hear our opinions. I couldn't think of a specific expression, but he delivered that attitude through his language.

> Most Chinese teachers I have met before never showed this attitude. They made me feel they simply wanted to deliver a lecture. If we know we are listened to, we will care more about expressing ourselves. I hope we can create this environment in our country. Everyone can discuss, and everyone has a voice.
>
> (Interview: December 2020)

This is another example illustrating how analysing intercultural pragmatic differences can trigger SA students to reflect on and even reshape their senses of self, which can lead to development not just as an L2 learner but holistically as a person. Although Win could not recall specific the pragmalinguistic structures used in the classroom, she reflected on the atmosphere created through the language where teachers and students conversed equally, despite the social power gaps between them. She extended this power of language across a wider social context. Her action echoes Win's career plan and motivation for English learning mentioned at the beginning — to make the world better, and to foster mutual understanding between Han Chinese and minorities. This case, viewed together with her reflections following the Welsh taster activity, also seems to suggest that exposure to diverse language use contexts not only sensitised Win to the pragmatic dimension but encouraged her reflections on social and political consequences related to language use and her existing viewpoints and values.

## 5.4 Mary

### 5.4.1 Background Information

Before starting the TESOL course in the UK, Mary had obtained a bachelor's degree in Business English and a master's in Linguistics from a three-year postgraduate programme in China. English, for her, had been a tool mainly for academic communication; she proactively attended seminars/lectures in her research field in universities in Shanghai and participated in academic discussions mediated through English. With the experience mentioned above, she considered herself a proficient user of formal English with a good grasp of grammar and capable of communicating fluently in academic contexts. However, Mary did not feel equally confident when holding an informal conversation and was eager to improve her spoken English, especially in non-academic contexts. She found maintaining a conversation a major difficulty: 'Probably it is because of my English linguistic proficiency. When other people start a topic, I sometimes don't know how to continue it' (Interview: December 2019). For this reason, Mary would sometimes intentionally avoid small talk with her flatmates. Mary's academic background in linguistics had also familiarised her with the definition of pragmatics before the research.

In the first six weeks, Mary was busy with academic tasks as well as daily chores in the new SA environment. As she described later, she 'hit bottom' emotionally after the initial excitement of her arrival, during which she had a little motivation to communicate with the outside world. Her state gradually improved as she was 'getting used to life here and feeling more comfortable to communicate and use the English language' (Interview: December 2019). In addition to her interactions within academic contexts, Mary went on a trip to the Lake District organised by the department and joined the Irish dancing society in the student union; however, she felt her social circle was still very small, and she had not practised

spoken English as much as she had expected to by the end of the first semester: 'I thought I could easily open up myself for socialising. Perhaps I was procrastinating and using homework as an excuse. I should go out.' She sought advice from me during the interview about social opportunities to practice oral English as well as meeting friends from other backgrounds. However, after spending most of her winter holiday at home, essay-writing, the outbreak of COVID-19 suspended Mary's social plans. During the research, I did not receive many messages from Mary about her L2 pragmatic encounters. One of the reasons could be her limited access to English mediated interactions.

### 5.4.2 Challenged Stereotypical Impression of 'Britons'

Before sojourning in the UK, Mary had perceived British culture as 'implicit', where, she believed, people are 'gentle and like to keep their distance from each other'. This impression was mostly gained through sessions in one of her undergraduate modules on 'intercultural communication'. However, her understanding soon started to change in the first few months of her SA life.

> **Mary:** When we were hiking, our team leader [British] kept greeting passers-by. I was confused. We don't know them, why should we greet them? … I then tried to greet people, and it felt really good. When you say 'Hi' first, the locals will give you big smiles and greet you back. They sometimes even let you stroke their dogs… I felt kindness from strangers. It's quite important, I think, especially when I'm in a different country.
>
> (Interview: November 2019)

The change in her interpretation of British culture seemed to be a result of an accumulation of these daily encounters. She mentioned examples including receiving help from enthusiastic passers-by and how small talk started easily and naturally between her and

strangers. All of these encounters included acquisition of new L2 sociopragmatic conventions, encouraging Mary to challenge previous stereotypes of the L2 community and to re-evaluate the interpersonal distance between strangers in the new SA context:

> **Mary:** I used to think people here are hard to approach. It turned out not to be the case. I then realised what we've learned from the textbook could be different from our true experience. Locals are willing to communicate with you. Sometimes you feel they aren't, but it's likely they don't know how to approach you either. They are also afraid of embarrassment. If you start a conversation, they will just open up to you.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

### 5.4.3 Struggles with L2 Pragmatics in Informal Conversations

As mentioned earlier, Mary sometimes struggled with spoken English, especially in daily informal conversations. Two examples are listed below:

> **Mary:** I don't know how to respond to 'thank you'. I used to respond with 'You're welcome' or 'It's my pleasure', as it is taught in textbooks. For example, once I blocked someone, and I stepped back. He said, 'Thank you', and I said, 'It's OK', but I felt a bit weird. Cashiers in shops also say 'Thank you' after I pay. I don't know how to reply either.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

> **Mary:** My friend learned the expression 'Could I have this one?' from English native speakers. She used this sentence when we bought lunch in a market, and the seller said, 'Of course, you can, but only if you pay for it.' I don't know if he was trying to be humorous, or if this sentence ['Could I have this one?'] is usually used between people from different social classes.
>
> (Learning Journal: February 2020)

From these two cases, it could be seen how an L2 learner proficient in grammar struggled with widespread and basic pragmatic use during study abroad. These trivial, awkward moments might not hinder Mary from delivering general meanings and achieving communicative purposes (e.g. to buy food); however, they could explain her aforementioned difficulty around continuing a topic and maintaining a conversation in spoken English. In the first example, it was likely that Mary felt the favour was mutual and she therefore could not accept the thanks, or because she did not hear 'you're welcome' used by others during her study abroad. It should not be simply interpreted as lacking knowledge of frequently used linguistics units but rather difficulties in presenting the desired self-image (e.g. to be polite and casual) to the interlocutor(s) during daily conversation.

In the second case, the unclear intention behind the seller's response made it hard for Mary to find an appropriate reply and thus might have hindered her from prolonging the conversation. It might be worth mentioning that as the researcher and Mary's friend, I usually find our conversations in Chinese smooth and enjoyable; it is not likely that Mary frequently struggled with the same problem in her interactions in her L1. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume the difficulties Mary faced in L2 pragmatics were one of the reasons she procrastinated about English-mediated socialisation.

### 5.4.4 Mistaken Assumptions and Overgeneralisations with L2 Pragmatics

During the year, Mary made mistaken assumptions about L2 pragmatics on different occasions, such as a conversation between Mary, her Chinese friend and a British student they had just met during an Irish dancing session:

> **Mary:** My friend told the British girl, 'I like your smell'. I was shocked, and the British girl also looked embarrassed. I told the British girl that my friend was trying to say, 'I like your smile', and we all laughed. Later, my friend told me she did mispronounce 'smile', but I thought she meant she liked that girl's perfume. I corrected her sentence to ease the embarrassment as I think perfume is a sensitive topic in their culture. It is something private, and foreigners might not want to talk about it.
>
> (Learning Journal: October 2019)

Although Mary resolved the embarrassing moment tactfully, a mistaken assumption was made about the appropriateness of complimenting someone's perfume. This could be an extension of her general generalisation of 'Western culture':

> **Mary:** My mom and grandma, the older generation in China, think it's normal to ask others about their age and salary, but I don't think it's OK. It is a private matter. I think this is an influence from Western culture.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

Perfume is usually considered a personal choice and an intimate present, which is likely to be the reason Mary regarded it as private. With this background knowledge, it seems reasonable for her to assume that the behaviour of 'Westerners' or 'foreigners' is consistent with this and to consider talking about private topics unacceptable, especially with a stranger. Mary's assumption about the use of 'cheers' in the UK context is another example:

> **Mary:** I just noticed 'Cheers' can be used to show appreciation. Perhaps this is an expression popular among young people?
>
> (Interview: April 2020)

Mary's misinterpretation here seems to be a result of overgeneralisation from her limited contact with the L2 community, especially with British people of different ages. Some of these mistaken assumptions seemed to linger during her year of study abroad without enough similar cases to trigger noticing (e.g. to see older people use 'cheers'); the others were self-corrected through implicit feedback or further conscious attention to the ambiguity. The following is an example of Mary's developing understanding of use of terms of address in an academic context:

> **Mary:** I realised people here like to use their first names. At the very beginning, I used first names to address people, as I felt it was more friendly. Then I noticed all the citations in academic essays are last names. It seemed last names are used more often in serious and formal contexts. Therefore, I started using first names and surnames together when I sent emails to lecturers. Later, I noticed they always start emails with 'Dear Mary'. I realised they want us to use their first names. The teacher-student relationship is closer than it is in China. It is probably again about culture.
>
> (Interview: April 2020)

In this case, Mary overturned her pragmatic assumptions twice with conscious attention paid to the pragmalinguistic use of more proficient speakers within the same context. As for her perception of the interpersonal relationship, it is not clear whether the observation about interpersonal distance between teachers and students contributed to her pragmatic development, or conversely, the noticing of new pragmalinguistic features lead her to reflect on the relationship between teachers and students. Mary touched on the link between language use and culture but did not explain it further during this exchange.

### 5.4.5 Rejection of NS Pragmatic Use

Mary expressed her strong enthusiasm for learning 'authentic' native-like English many times in our interviews. For example, she immediately regretted saying 'you first' to people behind while hiking, as she realised 'after you' is a more native-like expression, even though her first choice of language delivered the very similar meaning. Nonetheless, there were a few occasions where Mary rejected NS pragmatic norms, such as her resistance to the way shop assistants addressed her:

> **Mary:** I noticed people working in shops address you in a very intimate way, like 'my love' and 'honey'. This is very different [from China].
> **R:** How did you feel about it?
> **Mary:** I'm not used to it. We are not close at all. Isn't this too intimate? Actually, I noticed it when I watched American TV series. It probably has something to do with my personality. I also don't like Chinese people calling me '亲' ['dear' in Chinese, usually used by online customer service staff to show a friendly tone to customers].'
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

Mary perceived the intention behind the language to establish a closer, more friendly interpersonal relationship, but she hoped to maintain distance with the stranger. This is likely to be the reason behind Mary's resistance to NS norms in this case; she felt she was positioned uncomfortably in the conversation with shop assistants in the UK by the way they addressed her. Another example is a phrase Mary learned from a British lady during school hiking:

> **Mary:** One girl said, 'I want to go to the toilet'. After she left, our British team leader told us they [Britons] prefer to say it more indirectly, like 'I want to spend a penny'. It reminded

me of the foreign teacher in my uni. He told us 'toilet 'sounds impolite. It's coarse, and it's related to the social hierarchy, I think.

**R:** Will you use the new expression you have learned?

**Mary:** I will not use 'I want to spend a penny'. Using 'toilet' might be weird, but this is also weird. First, it is rarely used. I don't think my friends, either Chinese or other non-British students, would understand. I also feel it's a bit of 'showing off'. It's like a foreigner suddenly says something like '猪八戒照镜子 (zhū bā jiè zhào jìng zi)' (a Chinese idiom 'Pig monster looks into the mirror' meaning 'someone stuck in a dilemma'). I would say 'I want to go to the ladies' room'. I wouldn't use 'toilet', but I wouldn't use 'a penny', either.

**R:** Do you think it is too local and you feel that you are not British [interrupted]

**Mary:** Yes.

**R:** And you would feel strange saying it?

**Mary:** Yes, strange.

(Interview: November 2019)

Her choice not to use 'spend a penny' was mainly due to concerns about its communicative effectiveness and her ELF user identity, as she hoped to exploit English as a lingua franca as a medium to reach and interact with a wider community. Mary's identity as a foreigner also plays a role in her rejection of the new form here. It seems Mary viewed idioms and local phrases as insider language typically shared in the L1 group, and believed using such language would be regarded by others as an awkward attempt to approach a community to which she did not belong.

### 5.4.6 Attitude Shift towards Importance of Language Pragmatics

Mary's academic background in linguistics had familiarised her with the definition of pragmatics before the research. In our last interview, which was one year after she first arrived, she reported a significant change in her attitude to L2 pragmatics:

> **Mary:** It might be inappropriate to say this [pause]. Before studying abroad, I was greatly influenced by a tutor in my postgraduate department in China. His work focused on phonology. He believed linguistic study should be accurate, and linguists see patterns in language, just like mathematicians derive formulas. Pragmatics was considered by him as subjective, illusory and even useless. At that time, I agreed with him. However, after living here for a year, I now feel pragmatics is the core of a language, and it is so important.
>
> (Interview: September 2020)

Mary's hesitation suggests she had concern about offending me with her criticism of pragmatics research. In this conversation, I realised she had probably intentionally avoided revealing her initial attitude to pragmatics research intentionally in our first interview when asked about her understanding of the term. The reason why she decided to share this in the last interview may be partly her different attitudes to the topic. It could also be the case that the closer relationship established between us during the year, not just as researcher and interviewer but also as friends, made her more comfortable about discussing topics considered sensitive in the earlier stage.

Following her reflections above, I invited her to think of more concrete examples of these moments in which she realised the importance of L2 pragmatics:

> **Mary:** I was hanging out with a Malaysian girl who speaks English and Chinese. Her Chinese is fluent, but her words sometimes made me uncomfortable, although I know she didn't mean anything bad. I think it reflects her difficulties with Chinese pragmatics. For example,

> my kitchen was messy after I moved to a new flat; so, I went to the Malaysian girl's place for lunch. She asked me: '你下午还在这里吗?' ['Will you still be here this afternoon?']. She used '还' ['still']. I think her question was out of a good intention, but it felt she was suggesting I should leave… Sometimes you can deliver the meaning, but it does not necessarily mean you make others comfortable in the conversation.
>
> (Interview: September 2020)

In the case above, Mary generalised the importance and difficulty of L2 pragmatics from her experience as a native speaker of Chinese. From rationalising her uncomfortable feelings as a listener, it seems Mary realised that pragmatics related errors could cause misunderstanding on a personal level and negatively impact interpersonal relationships, which, unlike grammatical or vocabulary issues, may be less likely to be corrected or explicitly negotiated in a conversation. This concern caused anxiety for Mary, but she managed to cope with it by relating to English native speakers:

> **Mary:** I worried that I might make similar mistakes in English. Native speakers might interpret my language differently, or I might offend them by asking inappropriate questions. I started to feel less anxious about the possible offence I could cause when I put myself in their shoes. If I can understand a foreigner's Chinese, I would think their Chinese was really good. They [native speakers] are quite tolerant. I feel I'm more willing to talk with others after I broke through this mental barrier.
>
> (Interview: September 2020)

Reflecting on her perspective of herself as a native speaker of Chinese, Mary concluded that with her foreigner as well as L2 learner identities, her unconventional and even inappropriate uses are more likely to be tolerated, and she is not always expected to grasp

nuances in the language. This might also explain the gradual increase in her willingness to communicate over the first semester, from 'hitting bottom' to 'feeling more comfortable to use English' (Interview: December 2019), as mentioned at the beginning of this section.

At the end of the year, I invited Mary to reflect on her participation in this research. She believed this study had fostered her conscious attention to L2 pragmatics during the year, which she may have noticed without this research but might not have intentionally observed or reflected on. She also reiterated the observations of L2 pragmatics she reported in the first semester: 'the rules [in English-speaking communities] are not as narrow as expected', and 'people are actually quite tolerant' (Interview: December 2019). Her new interpretations of L2 pragmatics, alongside other intercultural encounters during the year, nudged her to reflect on her self-development towards becoming a 'global citizen' as well as the dissolving borders between cultures:

> **Mary:** With more communication between each other, the cultural difference is not that obvious, and we know each other more. I used to think Westerners have terrible misunderstandings about the Chinese. Now I feel the truth is that, with more communication through internet and a mobile population, people are developing global citizenship. They are not narrow-minded when viewing cultures; instead, they respect and try to understand all the cultures, not just those categorised broadly into Western/Chinese ones, but smaller subcultures too.
>
> (Interview: September 2020)

## 5.5 Chloe

### 5.5.1 Background Information

Before coming to the UK, Chloe had just completed her bachelor's degree in Chinese Language Education in Shanghai. During the undergraduate period, she was learning English in a private school, where she had ample opportunities to speak English with not only other Chinese learners but teachers and students from other cultural backgrounds. Her IELTS speaking score was 7.5, which suggests a high level of oral proficiency in English. She picked the English pseudonym 'Chloe' for herself for this research.

In the first semester, Chloe kept in very close contact with me, enthusiastically sharing stories about her life and study three to four times a week, though some of her reports were not very relevant to L2 pragmatics learning. She was an active student, frequently interacting with tutors during and after the classes. In the first two months, she also proactively took part in conversational events such as debating groups and story-sharing groups in and outside the university. With high-level oral English proficiency and rich experiences of communicating with people from various countries, Chloe adapted to the SA life smoothly within the first few months. Later, she started to use online dating apps, and chatting and dating then became the central part of her social life. She reported spending around one hour each day chatting with people from dating apps, and she met people face to face to spend hours or a whole day together, once or twice a week.

Chloe's active social life in English seems to be closely connected with her fluent oral English and her great willingness to speak. She reiterated in interviews and logs that she enjoyed using English and proudly mentioned several times about compliments she received about her oral fluency and standard American accent. Rather than opportunities to intentionally

learn and practice English, she regarded these conversations as a natural and common part of her life with social purposes (e.g. meeting new friends, discussing interesting topics, seeking company or dates). Chloe was also highly self-aware of language learning during communications, sometimes sharing with me interesting English expressions she had learned from others and her improvement in using more sophisticated sentences. Such awareness also applied to pragmatics learning, as exemplified below:

> **Chloe:** And why did you use 'thank you' instead of 'hahah that's very sweet of you' or something? In China, we seldom say thank you to people who are close to us, but I do say it to my friends… so sometimes you say 'thank you' to me I feel there is some kind of distance?
>
> (Original Text from Chloe's Online Chat Screenshot: October, 2019)

Chloe spotted the unfamiliar use of 'thank you' by her Italian boyfriend in their daily conversation and sensed a vague connection between language choices and interpersonal distance and relationships. In the message above, she cut off the conversation to seek confirmation or an explicit explanation of such link; however, her boyfriend skipped this question and moved on to another topic, and Chloe did not comment further on this conversation.

### 5.5.2 'I'd like to become a British!': Very Positive Attitude to L2 Pragmatics

In the first few months, Chloe showed an extremely positive attitude to the English language and the English native-speaker community. The following conversation she had with her British friend is an example:

**Chloe:** I have been to York, Edinburgh and Ilkley. This week I just hung out in Leeds going to different activities, enjoying free food Hahahah.

**Chloe's British friend:** I told you you've become a British!

**Chloe:** Still far away from a true British hahah. I'd love to though!

(Original Text from Chloe's Online Chat Screenshot: October, 2019)

Later in our interview, I asked Chloe whether she meant it when she said she would like to be British, she laughed and told me that it was half joking and half her true feeling. Along with Chloe's willingness to integrate into the community of British people/English native-speakers went her rejection of the Chinese language, and even a slight repulsion from her Chinese identity. It seems she was intentionally excluding herself from the other Chinese and avoiding using the Chinese language:

**Chloe:** Maybe not many people feel this way, but speaking English all the time kind of blurs my Chinese identity… I saw a photo online of other Chinese classmates having hotpot together. I felt I was left out, but I didn't really want to join them anyway… I don't know why, but I just don't want to spend time with Chinese people, unless we speak English. I feel uncomfortable when speaking Chinese, unless I really like that person.

(Learning Journal: November 2019, original text in English)

**Chloe:** Once I saw another Chinese student waiting outside the language centre. She asked me in English: 'Have you been waiting for long?' I answered in English. She soon found out I'm Chinese and started speaking in Chinese with me. I left with an excuse right away. If she had talked with me in English, I would have stayed in our conversation longer.

(Interview: November 2019)

A likely explanation for Chloe's positive feelings towards the English language and the English-speaking community stems from her delightful life and study experiences with English. Chloe mentioned it many times in our conversations. It seems many positive changes in her life happened after she started learning English in the private school, as this excerpt from our first interview might illustrate:

> **Chloe:** When I was young, all the people were using Chinese, and we all received an exam-oriented education, like cramming. In the classroom, the most popular students were always those who got high scores. When they spoke, everyone would listen, and teachers let them talk more. If you were not that kind of 'good student', no one would care what you said. That was not a good feeling. I feel I was [pause] disrespected? It's like [pause] no one cares about you… But in the private school where I learned English, teachers encouraged us to speak, and everyone was listening carefully. It felt good. I felt I existed.
>
> (Learning Journal: August 2019)

In our interview, I could clearly see her excitement and passion while she was sharing her stories about her joyful learning experience and friendships in the private school. She started to feel her voice was valued, and at the same time she gained a sense of belonging within the group, and a sense of achievement as an outstanding student who speaks L2 fluently. On the other hand, her tone describing life outside her English learning was completely different. Apart from school life, she mentioned how she struggled to communicate with parents and Chinese peers. It seems she associated the English language with a friendly community and a positive self-image as a confident and outstanding individual accepted and valued by others, while connecting undesirable feelings and experiences with the Chinese language and community.

Chloe's attitude to languages and communities was consistent in her interpretation of L2 pragmatic encounters over the first few months. At this stage, her noticing of new features of English pragmatics was usually accompanied by a comparison with the Chinese equivalent and criticism of the latter, as shown in the following three examples:

> **Chloe:** Before the LGBT parade, I bought a bracelet from a pedlar. She was very welcoming and nice. She said: 'Morning honey, have a nice parade.' But Chinese pedlars seldom, or even never, do such a thing. They will just tell you how much the goods are and take your money… If those kinds of jobs were replaced by robots, I think it may have a better chance in China.
>
> (Learning Journal: August 2019, original text in English)

> **Chloe:** In China when we are in the restaurant we will call 'Waiter Waiter! Give me blah blah…' We won't even use 'please'. But Britons would never call for a waiter to help them. They simply give them a look, and waiters are very observant and will come to their table to serve them.
>
> (Learning Journal: August 2019, original text in English)

> **Chloe:** It's quite scary when my [Chinese] boyfriend said he loves me. Chinese don't distinguish 'like' and 'love'. You can't just love someone after two weeks. Chinese people don't have a clear distinction between 'like' and 'love'. It's a common issue. They can love you from the second day after you meet… I am quite Western now, ha ha.
>
> (Learning Journal: September 2019, original text in English)

In the three cases above, Chloe held positive attitudes towards all the new L2 pragmatic features, including pedlar's greetings, British restaurant manners, and the way to express affection in Western countries. On the other hand, her word choices such as 'robot',

'common issue' and 'won't even use please' suggested a critical attitude towards corresponding pragmatics norms she had observed in Chinese society. Her description seems to be based on moral judgements about the two groups of people; for example, that compared with British (or Westerners) people, the Chinese act coldly, impolitely and strangely in these situations. Moreover, it appears that she perceived a clear boundary between Westerners and the Chinese while at the same time attributing her disagreement with Chinese norms to her Westernised identity.

### 5.5.3 General Comparisons between Chinese and Western Cultures

Another pattern appearing in the three excerpts above is that Chloe tended to compare cultures at a rather general level and quickly came up with essentialist generalisations based on her limited contact and experience. Examples include her conclusions like ‘Chinese don't distinguish "like" and "love"’ and ‘Britons would not call for a waiter to help them’. Such generalisations could also be observed in her descriptions of men whom she dated from different countries:

> **Chloe:** Remember the Indian guy I told you about? … He asked for my permission to hold my hand, and he kissed me on my lips when I went back. That British guy, when he thought I liked him, he asked me if I would be willing to have a wild night with him in a bar and go back to his hotel… I strongly felt that he [a Chinese young man] likes me. He stood really close to me, and he put his arm around my shoulders a few times. He even tried to hold my hand. It was awkward… When it comes to sex, there is something different about Western and Oriental cultures. Body language is also a little bit different when guys from different cultures try to approach girls.
>
> (Learning Journal: September 2019)

From Chloe's review of her experiences, it seems she tended to attribute people's different levels of directness to national-level cultural differences. 'Western' and 'Oriental' cultures are again mentioned as two opposite units and are considered by Chloe as the rationales behind people's behaviours and language choices.

### 5.5.4 Melting Boundaries Between Cultures and Critical Interpretation of Stereotypes

Over time, however, Chloe's perception of the boundaries between Western and Eastern cultures, as well as more specific national cultures, gradually blurred. She explicitly illustrated this change at the end of the first semester:

> **Chloe:** I used to consider 'Western culture' as a whole. Then, I divided 'Western culture' into British culture and American culture, and believed British culture represented Europe. In the UK, I've met people from different countries, and I realised the cultures in those European countries are actually different from that of the UK. They are like a lot of different small pieces. Now, I think even every individual is different, and they are also like small pieces. I mean [pause], I think I have fewer cultural stereotypes… It's not like I was suddenly enlightened in a moment. I feel I changed gradually into a different person.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

Reflecting on the experience, Chloe realised her previous conclusions about correlations between behaviours and national-based cultures were very likely to be overgeneralisations. By this time, Chloe had been able to move beyond essentialist stereotypes, with an awareness of individual differences in people's communicative practices. The gradual shift of her cultural ideology could be illustrated by Chloe's reflection on the role of cultures in her dating experience:

> **Chloe:** I was thinking about the Italian guy. When we first met, he was talking about other people's stereotypes about his country, and he also said he loves Chinese culture, and he wanted a cultural exchange between us. When we got to know each other more, I felt he is just him. It's not all about culture. I started to feel everyone is an individual. It's about culture, but it's more about the personality. It [our communication] is influenced by the culture somehow but it is more about the person. It's interesting. When I first talked with that guy from Portugal, he didn't even mention he was from Portugal. He was a post-doc researcher. We talked about his research and my weekend. We were chatting about the influence of higher education on us, and I felt it was this topic that connected us together. Even if we didn't mention anything about our different backgrounds, you would realise we shared a lot of similarities.
>
> (Learning Journal: November 2019)

It seems that as time passed and interpersonal distance shortened Chloe gradually felt she was interacting with individuals with unique minds and experiences rather than representatives of certain cultures, constructed by the agreed values of a specific society.

Although Chloe believed generalisations could lead to hasty and unfair judgements, she did not completely deny the influence of established cultural values on people's activities. In her learning log, she reviewed the concept 'stereotype' with a critical eye:

> **Chloe:** Culture background sometimes is only a stereotype, and we may start to picture someone by their culture even before meeting them in person… Foreigners also have this kind of overgeneralisation to Chinese, I think, like the Greek guy told me he thinks we (Chinese) are indifferent. [However,] stereotypes can [also] be used to analyse people's behaviour. For example, the Indonesian said: 'We kissed the first time we met. I think this

> is too fast.', while the Portuguese asked me: 'Can I kiss you?' the first time we met. I asked why, and he said he felt the connection. This is the difference. I think their attitude to kissing is probably influenced by their culture. Chinese people won't kiss you on the first date. In this kind of situation, I consider culture as a factor influencing people's behaviours.
>
> (Learning Journal: December 2019, original text in English)

Compared with the first few months, Chloe was able to employ national cultural frames more strategically as reference points to mediate intercultural communication. She had realised stereotypes could lead to unfair judgements, but some fair generalisations could also be useful reference points to manage expectations and understand differences. Then, I invited Chloe to review the three cases related to L1/L2 pragmatics mentioned earlier (buying bracelets, ordering in the restaurant, and the difference between 'like' and 'love'), where she had concluded Chinese people to be robot-like, rude and weird. Chloe laughed and admitted she did make unfair judgements of Chinese people:

> **Chloe:** They now look like strong stereotypes. I wasn't entirely wrong, and I still think some people are like that, but I wouldn't generalise these negative characteristics across all Chinese people. I made some unfair judgements… It reminds me of an experience. In the UK, people would usually hold the door open for other people, and the person behind would say 'Thanks'. In China, many people don't say 'Thanks' in this situation. I used to think they were rude. Once, two Chinese guys held the door for me. I walked in and nodded to them gently. Then, I realised I forgot to say 'Thanks'. I reflected on this encounter later. Maybe this is something subconscious. I think many Chinese do appreciate this kind of friendly gesture, but they are not used to saying it out, or perhaps their mind is occupied by something else at that moment. I wouldn't quickly jump to a negative judgement now about Chinese people. I tend to think about the reasons behind things.
>
> (Interview: December 2019)

The evidence presented thus far shows how Chloe's reshaped cultural ideology fostered reflections and new interpretations of experience related to L1/L2 pragmatics. In the case above, she challenged her previous judgements of the Chinese and attempted to rationalise their pragmatic choices with understanding and empathy. She went beyond the previous essentialist, stereotypical comparisons, developed an awareness of more complex social realities, and demonstrated a more nuanced analysis of contextual factors behind varying language choices and behaviours.

### 5.5.5 'I want to be myself without nationality restrictions'

With her evolving perception of culture, Chloe had also been developing a transcultural identity and re-positioning herself as well as others within intercultural communication:

> **Chloe:** When I first arrived in the UK, I was eager to be more like a British, but I think my attitude towards that has completely changed. I don't want to be a British or an American anymore. I want to be myself, without being restricted by nationalities, though I was born in China, and I am Chinese, and I will always be… It is easy to imagine some places to be peaceful, polite, and equal without getting much hands-on experience.
>
> (Learning Journal: March 2020, original text in English)

> **Chloe:** During studying abroad, I've realised some conflicts in intercultural communications are not really about culture. People from the same country might also face these conflicts. People are all different, even if they are from the same country. I don't want to restrict people within a framework. They are from a specific country; so, they might think in this way.
>
> (Learning Journal: April 2020)

‘Development of cultural awareness’ seems to be the theme of Chloe’s chapter. The truth is, although being told to keep journals regarding the learning of L2 pragmatics, Chloe did not show much effort to bear that in mind; instead, she was more enthusiastic in sharing her views and reflections on culture and her cultural identity. Her passion for different cultures was partly out of academic interest; Chloe focused her MA dissertation on intercultural communication and considered basing her PhD proposal on the same topic. Her deviation from the topic suggests to a certain extent the inseparability of the two concepts, pragmatics and culture, as mentioned in the literature review chapter. For Chloe, it seems L2 pragmatics served as a lens through which to observe and analyse cultures; her progressing reflections on people’s communicative practices fostered an in-depth understanding of boundaries, stereotypes and individual agency as well as other cultural concepts. Such reflections also seemed to stimulate a re-negotiation of her ideal cultural identity, which shifted from a British-like Chinese to a transcultural being who is able to transcend rigid structures and operate between them.

Chapter 5 has thus far presented narratives of five Chinese learners regarding their experiences related to L2 pragmatic learning and use in the UK SA context. From organising a series of critical learning incidents into the form of a life story, I have attempted to depict each participant in terms of the whole of the person’s account and to contextualise each learning event not only within a social context but also the individual’s holistic development. It could be seen that the participants – each with a different life history, educational background, L2 proficiency level, SA expectations, and social contacts and learning resources available during sojourning – showed idiosyncratic trajectories in their L2 pragmatics learning and reflections on identity and culture-related topics. Chapter 6 will move onto a paradigmatic analysis, which synthesises and consolidates findings from the individual narratives to address the three research questions systematically.

# Chapter 6: Cross-Narrative Analysis

This chapter will move on to a paradigmatic analysis of the five SA students' pragmatic-related learning experiences. It aims to identify patterns shared between individuals and consolidate the findings from the individual narratives. This chapter will also provide systematic answers to the research questions (RQs) proposed earlier in Chapter 4:

1) In what moments do students notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK study-abroad environment?
2) What learning strategies related to pragmatics do participants report using in L2-mediated interactions?
3) How does students' pragmatics learning relate to their evolving senses of self and intercultural awareness?

## 6.1 Response to RQ1: Noticing of Gaps in L2 Pragmatics

The term 'noticing' was first proposed by Schmidt (1990) to refer to focal awareness or attention in L2 learning and acquisition. Counter to what Krashen (1981, 1985) suggested in his input hypothesis, stating that acquisition is largely a subconscious process when learners are exposed to comprehensible L2 input, Schmidt (1995) emphasised the importance of consciousness, holding the view that noticing new linguistic features, while not necessarily guaranteeing learning or acquisition, is the prerequisite to filling the gap between their interlanguage and the target language. For L2 pragmatics learning, noticing involves awareness of pragmalinguistic features and the associated sociocultural contexts (Schmidt, 2010). It is considered an essential cognitive step in metapragmatic analysis, which can trigger further comparison and reflection in interaction (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013; McConachy and Liddicoat, 2016). However, a literature search reveals that the number of studies investigating the noticing of L2 pragmatics is relatively small, and most of them have

mainly focused on pedagogical pragmatics. Some researchers have cited Schmidt's noticing hypothesis to explain the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic instructions (Halenko and Jones, 2011; Bardovi-Harlig and Vellenga, 2012; Halenko and Jones, 2017), while other studies have explored how pedagogical intervention fosters noticing of pragmatic features (Takahashi, 2005; Sachtleben and Denny, 2012; Nguyen, 2013). However, learners' noticing of L2 pragmatic features within the natural context remains under-investigated, which is one of the main contributions this research brings to the field. This section will describe situations where the participants tended to notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK SA environment in order to answer the first research question.

### 6.1.1 Overview of Noticing Reported by SA Participants

I would first like to re-introduce Table 4.2, which presents the number of noticing episodes each participant reported via learning journals. As introduced earlier in Section 4.5, each episode stands for the description or reflection of one social event which involves L2 pragmatics, and thus the number of the episodes can roughly indicate the frequency of noticing. Viewed together with the individual narratives in Chapter 4, the table suggests that exposure to the target language can be an influential factor affecting learners' noticing of L2 pragmatics.

| **Participants** | **Interviews** | **Learning Journals (Online Chat)** |
|---|---|---|
| Chloe | 4 times, 191 mins in total | 47 noticing episodes, about 12,400 words |
| Tina | 5 times, 174 mins in total | 43 noticing episodes, about 37,000 words |
| Win | 5 times, 232 mins in total | 15 noticing episodes, about 2,700 words |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hanguang | 5 times, 228 mins in total | 21 noticing episodes, about 3,300 words |
| Mary | 5 times, 168 mins in total | 13 noticing episodes, about 2,400 words |

*Table 4.2 Qualitative Data from Online Chat and Interviews*

Chloe and Tina, who were more proactively seeking English-mediated interactions during SA, recorded and reflected on noticeably more L2 encounters via spontaneous learning journals. Hanguang was active in the first semester, while the number of noticing episodes reported by him decreased observably during the second semester, during which he admitted largely shifting his attention from establishing or maintaining L2 interpersonal connections to pursuing academic achievements and opportunities. Mary, who claimed to have relatively limited access to English-mediated social activities outside the classroom, reported less noticing. Although she seemed to be a cooperative, enthusiastic participant hoping to contribute personal stories to this research, she explicitly told me she was not able to do so due to a lack of English contact with English speakers. The difference in L2 contact appears to be a result of interwoven factors, including individual ones (e.g. personalities, confidence in L2 proficiency, SA goals and expectations, motivation to improve L2 communicative competence), and environmental ones (e.g. social restrictions during COVID-19, interpersonal connections and resources, academic pressure). This observation, from the perspective of noticing, complements the conclusions of previous studies' (e.g. Sánchez-Hernández and Alcón-Soler, 2019) that intensity of L2 exposure is an influential factor in L2 pragmatic gains during SA.

Another hypothesis that can be formed from limited noticing episodes recorded by some participants is that many L2 learners may not devote much effort to improving L2 pragmatic competence during SA. It is worth noting that the each of the five students here

volunteered to participate in this study out of their interest in L2 language and culture, and they were instructed to record pragmatic-related encounters. All of them were in TESOL-related MA courses, regarded EFL teaching as their future career path, and most of them expressed strong motivation to use the SA opportunity to improve communicative English proficiency. It could be assumed that noticing of L2 pragmatics might happen even less for students who do not share these features. A potential reason behind this phenomenon is the lack of understanding and awareness of pragmatics. As introduced in the context chapter of this study (see Section 2.2), pragmatics receives little attention in EFL teaching and assessment in China compared to other linguistic aspects. Being the underemphasised section in curriculum, pragmatics is a 'rather invisible' dimension within language learning (Taguchi, 2018, p.67). Therefore, learners might not see the point of planning self-regulated pragmatic learning strategies; on encountering breakdowns or difficulties in L2-mediated interactions, they are also less likely to regard pragmatic gaps as a key barrier.

Other than the two observations above, information that could be concluded from the table is limited. An important reason is that this study did not directly capture the participants' noticing of L2 pragmatics in daily life but relied on their self-report of noticing. In other words, the journal entry not only relied on participants' awareness of L2 pragmatics but their commitment to this research. Tina, the most active participant, specified that she enjoyed keeping learning journals as it distracted her from academic pressure, and journal-writing as a reflective process fostered her in-depth understanding of language, culture, and interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, there could have been situations wherein participants noticed learning gaps yet chose not to share, or where noticing happened yet did not raise explicit attention. It thus seems imprudent to draw more conclusions on the connection between noticing of L2 pragmatics and other personal or environmental factors

based on the table above. This point will be revisited and further elaborated when the limitations of this study are discussed in Section 7.3.

The coming sections will describe moments when learners tend to notice L2 pragmatic gaps. The findings generally support Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) point that learners' awareness is raised when new pragmatic features 'challenge their current assumptions, spark interest, raise questions, or provide points of connection' (p.60). Here, I divided my answer to the research question into two dimensions: Section 6.1.2 will focus more on the aspect of second language acquisition, describing learners' noticing of pragmatic gaps triggered in L2 input, output and interactive feedback. Meanwhile, Section 6.1.3 will cover two social occasions where learners tend to struggle in negotiating meanings and relationships, and during which they notice their knowledge gaps in L2 pragmatics. With an understanding of specific situations in which sojourners experience confusion or difficulties, this study can help us understand exactly what learners might find helpful for learning, in order to provide specific pedagogical guidelines for SA support and preparation and ESL/EFL teaching.

## 6.1.2 Noticing of L2 Pragmatic Gaps in L2 Input, Output, and Interactive Feedback

### 6.1.2.1 'Cheers' Means 'Thank you'? – Unfamiliar Pragmatic Features in L2 Input

From the narratives, it could be observed that SA learners tend to notice the gaps in their pragmatic knowledge when encountering unfamiliar or unexpected pragmatic use. A case in point is unfamiliar pragmalinguistic forms used by other speakers, especially those emerging frequently in daily interactions (e.g. noticing of 'cheers' as an informal expression of gratitude in Hanguang's and Mary's cases – p.158 and p.183). Noticing was also likely to happen when sociopragmatic/pragmalinguistic features in L2 input deviate from social and

linguistic conventions acquired in learners' previous experience. As Cohen (2012) pointed out, L2 users might approach a situation with expectations, only to realise the pragmatic norms in the target language community are surprisingly different. Abundant instances could be found within the individual narratives, such as noticing of intimate terms of address (e.g. 'love' and 'honey') used by shop assistants and vendors, which three participants believed to be unconventional and inappropriate in their L1 society. Noticing of such differences was accompanied by the participants' reflections on the different interpersonal relationship negotiated by the new pragmatic form: Chloe interpreted the new term of address as a project of the speaker's friendliness and kindness to strangers, while Mary felt undesired intimacy and uncomfortably shortened interpersonal distance.

#### 6.1.2.2 Is 'I hope you are doing well' Too Casual? – Social and Moral Considerations in L2 Output

The connection between noticing and language production has been explained in the output hypothesis, one of the classic psycholinguistic theories in SLA; in L2 output, the need to communicate encourages learners to identify gaps between what they hope to express and what they are able to express (Swain, 1985). The process raises consciousness of their linguistic inadequacies and might stimulate learning of corresponding L2 forms or using other communicative strategies in order to fulfil the communicative purpose (ibid.). In this research, it appears that the participants' noticing of L2 pragmatics was triggered mostly by interpersonal considerations rather than unsure linguistic forms. A likely explanation is that, with significantly increased exposure to English-mediated interactions, the sojourners became aware of the social consequences of inappropriate L2 usage, such as damaged rapport and negative personal judgement, which were largely neglected back in the Chinese EFL context where they had limited opportunities to use English in authentic communication. Moreover, as pointed out by McConachy (2018), people hold expectations

regarding obligations and entitlement in relationships, not only about how their roles are performed (e.g. a doctor treating patients) but also moral features presented (e.g. a doctor being professional and friendly). Findings in this study suggest noticing is likely to happen when learners find the shared expectation unclear in the target language community, or when they are unsure about how to present the expected moral features in L2.

Rich evidence can be found in the individual narratives for the social and moral basis of noticing in L2 output. Here, I will illustrate the point by re-introducing Tina's struggles in her interactions with academic tutors. A case in point of noticing triggered by unclear social expectations is her hesitation before sending an email; she hoped to re-confirm the location of a butcher's recommended by a tutor in an informal conversation during the school trip, yet she was unsure whether students are obliged to limit their email requests to only academic-related topics. Another example of noticing triggered by unsureness of language choices to present certain moral features, Tina deliberated when drafting emails to tutors, carefully thinking through her choice of term of address, the content of the first sentence (greeting or introducing herself), and the way to phrase the request. During this process, Tina became aware of her lack of pragmatic knowledge regarding email-writing language and conventions and attempted to fill the gap by analysing the function of language use (e.g. 'I thought about starting with "I hope you are doing well", but I feel it's too casual for lecturers, so I decided not to use this sentence and go to my point directly.'). Behind her struggles were social and moral considerations to maintain the teacher-student relationship by avoiding proposing unreasonable requests and showing respect to the tutor's time.

#### 6.1.2.3 'Look, he thought you are a king!' – Feedback in L2-Mediated Interactions

Explicit corrective feedback on L2 pragmatic use from more competent speakers was rarely mentioned by the five participants during their SA year. An important source for L2 learners

to gain explicit linguistic feedback is ESL/EFL classrooms, whereas none of the participants mentioned receiving or having access to pragmatic-related support during or before SA. Only Tina mentioned her experience of being corrected on her pragmatic choices (e.g. terms of address, service requests) by her close friend, who was a long-time resident of Europe and a more proficient English speaker, and this finding is consistent with previous studies (Shively, 2011; Hassall, 2013). In Shively's (2011) study investigating SA Spanish learners' pragmatic performance during service encounters, the researcher spotted corrective feedback from the service provider only rarely across 113 recordings of counter service experienced by seven participants over 14 weeks, despite the sojourners' unconventional pragmatic choices. Host families involved in Shively's study also reported that they only commented on the participants' pragmatic choices when asked specifically by the students. Hassall's (2013) research, which tracked 12 Australian students studying in Indonesia through learner diaries and regular interviews, also shows learners reporting receiving a lack of corrective feedback learners on their inappropriate use of address terms within the SA context. One reason for the lack of corrective feedback might be the awkwardness of pointing out inappropriate language choices; even if proficient speakers feel offended, they might not call out learners on pragmatic usage (Cohen, 2012, p.251). Another reason could be the tolerance of ambiguity when English is used as a lingua franca between people from various language backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2011). ELF participants tend to let unclear words and utterances pass and treat non-standard expressions of other speakers as normal, as long as the general mutual understanding can be achieved (Firth, 1996).

Lack of corrective feedback on learners' pragmatic use has been considered an important factor hindering improvement in L2 pragmatics during SA, even for learners with intensive L2 exposure (Vidal and Shively, 2019). As pointed out earlier in Chapters 1 and 3, some pragmatic conventions, such as the way proficient speakers adjust politeness levels or

indirectly propose requests, are not easily observable in daily interactions (Taguchi, 2012). Moreover, accumulated experience in achieving communicative goals without corrective comments might lead to L2 pragmatic fossilisation. From email-writing experiences shared by participants, it appears that most unconventional pragmatic uses did not prevent them from achieving communicative purposes. An example is the terms of address used by Hanguang and Win with their academic tutors at the beginning of the email (e.g. 'Sir Gavin', 'Dear and Distinguished Professor'). Neither of them showed awareness of the unconventionality of their language choices during the interview, nor did they receive corrective feedback from the tutors. Understandably, lecturers might have held an inclusive attitude to different address terms used by learners from different backgrounds and chosen to focus on academic-related requests proposed in the emails rather than linguistic details. Such tolerant attitudes among academic tutors and locals was noticed by Tina, which, she claimed, relieved her communication anxiety but impeded her from develop communication skills. While she frequently encountered ambiguities and confusion in email-writing and was willing to improve, she never received corrective input from the interlocutors; consequently, she turned to her NS classmates and me for advice.

On the other hand, it was common for the participants to become aware of L2 pragmatics with implicit feedback from communication breakdowns. When failing to achieve the communicative purpose or receiving unexpected responses from interlocutors, they tended to re-evaluate the contextual appropriateness of their L2 choices. Hanguang's consideration of the formality of the sentence 'How can I address you?' that he used to ask for names is one of multiple examples, when he noticed the interlocuter's surprised face and was teased by a Briton nearby: 'Look, she thought you are a king!' (see p.152 for more details). Another instance is Tina's reflection on the appropriateness of staying after the class for questions. After being told to book a meeting time via email by her tutor, she felt embarrassed and

started wondering whether her behaviour was acceptable within UK higher education (p.130).

### 6.1.3 Noticing of L2 Pragmatic Gaps in Specific Social Occasions

Section 6.1.2 described how SA students' noticing is triggered in language input, output, and interaction, which provides insights into SA learners' pragmatics learning and acquisition process. This section will address the first research question from a different dimension by describing two social occasions where the participants tended to struggle in negotiating interactions and interpersonal connections, during which they noticed their knowledge gaps in L2 pragmatics.

#### 6.1.3.1 Rapport-Sensitive Interactions with Academic Tutors

Three research participants (Tina, Hanguang, and Win) reported L2 pragmatic-related struggles in email writing and face-to-face communication with tutors, including the use of terms of address, the timing of requests, pragmalinguistic forms to propose requests, expression of disagreement, and language formality. Some of the cases have been mentioned in Section 6.1.2. One reason for their prudence in pragmatic choices might be the intertwined transactional and interactional purposes of student-tutor interactions; students, in most cases, hope to receive support from their tutors but at the same time need to maintain the hierarchical relationship by using status-congruent language (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015). The rapport-sensitive nature of communication can prompt learners to endeavour to attend to the interlocutor's face needs.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the participants' experience in their previous universities in China, where conventions and expectations in student-tutor interactions can be very different. Scholars (e.g. Zhou et al., 2012) have also highlighted the

authoritarian role of teachers in cultures with Confucian heritage and obligation on students to show compliance. Although the young generation tends to hold more flexible cultural values and challenges the absolute authority of teachers (Tran, 2013), respect for seniority is still generally expected in students' language use. For example, addressing teachers by their first names is normally considered very offensive in China. It could thus be assumed that the participants, influenced by L1 social values and taking into consideration the significant differences between cultures, paid extra attention in this situation to maintain a harmonious teacher-student relationship. The findings here echo Ai's (2017) study investigating seven Chinese learners' SA experience in Australia, where some of them felt afraid to communicate with teachers. Reasons included the influence of the hierarchical teacher-student relationship in traditional Chinese culture and the students' lack of confidence in communicating their concerns and questions to tutors in English.

#### 6.1.3.2 High-Level L2 Users' Clumsiness in Daily Small Talks

Another circumstance where the participants frequently encountered pragmatic-related difficulties was small talk, defined as 'a conventionalised and peripheral mode of talk', or casual and usually directionless social intercourse (Coupland, 2014, p.1). Findings in this study share great similarities with those in Yates and Major's (2015) qualitative longitudinal study, which traced the settlement processes of immigrants to Australia who arrived with only rudimentary English skills. In interviews, their participants reported striking difficulties in small-talk knowledge and skills, such as participating in chat, interpreting and using informal and indirect language, and understanding and responding to humour. All of these issues reported by the immigrants were also found in the narratives of this study's participants, who were English users at the C1 level. Moreover, the participants reported struggles around initiating or finishing small talk, strategies to maintain conversations, and appropriateness of specific topics. Difficulties in small talk seemed to hinder them from maintaining

conversations, and establishing interpersonal connections, and they sometimes even prevented them from participating in L2-mediated social activities confidently and comfortably.

Section 6.1 has systematically synthesised pragmatic-related incidents reported by the SA participants in this research and has addressed the first research question 'In what moments do students notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK study-abroad environment?' These include when learners encounter unfamiliar pragmatic use, struggle in negotiating identities and relationships, and receive implicit feedback from other speakers regarding appropriateness of their language use. It has also identified student-tutor interactions and small talk as two social occasions wherein SA learners tend to notice their pragmatic gaps. The following section will move on to the answers to the second research question: 'What learning strategies related to pragmatics do participants report using in L2-mediated interactions?'

## 6.2 Response to RQ2: Pragmatic Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are defined as 'conscious, learner-regulated thoughts and actions for developing specific skills and general proficiency' (Oxford and Gkonou, 2018, p.406). Referring to Diao and Maa's (2019) definition of pragmatic competence shared in Chapter 3, I define 'proficiency' in this research as the learners' ability to select appropriate forms for specific contexts, to flexibly present themselves in desired ways in L2, and to interpret the meaning of particular ways of speaking in relation to the sociocultural context (Diao and Maa, 2019). In other words, students employ strategies to develop not only linguistic proficiency but also intercultural and interpersonal knowledge and skills. Previous studies (e.g. Benson and Gao, 2008) suggested differences between individuals, including both

personal and contextual factors, when choosing and applying learning strategies. The individual variation in L2 pragmatic strategies has also been observed in and richly illustrated by the five individual narratives in Chapter 5.

Although L2 learning strategies have been widely investigated in terms of vocabulary, grammar and four communication skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), the strategies learners apply specifically for L2 pragmatics learning have received scant attention in research literature. Instead, research interests have been mainly focused on the strategies of moment-by-moment pragmatic usage identified in discourse analysis (e.g. Nguyen, 2008; Björkman, 2011; Zhu, 2017). Cohen (2005, pp.288-290) first provided a systematic categorisation of pragmatic learning strategies:

a. identifying L2 speech acts to learn, using criteria such as frequency of use and stake value
b. observing native speakers' pragmatic use and choices
c. asking natives to model performance or answer questions regarding certain speech acts
d. consulting written material, such as L2 textbooks, websites, and research articles
e. conducting cross-cultural analysis between L1 and L2 speech communities

Taguchi (2018b) then divided the concept more specifically into metacognitive and cognitive strategies, with some types overlapping with Cohen's model. According to Taguchi, metacognitive strategies include directing attention to pragmatic-related concepts and features, obtaining resources from observation or interaction, and monitoring and evaluating of the communication process. Cognitive strategies involve engaging pragmatic knowledge in L1, analysing the L2 communication context, and synthesising interlanguage

pragmatic information. However, neither Cohen's (2005) nor Taguchi's (2018b) categorisations have been widely validated in empirical research.

Section 6.1 has provided evidence of how learners identify L2 speech acts in order to learn and direct attention to pragmatic-related features by describing moments when SA learners tend to notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge. This section will extend the discussion by introducing the patterns shared between the participants regarding the pragmatic learning strategies they reported using. The findings are not strictly structured following the two taxonomies yet provide empirical evidence for some of the strategies mentioned above. It could also be observed from the qualitative data that application of strategies did not always lead to successful pragmatics learning; instead, participants rather frequently generated misinterpretations or overgeneralisations during their independent learning.

### 6.2.1 Seeking Explanation from Competent Speakers

Consistent with Cohen's (2005) model, a strategy reported by all the participants involved seeking help and explanation from competent speakers, including not only native-speaker friends but non-native speakers with higher proficiency and more social experience in the host environment. Tina and Mary also engaged me, the researcher of this study and a more experienced international student in the UK, as a part of their learning resources, asking for pragmatic-related clarifications and modelling while sharing their stories in online chat and interviews. However, the use of this strategy sometimes led to overgeneralisation when the participants did not realise the pragmatic choice and/or interpretation was only prevalent in specific communities or genres, or even was just a peculiar linguistic habit of a specific individual. A typical example is Win's adoption of 'Sir Gavin' rather than 'Dear Gavin' as the opening of her email to a male lecturer, following the advice of a friend who is a native

speaker of British English. 'Sir Gavin' is apparently not a conventional address term for a male tutor in the UK higher education context, nor had Win observed such use elsewhere during her study abroad, yet she adopted the suggested norm without a doubt, considering the friend's native-speaker identity. Another instance came from Hanguang, who sought a British friend's opinion about the frequency of 'good morning/afternoon' used in daily life and concluded that they are old-fashioned and have been broadly replaced by 'morning/afternoon', despite the fact 'good morning/afternoon' is still common, especially in formal contexts. It is not difficult to surmise that such overgeneralisations could remain uncorrected for a long period, even until the end of SA, without corrective feedback or more relevant language input to stimulate noticing and reflection.

### 6.2.2 Imitating Competent Speakers' Pragmatic Actions

Imitation, or copying, has long been found to be the most common social learning strategy in research on human behaviours (Kendal et al., 2018). It has also been observed in this research as a strategy which participants frequently employed in learning of pragmatics, echoing the category 'obtaining resources from observation or interaction' mentioned by both Taguchi (2018b) and Cohen (2005). A number of examples can be found in individual narratives. Hanguang, for example, imitated expressions other speakers used to ask for names ('What's your name?') in informal circumstances after receiving implicit feedback that his expression ('How can I address you?') was too formal.

Similar to the pragmatic advice sought from native or other competent speakers discussed in Section 6.2.1, imitation by SA learners can be sometimes unsuccessful. A common reason seems to be overgeneralisation or misinterpretation of the observed pragmalinguistic feature. For example, Mary once noticed that surnames were used in academic citations;

she then assumed using surnames is the convention in academic settings and changed the way she addressed her lecturers from using their first names to a combination of both first names and surnames. Although her intention was to follow expected patterns in the higher education setting, her overgeneralisation of the rules actually led to unconventional pragmatic usage. Another possible reason leading to failed imitation is that learners hope to copy a speech act yet lack the necessary pragmalinguistic knowledge to fulfil their intention. A case in point is Win's attempt to initiate small talk. Realising most people in the room were talking with strangers nearby, Win attempted to integrate by imitating them and starting a conversation, yet she was rejected due to her inappropriate pragmalinguistic choice ('Shall we talk? Everyone is talking.').

Moreover, it is worth noting that the participants did not imitate pragmatic use in an indiscriminate manner, even if the model was a native speaker. Instead, even those claiming high motivation to learn 'authentic British English' sometimes intentionally reject NS norms. The cognitive process behind the imitation decision is usually accompanied by identity-related considerations, which will be further elaborated on in Section 6.3.1.

### 6.2.3 Metapragmatic Analysis 1: Forming Predictions with Existing Cultural and Language Knowledge

The strategy of cross-cultural and interlanguage analysis mentioned by Taguchi (2018b) and Cohen (2005) is divided into two sub-strategies in Sections 6.2.3 and 6.2.4. The findings here also exemplify 'metapragmatic awareness' from Section 3.4.4, demonstrating the process where learners engage with L2 pragmatics in an explicit and analytical way through drawing on existing linguistic and sociocultural resources. Two types of metapragmatic analysis emerge from the data: this section will illustrate how learners form

pragmatic predictions with existing cultural and language knowledge to navigate pragmatic decisions in unfamiliar L2-mediated social situations or relationships; section 6.2.4 will focus on how learners engage previous cultural and linguistic experience as reference points with which to interpret and rationalise new pragmatic forms learned in L2 interactions.

It seems the main resources that participants reported drawing upon to form pragmatic-related assumptions include (1) social and linguistic conventions acquired in previous communities, and (2) knowledge and generalisations about the host country and target language community. One example of the former is Hanguang's attempt to avoid potential offence by using 'I'm not trying to offend you, but…' when challenging his academic tutor on their draft feedback, as 'in Chinese ideologies, the young should respect the experienced and the old' (Interview: December 2019). The latter could be illustrated by Mary's assumption that complimenting another's perfume is inappropriate, as she believed the topic is private and not usually welcomed in 'Western culture', where people emphasise privacy more.

There were also cases where participants creatively and flexibly engaged both (1) and (2). A vivid example is Tina's choice of the address term 'mom' for her friend's Polish mother-in-law. Tina's choice of the address term, which later proved to be inappropriate, was based on the fusion of pragmalinguistic conventions in her L1 society and her general impression about Polish. Following are some relevant sentences brought back from Tina's narrative:

> **Tina:** … I felt Polish people are relatively conservative, and it would be blunt if I just call her Helen. My friend calls her 'mom'. I, then, also called her 'mom'. I didn't mean she was my mom. For me, it's like we call older people 'aunt' in China to show politeness and respect.
>
> (Learning Journal: January 2020)

As explained by McConachy (2018), when encountering new L2 pragmatic features, learners tend to decode the social meaning behind the linguistic units by referring and relating to existing cultural and language knowledge and their previously held understandings (sometimes stereotypes) of the host country. The findings also support Liddicoat's (2014) observations regarding language learners' monologues and group discussions; when interpreting unfamiliar language use, they 'begin from their own cultural assumptions and seek to articulate their own understanding of the aspect of language use that they are trying to interpret' (p. 269). Learners' interpretation, therefore, can be coloured by what they bring to their SA interactions and may not necessarily match speakers' intentions or the conventional meaning of the new L2 form (ibid.). Although Tina's assumption here was incorrect and led to unconventional pragmatic use, the meta-pragmatic analysis process demonstrates how a SA student may strategically select pragmatic forms through analysing cultural and interpersonal features mediating the conversation. The example also demonstrates how learners can creatively and flexibly engage transcultural and translanguaging knowledge when attempting to decode new sociocultural encounters.

### 6.2.4 Metapragmatic Analysis 2: Rationalising L2 Pragmatic Forms through Cross-Cultural Comparison and Reflection

As discussed in Section 6.1.2, participants tended to notice pragmatic features that deviate from conventions followed in their previous communities. Noticing then triggered the participants to compare knowledge accumulated in previous experience and the new pragmatic forms. Some of the comparisons were restricted to surface-level, stereotypical descriptions and generally followed an essentialist paradigm. Examples include, but are not limited to, Sections 5.5.2 and 5.5.3, in which Chloe compared 'Chinese' and 'British'

pragmatic use that she observed in the first few months and jumped to snap negative judgements regarding her L1 community.

This finding is similar with a case reported in Shively's (2011) longitudinal studying of SA Spanish learners' service encounters, which shows that learners sometimes fail to 'learn the cultural point of view and the cultural values informing the behaviour', even though they notice and acquire the new pragmatic feature (p.1825). One participant, Greta, adapted to Spanish norms by dropping 'como estás?' ('how are you?' in Spanish) and making the request directly at counter services although she considered it unfriendly and perfunctory. She did not seem to take on the cultural values informing the convention or how Spanish native speakers express friendliness in such context. Greta also viewed commonly used imperative requests in Spanish as 'authoritarian' (p.1830), without realising that it is viewed as a clearer manner to communicate by Spaniards. The difference here is that, instead of jumping to negative moral judgement about new L2 features, Chloe intuitively criticised the Chinese for being rude and indifferent based on pragmatic conventions she observed in her L1 society.

However, there were also many cases where the participants avoided snap judgements and reported a more in-depth rationalisation process. They went beyond the surface of linguistic and behavioural disparities to reflect on the sociocultural meanings that lay behind the differences. Ample examples can be found in individual narratives. Here, we may revisit a part of Tina's analysis of different directness when expressing love between Chinese and Polish families, after her Christmas dinner with a Polish family. She creatively rationalised the implicit way to express affection, which she commonly experienced in her L1 society, by explaining the consistency between self-expression and aesthetic preference in Chinese culture. At the same time, she recognised the positive impact of expressing affection directly

in intimate relationships in her experience with the Polish family (see p.139 for more details). Another example is Tina's interpretation of 'sorry' being used frequently in the UK; while realising it might not suggest a sense of care most of the time, she saw its value in negotiating harmonious and respectful interpersonal relationships (see p.138).

In cases like this, participants' reflection extended from a surface-level comparison of pragmatic actions to the cultural values informing the different norms. In this process, learners might decentre from their familiar cultural and moral framework to understand the values and interpersonal significance of the new forms and practices (Liddicoat, 2014). Similar patterns appeared in McConachy and Liddicoat's (2016) study investigating learners' intercultural meditation in pragmatic analysis. While some reflections did not seem fully developed with only stereotypical comparisons of daily practices in national units, others moved beyond superficial analysis and showed the learners' interpretations of cultural significance behind specific contexts and pragmatic differences.

## 6.3 Response to RQ3: L2 Pragmatics Learning, Learner Identity, and Intercultural Awareness

The connection between learning of L2 pragmatics, learner's identity, and their intercultural knowledge have been lightly touched in the responses to the first two research questions. Section 6.1.2 has been pointed out that noticing of L2 pragmatic gaps is usually accompanied with struggles in identity concerns, when learners hope to establish connections, negotiate relationships, or present themselves in a certain way (e.g. to be polite, casual, friendly) while failing to, or feeling unsure whether they can, achieve the interpersonal goal due to lack of sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic knowledge. From the pragmatic-specific aspect, the finding supports difficulties in 'identity-related L2 proficiency'

identidied in Aveni's (2005) study, which reported a case of an SA student holding a self-image as being witty and cool who failed to articulate those characteristics in L2 encounters. In the response to the second research question, especially Sections 6.2.3 and 6.2.4, I have illustrated how learners may proactively engage previous cultural knowledge and experiences to interpret new pragmatic use or form pragmatic assumptions. This section will extend the connection between the three key factors and answer the third research question: 'How does the students' pragmatics learning relate to their evolving senses of self and their intercultural awareness?' The answer will be divided into three parts: identity-related considerations in L2 pragmatic learning and use, identity development in learning of L2 pragmatics, and development of intercultural awareness in metapragmatic analysis.

## 6.3.1 Identity-Related Considerations in L2 Pragmatic Learning and Use

As discussed in Section 3.4.3 in the literature review, the role of identity in learners' L2 pragmatic choices has received attention from various SA researchers. However, the number of empirical studies exploring such connections is still relatively small, and research related to L2 pragmatic development is still generally investigated employing quantitative data (Ishihara, 2019). In this section, I will expand the existing discussion reviewed in Section 3.4.3 with empirical evidence from this narrative study, focusing on the role of three identity-related factors lying behind learners' L2 pragmatic learning and use: internalised cultural values; desired interpersonal distance and relationship; and perceived 'foreigner' and 'ELF user' identities.

### 6.3.1.1 The Role of Internalised Cultural Values

Echoing Kecskes (2014), who stated that language learners carry sociocultural repertoires to interpret interpersonal behaviours developed throughout the history of life experiences in previous societies, findings of this study have suggested that learners' noticing,

interpretation, and willingness to adopt new L2 pragmatic features can be influenced by their internalised cultural values. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies (e.g. Al-Issa, 2003; Ishihara & Tarone, 2009; Iwasaki, 2011; Kim, 2014; Shively, 2011) with most existing studies concluding the L1 culture is a key factor affecting learners' L2 pragmatic choices. For example, in Ishihara and Tarone's (2009) study, a Japanese L2 learner intentionally diverged from a normative use of *keigo* (honorifics in the Japanese language) in a role-play task. He spoke to a 'younger employee' in a register that would be considered over-polite in Japanese society. Behind his rejection of NS norms was an intention to apply cultural values acquired in America, his L1 society, to establish a horizontal supervisor-subordinate relationship.

Admittedly, learners' cultural values can largely be L1-based, and evidence from the participants' narratives can be found to illustrate the point. An example is from Hanguang's case, where he specifically pointed out the influence of Chinese culture in his rejection of NS pragmatic conventions. Despite his awareness of the convention of using first names to address lecturers in UK universities and a more egalitarian communication style, he felt uncomfortable adopting the forms due to a transfer of L1 cultural values, which highlights the importance 'for the young to show respect to the old, and for inferior to respect the superior'.

However, it needs to be pointed out that the term 'L1 culture' bears the risk of falling into an essentialist paradigm by overgeneralising or oversimplifying people in a country and even a bigger area who share the same L1. It might also disguise the influence of smaller cultural communities in which learners have been engaged and learners' agency in negotiating cultural values picked up from previous societies (Blommaert, 2005). Chloe's story is a typical counter-example of the L1 culture's influence. As a Chinese person who spent her

whole life before SA in China, she seemed to hold a rather rebellious attitude to Chinese culture, language, and even community at the beginning of the academic year; she proudly identified herself as a 'Westernised' Chinese with rich experience of socialising with English-speaking teachers and peers from a private English school. Consequently, at the early stage of the SA year, she held extremely positive attitudes to the new English pragmatic features she noticed in her life, and at the same time criticised corresponding pragmatic norms prevalent in China.

Influences of smaller cultural units and personal life experiences permeate experiences reported by the participants. Although all the participants share the same L1 and lived in the same country before SA, with different life and educational backgrounds and access to various communities, their noticing, interpretation, and use of new L2 pragmatic features observed from their personal narratives vary significantly. Take Hanguang's case as an example. He explained his inconsistent attitudes to intimate terms of address ('love', 'honey', 'boy') in terms of his family background, in which he maintained a closer relationship with female relatives. That was why, he believed, he felt uncomfortable when male shop assistants used these terms while he found it pleasant when the interlocutor was female. He has also explicitly discussed the influence of values in ancient Chinese literature ('morality', 'courtesy', 'elegance' and 'harmony') on his language choices, which exemplifies the influence of sub-cultures on SA students' L2 pragmatic use.

This section, therefore, complements and expands existing studies by concluding that language learners' interpretation and willingness to adopt new L2 pragmatic features are influenced by the values internalised from previous cultural communities. Specifically, I argue that the 'previous cultural communities' should not be simplified as 'L1 community', 'home-country community', or any group defined by language or geographical borders.

Instead, as Blommaert (2015) argued, ‘any living individual would be expected to have access to a terrific multitude of such “niches” and would therefore be tremendously “multicultural”’ (p.24). When drawing on previous cultural repertoire to interpret L2 pragmatic features and mediate language choices, learners do not rely on a specific schema but a personal collection of resources from their multicultural experience.

#### 6.3.1.2 The Role of Desired Interpersonal Distance and Relationship

Supported by rich evidence from the narrative chapter, another factor that seems to influence learners’ choices of L2 pragmatics is the interpersonal distance and relationships they seek to maintain during the conversation. Identity-related concerns may lead to L2 learners, even those claiming high motivation to learn ‘authentic British English’, rejecting NS norms: for example, Mary’s and Hanguang’s disapproval of ‘honey’ as used by shop assistants; they felt the term suggested excessive intimacy and positioned them uncomfortably in the conversation with the stranger by shortening the desired interpersonal distance. Even when reporting convergence regarding the same L2 pragmatic feature, different learners may have different considerations regarding their communicative purposes and interpersonal relationships (McConachy and Fujino, 2021). A case in point is Win’s and Tina’s rejection of using ‘Dear Gavin’ to start an email to a tutor. While Tina was concerned more about whether she would violate email conventions by using the lecturer’s first name, Win wanted to avoid the inappropriate intimacy she sensed with the word ‘Dear’, even if she had noticed Gavin used ‘Dear Win’ in his email as an English native speaker.

This finding is also consistent with some of the previous studies. One of them is Hassall’s (2014) study, mentioned in Section 3.4.3, which reported the case of an Indonesian L2 learner who adopted ‘bapak/ibu (dad/mom)’ as terms of address for the host parents.

Feeling warmly accepted by the family, he willingly adopted these terms to express affection and intimacy, despite finding such use strange at the very beginning. Similar findings have also been shown in Siegal's (1996) case study of an American SA student in Japan, in which the learner's lack of honorific language usage in a conversation with her professor was interpreted as an attempt to present herself not 'as a mere student, but as a knowledgeable researcher on a semi-equal basis with the professor' (p.274).

It is worth noting that the line between the two factors mentioned above, internalised cultural values and learners' desired social distance, can be blurry. One's expectations of social relationships are usually mediated by sociocultural conventions acquired in previous communities, and therefore the two factors are not always separable. Here I shall bring back the close connection between culture and identity proposed by Nunan and Choi (2010) in Section 3.3.3; the former is 'artifacts, ways of doing, etc. shared by a group of people', while the latter is 'the acceptance and internalisation of the artifacts and ways of doing by a member of that group' (p.5). While categorised into two sections in this study, the potential overlap in between should not be neglected.

#### 6.3.1.3 The Role of 'Foreigner' and 'ELF User' Identity

This section illustrates how the perceived 'foreigner' or 'ELF speaker' identities can influence learners' pragmatic choices. The findings echo Brown's (2013) research, covered in Section 3.4.3, which shows that learners' perception of themselves as 'foreigners' or 'outsiders' in the target language community could also lead to an intentional violation of NS conventions: for example, Mary's rejection of the term 'I want to spend a penny' learned from a British local. Although she exhibited a strong desire to learn native-like English during the SA year, she viewed idioms and local phrases as insider language typically shared in the L1 group and believed using such language would be regarded by others as an awkward

attempt to approach a community she did not belong in. Her choice not to use the expression, as she reported, was also due to concerns about its intelligibility to non-native English speakers, which suggests the influence of her ELF user identity. She hoped to exploit English as a lingua franca as a medium to reach and interact with a wider community rather than native speakers only. The latter reason shares similarities with findings in Nogami's (2020) study, which showed that some Japanese English learners intentionally deviated from NS conventions out of consideration that the ELF interlocutor might not hope to follow such norms.

Apart from how 'foreigner' and 'ELF' identities lead to rejection of NS pragmatic norms, there is also evidence from the participants' narratives about how they mediated communication anxiety and developed confidence as language users. For instance, Tina mentioned her concerns a few times about the appropriateness of her language in tutor-student interactions in the first few months of sojourning, while later she felt more relaxed as 'teachers are very tolerant to international students about email writing' (Interview: December 2019). Similar feelings were shared by Mary, who discussed her increased confidence in English communication: 'I feel less anxious about possible offence I could cause... They [native speakers] are quite tolerant' (Interview: September 2020).

Viewing these citations in terms of their holistic SA experience, during which Tina and Mary generally perceived the proficient speakers around them as friendly, tolerant, and supportive, one may conclude that the 'foreigner' and 'ELF learner' identities were gradually constructed by the participants in a rather positive manner, increasing their willingness to communicate and helped them find equal power in conversations with native speakers (More details will be covered in Section 6.3.3.3). The shift can be observed from their confident divergence from NS norms, and more explicitly, from Tina's summary of her

changed attitude to 'purest NS English' in our last interview: 'Now I feel English does not belong to native speakers only… We [non-native speakers] might speak differently, but it does not mean our English is not authentic' (Interview: September 2020, see p.148 for more details).

#### 6.3.1.4 The Role of Actual Communicative Situations

The three sections above have, from three different dimensions, illustrated how learners exercise their own agency as language users in making pragmatic choices. Lastly, it needs to be highlighted that it was in specific contexts that the previously mentioned elements gained relevance for the five participants, and their exact role was determined. Zimmerman (1998, p.91) explained the phenomenon with the term 'transportable identity'; identities are not simply pre-possessed characteristics that speakers bring to the conversation but can be activated, facilitated or hindered in different interpersonal relationships and communicative situations. SA students' pragmatic interpretations and usage are results of an interaction between their previously internalised identities and cultural conventions, and how they selectively activate them in particular contexts.

Hanguang's seemingly contradictory L2 pragmatic choices are an illustration of this point. On the one hand, he held critical attitudes to 'cheers' being used as an informal substitution for 'thank you', as he believed it indicated the degradation of English from an 'always formal and elegant' language; on the other hand, he happily adopted 'ey up', a casual daily greeting in Yorkshire dialect, when talking to a Yorkshire bookstore assistant. As explained earlier, it was very likely that Hanguang, without being aware, claimed different identities in the two situations. In the former situation he interpreted 'cheers', the new linguistic form, from the perspective of an enthusiast of classic literature who regarded the English language as an idealised aesthetic symbol which should be 'always elegant and formal'. However, this

'language critic' identity seemed to be suppressed in the harmonious daily conversation in the bookstore. Instead, he revealed his identity as a friendly customer and a sojourner eager to know about local language and culture, which motivated him to imitate the dialect.

The finding echoes Davies and Harré's (1990) reflection on speakers' self-positioning in conversations; as discourse and their positions change, people might engage different emotional/social/cultural repertoires, and therefore their narratives might not always read coherently. With the understanding of the emergent, fluid nature of identities in communicative settings, these 'inconsistencies' in learners' pragmatic choices, should not be regarded as 'exceptions' but the 'normality' that permeates everyday language use.

### 6.3.2 Identity Development in Learning of L2 Pragmatics

Section 6.3.1 has presented data showing how learners' identity-related concerns could affect their learning and adoption of new L2 pragmatic features in the SA context. This part will now move on to the reverse influence – how exposure to new L2 pragmatic features may lead to SA learners' identity development. The mutual influence between language learning and learner identity has been discussed in relation to general L2 learning (e.g. in Benson et al.'s study mentioned in Section 3.3.4), but it has not been adequately discussed and exemplified in existing empirical works on L2 pragmatic development. As discussed earlier, learners assess sociocultural contexts and interpersonal relationships when making pragmatic choices (Kesebir & Haidt, 2010; McConachy, 2018; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2016). Conceivably, learning new pragmatic features can in return make learners aware of different ways to negotiate relationships and identities, consequently advancing reflections on their current perceptions of their selves in interpersonal connections (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013). This section will validate the hypothesis with evidence from this study.

Before showing examples, I shall first clarify what 'identity development' refers to in this project by re-introducing the poststructuralist definitions of identity mentioned in the literature review. Identity is viewed as a 'fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing' understanding of the relationship between self and the social world (Norton and Toohey, 2011, p.13). In other words, one's identity is constantly shaped through interacting with others in the community, as individuals establish and adjust their positions in the world while at the same time receiving feedback from and being positioned by others (Gee, 2000; van Lier, 2004). Previous researchers (e.g. Benson et al., 2013; Burck, 2005) have identified two dimensions of identity: (1) how one understands the 'self' and projects it to others; and (2) how the projected identity is perceived in social interactions (e.g. Benson et al., 2012). This study mainly investigates identity from the learners' perspective, focusing on their perceptions of themselves and their relationships with the world and how they shape it through the negotiation of those relationships. Identity development discussed in this research therefore refers to the ongoing self-interpretation process, during which the present 'I' constantly reflects on the past 'me' in order to guide the future 'me' as life experience accumulates (Wiley, 1994).

Here I will bring back two examples from the participants' narratives to illustrate how noticing and analysing pragmatic differences can trigger SA students to reflect on and even reshape their sense of self. The first example involves Hanguang and his change of speech act strategy when accepting compliments after staying in the UK for five months (see p.162 for the interview transcript). Hanguang used to respond to praise with self-derogatory expressions (e.g. 'No, no. It's not like that'), through which he attempted to show humility. His pragmatic strategy was consistent with the meaning of 'Hanguang (含光)', the pseudonym he picked for himself, which means to 'to dull the glow and be humble'.

Accepting compliments with ‘thank you’ could simply be Hanguang’s imitation of competent speakers and an attempt to acculturate to the L2 community. However, it appears the conversational experience gained changed his self-consciousness and, in general, the identity he wants to convey to others on similar occasions— moving from being humble to being confident and open. The new sense of self, in return, impacted his pragmatic choices in L1: ‘I used to behave differently [in the two languages], but I feel they are mixing up. Now, if I think I am good at something, I will not try to hide it when others compliment me’ (Interview: December 2019).

The second case involves Tina’s analysis and reflections on modes of address in English and Chinese in conversations with senior people around her, such as her host family, language partner, and doctor (see interview clips on p.144). She compared the different forms of address used in the two languages, and how they differently impact on and reflect interpersonal relationships: ‘When I use the polite form [in Chinese], I feel the interpersonal distance is suddenly lengthened, and I feel we can never become friends’. Through meta-pragmatic analysis, Tina saw new possibilities in negotiating senior-junior relationships, a genre she had been familiar with but negotiated differently in her L1 community before SA. Tina also developed a new ideal position in such relationships; as the junior, she hoped to present herself and be identified by the interlocutor as an individual with equal voice and social status without being constrained or distanced by the age-related hierarchy.

Although this section only brings back two data clips from the large amount available, the examples are representative, and all five participants reported significant personal changes in different aspects of life closely related to their metapragmatic reflection throughout their SA year. Some of the changes were shared (e.g. three participants expressed a new preference for less hierarchical interpersonal relationships mediated by egalitarian forms of

address in English), and some are idiosyncratic, closely connected to the person's background and L2 resources available during SA. As Benson et al. (2013) argued, individuals' L2 learning and use are interwoven with their life experience, and thus the process of 'becoming a different person' proceeds with the development of language skills and knowledge (p.32).

The process also resembles Mathew's (2000) 'culture supermarket' metaphor in intercultural communication: people entering an intercultural zone are compared to those moving from local stores to supermarkets; more sorts of products are available, stimulating the new immigrants to evaluate their preliminary choices with new alternatives. In L2 pragmatics, especially when learners notice differences between unfamiliar L2 usage and norms that they have previously conformed to, they are capable of transcending L1/L2 comparison at a surface level to investigate how identity is presented with the language and how interpersonal relationships are negotiated differently. The new alternatives can stimulate sojourners to reconsider how they hope to position themselves and to be positioned by others, through which learners gain a deeper awareness of both the 'self' and its connections to the social world. The identity development may in turn lead to adoption or rejection of the new L2 pragmatic forms, and even cause cross-linguistic influence with new pragmatic choices and strategies transferred back to other languages they have known.

### 6.3.3 Development of Intercultural Awareness in Metapragmatic Analysis

Previous sections (6.2.3 and 6.2.4) have illustrated how the participants use existing cultural knowledge to form assumptions and interpret new features in L2 metapragmatic analysis. This section will discuss how pragmatic-based reflections can in return foster learners' development of intercultural awareness. In this study, the participants' developed intercultural awareness can be observed across three dimensions: disruption of essentialist

tendencies; development of intercultural inclusiveness; and development of transcultural competence.

#### 6.3.3.1 Transcending Essentialism

At the early stage of SA, three of the five participants showed obvious tendencies to explain linguistic and behavioural differences they observed as patterns consistent with the group people belong to; their categorisations of these groups were generally based on national (e.g. Britons), geographical (e.g. Westerners), and linguistic borders (e.g. English speakers). This seems to be the result of the concepts of national cultures easily accessible in daily discussions (Pizziconi, 2021), and the intercultural education —— mainly based on an neo-essentialist paradigm —— they had received back to their home country. However, with accumulated intercultural communication experience during SA, the participants tended to challenge cultural stereotypes and essentialist statements they had held at the earlier stage. They demonstrated more caution when making generalisations, gained an awareness of multiple voices within the same cultural group, and brought more context-specific factors into their intercultural comparison and analysis with a developing understanding of the situated nature of culture. Citing Baker's (2011b) model for learners' intercultural awareness development mentioned in Section 3.2.5, the participants generally moved up from Level 1 to Level 2 by developing an understanding of the complexity of cultures.

Evidence can be found in the narratives of Hanguang, Mary and Chloe. Before studying abroad, Hanguang saw Britons as 'always elegant, formal, and polite'. When first noticing language use (e.g. 'cheers') that deviated from his perceived image of people in the UK, he made an intuitive negative judgement, believing that the casual and informal language is a sign of 'English degrading' and 'Britons losing their identity'. However, it seems he generally

moved beyond the stereotype with increased contact with locals and exposure to more informal language use (e.g. ‘Ey up’ and ‘love’). Later in the year, he demonstrated more caution when making generalisations in our interview discussions (e.g. ‘I feel there is more freedom in Western countries. It is probably my stereotype though.’). His change could also be seen from his reflection on his changed perception of British culture in the last interview, in which he presented his awareness not only of inaccurate stereotypes he formerly held but also the fluidity of cultures by mentioning mutual influence between local Britons and immigrants. Mary shared similar experiences as Hanguang’s. Before studying abroad, she had seen Britons as generally ‘implicit’ and ‘hard to approach’. However, with increasing contact with strangers, such as greetings she received during hiking and small talk easily initiated in informal social events, she challenged the stereotypical group image learned before and became aware that ‘what we’ve learned from the textbook could be different from our true experience’ (Interview: December 2019).

The tendency to disrupt essentialist interpretation of culture is especially obvious in Chloe’s case. In the first few months, Chloe would easily fall into overgeneralisations when explaining pragmatic differences she observed, such as ‘Chinese don't distinguish "like" and "love"’ and ‘Britons would not call for a waiter to help them’. Later, she gradually developed a critical cosmopolitan disposition, which is demonstrated in her growing awareness of the blurred boundaries between Western and Eastern cultures and national cultures, the common ground shared between these cultures, and the role of individual agency in mediating language use and behaviours (see Section 6.5.4 for more details). When reflecting on her previous negative judgements on Chinese culture at the early stage, she admitted holding stereotypes, and showed greater awareness of nuanced contextual factors in intercultural comparisons. One example is her rationalisation of differences between Chinese and Britons when expressing gratitude when holding the door open for a stranger

(see p. 198). Moreover, Chloe presented a more in-depth, critical reflection on cultural stereotypes; although she believed generalisations could lead to hasty and unfair judgements, she did not completely deny the sharedness of cultures. Instead, she treated cultural generalisations as helpful reference points to strategically manage expectations and understand differences in intercultural communication.

#### 6.3.3.2 Developing Cultural Inclusiveness

By probing into sociocultural meanings and avoiding snap judgements when encountering unconventional pragmatic features, the participants also seemed to develop an understanding of different perspectives and a sense of inclusiveness. As discussed earlier, SA students are capable of moving beyond linguistic and behavioural disparities to reflect on the interpersonal and sociocultural meanings that lay behind pragmatic differences. The process can urge learners to realise 'limitations and consequences of understanding the linguistic practices of one language within the cultural frameworks of another' (McConachy and Liddicoat, 2016, p.27), and consequently decentre from their familiar structures to 'understand multiple perspectives and to search for and accept multiple possible interpretations' (Liddicoat, 2014, p.261).

Multiple examples could be found in the participants' narratives, such as Tina's reflection on the different levels of directness between Polish and Chinese families in expressing love, mentioned in Section 6.2.4. Tina creatively explained the implicit way to express affection she perceived in her L1 community by explaining its connection with aesthetic preference in traditional Chinese culture. On the other hand, she recognised the importance of expressing love directly in intimate relationships through her experiences with the Polish family. Within this process, Tina developed a deeper understanding and gained an appreciation of cultural

values informing the different norms in L1 and L2 communities with an unjudgmental, inclusive attitude.

Another example is Win's reflection on the joke she failed to catch in the Welsh Taster, which nudged her to reflect upon the notable differences in people's tolerance and openness towards topics regarding territorial independence in L1 and L2 cultures (see Section 5.3.3 for details). Instead of making a negative judgement about either side, Win attempted to rationalise the great divergence with an empathetic attitude and open mind. Later in her presentation regarding Tibetan culture, Win also sensitively paid attention to inclusive language use to navigate a path between the potentially opposing viewpoints.

#### 6.3.3.3 Developing Transcultural Competence

Through metapragmatic reflections, the participants also seemed to develop transcultural competence. The prefix 'trans' here refers to the flexibility in language and cultural practices, whereby learners negotiate their positions 'through and across, rather than in-between' cultures' (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019, p. 472). More specifically, transcultural individuals may not always regulate themselves with a certain cultural framework; instead, they are capable of challenging established structures and agentively negotiating their intercultural identities without necessarily fully adopting the shared conventions of a community. Citing Baker's (2011b) model again, these learners started to develop Level 3 intercultural awareness, not only aware of the complexity of cultures but able to flexibly transcend and mediate between different cultural contexts.

The participants' developed transcultural selves are reflected in their pragmatic choices, where learners form unique intercultural identities and develop a communication style without fully conforming to conventions from either home or host community (Blackledge

and Creese, 2017). An example from the pilot study of this research illustrates the point well. During the interview with a student from Indonesia studying in the UK, I noticed she consistently addressed a lecturer 'Dr David'. The participant explained that she intentionally avoided the two conventional ways to address tutors, to use either the first name or 'Dr + surname'. She felt uncomfortable using the first name, as it is considered very rude in her home culture; however, with the awareness that other students usually address the tutor as 'David', she worried that 'Dr + Surname' would project an impression to the tutor that she intentionally tried to distance him. 'Dr David' was a term, although not falling in either L1 or L2 conventions, creatively used by this participant to navigate the linguacultural differences she noticed and balance the identity concerns and negotiate the teacher-student relationship in the way she wanted.

Moreover, Chloe and Tina explicitly discussed developed transcultural competence in learning journals and interviews. Becoming aware of the previous stereotypes of Western and Eastern cultures and individual autonomy in negotiating cultural values, Chloe gradually tore off her 'Westernised Chinese' label, which used to be a hugely important part of her sense of self as a sign to distinguish herself from her Chinese peers and to proudly present her appreciation of Western culture, which she had perceived to be more developed compared with her home culture. Instead, she developed a new ideal transcultural self who was 'not restricted by nationalities' (Learning Journal: March 2020), and who attempted to avoid 'restricting other people in national frames' (Learning Journal: April 2020). For Tina, the transcultural identity is partly reflected in the way in the last interview she negotiated her identity as a SA learner from a developing country, during which she challenged the authority of the Western culture and turned around perceived cultural deficiency to a position where she shared equally legitimate cultural resources with locals (see p.147 for more details).

To summarise, Chapter 6 has systematically addressed the three research questions, from which we see the essential roles of culture and identity in learning L2 pragmatics, echoing the title of this thesis. In the SA context, students' noticing of knowledge gaps in L2 pragmatics is usually triggered by unfamiliar sociocultural conventions or identity-related considerations on social and moral levels. When forming assumptions and interpreting new pragmatic features, learners often rely on cultural frameworks as reference points and analyse the potential interpersonal impact of the noticed forms. Moreover, there seems to be a bidirectional relationship between (1) L2 pragmatics development and (2) identity and intercultural awareness of learners. Learners' understanding and use of L2 pragmatics are influenced by their previous cultural experiences and sense of self. Conversely, a conscious effort to invest in the development of pragmatic competence has forced them to re-engage with and often challenge their preconceived notions of what is appropriate, leading to reflections and even them reshaping their previously-internalised cultural values and their understanding and negotiation of the connection between ‘self’ and ‘others’.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

This longitudinal, narrative study has investigated how five Chinese postgraduate students in the UK developed L2 pragmatics throughout their year of study abroad. It has provided answers to the questions I proposed in the introduction: (1) the pragmatic-related struggles learners face and how they notice, analyse, reflect on, and adopt new pragmatic forms, and (2) whether L2 pragmatic development has any broader impacts on learners, especially on their interpretation of the sociocultural meanings behind the linguistic forms and their self-perception. With data generated through interviews and learning journals over a 12- to 15-month period, this study acquired an emic perspective by focusing on critical learning incidents noticed and reflected by SA students themselves and learning strategies they reported using. Biographical narratives and paradigmatic analysis have been combined to present both the trajectories of learners' idiosyncratic pragmatic development and patterns shared between individual cases. This section will first summarise the key findings and contributions of this thesis. It will then describe the project's limitations. Lastly, it will discuss its implications for both pedagogy and future research in the relevant fields.

## 7.1 Summary of the Key Findings

In response to the first research question ('In what moments do students notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK study-abroad environment?'), this study has described moments in L2 interactions when students tend to notice gaps in their pragmatic knowledge. These include (1) encountering unfamiliar sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features in others' language use, (2) struggling in negotiation of social or moral meanings when expressing themselves, and (3) receiving implicit feedback from other speakers regarding appropriateness of their language use, such as unexpected reactions or communication breakdowns. It has also identified two specific types of social occasion

where SA learners, even those with high-level linguistic proficiency, tend to struggle with L2 pragmatics. The first is interactions with academic tutors in both written and oral forms. The genre seems to be particularly rapport-sensitive for SA learners, as they hope to receive support from the tutors and at the same time need to maintain the power distance in the relationship by using status-congruent language. The participants' discretion in tutor-student relationships in this research also seems to be an extension of their L1 cultural values, in which learners are usually expected to show respect for their teachers in a more hierarchical relationship. The second social occasion the students tended to find difficult is small talk, which requires mastery of rather sophisticated conversational and sociocultural skills such as initiating and maintaining conversations, picking appropriate topics, and understanding informal and indirect language use and humour.

In response to the second research question ('What learning strategies related to pragmatics do participants report using in L2-mediated interactions?'), this study has described four learning strategies frequently employed by the five participants in learning L2 pragmatics: seeking help from competent L2 speakers; imitating their pragmatic actions; forming predictions with existing linguacultural knowledge; and rationalising new L2 pragmatic features through cross-cultural comparison and reflection. Some of these strategies have led to successful learning. At the same time, findings show that learners rather frequently come to overgeneralisations or incorrect sociopragmatic assumptions due to their limited L2 contact, leading to unconventional L2 pragmatic choices. These misinterpretations could remain uncorrected for a long period, even until the end of the SA period, without corrective feedback or more relevant language input to stimulate noticing and reflection. Despite this, this section demonstrates how learners make deliberate efforts to address their knowledge gaps in L2 pragmatics by engaging explicitly and analytically with new forms. In this process, learners sometimes move beyond the surface of linguistic forms

to explore underlying sociocultural and interpersonal meanings and strategically mediate pragmatic choices by creatively and flexibly engaging transcultural knowledge and translanguaging skills.

In response to the third research question ('How does their pragmatics learning relate to the students' evolving senses of self and their intercultural awareness?'), this study has reported a bidirectional influence between L2 pragmatics development and learner identity from a longitudinal perspective. Evidence suggests that sojourners' interpretation and use of new L2 pragmatic forms are mediated by identity-related considerations, including internalised cultural values, desired interpersonal relationships, and their perceived foreigner and/or ELF identities. In return, noticing and analysing pragmatic differences can trigger SA students to reflect on and even reshape their sense of self, which usually leads to development not just as an L2 learner but holistically as a person. As mentioned in the last paragraph, learners are capable of transcending L1/L2 comparisons at a surface level to investigate how identity is expressed linguistically and how interpersonal relationships are negotiated differently in the L2. The new alternatives may then stimulate sojourners to reconsider how they position themselves linguistically and how they are positioned by others, through which learners in turn gain a deeper awareness of both the 'self' and its connections to the social world. By probing into sociocultural meanings behind different pragmatic forms, sojourners may also develop intercultural awareness, with enhanced understanding for different values, and the competence to react to different linguacultural systems flexibly.

## 7.2 Contributions

The thesis has advanced our understanding of L2 pragmatics learning in the SA context with both theoretical and methodological contributions to the field.

### 7.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

First, the amount of research investigating noticing of L2 pragmatics is relatively small; most studies have focused mainly on pedagogical pragmatics, and learners' noticing in the natural context remains under-investigated. Responding to the first research question, this study has attempted to fill this gap by identifying moments where learners tend to notice L2 pragmatic gaps from both aspects of the SLA process and social occasions, according to the evidence from their self-report narratives.

Second, while L2 learning strategies have been widely investigated in terms of vocabulary, grammar and the four communication skills, the strategies learners apply specifically for L2 pragmatics learning have received scant attention from educational researchers. Cohen (2005) and Taguchi (2018b) formed theoretical frameworks of pragmatic learning strategies, yet their categorisations have not been adequately validated with empirical evidence. By answering the second research question, this study has supported some of the strategies in Cohen's and Taguchi's frameworks, illustrating how the application of these learning strategies may lead to unintentional misinterpretation and even unconventional pragmatic choices. This section also shows how learners' noticing at superficial levels, as the entry point of meta-pragmatic awareness, leads to more in-depth intercultural comparison and reflection underpinning their L2 pragmatic choices and interpretation. This will be elaborated under the third point of this section.

Third, the number of empirical studies exploring the connection between identity, culture, and pragmatics is still relatively small. There has been a tendency in L2 pragmatics research to treat language and culture as separate factors rather than as integrated variables. Regarding learner identity, previous studies have mainly focused on how L2 learners' identity and previous cultural experiences impact on their L2 pragmatic choices by investigating reasons behind learners' adoptions and rejections of NS norms. However, a much smaller number of studies have investigated the reverse influence – how learning of L2 pragmatics could potentially foster learners' identity shift or development, especially not from a longitudinal perspective. The discussion regarding the third research question has expanded the existing discussion about how identity-related factors affect learners' L2 pragmatic learning and use, with empirical evidence from this qualitative longitudinal study. It also suggested how, in return, exposure to new L2 pragmatic features can prompt learners to go beyond linguistic forms to explore cultural and interpersonal meanings behind the language, which may then lead to the development of identity and learners' intercultural awareness. By doing this, this study expands the focus of pragmatic research from how learners develop L2 linguistic proficiency to how L2 learning fosters broader personal development.

### 7.2.2 Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, this study addressed the criticisms of the ontology and epistemology prevalent in L2 pragmatics research as discussed in Section 3.4.3. First, it has moved beyond assessing learners' pragmatic competence by reference to inner-circle English pragmatic standards, in the belief that these should not be considered the only legitimate forms in the ELF context. By doing this, this research attempted to avoid falling into the centre-West chauvinism tendency warned against by Holliday (2011) and Harvey et al. (2019) or the NS supremacy decried by Bond (2019). The Chinese SA students in this study were not

positioned as powerless newcomers who passively accept and struggle to squeeze themselves into the linguacultural context of the host country. Instead, the study reveals their competence in negotiating their unique intercultural identity and challenging existing cultural and linguistic structures acquired from both L1 and L2 communities. Their previous linguistic and cultural knowledge, even when it deviated from NS norms, was not labelled as incorrect or as negative transfer, but was interpreted as a valuable resource in unpacking the meaning of L2 pragmatic features.

Moreover, this study did not attempt to measure SA learners' improvement with tasks simulating social situations, such as DCT and role-plays, adopted by the majority of studies concerning learning of L2 pragmatics. Instead, it focused on how they learn, react to, and reflect on L2 pragmatics in real-life situations with learners' self-reported narrative data. By doing so, this study has (1) avoided the authenticity and validity issues that DCT and role-play tasks may cause, and (2) shifted attention from pragmatic forms or contexts that interest researchers to moments of pragmatic learning noticed and considered significant by learners themselves in L2-mediated interactions. With close attention to the participants' rationalisations and reflections on real-life interactions, this thesis has also probed into learners' cognitive processes and inner struggles in their L2 pragmatic learning and performance. It could thus be said that this research approached 'L2 pragmatics learning' from a student-centred perspective that has been inadequately addressed in previous research.

Last, this research enriches the field by providing a longitudinal perspective. The number of longitudinal enquires focusing on SA sojourners' pragmatics learning is still relatively small, especially the ones investigating learners' developing meta-pragmatic awareness rather than their 'measurable' progressing proficiency. However, the significance of the

longitudinal design has been highlighted by many researchers. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, some linguistic and sociocultural norms are indirect and not easily observable in social interactions (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001), and thus it usually takes time for learners to notice and acquire L2 pragmatic features (Taguchi, 2012). Understanding sociocultural meaning of language use also involves constant interpretation of emerging social interactions and synthesis of pre-existing knowledge and new experiences (McConachy, 2018; Tullock, 2018). The longitudinal element of this research therefore contributes to conceptualising L2 pragmatic development by capturing learners' pragmatic-related changes and their ongoing interpretation of the sociocultural contexts underpinning the changes. The longitudinal design also allows the researcher to observe how accumulating pragmatic-related encounters and reflections lead to the sojourners' development not only as a language learner but a holistic person. These observations answer the questions asked at the beginning of thesis (Section 1.1): how SA students' struggles and sense-making process trigger exploration of deeper cultural and interpersonal meanings behind the language, and how they are nudged to reflect on and even change their self-perception and the values shaped in their previous communities.

## 7.3 Limitations

The following limitations regarding research methodology should be taken into consideration when reading and evaluating the contributions of this thesis.

First, since this was an intensive longitudinal study managed by one single researcher, the sample size of this study is small, limited to five Chinese postgraduate students studying in the UK. It would therefore be undesirable to indiscreetly generalise the findings to students of different language, cultural, and educational backgrounds, and broad generalisations and

predictions are not the aims of this individual-centred inquiry. As discussed in the section on research trustworthiness (Section 4.8), the process of generalisation in this study is expected to be more reflexive, requiring readers to view the research more reflexively and critically and consider whether the findings and conclusions apply by connecting the specific cases in this research to their life contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Second, data generated were based on participants' recall of daily interactions concerning L2 pragmatics. In other words, the study did not directly capture the participants' noticing of L2 pragmatics but their self-report of noticing. There could have been cases where participants noticed learning yet chose not to share, or where noticing happened yet did not raise explicit attention. Moreover, learners' self-report data failed to capture every detail in the conversation, and their recollections might not be completely accurate. Despite these unavoidable limitations, the method enables the researcher to capture critical learning moments and their meanings to learners in various daily situations that are important for accelerating their language and holistic development yet were not accessible for direct observations or recordings. This type of data is necessary for this research, as it aims to investigate L2 pragmatics learning from the learners' perspective (e.g. what pragmatic features attract their attention and how they interpret the noticed features) rather than analysing conversational details or quantifying learners' improvement when using certain pragmalinguistic forms.

Moreover, the research design might have failed to capture learners' development or changed attitudes regarding certain pragmatic features. Unlike DCT or role-play tasks, which require learners to use or react to specific conversational contexts, learning journals rely on naturally occurring conversations and thus cannot guarantee collecting data in comparable situations over time. Some consistencies between different episodes can be observed from

the individual narratives, such as Tina's gradually developed understanding of using terms of address in both L1 and L2 languages. In some other cases, however, the researcher might have only captured participants' initial assumption or interpretation regarding certain pragmatic usage and failed to track learners' follow-up learning or actions. Another reason behind this challenge is the relatively short time for effective data collection. Although the study went on for more than a year, learners' L2 socialisation was greatly disrupted by the outbreak of COVID-19 after the first four months. The limited L2 contact might have prevented changes from happening or being captured.

Last, it needs to be pointed out that participating in this research likely influenced participants' SA lives. Journal keeping, interview discussions, and the researchers' continuing involvement might have unavoidably fostered noticing and reflection on issues related to L2 pragmatics, culture and identity. This influence was confirmed by all the participants at the end of the study. Most of them believed the commitment to keeping pragmatic-related learning journals prompted them to pay additional attention to daily conversations and ponder language choices, which could have been neglected or quickly slipped from their minds without this research.

Although the study has claimed to approach the topic from the learner's perspective, I am aware of the role of the researcher in interactional conversations. As Talmy (2011) pointed out, participants' voices are 'situationally contingent and discursively co-constructed', and thus dependent on the researchers' prompts and responses in conversations (p. 27). Even in participants' monologues, the interactive component should still not be neglected, as the 'process of articulation may in fact be a constituent part of the reflective activity being communicated' (Liddicoat, 2014, p.275). Additionally, some participants proactively engaged the researcher as a part of their L2 learning resources, asking for advice to expand

L2 social connections and pragmatic-related clarifications and modelling while sharing their stories in online chat and interviews. While admitting researcher influence does not negate insights generated from this study, it is important to understand that this research is also a part of the participants' learning context while reading and interpreting the qualitative data (Croker, 2009).

## 7.4 Pedagogical Implications

The study generates insight into how institutions and tutors might help international students find their place in their adopted communities and foster inclusion by providing pragmatic-specific support. Evidence in this study indicated identity challenges that SA students face in daily interactions concerning L2 pragmatics, as linguistic barriers and unfamiliar conventions in interpersonal communications can influence their abilities 'to do things with words and to function as a person' (Benson et al., 2012, p.183). Nevertheless, the support that most students receive from their university only relates to their academic subjects. Through probing into the SA experience from the students' perspective, this study highlights the benefits of pragmatic-related support at the pre-departure stage (e.g. language courses, SA preparation training) and in the higher education context during SA (e.g. pre-sessional and in-sessional EAP courses, academic and career workshops, and online resources for independent learning).

The five participants' narratives have presented SA learners' autonomy and competence in learning L2 pragmatics noticed in daily conversations. However, there seem to be obvious gaps between their levels of pragmatic awareness and understanding of the sociocultural and interpersonal meanings behind the pragmatic forms. Moreover, as discussed in Section 6.1, the participants were TESOL students who presumably have higher L2 learning

motivation and greater sensitivity to language. This research might have also fostered noticing and reflection on issues related to L2 pragmatics. Taking these factors into consideration, instructors should not expect SA students from various backgrounds to pay as much deliberate attention to pragmatics learning as these participants did, and therefore pedagogical interventions are necessary.

Some previous studies (e.g. Halenko and Jones, 2011; Alcón-Soler, 2017) have discussed the effectiveness of explicit pragmatics teaching in enhancing SA students' perceived effectiveness in communication and maintaining interpersonal relationships. This thesis provides specific suggestions for pedagogical interventions by describing pragmatic-related gaps in L2 interactions noticed by learners themselves. Language tutors or SA facilitators may start with the two social occasions with which SA students tend to struggle. One is interactions between students and staff (especially academic tutors), which plays an essential role in learner motivation, learning experience, academic success, and a sense of belonging to the university (Rivera Munoz et al., 2020). The other occasion is how to initiate and maintain daily informal conversations (e.g. small talk), a common form of social exchange involving sophisticated conversational and sociocultural skills. The support is likely to help SA students, especially those from EFL backgrounds, overcome social awkwardness caused by L2 pragmatic gaps and build confidence in L2 interactions.

In L2 pragmatics teaching, it is necessary for the instructors to familiarise learners with the conventional form-meaning connections in the target community. Findings in Sections 6.1 and 6.2 have shown that SA students can easily fall into misinterpretation and overgeneralisation when making L2 pragmatic judgements independently. The misinterpretation sometimes leads to unconventional pragmatic usage, against the sojourners' willingness to choose contextually appropriate language. More specifically,

instructors may help learners understand how specific actions may lead to certain interpersonal effects (e.g. what is usually considered rude or inappropriate; Padila Cruz, 2015). The purpose is to equip students with the competence to use language effectively to achieve communicative purposes and prevent them from unintentionally presenting themselves negatively (e.g. being rude or insincere).

More importantly, this study suggests the greatest value comes from raising learner-centred pragmatic awareness and scaffolding them on self-regulated learning strategies. 'Learner-centred' awareness here refers not only to learners' sensitivity towards the gaps between their interlanguage and specific standards (e.g. NS norms, host-country conventions) but deliberate attention to pragmatic-related issues and topics they themselves encounter in real-life communication. Similarly, teaching self-regulated learning strategies aims to encourage learners to direct attention to L2 pragmatics learning and to proactively engage their linguacultural repertoires and available resources to resolve pragmatic-related difficulties. As Taguchi (2018b) pointed out, studies regarding instructional intervention have focused mainly on teaching specific speech acts. However, it is unknown whether the skills are transferable between different pragmatic features (Taguchi, 2018b), and many learners fail to retain the taught linguistic forms in the long term (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Halenko and Jones, 2017). On the other hand, by developing pragmatic awareness and voluntary learning strategies, students are more likely to gain autonomy and take the lead in their learning. It is thus more likely to achieve more sustainable learning effects.

To cultivate 'learner-centred' pragmatic awareness, it is necessary to move beyond a rigid NS-centred normative system in pragmatics teaching. Policy makers, curriculum and assessment designers, and instructors, especially those in the ELF context, should not assume learners' ultimate goal is to speak like native speakers. Nor should they assume that

learners would always be willing to accept the cultural and linguistic conventions of the host country. Instead, sojourners may challenge, appropriate, or redefine established rules, and it is therefore important for the instructors to 'exercise sensitivity in accepting and assessing learners' unique negotiation of identity' (Ishihara, 2019, p.170). Learners' previous linguistic and cultural knowledge, even if deviated from NS norms, should not be simply labelled as incorrect forms or negative transfer but can be actively engaged as resources for unpacking meaning of new pragmatic features. As suggested by Hornberger (2005),

> …bi/multilinguals' learning is maximised when they are allowed and enabled to draw from across all their existing language skills (in two+ languages), rather than being constrained and inhibited from doing so by monolingual instructional assumptions and practices. (p.607)

To achieve the aforementioned points in classroom practice, instructors may first provide conversational materials (e.g. videos and transcripts) that contextualise the pragmatic features to teach. Providing authentic, communicative materials is especially important for EFL learners at the pre-departure stage, as L2-mediated interactions might not be available for them outside the classroom. For students already in the SA context, learning journals adopted in this research as a data collection tool can be used as an additional pedagogical tool to raise learners' pragmatic awareness. With proper guiding questions for learning journals, SA students can be encouraged to become field researchers and gather pragmatic-related data from their SA experiences. Their observations, questions, and interpretations can then feed into classroom discussions to make the teaching more student-centred.

With the materials prepared by the tutor and/or extracted from learners' daily observations, instructors may first direct students' attention to the situational factors, such as the

communicative purpose, sociocultural backgrounds, and interpersonal relationships, and invite learners to consider how these have influenced L2 language use in the given situation. This step is to sensitise students towards the close connection between context and language choices, and to draw their attention to implicit subtle pragmatic features (e.g. how to adjust politeness levels or indirectly propose requests) that are not always easily observed. For learners from EFL backgrounds who lack actual experience of language use, this step can also scaffold them to approach language as social practice, not just carrying transactional function but bringing interpersonal consequences with 'appropriateness' as an important dimension in L2 proficiency together with fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

To effectively engage learners' linguacultural resources, the instructors may then ask students to compare their observations of L2 pragmatics with their knowledge and experience in L1 or other languages they have learned or acquired. Apart from different linguistic forms, students can be guided to explain possible reasons causing the divergence, and how these differences may lead to different social and interpersonal consequences. At this stage, tutors can also encourage learners to appropriate new knowledge by reflecting how they would use the pragmatic forms and whether the new forms help them better negotiate relationships.

Using 'small talk' as an example, I will illustrate the procedure above with some sample prompts instructors might use or adapt for classroom tasks, in order to focus learners' attention to the connection between the sociocultural context and language use scaffolding learners to help them unpack the meanings of new L2 pragmatic features. These sample questions can be used to foster learners' independent reflections or group discussions, in which learners with different linguistic, cultural, or educational backgrounds are likely to

enrich each other's perspectives by sharing and discussing the various resources they bring to the classroom (Collins and Delgado, 2019).

| **Stage 1: Directing learners' attention to the connection between contexts and language use** |
|---|
| Examples of Discussion Prompts:<br>- When do people usually participate in small talk?<br>- What are the potential relationships between the interlocutors in small talk?<br>- What are the common topics for small talk?<br>- How do people usually start small talk? And how do they finish it?<br>- What are the common features of language used for small talk (e.g. formal/informal)? |
| **Stage 2: Engaging learners' existing knowledge and experience for comparison** |
| Examples of Discussion Prompts:<br>- Is it common for people to have small talk in your L1 or other languages you know?<br>- Do you notice any differences between small talk in different languages (e.g. occasions, topics, language use, frequency…)? Could you explain? |
| **Stage 3: Encouraging learners to explore sociocultural meanings behind linguistic practices** |
| Examples of Discussion Prompts:<br>- What do you think caused these differences?<br>- How are these differences impact interpersonal relationships differently?<br>- Reflect on your experience in doing small talk (if any). Were there any challenges for you to start or maintain a conversation? Do you feel more confident now to deal with them?<br>- Will you try to initiate small talk next time? How would you initiate small talk? |

*Table 7.1: Example for Pragmatic Instruction*

The method proposed above encourages instructors and content developers to consider two dimensions that tend to be neglected in existing learning tasks and materials that focus on L2 pragmatics. First, apart from raising learners' awareness of the connection between linguistic forms and contextual factors, tutors may also scaffold learners for digging the reasons behind such connections. Questions to guide learners to compare the new with known knowledge and rationalise the differences are likely to advance learners' understanding of sociocultural values behind the divergence. The data in Section 6.3.3 have shown that the process may also further encourage learners to decentre from familiar sociocultural frames to interpret new pragmatic practices from alternative perspectives, move beyond intuitive judgement or essentialist conclusions when encountering differences, gradually acquire a sense of cultural inclusiveness, and develop not only as more proficient L2 users but holistically as more reflexive and culturally aware individuals. Therefore, the pedagogical implications discussed above are not only applicable in second language education; the same strategies can also be extended to help learners develop intercultural awareness and competence. Culture, as an abstract and vague notion, is not easily captured or teachable; students and teachers may discuss culture with its concrete projections in social practice, such as behaviours, attitudes, language use, and beliefs of members within certain cultural communities. The learners' narratives (especially Chloe's) have illustrated how pragmatics serves as a site for learners to observe and critically analyse cultures, echoing Liddicoat's (2014) and McConachy's (2014) proposals to engage pragmatics in intercultural education.

Second, the teaching method highlights the importance for learners not only to learn or acquire pragmatic features following certain standards (e.g. NS norms, host country conventions) but to appropriate the learned knowledge by considering whether the new

features might lead to different social and interpersonal consequences if used in their own lives. As mentioned in Section 6.3.2, by discussing whether and why they hope to adopt the new forms or reject them, students may reconsider how they hope to position themselves and to be positioned by others, through which they gain initiatives in negotiating meanings and relationships in L2. By encouraging learner agency in L2 pragmatic choices rather than simply following pre-defined standards, this stage also aims to cultivate ELF users' sense of ownership of English. It could be seen from participants' interview data, especially in the early stage of SA, that some of them perceived British NS English as the 'most authentic form' and consequently identified themselves as second-language learners who are expected to learn from native speakers. Similarly, some of them seemed to label themselves as 'SA students from a developing country' who came to the UK to be 'further Westernised' or learn from the more advanced society. The identity of the 'inferior' or 'less culturally valuable' speaker, either assigned to or claimed by SA learners, might lead them feel powerless or marginalised (Nogami, 2020b). By encouraging them to appropriate the 'rules' and even challenge them, these activities are likely to encourage learners to use the language more confidently and flexibly and help international students gain a stronger position in their adopted communities.

## 7.5 Suggestions for Future Research in L2 Pragmatics Development

One implication of this study for future researchers is the value of approaching L2 pragmatics learning from learners' perspectives with their self-reported data. Compared to other commonly used data collection devices, the method sacrifices details and absolute accuracy in learners' pragmatic-related conversations, yet it captures pragmatic learning incidents in a wide range of real-life contexts that are not directly observable via other devices. It also provides fresh insight to the field by shifting attention from what researchers

take interest in (e.g. learners' use of specific speech acts in specific situations) to what causes confusions and difficulties to learners themselves in authentic communication. By probing what learners find helpful to learn, research can provide more focused and practical implications for L2 teaching and SA learner support.

Moreover, this thesis has focused mainly on how SA students use their own resources to learn and reflect on L2 pragmatics independently. Future work is needed to validate pedagogical implications yielded by this research and explore more effective teaching practices in order to enhance student-centredness and authenticity in L2 pragmatics teaching. Examples include but are not limited to how tutors can effectively foster learners' pragmatic awareness and use of self-regulated learning strategies, and how learners' daily observations regarding L2 pragmatics can feed into teaching and classroom discussion.

Lastly, this thesis has presented pragmatics at the intersection of language, culture, and identity, and how learners reflect on their sense of self and raise intercultural awareness through metapragmatic analysis. This has received scant attention in previous research, yet the findings of this study suggest this would be a fruitful area for further work. Focus of future studies concerning L2 pragmatics learning may move beyond learners' linguistic proficiency and explore how learning of L2 pragmatics enables them to develop holistically. Attempts need to be made to capture not only learners' language performance but their metapragmatic reflections, with devices such as interviews, group discussions, or learning journals. Researchers may investigate, for example, how they develop different understandings of sociocultural meanings behind the pragmatic forms, whether they feel more confident and comfortable negotiating relationships with new features acquired, and whether their reflections on L2 pragmatics lead to wider changes in their values and identity.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Ethical Approval

The Secretariat
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT Tel: 0113 343 4873
Email: ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Xiaowen Liu

School of Education

University of Leeds

Leeds, LS2 9JT

**Social Sciences, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee**

**University of Leeds**

4 December 2022

Dear Xiaowen

| | |
|---|---|
| **Title of study:** | **The connection between learner identity and pragmatic development in study-abroad environment** |
| **Ethics reference:** | **LTEDUC-110** |

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for proportionate (light touch) ethical review has been reviewed by a representative of the Social Sciences, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

| Document | Version | Date |
|---|---|---|
| LTEDUC-110 Ethics Form - Xiaowen Liu.doc | 1 | 18/06/2019 |

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as other documents relating to the study. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited, there is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie

Senior Research Ethics Administrator, the Secretariat

On behalf of Dr Kahryn Hughes, Chair, AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix 2: Participant Recruitment Presentation (Texts in the Slides)

**Slide 1: Cover Page**

Interested in participating in a TESOL PhD research?

**Slide 2: About my Research**

- How do international students learn about English language and cultures during the year studying abroad in the UK?
- A longitudinal research project — will last for about six months

**Slide 3: I am looking for participants who**

- are from different backgrounds (UK/EU/International Students)
- hope to make friends with people from different areas
- have different attitudes to British culture
- would like to talk with me about their past and future learning experience

**Slide 4: What you need to do**

- Have three one-hour interviews with me in October, December and June
- Share with me your learning experience in and outside the classroom and your feelings through a chatting app
- Meet me every month to have a short discussion about things you share

**Slide 5: What you can get from participation**

- Participating in a PhD research in the TESOL field would be an academic-related experience and a learning opportunity. It would be helpful for you to prepare for designing and carrying out your own research for your MA dissertation.
- Discussing learning experiences regularly with the researcher may prompt you to reflect on language and culture learning. It could in turn facilitate long-term development as both a learner and a language teacher.

**Slide 6: If you are interested**

- [personal contact information, including my email, WeChat, WhatsApp]
- or just stay after this and talk with me

## Appendix 3: Information Sheet for Participants

**Information Sheet for Participants**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

**The title of the research project**

Culture and Identity in the Learning of Pragmatics during Study Abroad

*(*pragmatics: a linguistic aspect mainly about how language is employed to achieve social purposes and manage social relationships)*

**What is the purpose of the project?**

This is a self-funded PhD project. The research aims to investigate the opportunities that exist in the UK study-abroad environment for development of L2 pragmatics and the strategies that international students use to develop pragmatic competence. It will last for two semesters (about 24 weeks).

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw without affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason if you withdraw, and the data will not be used for the research. The withdrawal is acceptable any time before June 2020.

**What do I have to do?**

You will have three one-hour interviews with the researcher at the beginning, middle and end of the research project and short monthly meetings. The content will be related to your past learning history and your experience of language learning and intercultural communication during study abroad, mostly in the forms of open questions and discussion.

You will also be required to keep learning journals about daily communication related to learning of L2 pragmatics on WeChat (a chatting app) and share these regularly with the researcher. There is no specific number required for logs. You are encouraged to record situations which you find interesting, stimulating, confusing, and even awkward, just like sharing life experiences with a friend. The experiences you provide will then feed into discussions during our monthly meetings

**Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

You will be audio-recorded during our interviews and meetings. The recordings will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

**What are the possible benefits/disadvantages of taking part?**

Participating in PhD research in the TESOL field would be an academic-related experience and a learning opportunity, and it might be helpful for you when you come to design and carry out your own research project in MA dissertation. Moreover, it is hoped that recording and discussing your learning experience will help you reflect on your language learning and cultural adaptation during your study abroad, which could in turn help promote personal development in the long run. There is no foreseeable discomfort, disadvantage or risk involved.

**What will happen to my personal information?**

All WeChat messages and recordings will be transcribed within 24 hours, deposited in the One Drive account provided by the University of Leeds and deleted from the chatting app to guarantee privacy and confidentiality. You are also advised to delete the information from your phone and other devices. Data will be used only for research purposes, such as the PhD thesis, conference presentations, and written publications. All the contact information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored separately from the research data. We will take all possible steps to anonymise the research data so that you will not be identified in any reports or publications.

**Contact for further information**

(provided to participants)

Thank you for taking the time to read through the information.

## Appendix 4: Sample of Participants' Consent Form

### Consent to take part in
### *Culture and Identity in the Learning of Pragmatics during Study Abroad*
### Research Project

| | Add your initials next to the statements you agree with |
|---|---|
| I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 14/06/2019 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. | |
| I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research in an anonymised form. | |
| I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records. | |
| I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards. | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of participant | |
| Participant's signature | |
| Date | |
| Person taking consent | Xiaowen Liu |
| Signature | |
| Date* | |

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

## Appendix 5: Instructions on Learning Journals (Texts in the Slides)

**Definitions:**

- **pragmatic competence:** ability to use appropriate language in specific contexts, in order to achieve social purposes and manage social relationships
- **sociopragmatics:** social, cultural, and contextual factors that affect language use (e.g. interpersonal distance, social power gap, degree of imposition, shared expectations in a community)
- **pragmalinguistics:** specific linguistic items used to express the intention (e.g. I want a beer. / Can I have a beer? / I wouldn't mind having a beer. / A beer would be nice.)

**What you need to do:**

1. Share with me your daily interactions that involve pragmatics learning in both academic and non-academic contexts.
2. It can be something you find interesting, stimulating, confusing and even awkward — anything that catches your attention.
3. It can be related to language use: choice of words, sentence structure, intonation, etc.
4. It can also be something just about culture: people's expectations, habits, behaviour, ways to communicate, etc.
5. You need to describe the situation for me, and share with me your actions, feelings and thoughts.
6. You can use either text or audio recordings (the latter may save you some time).
7. You can use either Chinese or English.
8. I'll respond to your messages. The whole process will be like chatting with a friend.
9. We'll discuss your stories together every month.

**Examples for learning journals:**

**Clip 1:**

I invited my British friend to my place for dinner. After she finished the food on her plate, I asked her if she wanted some more. She said, 'I'm fine. Thanks'. I noticed this is a different

way to reject an offer politely. I usually say ‘No, thanks.’, but I feel ‘I’m fine’ sounds milder and less direct. It sounds a better expression and more polite if I want to say no when my friend kindly offers me something. So, I think I’ll use that phrase in the future.

**Clip 2:**

After I arrived in Leeds, I soon found most Uber drivers would say ‘How are you?’ to me and try to start a small chat, asking questions like ‘Where are you from?’. However, not many drivers in China chat with customers. I began to wonder whether talking with taxi drivers is a social expectation that I need to follow, and I tried intentionally to maintain conversations with drivers since then. After a while, I asked my friend who had been in the UK for longer, but he didn’t think it was necessary. I also asked an Uber driver whether he prefered customers to chat with him; he said he didn’t mind. After that, I still say ‘How are you?’, because I think it’s basic politeness, but I don’t keep chatting with them every time, especially when I’m tired.

**Clip 3:**

I wrote an email to my tutor because I wanted him to read and comment on my writing, but I was worried he might be busy at that time, and I didn’t want him to rush; so, I wrote a sentence at the end of the email: ‘Please take your time’. However, when I talked with my friend, she said ‘take your time’ is usually used by people in a more powerful position, like teachers to students, or supervisors to team members. I felt a little bit embarrassed. I hope he didn’t think I was impolite. I guess he will understand because I’m an international student. International students make mistakes.

## Appendix 6: Interview Schedule

### Interview 1

**Aim:** to gather background information from the participants

**Time:** at the start of Semester 1, October 2019

| Focus: | Prompts |
|---|---|
| language learning background / intercultural experience | - How long have you been learning English? Could you briefly describe your learning experience?<br>- Was there any memorable or unforgettable thing that happened to you during your English learning history?<br>- What is your main motivation to improve your English at this moment?<br>- Have you ever lived in or travelled to other countries? |
| study abroad expectations | - Why did you choose to do this course?<br>- Why did you choose the UK as your study abroad destination?<br>- Do you have any plans for English learning in this year?<br>- Could you briefly describe your expectations for study abroad?<br>- Could you try to depict a picture of a 'future you' after studying here for one year? |
| initial SA experience / willingness to acculturate, to participate in the ELF community, and to improve English | - Have you talked with English speakers from other countries?<br>- How do you feel about this kind of intercultural communication?<br>- Have you met new friends? Are they British, Chinese or from other backgrounds? Can you tell me about them?<br>- Are you looking forward to meeting more friends? What are you going to do about this? |
| existing knowledge of pragmatics | - Could you describe what a 'good/proficient English user' should be like?<br>- Have you ever learned about the term 'pragmatics'? If the answer is yes, could you explain your understanding of pragmatics? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | - Do you think pragmatics is important in English learning, compared with other things like grammar, vocabulary, speaking? |

## Interview 2:

**Aim:** to further probe into participants' perspectives related to the three research questions and changes happening to them during SA

**Time:** in the middle of Semester 1, November 2019

| Focus: | Prompts |
|---|---|
| critical learning incidents related to L2 pragmatics / follow-up questions about learning journals | - Are there any new stories you hope to share with me today, which you haven't mentioned in WeChat?<br>- (Specific questions developed from the participant's learning journals) |
| exposure to English / social patterns / learning strategies (RQ2) | - Do you feel your English has improved?<br>- Are you happy with the time you devoted to learning English (either formal or informal learning)? Have you intentionally sought opportunities to use English? |
| noticing of pragmatic gaps (RQ1) / learning strategies (RQ2) | - Do you feel any difference when communicating with people from different backgrounds, for example, UK, your home country, or people from other countries?<br>- Have you ever felt uncomfortable or lacked confidence in communication? Can you give me some examples?<br>- Were there any misunderstanding or conflicts in intercultural communication? How did you deal with that?<br>- Have you ever been told 'your language/behaviour here is inappropriate'? How did you react? |
| development of identity and intercultural awareness/competence (RQ3) | - Do you think you are being reshaped through intercultural communication, like your thoughts, values, behaviours, the way you communicate with others? Can you give me some examples? |

| | |
|---|---|
| influence of research participation | - How do you feel about keeping audio-record diaries? Did it help in some way? |

## Interview 3:

**Aim:** to further probe into participants' perspectives related to the three research questions and changes happening to them during SA

**Time:** at the end of Semester 1, December 2019

**Focus and prompts** resembled those in Interview 2

## Interview 4:

**Aim:** to track learners' L2 interactions and pragmatic development after the COVID-19 Outbreak

**Time:** in the middle of Semester 2, April 2020 (2 months after Covid-19 Outbreak)

| Focus: | Prompts |
|---|---|
| critical learning incidents related to L2 pragmatics / follow-up questions about learning journals | - Are there any new stories you hope to share with me today, which you haven't mentioned in WeChat?<br>- (Specific questions developed from the participant's learning journals) |
| exposure to English / social patterns | - Do you still have opportunities to use English apart from attending online classes?<br>- Do you still have social activities in English, online or offline?<br>- Are you planning to take part in some online activities in English? |
| noticing and learning of L2 pragmatics online (RQ1) | - Have you noticed any pragmatic-related difficulties when communicating online (e.g. in online classes)?<br>- How are these difficulties different from offline ones? |

## Interview 5:

**Aim:** to summarise pragmatic learning during the year and track changes happening to learners regarding their identities and intercultural awareness

**Time:** after the academic year is finished and before the participant travels back to China, September-December 2020

| Focus: | Prompts |
|---|---|
| critical learning incidents related to L2 pragmatics / follow-up questions about learning journals | - Are there any new stories you hope to share with me today, which you haven't mentioned in WeChat?<br>- (Specific questions developed from the participant's learning journals) |
| pragmatic development | - Do you feel your English communicative competence has improved during the year? Could you explain?<br>- Do you feel your pragmatic competence has improved during the study abroad period? Could you explain? (re-introduce the definition if necessary)<br>- Do you feel it's easier to express yourself in English than a year before? Could you think of any examples?<br>- Do you feel it's easier to manage interactions and interpersonal relationships through the English language than before? Could you think of any examples? |
| development of identity and intercultural awareness/competence (RQ3) | - (For those who mentioned determination to learn 'authentic British English' in the first interview)<br>- You told me at the beginning of the year you wanted to sound more like a native speaker. Do you still feel that way? If not, why?<br>- Have you changed as a person through communications during the study abroad period? Could you explain?<br>- Do you have new understandings about different cultures after the year? |
| influence of research participation | - Do you think participating in this study makes any difference for you? Could you explain? |

## Appendix 7: Preliminary Categorisations in Paradigmatic Analysis

**RQ1: In what moments do students notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK study-abroad environment?**

1. When they realise linguistic/communicative gaps in daily conversation
- in L2 input: unfamiliar expressions in conversations
- in L2 output: lack of sociopragmatic/pragmalinguistic knowledge about how to deliver subtle meaning, manage relationships, and present the 'self' in a desired way (linked to Swain's output hypothesis)

2. When misunderstanding or communication breakdown happens, usually with implicit feedback from interlocutors

3. Explicit feedback from other speakers (very rare)

4. When others' language use or behaviours deviate from expectation
- when new sociopragmatic/pragmalinguistic features are very different from conventions of their previous communities (e.g. L1 society)
- when new sociopragmatic/pragmalinguistic features do not meet their previous knowledge (sometimes stereotypes) of the target language community

5. Participating in the research itself fosters noticing pragmatic learning

6. Individual factors:
- Participants who had limited L2 exposure reported less noticing (Mary and Hanguang).
- Participants who shared more learning experience in log interaction seemed to enjoy talking with the researcher, or the reflective/sharing process itself (Tina and Chloe).

**RQ2: What learning strategies related to pragmatics do participants report using in L2-mediated interactions?**

1. Learners sometimes imitate native/more proficient speakers or seek help from them; however, these approaches sometimes lead to overgeneralisation.

2. Learners tend to rely on cultural and linguistic resources acquired and learned in previous communities to navigate unfamiliar genres. Examples include their life experience in the L1 society, and knowledge learned about the target language community from various channels (e.g. textbooks, film work, media, friends). However, their analysis of the situation sometimes leads to unconventional pragmatic use.

3. Learners sometimes go beyond the linguistic surface and try to make sense of new pragmatic features by probing into cultural values behind the language, the connection between language use and interpersonal relationship, and the communicative purpose of language.

4. Foreigner and/or study-abroad student identities are sometimes activated to counter anxiety caused by L2 use and an unfamiliar sociocultural environment.

5. Learners sometimes employ academic subject knowledge (e.g. knowledge in linguistics and intercultural communication) to rationalise specific experiences.

6. Some learners develop and flexibly use different sets of pragmatic strategies with people from different backgrounds (see also RQ3).

## Appendix 8: Sample of Original Interview Transcripts

***The Fifth Interview / Tina / 09.2020 (R stands for Researcher, and T stands for Tina). Only scripts used in this thesis have been translated.***

1 **R** 你觉得一年留学的过程里，语用的能力整体有提升吗？

2 **T** 从语言的角度来说，你要说我的 vocabulary 变得比以前更专业了，或者怎么样，说实话我觉得不是特别明显，因为接触的机会还是少点儿了，尤其是一封锁。但是我经验比以前丰富了，比如以前有一个我不知道的 vocabulary，我可能就呆在那了，不知道怎么说，但是现在我会迂回，用别的词汇来让别人知道我是什么意思。

3 **R** 那么你觉得用语言去把握人际关系这块儿呢，是否有提升呢？

4 **T** 我觉得有。以前我对使用英语不是很自信，另一方面以前在国内，我也没有长期和外国人，或者和别人，长期把英语用作一个交流工具。以前还是要么你教，要么你学，其实还是假的嘛。但是这边有很多情况下，你是必须要用这个语言，一来二去你的自信就提升了，再一个就是你习惯一些了，就觉得嗯，我可以说。比如以前我在出租车上，我特别怕司机和我搭讪，因为我听不懂，司机有时候也不是 native speaker，我就觉得好尴尬呀。但是现在我快走了，我就希望我多有机会和别人聊一聊，我就会主动和他们说话，也没有这种抵触的感觉了。语言水平的提升好像会把你变得更加 outgoing 一些，去和别人建立一种关系。

5 **R** 这是不是和你之前说的，感觉这边的人比你想象中包容，有关系？

6 **T** 对对对，刚来的时候你不太清楚这边是什么环境，这边人是什么脾气秉性，什么习惯，但是现在至少从你接触的这个小圈子里，你也大概了解了，就说呗，错了也无所谓。

7 **R** 是对这边的人有了一个整体的印象吗？

8 **T** 可以这么说，来之前从电影里看到的呀，还有你学到的读到的文章，会觉得英国人总体上可能是这么一个比较 gentle 的，比较喜欢端着的，这么一个比较讲究风度但是一定程度上有一些距离感的民族，但这个和他们真实的情况完全不是同一回事。现在也不见得对他们有一个多么深

刻，多么正确的印象，但是通过接触，你自己 individually，你肯定产生了一个自己的印象。

9 **R** 你意识到对于他们的 stereotypes，是在你来留学以前，还是以后呢？

10 **T** 来以后肯定更加意识到，但来以前我就知道，因为任何一个东西，你从小说里看到或者看它的官方介绍，和它本身肯定不是同一回事。每个人和每个人都不一样，对于一个民族整体的印象，肯定是非常 diversity 的一个概念，我知道我以前认识的必然是片面的，但是之前也没仔细琢磨过他们真实是什么样的。

11 **R** 那么你觉得对于这种 diversity 的认知，对你的语言使用有什么影响呢？

12 **T** 有影响的。比如我在和学术导师 book an appointment， 在他办公室我和他讲话的时候，我的语言和我的姿态，肯定和在 common room 遇到我们研究生的 support officer，肯定是不一样。一方面是我们的关系，他们的身份不一样，另外他们的 personality 也不一样。一个呢是日常经常帮助我们的一个导师，每天和我们接触，一定程度上你把她当做一个熟人，一个朋友，但另一个掌管着你的分数，你有一部分是握在他手里的。另外他俩 personality 也不同，比如 officer 她做这个工作，她本身就是一个比较开朗的人，但是这个学术导师是一个典型的做学问的人，你和他嘻嘻哈哈有说有笑，就不是很自然。

13 **R** 【重新解释了 sociopragmatics 与 pragmalinguistics 的定义】刚才你解释了词汇的进步嘛，从这两个方面的话，你感觉有了很多提升吗？

14 **T** 都这么大年纪了，我觉得肯定是知道什么场合下，什么话该说，什么话不该说，但是有时候就是不知道英文对应的语言是什么，所以这个时候我就会有意识的，接触到这个场合的时候，看看别人是怎么说的，尤其是写邮件的时候，会去看看他们是怎么回的。比如说这次我给 host 发邮件的时候，我就学到了一个表达。她说我给她发邮件之前，她刚好答应了另外一个学生过去住，所以很遗憾没法 host 我了，她说: ‘maybe our road will cross sometime in the future’。这个表达我觉得挺巧妙的。这个时候我也想和她说没关系啊，以后欢迎你来中国呀，或者我再来可以联

系你，但我不知道怎么用英文贴切的表达出来。在这方面有一些提高，但感觉不是那么明显，我还是觉得接触机会少。

15 **R** 嗯，那我们来看看下一个问题哈。对于母语者规则这件事，你的想法有什么变化吗，刚开始来的时候我记得你提到过想学习地道的英式英语。

16 **T** 对，我以前是有这种误解的，我觉得英语有地道与不地道的区别，但现在我觉得英语不是一个母语者的专利。这个我们上课的时候也提过。非母语者也经常用英语沟通，我们也在用我们的方式去使用英语，可能我们的发音啊用词啊和母语者不一样，这没有理由说我们的就不地道，只是两种不同的使用方法。只能说母语者的用法，是最原始、最初的用法吧，但是不能说衍生出来的就是不地道的。

**Translation of the underlined sentences:** I had this misunderstanding. Only native speakers' English is authentic. Now I feel English does not belong to native speakers. This idea was also mentioned in our classes. Non-native speakers also use this language to communicate, and we use the language in our way. We [non-native speakers] might speak differently, but it does not mean our English is not authentic. Our languages are just different.

17 **R** 那么在生活里有这样的例子吗，促生了这种想法的改变？

18 **T** 比如我这次出去旅游的时候，认识了沙特、泰国和韩国的朋友，我们都是使用英语沟通的。沙特的这个人的英语说得特别好，但我感觉 ta 是词汇量比较大，应用自如，不是说 ta 说的特别像英国人或者美国人。泰国的两个同学可能词汇就没有那么自如。但我没有拿他们和英国人和美国人去比。有时候我下意识的去比，我就会提醒我自己，现在的英语已经和以前不一样了，泰国英语就是这样的，阿拉伯英语可能就是那样的，这只是不同的 version。

19 **R** 那么和母语者沟通的过程中，作为非母语者，也会觉得非常自信吗？会感觉你们也是很平等的，都是这个语言的主人吗？

20 **T** 怎么说呢，我会觉得我需要和他们学习的东西更多，倒不是说英国英语是最纯正的，只是说他们从小就说着这个语言长大的，所以可能各个方

面，比如词汇啊，说的比我好一些，所以我去学习这个语言的内容，而不是要特地学习他这个版本的发音啊或者什么的。

**Translation of the underlined sentences:** I still think I can learn a lot from native speakers, not because I think British English is the purest, but because they have been speaking this language since they were very young, and thus they are more proficient and experienced speakers.

21 **R** 我明白了。那么你觉得在这一年的过程中，使用英语去和别人沟通，你有什么整体的改变吗？这个问题会不会有点奇怪？

22 **T** 不奇怪不奇怪。之前咱们说过的“你”和“您”就是最好的例子，之前在国内的时候对长者习惯要用敬称，你就没有想过你能和一个年龄差很多的人，能成为很平等的、没有任何代沟的朋友。但在这边没有这个敬称，你觉得你和任何人都可以发展成很近的闺蜜的关系，不管她年龄多大，也不管他辈分比你长还是比你小。可能没有了这部分的因素造成的一种隔阂，一定程度上觉得我变得更加开放和随意了一些。

23 **R** 那么你觉得这个会给你回国以后带来行为或者语言上的改变吗？

24 **T** 我觉得有可能，但是要看对方的接受程度。以前我没有过和一个那种身份的人，这样去交流，也没有想过我可以这样去交流。现在呢我觉得我经历过了，我的交流方式里就多了一个版本，假如你是接受这个版本的，我觉得我可以和你用这个版本的方式去交流，但是如果你接受不了的话，那我会切换回去从前。

**Translation of the underlined sentences:** Now I feel I have experienced life here, and I developed new version of communication. If you also like it, I'll use the new version with you, or I can still switch back to my old way.

25 **R** 这个多个版本的交流方式真是很棒！下面这个问题我之前可能问过了，但是我感觉随着时间流动，你可能会有一些不同的想法。你觉得一年来参加这个研究，对你有什么样的影响吗？

26 **T** 我觉得给我带来了快乐吧，尤其是我写论文写得脑子都不转的时候，我就会想，我还有没有什么可以和小文分享的东西，这个聊天本身也是一种休息嘛。然后它也帮助我去思考吧，我如果不去分享的话，我可能不

太会去思考这方面的问题，但是思考这些，会让我把事情想的更明白。就像之前我提起的那个大多数人叫她姐姐的朋友，我之前就有一些隐约的想法，觉得她精神压力有点大，生活的负担太重，不允许自己犯错，但我后来觉得可能就因为她是“姐姐”。这些事我以前有一些想法，但是没有思考的这么明白，但因为和你做分享，我现在想的更清楚了。

27 **R** 想清楚这些会有什么好处吗，你觉得？

28 **T** 肯定有好处呀，比如你知道这是一个坑，你不会去踩，或者你朋友生活中遇到这样的问题，你会看得更明白。我感觉其实是这样的，你看到的世界，你想清楚的地方，你看到的是一个很清晰的画面，但你没有思考清楚地地方，其实是一片朦胧。通过和你聊的过程，你把这个清晰的画面变大了，那一定程度上就活得更明智了，更了解别人，也更了解自己。

**Translation of the underlined sentences:** I feel the world is like a big picture. The parts you've thought through are just clear, but those you haven't thought about are blurry, like covered by mosaic. Through talking with you, the clear area is expanding. To some extent, I feel I'm thinking more wisely, knowing better about both myself and others.

29 **R** 我的问题问完了，你有什么要补充的吗，比如你感觉对你很重要，但是我没有问到的？

30 **T** 第一次采访的时候你问过我，对我自己的这一年有什么样的预期，前两天我就想起来了我们第一次的对话。当时我好像说我希望提升自己的魄力，还有别的什么，这几个我觉得一定程度上我都达到了自己的预期。

31 **R** 那我就仔细的问一下哦，你觉得这部分达到的预期，会有一定程度，是受到语言学习的影响吗？

32 **T** 会吧，如果你把语言学习的范围放得更广一些，就是语言学习的方方面面。比如说我的第一篇论文是关于动机的，那个对我的想法影响特别大，我认为这也是语言学习的一部分吧，就是通过研究语言学习的动机，让我认识到了内在驱动力是多么重要的一件事，一个人真的想去做一件事和不想去做，有这么大的差别。以前我逃避的事情，我真的逃避

了以后，我就过得更舒服更快乐了吗，其实后来我想还是要遵循内在动因，把这个事情做了，才能真正觉得平和安宁。其他的，比如什么场合说什么话，也有影响。在这边我去和各种形形色色的人沟通，不像以前坐在一个办公室，大家一定程度上都遵守了同一套社交规则，虽然有不同的 personality，但是不能很出格。这边大家会有一些随意，有一些我本来觉得没有勇气去说的话或者做的决定，他们在一些场合就会去做，大家也没有觉得这是不得体的，所以后面就觉得，也可以说，也可以做。

**Translation of the underlined sentences:** They would sometimes say and do things that I was not brave enough to do, and it seems nobody feels it's inappropriate. Later, I feel I can also say and do these things.

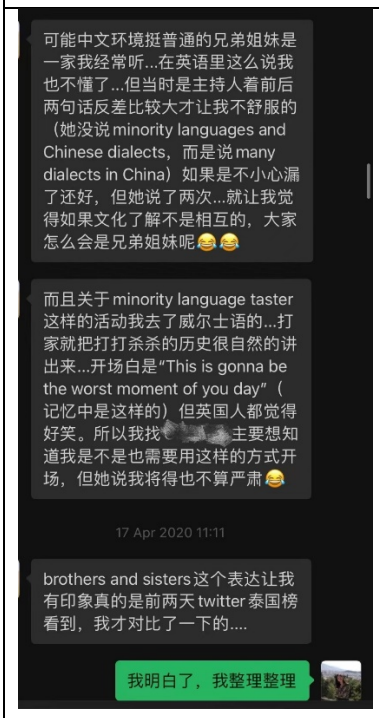
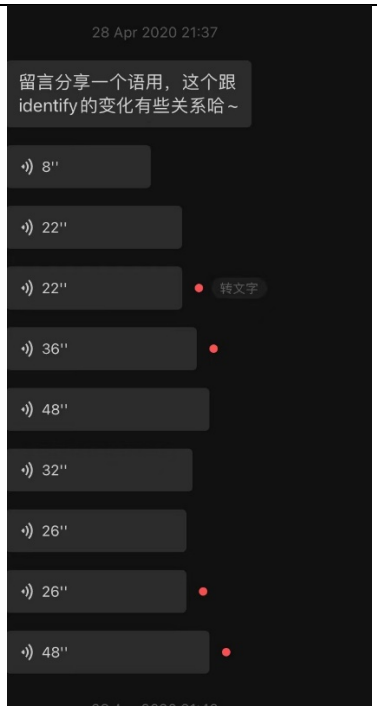
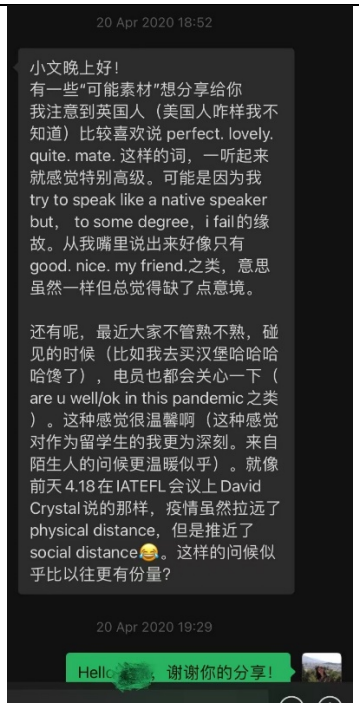
33 **R** 有这样的例子吗？

34 **T** 比如有个英国同学，特别喜欢在我们的 Whatsapp group 里组织活动，比如今天是个好天，我们去露营，或者滑冰和生日 party 之类的。如果是我，我就觉得我会非常不好意思，因为我也不是被选出来的一个组织活动的人。但我看到他其实这么说，大家也没有觉得怎么样。所以后来我也经常在群里公开去讲一些事，比如我看到一些资料，我觉得很有用，我就会分享到群里，如果有人觉得有用，可以直接下载。之前接触过他们的这种做事方式之前，我会觉得有些不好意思，人家也没说需要，你这么找了一个东西抛在这会不会打扰人家？怎么说呢，我们中国人不喜欢出头。但后面就觉得没有关系，就是一个真诚的分享，不带有任何，而且有可能解决别人的燃眉之急，那么干嘛不这么做呢？

**Translation of the underlined sentences:** For example, a British classmate likes to propose gatherings in our WhatsApp group. In the past, I would feel embarrassed about doing that. I would think, 'I'm not a representative or something elected by other members'. However, I noticed everyone in that group is fine with that. Now, I also frequently initiate things in that group, like sharing learning materials that I find useful with others... It is just a sincere gesture; so, why not?

## Appendix 9: Samples of Original Learning Journals

***Part 1: Screenshots of Learning Journals via Wechat***

| *Win's Journal* | *Tina's Journal* | *Hanguang's Journal* |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |



***Part 2: Five Entries from Mary (Only scripts used in this thesis have been translated.)***

**【10/2019】**

Mary: 我和我朋友上次去学那个踢踏舞，我们一直踩不对点，找不到节奏，自由练习的时候一个英国女生主动过来教我们跳，我们都很感激她，我估计我朋友也很激动，就对她说了句："I like your smell!" 我当时比较震惊，心里正纳闷，我看到那个英国女生也比较尴尬，明显愣了一下，我马上戳我朋友，她好像没反应过来，所以我就马上纠正说：she likes your smile! 这时我们都笑了！后来和我朋友交流这件事，她说是自己发错音了，一直把双元音 smile 发成单元音 smell，我当时还以为她想说 I like your perfume! 不过我感觉外国人会比较介意讨论香水这个问题，因为是比较私密的东西，所以就赶紧救场，没想到阴差阳错，果然是因为语音的问题导致的。**- See Translation on p. 183**

**【12/2019】**

Mary: 我在我们的 assignment 里看到这么一句话: ‘you might discuss about the absent feature of spoken discourse’，我的理解就是这部分是可选的，可以写也可以不写，但是很多同学告诉我他们觉得我们必须要写这一个部分。他们说一个老师告诉他们，如果英国人说’may’或者’might’，那么他们就是在间接表达: ‘You must do this’。我记得之前在中国有一个类似的例子，有一个英国老师说 ‘you might as well do …’，他的意思是想布置作业，结果没有人做。我感觉很困惑，所以我最后给这门课的老师发了邮件，然后这个老师说 it is not compulsory。

**【04/2020】**

Mary: 我最近越来越觉得思维方式是跨文化交流的一个很重要的方面，我总是下意识地用汉语的思维方式，比如说前两周去 hiking，中途有点累想让我后面的人先走，脱口而出的就是 ‘you first’，其实我知道应该要说 ‘after you’，但是当时下意识的反应就“你先走”，而且这种情况发生了好多次，每次给人让路，或者进电梯的时候，我总是下意识说 ‘you first’，说完就懊恼。我主要觉得是一个礼貌方面的远近问题，我们习惯于让别人先，就是表示尊敬，这边人的思维是在你之后表示尊敬，我感觉这些语言表达背后是思维方式的差异。**- Partly mentioned and translated on p. 185**

**【04/2020】**

Mary: 再有就是我发现这边人很喜欢别人称呼他们的 given name。对我来说这是一个稍微比较波折的发现，最开始我喜欢叫别人 first name，觉得比较亲切。后来发现文献中的所有引用都是 last name，我感觉姓氏一般用在比较严肃和正式的场合，那之后每次给我们老师发邮件的时候我都是 first name + last name。但是他们每次回复我都是 Dear Mar，最后的署名也是自己的 first name， 所以我后来就感觉其实他们是希望被称呼 first name 的，师生之间的那种距离关系感觉比国内要近，这应该还是文化层面的东西。**- See Translation on p.184**

**【06/2020】**

Mary: 有一次我去一个英国姑娘家做客，一起排练表演，排练结束以后，如果是中国人应该会假客套一下，留你吃饭啊什么的，但是我觉得这边的人没有，排练完以后他就直接提醒你，你该走了。

R：会有一点尴尬吗？

Mary：我当时是有一点不舒服，但是后来我觉得，可能他们的文化就是这样，比较直接。她其实不算暗示了，她说一会有同学要来，她现在还有 30 分钟，要抓紧时间洗个澡，所以你得走了，差不多这个意思。如果是我的话，我可能会问她想不想留下吃个晚餐，尝尝中国菜，客套一下，但是不是真的想留她。