COPYRIGHT ASSIGNMENT AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR A STUDENT THESIS

Your unpublished thesis, submitted for a degree at Williams College and administered by the Williams College Libraries, will be made available for research use. You may, through this form, provide instructions regarding copyright, access, dissemination and reproduction of your thesis. The College has the right in all cases to maintain and preserve theses both in hardcopy and electronic format, and to make such copies as the Libraries require for their research and archival functions.

The faculty advisor/s to the student writing the thesis claims joint authorship in this work.

I/we have included in this thesis copyrighted material for which I/we have not received permission from the copyright holder/s.

If you do not secure copyright permissions by the time your thesis is submitted, you will still be allowed to submit. However, if the necessary copyright permissions are not received, e-posting of your thesis may be affected. Copyrighted material may include images (tables, drawings, photographs, figures, maps, graphs, etc.), sound files, video material, data sets, and large portions of text.

I. COPYRIGHT

An author by law owns the copyright to his/her work, whether or not a copyright symbol and date are placed on the piece. Please choose one of the options below with respect to the copyright in your thesis.

I/we choose not to retain the copyright to the thesis, and hereby assign the copyright to Williams College.

Selecting this option will assign copyright to the College. If the author/s wishes later to publish the work, he/she/they will need to obtain permission to do so from the Libraries, which will be granted except in unusual circumstances. The Libraries will be free in this case to also grant permission to another researcher to publish some or all of the thesis. If you have chosen this option, you do not need to complete the next section and can proceed to the signature line.

I/we choose to retain the copyright to the thesis for a period of 100 years, or until my/our death/s, whichever is the earlier, at which time the copyright shall be assigned to Williams College without need of further action by me/us or by my/our heirs, successors, or representatives of my/our estate/s.

Selecting this option allows the author/s the flexibility of retaining his/her/their copyright for a period of years or for life.
II. ACCESS AND COPYING
If you have chosen in section I, above, to retain the copyright in your thesis for some period of time, please choose one of the following options with respect to access to, and copying of, the thesis.

✓ I/we grant permission to Williams College to provide access to (and therefore copying of) the thesis in electronic format via the Internet or other means of electronic transmission, in addition to permitting access to and copying of the thesis in hardcopy format.

Selecting this option allows the Libraries to transmit the thesis in electronic format via the Internet. This option will therefore permit worldwide access to the thesis and, because the Libraries cannot control the uses of an electronic version once it has been transmitted, this option also permits copying of the electronic version.

___ I/we grant permission to Williams College to maintain and provide access to the thesis in hardcopy format. In addition, I/we grant permission to Williams College to provide access to (and therefore copying of) the thesis in electronic format via the Internet or other means of electronic transmission after a period of ____ years.

Selecting this option allows the Libraries to transmit the thesis in electronic format via the Internet after a period of years. Once the restriction period has ended, this option permits worldwide access to the thesis, and copying of the electronic and hardcopy versions.

___ I/we grant permission to Williams College to maintain, provide access to, and provide copies of the thesis in hardcopy format only, for as long as I/we retain copyright.

Selecting this option allows access to your work only from the hardcopy you submit for as long as you retain copyright in the work. Such access pertains to the entirety of your work, including any media that it incorporates. Selecting this option allows the Libraries to provide copies of the thesis to researchers in hardcopy form only, not in electronic format.

___ I/we grant permission to Williams College to maintain and to provide access to the thesis in hardcopy format only, for as long as I/we retain copyright.

Selecting this option allows access to your work only from the hardcopy you submit for as long as you retain copyright in the work. Such access pertains to the entirety of your work, including any media that it incorporates. This option does NOT permit the Libraries to provide copies of the thesis to researchers.

Signatures removed
METACOGNITIVE AND SOCIOAFFECTIVE STRATEGIES OF
SELF-REGULATION IN A STUDY ABROAD CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY OF
AMERICAN LEARNERS OF MANDARIN CHINESE

by

PATRICIA CHO

Cecilia Chang, Advisor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors
in Asian Studies

WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Williamstown, Massachusetts

May 24, 2010
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**
1 Background .............................................................................................................. 3-5
2 Research Questions ................................................................................................. 5-6

**CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**
1 The Psychological – Socio-cultural Divide .............................................................. 7-9
2 Individual Differences ............................................................................................. 9-11
2.1 Strategy Research ............................................................................................... 11-15
3 An Attempt at Integration: LLS and the Socio-affective Realm Combined
   3.1 Constructing the New Self: The Real Source of Anxiety .................................. 15-17
   3.2 The Self-Regulatory Learner ........................................................................... 17-19
   3.3 Integrative Framework .................................................................................... 19-21
4 Study Abroad ........................................................................................................... 21-24
5 Metacognitive Self-Regulation ............................................................................... 24-28
   5.1 Explicitness ..................................................................................................... 28
   5.2 The Evolutionary Nature of Self-Regulation ................................................... 28-29
   5.3 Merging Goals ............................................................................................... 29
6 Socio-affective Self-regulation
   6.1 Re-Constructing the Self ................................................................................. 29-31
   6.2 Anxiety: Negotiating the Fine Line Between Success and Failure .................... 31
   6.3 Social Setting: American Bubble .................................................................... 32-35
7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 35

**CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY**
1 Method
   1.1 Setting ......................................................................................................... 36
   1.2 The Curriculum ............................................................................................. 36-38
   1.3 Special Features ........................................................................................... 38
   1.4 Methodology ................................................................................................ 39

**CHAPTER 4 - CASE STUDIES**
1 Participants
   1.1 Participant Backgrounds ............................................................................... 40-44
2 Themes .................................................................................................................. 47
3 Strategies .............................................................................................................. 47-48
4 Case Studies
   4.1 Benjamin: The Success of Individualism ......................................................... 49-55
   4.2 Stanley: Eager Overachiever ......................................................................... 56-61
   4.3 Colin: The Backseat Learner ......................................................................... 62-66
   4.4 Christina: The Stable Learner ....................................................................... 67-72
   4.5 Adhira: Debilitating Anxiety ......................................................................... 73-77
   4.6 Eric: Paradigm of Perseverance ................................................................... 78-83

**CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**
1 Discussion .............................................................................................................. 84-87
   1.1 Limitations .................................................................................................... 87-88
2 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 88-90

**APPENDIX I** ........................................................................................................... 91-92
**APPENDIX II** ........................................................................................................ 93

**REFERENCES** ....................................................................................................... 94-97
CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

1 Background

It is a long standing belief within the community of second language acquisition (where the target language is the majority language) research that students’ proficiency levels should display a significant increase after a period of study abroad (Huebner, 1995; Freed, 1995). However, the majority of studies conducted to support this theory have been inconclusive and researchers are still unable to articulate exactly why students do not gain the levels of proficiency predicted (Cohen and Shively 2007). Yet in the face of these findings, the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research community’s faith in the effectiveness of study abroad as a setting for language learning remains unavering.

Nevertheless, certain trends are emerging that indicate a shift in this oversimplified consciousness that assumes adding the study abroad variable introduces a catch all inevitably engendering success in language learning. As the SLA research community continues to realize the extent of individual differences, which becomes especially salient through learner strategy research, there is an emerging emphasis on specific qualitative methodology. Early research in the field clearly exhibits an emphasis on quantitative research; which, by nature, attempts to create holistically uniform groups of individuals to explain certain phenomena. But research published in recent years indicates that language learning is coming to be seen as one of the many rather than the sole product or purpose of study abroad, and that the trajectory of
language learning is thus necessarily and inseparably connected to variations in these individuals’ motivations, dispositions, experiences...etc.

Language learning doesn’t occur systematically, simply as a function of the input and output of a language, but instead rather unpredictably as a result of the infinitely variable total experience resulting from societal interaction as well as active self-regulation. The necessity of placing language learning within the larger societal context cannot be overlooked, and the intricacies of the whole experience must be well understood to ensure that individuals benefit as much from the study abroad experience as our intuition has dictated that they should. As such, further analyses of language acquisition especially when considered in relation to the setting, stand to benefit from the use of an integrative framework to determine what characteristics of the context facilitate social interactions that promote language gain. Viewing language gain holistically from a broader vantage point and considering the role it plays facilitating interaction in society must certainly be superior to the perspective that language gain results solely from cognitive processes.

Certain types of social interactions furthermore, do not occur exclusively in one context and different types of both beneficial and detrimental interactions occur in different types of contexts (Miller and Ginsberg, 2005; Heubner, 2005). Thus, we must depart from the general assumption that study abroad itself is beneficial; it isn’t the context itself but rather the social interactions, whether induced by the student or by the setting, and subsequently the individual’s singular experience that will ultimately determine gains in proficiency. This is not to say that the setting should be discounted as immaterial, rather it should be interpreted as another factor which would
affect the entire process of language learning, one which comes into interaction with other factors.

2 Research Questions

This study will attempt to explore the use of speaking strategies by students learning Chinese as a second language in a study abroad context ultimately with the aim of deepening our understanding of the nature of language learning as it relates to a study abroad context. In the face of a surprising amount of research having been deemed inconclusive as to the direct positive relationship between study abroad and language gain, it becomes necessary to reevaluate the approach (Freed, 1995). Given this fact, this project will propose a shift in current conceptions of the nature of language learning. To this end, the following questions will be examined:

1. What types of meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies do students use in self-regulatory language learning in the study abroad context?

2. How do these specific approaches to self-regulation contribute or prove detrimental to the development of oral proficiency?

3. Why do students’ study abroad experiences often result in lower than expected gains?

The opportunity for interaction with the native speaker environment especially in the form of spoken interaction with native speakers has historically been considered to be the primary factor of value contributing to the expected gains made in study abroad (Magnan and Back, 2007). Thus it becomes imperative that an examination of the effect of study abroad on a students’ oral proficiency takes such variables into consideration. The development of proficiency, as with any aspect of language
learning, is substantially affected by individual factors (Churchill and DuFon, 2006). As such, the current study investigating the relationship between study abroad and gains made in oral proficiency will be facilitated through case studies examining language learners’ metacognitive and socio-affective strategies of self-regulation used in study abroad and the subsequent facilitation of language gain. Ultimately, I hope to place these examinations conducted outside of the traditional psychological-socio-cultural dichotomy in a way which acts to further the integration of both social and psychological perspectives which necessarily precede an understanding of LLS as it interacts with the dynamic and numerous variables affecting language learning abroad.

Following is an examination of the existing literature of language learners’ strategies in a study abroad context. This literature review will be conducted in an attempt to secure a sufficient background in the history of the existing research regarding language learner strategies (LLS), specifically metacognitive strategies as they affect the process of learning Chinese as a second language (learning Chinese in a study abroad context). The study itself was conducted at Associated Colleges in China (ACC) in Beijing during the summer 2009 term.
CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

1 The Psychological – Socio-cultural Divide

There is a major, in some ways, debilitating division in second language acquisition (SLA) research regarding language learner strategies, which can be considered methods by which individuals direct their language learning experiences. This seemingly irreconcilable divide between the psychological and socio-cultural perspectives has been called the “psychological-versus-socio-cultural paradigm war” (Oxford and Schramm, 2007). This split has been responsible for what has seemed to be an unbridgeable gap separating what each camp considers should be the focus of SLA research. The psychological perspective brings the individual into sharp focus and examines the minutiae of the language learning process. Which is to say that researchers of the psychological tradition emphasize empirical analysis and the notion that universal cognitive processes govern language learning, just like learning in general. At the other end of the spectrum, stands the socio-cultural camp, which relies on qualitative research that highlights the effects of specific social settings and makes the claim that the interaction between the individual learner and the specific social setting forms the core of language learning (Oxford and Schramm, 2007).

But the inefficacy of such a polarized state of language acquisition research is slowly dawning on the field; and in response, most researchers now believe in incorporating both perspectives. The field is continually moving toward a more integrated theory that considers not only the individual (psychological) processes of learning that govern acquisition but also the socio-cultural forces that affect it. The
prominence of the socio-cultural perspective has of late, risen dramatically within the field of second language acquisition, especially with regard to strategy research (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005).

Nevertheless, the field of SLA has been dominated since its conception by the psychological research perspective. “The majority of studies to date, deal primarily with the acquisition of a second language (L2) rather than with its communicative use” (Pellegrino Aveni 2005). The psychological perspective on the nature of language learning assumes that individuals are equipped with a universal set of cognitive processes for learning, that learning language is a form of learning like any other, and that individual differences in pattern and frequency of strategy use can be quantified to predict language gain. But it has long been understood that the structural difficulty of creating taxonomies and categorizations of language learner strategies prevented complete accounts of psychological reality (Greenfell and Macaro, 2007).

At this point, the socio-cultural effects on language learning can no longer be denied. The interaction between the individual and the specific social setting is paramount to understanding individuals’ processes of language learning, because language aside from consisting of semiotic units of meaning, functions as our primary mode of communication. But again, a strictly socio-cultural perspective will also fail to yield sufficient explanations of the nature of language learning; its weakness also lies in its neglect of the definitive play that cognitive processing receives in learning a language, especially in an intensive study abroad setting.

Integrating the two perspectives has proven to be immensely difficult, but it seems safe to say that the nature of language learning must be better understood and
articulated if we are to move out of the unproductive stagnation exhibited by SLA research dominated exclusively by one perspective. Even recent literature that claims to be faithful to an incorporation of both perspectives still seems to uphold some semblance of the original division between psychological and socio-cultural perspectives, for example many of the studies published in Dörnyei and Schmidt’s (2001) volume *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition*, exhibit definitive loyalty to one perspective. In reality, it seems more accurate to view language learning in a study abroad context as a dichotomy, as an experience simultaneously involving cognitive processes, and socio-cultural interaction; for it cannot be denied that an individual is just as intensely a personal and individualistic being as she is a social one. It is necessary to precede discussions of further integration between the psychological and socio-cultural research perspectives with an understanding of individual differences and strategy research, to further explore the experience of language learning in a study abroad context.

2 Individual Differences

The subfield of individual differences within the study of second language acquisition has been subject to significant advances within the past few years. What began as a rather weakly defined set of factors which were identified as affecting language learning, has evolved into a much stronger force to be reckoned with as more research is being directed toward investigating its exact dynamic (Ellis, 1994; Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003; Gass and Selinker, 2008). Nevertheless, this is not to say that the study of individual differences enjoys unproblematic success and progression. Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) still attest to an “imbalance” in the field which they
attempt to “redress”; a general avoidance of the “unfashionable” study of individual differences in spite of the potential for further illumination of individual learner success, which quantitative research has imbued it with.

Given the unfortunate neglect, which the subfield of individual differences suffers, it seems appropriate that certain changes in the overall approach to research within this field are in order. Ellis (1994), attesting to the as of yet unexhausted utility of the concatenative approach, calls for continued integration of research using naturalistic methodologies in which the individual learners are observed in specific detail within natural settings. Such an approach would undoubtedly better serve the endeavor of illuminating the nature of such a malleable dynamic as that which exists between language learning and the multitude of individual differences.

Individual differences, or “person variables”, can be divided into cognitive (intelligence, aptitude, memory) and affective factors (anxiety, motivation, emotion), and are understood to affect the process of language learning (Robinson, 2002). The placement of individual differences continues to inspire an ongoing debate between the psychological and the social camps; the former being more concerned with innate empirically observable language learning processes and the latter placing heightened emphasis on language learning as a product of the individual’s interaction with the social situations. Nevertheless, theoretical and methodological favoritism does not seem to detract from the general consensus that the continued prominence of the effects of individual differences necessitates the use of “interpretive research” incorporating both perspectives and thus both quantitative and qualitative designs
(Erickson, 1991; Freed, 1995). Recent research clearly displays the extensive incorporation of this view (see Cohen and Macaro, 2007, for a review).

It is at this junction that some researchers began to take the position that a more social perspective of SLA is necessary for progress. Block (2003) articulates his ideal as “socially situating learning while not losing sight of language as a formal system” (p. 6). This debate (definitively far from being over, if it ever will be), continues to transpire and to further establish the theoretical basis for research in SLA. Though the specifics of the debate, which are extensive enough to fill entire volumes, extend far beyond the scope of this project, it is necessary to grasp the fundamental facets of both psychological and social perspectives as they have affected language learner strategy research, which has been identified as a subfield of individual differences, to establish the theoretical foundation of this project.

2.1 Strategy Research

Since the advent of strategy research in the 1970s and 80s, the study of language learner strategies (LLS) has been subject to a rather extensive amount of criticism pointed at the lack of consensus. The field of LLS research suffered from a general deficiency of sufficient operational definition. The very nature of a strategy constantly eluded specific description, and thus the dynamic of LLS in relation to language learning has retained its notoriety for a general lack of clarity (Greenfell and Macaro 2007).

However, beginning in the late 1990s two general shifts in the field of strategy research emerged in tandem with the “social turn” witnessed in SLA research reflecting the growing recognition of the role which different learning contexts play in
affecting strategy use (Block 2003; Greenfell and Macaro 2007). The first shift aims at
the dissolution of the dichotomy between the good language learner and the bad
language learner and thus the elimination of the notion that certain universals govern
strategy use and subsequent success. There is an attempt instead to establish the notion
of the individual language learner rather than the universal language learner.
According to Greenfell and Macaro (2007), the emphasis is now on the “individual’s
strategic reaction to a contextualized task or a series of tasks” (p. 23). The second shift
is one, which emphasized quality of strategy use over quantity.

These shifts were engendered by and reflected the necessity to bridge the
divide between the psychological and social perspectives resulting in what Oxford and
Schramm (2007) call the “psychological-versus-socio-cultural paradigm war”. The
psychological perspective uses the individual and individual differences as the focus in
language learner strategy research and is most often associated with quantitative
methodologies. Researchers who follow the psychological tradition are mainly
interested in explaining the dynamic surrounding the specific factors affecting an
individual’s cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategy use. On the other hand,
socio-cultural perspectives rely on qualitative research that highlights the effects of
specific social settings and makes the claim that the interaction between the individual
learner and the social setting form the core of language learning (Oxford, Schramm,
2007).

It is easy to understand the appeal as well as necessity of the psychological
perspective in its emphasis on quantifiable data, which carries with it the certainty of
specific objective results. Nevertheless, the very nature of language acquisition, in its
infinite variation, makes it such that it invariably evades complete empirical
description when using quantitative research. The myriad of factors affecting language
learner strategies makes solely quantified explanations of strategy use insufficient.
Though this is not to discount the importance of the insights provided by the
psychological perspective, it does point to the necessity of an integrated theoretical
foundation.

Thus, such a polarized state of language acquisition research is in swift decline;
the new trend adhering to the ‘compatibility thesis’ in which researchers attempt to
reconcile the differences of the two perspectives and subsequently invoke the power of
a combined perspective has arisen as of late. This is to say that researchers are
continually moving toward a more integrated theory that considers not only the
individual differences that govern acquisition but also the socio-cultural forces specific
to a given situation and the individual’s interaction with the setting that necessarily
shape the process of language learning. In addition, more diverse methodologies
incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research have been introduced. Given
the undeniable necessity of integrating both psychological and socio-cultural
perspectives, the incompatibility thesis, which essentially forced researchers to choose
a side, has become obsolete (Oxford, Schramm, 2007).

The variables affecting language acquisition strategies have thus come to be thought of
as belonging to one of these two perspectives, creating a dichotomy of two different
groups of strategies, which exist in a “symbiotic” relationship. Factors of individual
variation such as age, gender, nationality, career/motivation, and personality types
make up the psychological group and the social group consists of those variables
related to the environment, for example, learning setting (classroom, street, dining hall…) and social interactions (Takeuchi, Griffiths, Coyle, 2007).

Considering the recent trajectory of LLS research then, Greenfell and Macaro (2007) offer the following six points as indicative of researchers’ current conceptualization of LLS:

1. that strategies could continue to be identified under broad categories, despite the difficulties this entailed
2. that strategy research offered a radical new conceptualization of the language learning process, shifting the emphasis on to the individual learner;
3. that the learning context, nevertheless, was a major influence on the way that individuals and groups used strategies;
4. that strategies were value-neutral, not in themselves good or bad, but were used either effectively or ineffectively by individuals and by groups;
5. that strategy research continued to offer insights into the complex operations that constituted the process of language learning; and
6. that strategy use and achievement were inextricably linked.

This general understanding of the nature of LLS has led to the emergence of two constructs in which strategies operate and that represent the psychological/socio-cultural divide. The psychological perspective examines strategies as they relate to individual differences identifying two types of mental activity (cognitive and metacognitive), which affect strategy use. The socio-cultural perspective examines strategies that individuals use to navigate their communicative use of the language in social interactions. These two types of activities have been the subjects of much
scholarly investigation resulting in quite extensive definition and understanding (Oxford and Schramm 2007; Wenden 1998).

In an attempt to further the attempts to bridge the gap between the psychological and socio-cultural research perspectives, this project will use an amalgamation of Pellegrino Aveni’s (2005) concept of the “social dance” and a broad conception of Dornyei and Skehan’s (2003) “self-regulatory learner” in an attempt to deepen our understanding of the nature of language gain and fully harness the predominantly dormant potential for language gain in a study abroad context.

3 An Attempt at Integration: LLS and the Socio-affective Realm Combined

3.1 Constructing the New Self: The Real Source of Anxiety

The psychological perspective’s reduction of language learning simply to cognitive processes of learning, fails to consider that, in fact, the act of learning a language is just as much a construction of a new self, who is to be a participant in what Pellegrino Aveni (2005) calls the “social dance”. She presents a conception of individuals’ interaction in the second language as a “self-presentation through social interaction” to the outside world (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, p. 4). After all, we learn our first language(s) not to increase knowledge, but to be able to function in society, to be able to communicate with the other, project an identity in contrast to the other, and participate in the ensuing “social dance” of interaction. Considering that conversation features as the primary mode of interaction with the other, speech production is by extension, the primary mode of self-identification/self-creation.

Our words, our articulations are, to a certain degree, extensions of ourselves, not merely semiotic units of meaning. Thus, protecting our social identity includes the
deflection of threats to these social selves. In a study abroad program, especially one as intensive as ACC, featuring a language pledge that requires the students to operate exclusively in the second language, self-identity becomes contingent upon a limited linguistic base. The students’ identities become especially and constantly susceptible to attack, embarrassment, and anxiety: grammatically “wrong” utterances, teachers’ corrections, and inability to communicate with native speakers. The general incapacity to express the range of characteristics that make up the individual’s ideal self the one that she hopes to project onto the world, compromises the safety of her identity. Individuals are faced with serious “issues of self-preservation in a study abroad context, which have yet to be explored in depth in the field of SLA” (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, p. 3).

Each student has an idea of the ideal self she hopes to project which stands in contrast to the real self that is actually portrayed. This is the source of anxiety; the self-conflict that emerges from the size of the gap between the “real self” and the “ideal self” (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, 19). But whatever the specific relationship between anxiety and language gain is, what is certain is the existence of the multi-faceted rippling effect of anxiety dampening the language learning process on multiple fronts.

“Anxiety presents itself in learners’ behavior as a symptom of the deeper conflicts that a limited language base presents to self-presentation and self-preservation” (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, p. 25). The empirical research conducted thus far on the relationship between anxiety and language gain has largely proven to be inconclusive because it assumes a causal relationship between anxiety and language
performance. "Does anxiety impair students’ oral fluency, or do they become anxious in oral production tasks because their speech skills are low?" (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, p. 24). There is no definitive answer to the question because the answer is both.

The failure of these reductive measures can be attributed to the fact that they divert us from understanding what is fundamentally at stake. The student’s interaction in the study abroad context is not merely to engender language gain. We have slowly come to the realization that neither the language learner nor the language learning process can be reduced to simple universals; the learning experience is not something that can be completely understood through operational definition. The learner is rather, in embarking on the journey of study abroad, especially in one that entails complete immersion and a language pledge, engaging simultaneously in the study of a language as well as in the construction of a new self. The individual constructs this new self to project out into the world, but being conscious, intelligent individuals, encounter severe anxiety arising from the gap between the "ideal self" and the "real self". The anxiety of this poiesis and the plurality of coping mechanisms will prove fundamental to understanding the source of the lack of expected gains in the study abroad context.

3.2 The Self-Regulatory Learner

Dornyei and Skehan (2003) illuminate the concept of the "self-regulating learner", a concept borrowed from educational psychology, and one which has inspired a considerable amount of investigation within the field of LLS research dating back to Vygotsky’s seminal socio-cultural research. This notion of the self-regulatory learner sets the individual learner at the core and calls for specific individualized analysis. LLS research has witnessed the growing popularity of this paradigm which posits that
self-regulation in language learning makes use of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies to govern L2 information processing, the L2 learning process, and emotions/motivations respectively (Oxford and Schramm 2007; O’Malley and Chamot 1990). Nevertheless, research regarding the self-regulatory learner still reflects the distinct psychological versus socio-cultural divide and as such there is far less integration than would be optimal, resulting in a rather disjointed set of theories.

The psychological perspective of self-regulation considers cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies as stated above, but there is a rising popularity in notions of socio-cultural self-regulation. Such socio-cultural views have posited three primary theories according to Oxford and Schramm (2007) including the dialogic model, situated cognition in communities of practice, and the social autonomy model. It is not with the sole intent to situate the current research project within these traditions that this background on self-regulatory research is provided; it is also intended to elucidate the general understanding of self-regulation in order to depict the break that this study will make. The emphasis here is not on research methodology, though it remains crucial, rather the importance of this study lies in the suggestions and implications of the effect that different conceptualizations of the language learning process can have on the explanations.

Instead of attempting to further these specific theories of self-regulation, the present study will draw from the notion of self-regulation and all it entails and apply it to specific individuals as they proceed throughout the language learning experience. Thus, as much flexibility will be afforded the framework as possible, and self-
regulation will be broadly examined in terms of two types: metacognitive and socio-affective.

3.3 Integrative Framework

A combined integrative framework utilizing both the notion of the “social dance” and the self-regulatory language learner requires a drastic re-conceptualization of the very nature of language learning as well as the role that strategies play in the entire experience. Strategy research, for all its claimed attempts as of late to incorporate both psychological and socio-affective perspectives, fails to give the socio-cultural realm due credit considering the extent of its effect on the language learning process. This is not to say that it does not enjoy enough emphasis, rather that it is being viewed in a way that is less than optimal for the progression of the field. Rather than contributing to the “learning” process as a cognitive understanding of the language, it affects not only the cognitive mental learning that occurs but also the individual’s navigation through social interactions. These interactions are understood to require the projection of a self in which language serves as a communicative tool, and does not stand as individualized universal units of meaning that don’t vary with context.

Thus it is important to note that this study assumes that students use strategies throughout their process of self-regulation, but that these strategies have infinite possibilities of manifestation. Creating taxonomies often leads to a misunderstanding of the nature of language learning. It is necessary instead to correctly place the individual and correctly understand that the nature of language learning makes it such
that the focus should not be on the final *product* of self-regulation (strategies), but rather on a deeper understanding of the *process* of self-regulation instead.

Thus, this study proposes an understanding of the nature of language learning to be just as much a process of cognitive manipulation as it is a navigation of social interactions using the constructs of the "ideal" and "real" self articulated by Pellegrino Aveni (2005). Consequently, metacognitive self-regulation will be understood to be self-regulation of the formal process of learning the language (e.g. what students learn in the classroom) and socio-affective self-regulation to be the process of constructing the self. This self-construction will further be noted as the source of anxiety, and the amount of anxiety should be understood to be directly related to the size of the gap between the individual's conceptions of the "real" and "ideal" selves. In other words, the bigger the gap, the greater the anxiety. Those students who find ways to successfully navigate these infinitely connected processes seem to be the most successful in terms of language gain. This conceptualization of the nature of language
learning and the different facets of the study abroad experience is not intended to be a complete, all-encompassing theory, rather a single possible interpretation that provides some further insight.

4 Study Abroad

Having thus established some of the governing theories that relate to second language learning, we can move on to the literature that deals directly with examinations of study abroad and its influence on students’ development of proficiency in the target language (L2). Far from being considered any longer to be a definitive prediction of success in second language learning, the study abroad context has been demoted from its previous status. Research has led to the conclusion that considering study abroad to be a “unitary variable”, introduces the irresolvable problematic of forcing all students who participate in study abroad into the singular category of “learner” (Kinginger, 2008, p. 3). Instead, and as research has shown, it is important for us to consider the students not as “learners” who are endowed with a static base set of universals but as individuals who can and do differ in an infinite number of ways. In this sense then, participants would be better described by their key defining features; differentiating them by holistic understandings, which though they stem from a commonly accepted set of variables affecting an individual’s language learning, enjoy an infinite number of manifestations (Kinginger 2008). “Learners” will be addressed as “students” from this point forward to ensure the clarity of this distinction.

In this way, we can describe one student’s language learning process as driven by the key feature of extrinsic success (monetary or scholastic) and another’s as driven
by internal impetuses (self-identified interests or personal dispositions), another
student’s as both, and another student’s as neither. In other words, the research is
afforded the amount of unlimited flexibility required to undertake descriptions of
strategies characterized by such fluid nature. This project will refrain from the notion
of good or bad strategies, rather it will stay faithful to the understanding that certain
strategies are good for certain individuals and bad for others. This type of flexibility is
necessary within the current state of second language acquisition research if any
attempt is to be made at incorporating all of the factors, which affect the process of
language learning specifically within a study abroad context.

In this qualitative vein then, instead of attempting to provide a systematic and
strictly operational analysis of the six students’ language learner strategies, the
intention of this study is to focus broadly on metacognitive and socio-affective
strategies as they affect each individual’s self-regulatory language learning process.
The naturalistic methodologies employed in the study will be used first to describe the
students’ metacognitive processes of self-regulation which will culminate in
discussions of learners’ affective states. The social contexts will not be excluded from
the final analysis and will serve to provide a more holistic picture. To this end, the
remainder of the literature review will be dedicated to an examination of the research
conducted with these same broad intentions of integration (incorporating both social
and psychological perspectives), featuring naturalistic analysis and an understanding of
the paradigm of self-regulation. With this serving as the basic framework of analysis,
the point of this study is to further our general understanding of the process of
language learning and deepen our evaluations of the nature of language learning in
general. Rather than attempting to further the theory itself, the use of a broader general theoretical foundation in proceeding with this research will hopefully provide a closer inspection of the dynamic of language gain in study abroad contexts as they relate to strategy use and lay some groundwork for further articulations and advancements of integrative and efficient theories buttressing second language acquisition LLS research.

These inquiries put forth by this study are well complemented by those posited in Der-lin Chao’s (1998) article “Attitudes toward Speaking Chinese in an Immersion Program: The Effects on Language Learning”. The article reports case studies of two students Karen and Daniel in an attempt to determine the factors that contribute to successful Chinese learning.

Chao’s (1998) overall finding was that “a receptive learning attitude derived from an accurate understanding of the immersion environment is the key to effective learning” (p. 12-13). This conclusion lies parallel with that posited by Wang, Spencer, and Xing (2008). That the necessity of correct assessment of the environment as well as the subsequent understanding of effective strategy use is a given. Since students seem to be ill-equipped in the way of strategy use appropriate to a study abroad context, the question in need of answering is not whether or not study abroad is effective, but rather why is it that students are unable to use strategies that would take advantage of the opportunities for language gain in immersion contexts of study abroad.

In an attempt to begin to fill this void in our knowledge of second language acquisition, the research presented here will examine six cases navigating the dynamic of students’ strategies in a study abroad context through an analysis of logs
documenting weekly classroom observations and student interviews. Ultimately, this study is being conducted in the hopes of providing a better understanding of the language learning process and allowing us to come to more definitive conclusions not only of learning Chinese as a second language but of learning languages in general.

5 Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Metacognitive mental activity or metacognition refers to both “knowledge about one’s own cognition” and “automatic, executive processes of regulation and control” (Oxford and Schramm 2007, p. 62-63). Metacognition can be divided into metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies, which are dictated by metacognitive knowledge. Metacognitive knowledge can be delineated by three different types: person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategic knowledge, all of which significantly affect an individual’s process of language learning (Wenden, 1997). Wenden (1997) explains in his review of research regarding metacognitive knowledge and language learning that metacognitive knowledge influences planning, evaluating and monitoring in the self regulation of learning.

According to Wang, Spencer, and Xing (2008), metacognition is essential for students who wish “to assume increasing responsibility for planning and regulating their learning” (p. 48). In their article “Metacognitive beliefs and strategies in learning Chinese as a Foreign Language”, they argue that “students should be encouraged to analyze their own learning processes in order to improve their metacognitive learning strategies, which will reinforce “motivational aspects of self-efficacy” (Wang, Spencer, and Xing, 2008, p. 54). Essentially, metacognition of learning is an overall understanding of the process of language learning as it relates to that individual.
Ideally, good metacognition will necessarily lead to informed conclusions and inferences regarding effective language learning behavior as well as effective self appraisal and self management. Both of which lead to effective strategy use both in terms of type and frequency (Wang, Spencer, and Xing, 2008). Thus, metacognitive strategies are also executive skills that evaluate the success of a learning activity. Unlike metacognitive beliefs, “the emphasis is on reflection of learning processes and learning to learn, leading to enhanced self-direction and learner autonomy in language learning”, instead of on thinking about learning in general (Wang, Spencer, and Xing, 2008, p. 48). Thus, as they aptly state “students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction” (Wang, Spencer, and Xing, 2008, p. 48).

The article, presents a study, which examined forty-five native English-speaking students who had never studied Chinese, enrolled in a beginning level Chinese class to determine the effect of “good” metacognition on proficiency levels. Students who performed the best on the achievement tests are also the ones who are optimistic about learning Chinese. These students take on full responsibility, planning their learning, and directing their attitudes down the path most beneficial for progress in the language. Essentially, the main finding is that maintenance of a positive attitude during the language learning process, a consistent sense of motivation, and active engagement in directing one’s learning ultimately leads to successful gains in language proficiency (Wang, Spencer, and Xing, 2008).

Though the necessity of metacognitive strategy use to effective self-regulation of language learning cannot be denied, as stated previously, taxonomic categorization will provide at best, superficial results. It is necessary to strategies but also more
importantly understanding their origins, metacognitive beliefs, with engender a deeper understanding of the totality of metacognitive self-regulation and its effect on language learning.

Miller and Ginsberg (1995) examined “the ideas that students have about language and language learning” in their article “Folklinguistic Theories of Language Learning” in which they analyzed the narrative diaries, oral narratives and notebook journals of American students studying Russian in Moscow and St. Petersburg (p. 294). Essentially the article outlined their observations regarding students’ intuitive theories of language learning. The students’ theories were organized into two categories, the first conceptualized language and linguistic competence, and the second discussed language learning and learning strategies (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995).

Regarding students theories about language and linguistic competence, their first finding was that students conceptualize language as words and syntax. According to them, students’ views of what a language is composed of are much narrower than that of reality, often times excluding the “the more ‘communicative’ aspects of a language” (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995, p. 311). Students also believe that there is one correct way to say things in a language and that language is a unified system with fixed rules. Further, meaning lies in the words themselves. In other words, the students “package meaning as de-contextualized words” instead of focusing on the fluid nature of language and the importance of context (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995, p. 302). To the students, success meant producing grammatically correct utterances. Finally, students conceptualized the mind as a container with separate containers for separate languages,
and that “model words and phrases go in and come out of storage locations in the mind-container” (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995, p. 304)

The article also presented some intriguing theories regarding students’ language learning and learning strategies. They found that students viewed language as a puzzle and that learning the language corresponds to the construction of the puzzle. Students believed that speaking improves or deteriorates under certain conditions; when in a comfortable situation, the affective filter lowers and “better speech” is produced. In terms of when they thought language learning could occur, they felt that it would only occur during the production of “new linguistic items”, and not during listening though most of class time consists of listening (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995, p. 309). Lastly, they found that students viewed learning a language as a journey; that they go through “plateaus and slumps” ultimately to attain a “systematic, piece-by-piece mastery of an idealized, unvarying form” of the language (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995, p. 310).

There were three major findings put forward in this article, which should be quoted at length.

To a large extent students’ views of language exclude many of the features of language for which study abroad is particularly advantageous.

In spite of the fact that students denigrate formal instruction, their views of language and their views of learning lead them to try to recreate classroom situations in their interactions with native speakers outside of class.

As a consequence, students do not appear to take full advantage of the unique opportunities for learning afforded by study abroad (Miller and Ginsberg, 2005, p. 295).
The following three themes were identified to be especially pertinent to discussions of students’ metacognitive self-regulation and strategy use: explicitness, the evolutionary nature of self-regulation, and merging goals.

5.1 Explicitness:

The benefit of having a plan or a set of goals is a well-accepted notion within strategy research. However, it seems crucial to identify the significance of making these goals and plans explicit. It is important to set specific goals that complement the individual’s personality and his/her singular motivations. Such explicitness would attest to the level of “awareness and consciousness” of a student’s strategy use and thus the level of control that the student has over the process of self-regulation (Cohen, 2007, p. 34).

An explicit understanding of the entire process of language learning and the strategies most beneficial to an individual can thus only occur through constant evaluation and reevaluation of the different aspects that engender gains in proficiency. Such aspects include relationships requiring interaction in the target language, for example with professors, peers, and native speakers, study methods, specific areas of difficulty, etc.

5.2 The Evolutionary Nature of Self-Regulation

Far from being governed by a static set of metacognitive beliefs and strategies, self-regulation is a process, which undergoes constant revision. Individual students are not only units of learning endowed with a specific set of cognitive features, but are also humans, individuals endowed with an infinite capacity for change. Adams (2006), in her examination of the “effects of changes in language learning strategy use on
proficiency” studied American students participating in language programs in the Dominican Republic, France, Brazil, Spain, and Austria (p. 265). Her conclusion that students may need more consistent focus and guidance in terms of strategy use takes it as a given that sustained active development of the process of self-regulation is crucial to a more effective and focused language learning experience (Adams, 2006).

5.3 Merging goals

As Miller and Ginsberg (2005) pointed out, many students conceive of language as “idealized and unvarying” which would conceivably lead them to think it’s acceptable to limit themselves to the systematically taught language existing within the walls of the institution. Students must be made cognizant of the danger this goal merging presents, often manifesting in overemphasis on grades, professors’ comments… to attaining that ever-elusive fluency at the end of the struggle of learning a language. The specific manifestations of this tendency seen in the six cases will be discussed in detail below.

6 Socio-Affective Self-Regulation

The three themes most pertinent to understanding socio-affective self-regulation of the cases at hand include: notions of reconstructing the self, negotiating the fine line of anxiety between success and failure, and the American bubble social setting.

6.1 Re-Constructing Self

There has been a surge in recent years, following the rise of socio-cultural theory, of research on the notion of identity construction in relation to language learning. Toohey and Norton (2003) call for increased emphasis on the social
practices involved in learning a language and provide (not an alternative) but rather a complementary view of language learning which attests to the “importance of examining the ways in which learners exercise agency in forming and reforming their identities in those contexts” (p. 71). Riley (2003) similarly points out that the “primary mechanism” of the social interaction, which is a process of “inter-individual negotiation and enactment of social identity”, is language (p. 107). Gore (2005) explicates that many students view study abroad as an academic endeavor rather than as a process that, though academic in nature, still includes the possibilities of “learning about another culture” and more importantly, “learning about myself” (p. 125). Most students fail to conceive of this dialectic of social interaction between the individual and society, and will not necessarily understand or be conscious of this process of creating a new self. But it does not seem that direct consciousness of this process itself is not what is important, rather it is the notion of the communicative use of language requiring knowledge of “specific norms of language use” that the students must grasp (Mora, 2000, p. 56).

In her experience learning Japanese, Ogulnick (2000) eventually came to the conclusion that “there is a dialectic between language learning and identity that is inextricably linked to our historical experiences and the sociopolitical contexts in which we find ourselves. Beyond knowing words and grammar, learning a language involves acquiring a role, and knowing how to act according to that social definition.” (Ogulnick, 2000, p. 170). In light of all of these recent findings, it becomes crucial to warn students of the dangers of forgetting about putting language into context, to
illuminate this “dark side” of language learning that requires the construction of a new identity/adaptation of identity to a new language.

6.2 Anxiety: Negotiating the Fine Line Between Success and Failure

The nature of language learning makes self-evaluation difficult to say the least, much like trying to measure how much you’ve grown by gauging how much further away the ground looks. The gains made mostly escape perception until a considerable difference established over considerable time becomes suddenly apparent. Thus, it is difficult to engender the feeling that an individual’s language learning process is successful from day to day.

The relationship between success, failure, anxiety, and motivation has yet to be explored in sufficient detail. Williams, Burden, and Al-Baharna (2001) conducted a study of teachers’ and students’ notions of success and failure and the extent to which these notions affect motivation. They conclude by encouraging the notion that students’ “feelings of internality and control” in engendering success are crucial to students’ sustained motivation and that this entire dynamic should be studied in relation to all the variables it can be affected by including both the cognitive and socio-affective processes (Williams, Burden, and Al-Baharna, 2001, p. 183). Thus, it becomes necessary to consider the extent to which students’ notions of success and failure contribute to their anxiety and detract from the benefit to be gained in participating in the construction of an identity within a second language undoubtedly imbued with communicative use.
6.3 Social Setting: American bubble

The immutable spread of globalization has undoubtedly thrust the world into an age in which physical boundaries and territorial borders are no longer considered significant obstacles to international connections (travel, business, etc...). Modern society enjoys a level of technological advancement that allows for an unprecedented degree of access to the world (Kinginger, 2008). Paradoxically, as the physical borders seem to dissolve, the growing prominence of nationalism coupled with the technological advancements of this post-industrial era has brought into especially sharp distinction the borders of what Anderson (1983) called the “imagined communities” of modern nations. The members of modern nations uniquely adhere to a “deep horizontal comradeship” forming collective identities (Anderson, 1983, p. 7). Membership is exclusive, and admittance is granted only to others considered citizens of the nation in question (Anderson, 1983).

As Kinginger (2008) observes, in her report of a study on American students participating in study abroad programs in France, they displayed a very strong sense of national identity, which manifested in their attachment to an “electronic umbilical cord” allowing them to be in constant contact with their American contacts and maintain their social identities (p. 62). We can only imagine the strength of the national identity exhibited by American students who immerse themselves in non-Western cultures. The rigid maintenance of these national identities seriously hinder students’ gains in proficiency, neglecting the pragmatic aspects of language, the students effectively evade the anxiety constantly hovering over the process of reconstructing identity in study abroad. As such, these students neglect to partake in a crucial component of
learning a language, establishing it as a mode of communication through which students engage in the construction of a new self and thus seriously hinder acquisition of those aspects of language (such as pragmatic comprehension) that do not lend themselves to being taught in a classroom.


There is a "lack of adequate exposure to the target language and especially to its pragmatic features while students are abroad" (Cohen and Shively, 2007).

Study-abroad students lack adequate awareness of language and culture strategies to make the most of the language learning opportunities that study abroad affords them (Cohen and Shively, 2007).

As they explicate, "In principle, students have access to appropriate pragmatic behavior and native speakers of the target language on a daily basis and, therefore, should be more likely to make gains than their peers who stay at home". However, Barron (2003) proposed that the reason for the lack of expected acquisition of pragmatic norms even with year long study abroad programs may be due to the fact that the amount of interactions with native speakers may not be sufficient to receive the necessary amount of pragmatic input. It is true that the availability of pragmatic input is what marks the difference between study abroad and at home language learning. However, the findings presented in this article align parallel to those of Barron (2003), essentially that more native speaker interaction is necessary if we hope to make learners’ study abroad experiences as effective in promoting language gains as possible (Cohen and Shively, 2007).
Furthermore, even the minimal amount of interaction that students receive is colored by their common treatment of all interactions in the second language as extensions of the classroom. Heubner’s (2005) article “The Effects of Overseas Language Programs” presented an examination of an experimental intensive Japanese language course for beginner Japanese students and looked at the subsequent effects on proficiency in contrast with the same course in the United States (Heubner, 2005).

The findings presented in this article were consistent with established beliefs about study abroad and language learning; mainly that study abroad does aid (however minimally) gains in proficiency of the target language. But there was one insight that is important to point out and should serve as a marker for the necessity of future research in this aspect of study abroad.

First, students abroad approach their language learning and the language classroom in the same way they do in the at home institutions. The students from the abroad institution displayed an increase in the strategies used, but there weren’t any significant differences between the two groups in variation, or type of strategies used. This is consistent with Miller and Ginsberg’s finding that students, when learning a foreign language attempt to treat all interactions conducted in the foreign language as extensions of the classroom (Heubner, 2005).

This last theme also alludes to the obvious need for congruence between students’ claimed theory and actual practice. Understanding (or claiming to understand) that interaction with the native speaking environment is a crucial component to the successful study abroad experience resulting in significant language
gain is a world apart from actually undertaking that step outside the comfortable familiarity of the dorm to do so.

7 Conclusion

The reason so much of LLS research has proven to be so inconclusive is due to its unbridled emphasis on quantification and subsequently on creating taxonomies of strategies. Having been unable to discover any conclusive set of findings regarding the relationship between strategy use and language gain, the present study hopes to use the notion of strategies within a larger construct of self-regulation, placing emphasis on the individual learner and examining strategies rather peripherally instead.

Using Pellegrino Aveni’s notion of the social dance and the subsequently derived understanding of language experience as affected by individual differences in cognitive processing as well as by social interactions involving the real and ideal self, we will further explore the notion of metacognitive and socio-affective self-regulation. The themes discussed above in the literature review will be examined as they manifest in each individual student. However, it is important to note before proceeding that these themes must not be examined in isolation; rather they must be understood within the entire context of language learning. Viewed holistically, the extent of the plurality of students’ language learning processes and subsequently the importance of such holistic naturalistic research will hopefully become clear.
CHAPTER 3:
METHODOLOGY

1 Method

1.1 Setting

This study was conducted at Associated Colleges in China (ACC), an intensive Chinese language program, during the eight-week long summer 2009 term. The program is located in Beijing, China and hosted by the Capital University of Economics and Business (CUEB; shoudu jingji maoyi daxue 首都经济贸易大学), which sits at the heart of Beijing’s ultra-developed bustling new business district. The program offers instruction for second year to fourth year Chinese according to students’ proficiency levels, which are determined by a written exam and an oral interview administered previous to the beginning of the term. The students are housed in the foreign students’ dormitory at CUEB equipped with a café and a cafeteria on the first floor and attend class in the campus classrooms.

1.2 The Curriculum

Throughout the duration of the summer term, all students undertake the daunting task of completing an extremely rigorous course in which the content of a full year’s worth of Chinese is compacted into eight short weeks. In terms of daily coursework, the students are assigned half a lesson to a full lesson from textbooks suited to their respective levels of proficiency (second to fourth year). Each lesson consists of a significant block of text (narratives, dialogues, short stories, articles, … etc.) and key vocabulary words from the text. Each student is charged with
the task of memorizing the vocabulary words and familiarizing themselves with the
text and its corresponding grammar points for classes the next day.

Every day of class held from Monday through Thursday consists of four
sections or periods, each lasting approximately an hour. Classes begin at eight am
sharp; the first period (dabanke: big class) is composed of eight students, and each
class decreases progressively in size as the day continues. The second period class
(xiaobanke: small class) consists of four students, the third (duihua: conversation
class), two students, and the final period of the day (danbanke: individual class)
consists of one student and one professor.

Every day, dabanke is initiated with a vocabulary quiz (tingxie: listen write) for
which the professor reads aloud two to three vocabulary words followed by one to
three sentences, all read one at a time from the text. The first two classes dabanke and
xiaobanke are composed of drills to teach and further familiarize the students with
proper usage of both the grammar points and the vocabulary.

The third class is usually based on a homework assignment to be completed the
night before the class. It consists of a discussion regarding the homework assignment,
which often deals with a topic tangential to that of the lesson. Occasionally, the
students are required (in varying degrees of frequency according to level) to write
essays to be graded then presented and discussed during duihuake (conversation class).

The fourth and final class is a one on one discussion between the student and
the professor and is usually afforded more freedom with regard to the topics but still
deals with those of the lesson. Throughout both the two final classes, the students are
encouraged to use the vocabulary and grammar from the lesson, which are written on
the blackboard or the whiteboard in the classroom for reference, in their conversations and discussions. As the conclusion of every week, the students take a test on Friday on the lessons covered during the week.

1.3 Special Features

ACC, like a few of its counterparts (Harvard Beijing Academy, Princeton In Beijing), require that their students consent and adhere to a language pledge which stipulates that they speak exclusively in Chinese throughout the entire duration of the program. Breaking the pledge incurs serious consequences ranging from warnings for the first offence to expulsion from the program for repeated offences.

ACC also offers many options for extracurricular involvement. The program provides optional classes on Chinese cooking and Taijiquan (Taichi) among others and organizes optional weekend trips hosted in rotation by the professors to the famous sites in Beijing. In addition, the students are required to participate in Chinese tables with a different group of students and professors each time as well as an activity (museum visit, debate with Chinese students, interviewing native Beijingers...etc.) after every Friday’s exam.

Often lauded for its exceptional Chinese language instruction regarding both its educational standards as well as the gains in proficiency experienced by participating students and instructors alike, the program proves itself to be a superior institution dedicated to each students’ success. Nevertheless, such an examination of the effects of gains in proficiency as the present study undertook, will reveal some serious implications regarding the exact dynamic of students’ experiences of oral proficiency gain in a study abroad context.
1.4 Methodology

The study, being mainly concerned with qualitative analyses of students’ metacognitive strategy use as it relates to a study abroad environment, was conducted in a case study format. Each student participated in weekly interview sessions which categorically inquired about his/her individual perspectives regarding language learning in general and in this specific study abroad context, as well as how the environment contributes to (or detracts from) gains made in oral proficiency. In addition, weekly classroom observation sessions were conducted for each of the students to examine their strategy use in the classroom as a supplement to the interviews in an attempt to further understand the students’ specific dispositions.

Pre and post-program Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) were administered to each student by Chen Wang (a certified OPI Interviewer and a third year professor at ACC), in order to validate the gains in proficiency, which the students made throughout the duration of the summer term. Each of the students’ gains in proficiency were then examined in relation to their overall strategy use and general perspectives of language learning.
CHAPTER 4:
CASE STUDIES

1 Participants

The students who participated in the case studies were recruited on a voluntary basis. Two students from each “grade” were chosen at random out of those who signed up to participate in the study resulting in a total of six students.

1.1 Participant Backgrounds

1.1.1 Benjamin – 2nd year

Benjamin is a nineteen-year-old male attending Swarthmore. He studied Spanish previous to Chinese and reports his proficiency level as good/advanced. His study of Spanish began minimally at six years of age and progressed to intensive study when he was 13. He has spent time studying abroad in a Spanish speaking country and his Spanish studies endowed him with a sense of comfort navigating a foreign language. The fact that he was able to achieve such high levels of proficiency in another language serves to strengthen his belief that he can handle the daunting task of learning a new language. Though he began at ACC among the lowest of the students in terms of proficiency levels in Chinese, his progress was extensive and the amount of gain he engendered in his own levels of proficiency were among the highest. He enrolled in the second year level at ACC and he plans to continue his enrollment in the spring, with the fall semester as a buffer. Benjamin, along with Stanley showed the most total improvement jumping two levels of proficiency from Intermediate Low to Intermediate High.
1.1.2 Stanley – 2\textsuperscript{nd}/3\textsuperscript{rd} year

Stanley is a twenty-year-old male enrolled as a junior at Yale University. His experience with foreign languages is very limited in comparison to that of the other students, having only studied Spanish in the past and even this for only two years beginning his sophomore year at Yale. He had studied Chinese for one year at Yale before coming to ACC and enrolled initially in the second year level. However, early on in the summer term, he skipped to second year of his own accord, feeling that he was not challenged enough. This immediately paints the picture of his strong inclinations to challenge himself and the benefits of this mode of thought, it will become clear, manifest in his impressive gains in oral proficiency over the 8 week term which amounted to a total gain of two levels from Intermediate High to Advanced Medium.

1.1.3 Colin – 3\textsuperscript{rd} year

Colin is a twenty-year-old male attending Hamilton College and enrolled in the third year at ACC. He has experience learning both Spanish and Latin; he spent one year (sophomore year in high school) learning Spanish and learned Latin from elementary school through high school graduation. He reports that his Spanish proficiency is fair to good and that his proficiency in Latin can be considered advanced. However, it is important to note that his experience with Latin (as with most) was restricted only to reading and writing. This project does not intend to delve into the dynamics of what this might imply regarding the relationship between previous language experience and self-regulatory strategy use. Rather, it is brought to light
merely so that it may provide a more complete understanding of Colin’s past language experience. Colin has spent two years at Hamilton studying Chinese and plans to attend ACC for two terms: summer and fall. The OPI measurements did not display any increase in oral proficiency level for Colin who stayed at Advanced Low.

1.1.4 Christina – 3\textsuperscript{rd} year

Christina, a nineteen-year-old female is a student at Hamilton College. Her language background is quite extensive, having studied German for 9 years since fifth grade and Latin for 4 years starting in ninth grade. However, her experience with foreign languages (she has one native language: English) is restricted to formal classroom settings, the effects of which would predictably reverberate throughout her experience with Chinese. She has spent two years studying Chinese, both at Hamilton, and she is enrolled in the third year at ACC with plans to continue her studies into the fall semester at ACC.

Christina’s experience with Chinese is singularly marked by her research experience; she assisted Professor Hong Gang Jin during the summer of 2008 with a research project at ACC. Thus, her familiarity with the program extends in a different direction than those students who have previously participated in Chinese study abroad programs. Christina was, previous to her enrollment and participation in the program, able to experience and observe the program from an objective distance. She had the opportunity to live in China with the same benefit of having a comfortable Americanized hub to live in with the added advantage of not actually being enrolled in the program and being burdened with ceaseless study. Christina’s pre and post
program oral proficiency interviews also did not indicate any improvement in her oral proficiency level of Advanced Medium.

1.1.5 Adhira - 4th year

Adhira is a nineteen-year-old female student attending Vassar. Her experience with various languages is extensive. But her language stories come ridden with holes; though she was born in India, she moved every four years; relocations constantly forced by her mother’s occupation. She speaks both English and Indian at home with her single mother and reports that her proficiency in Indian, which she studied for more than ten years beginning in elementary school, is only good. She has also studied French for the first three years in high school but reports that her proficiency in it is poor at best. She studied Chinese for two years at Vassar and for one year in high school and she was enrolled in the fourth year level at ACC with no concrete plans for future study. But the most critical and telling part of her experience with the Chinese language is the fact that she attended high school in China and is still enrolled in the fourth year level after two years of college level study. Adhira’s oral proficiency level as measured by the OPI did not see any increase after the program, maintaining Advanced Medium.

1.1.6 Eric - 5th year

Eric Nguyen is a twenty-year-old male attending Yale University. His background clearly explicates that he has had a significant amount of experience with different languages. Born in France to Vietnamese parents, although English is his primary and strongest language, he reports himself as having proficiency levels of good to advanced in both French and Vietnamese. He speaks Vietnamese at home and
his proficiency is thus probably linked to a “feel for the language” rather than formal study. Nevertheless, the importance of such study is not lost on him due to his three years of experience learning French in high school; though he was born in France, his French was limited due to the fact that he moved to America early on. He was enrolled in the fourth year level at ACC and his experience with Chinese includes first year and third year studied at Yale and second year at Duke’s summer program. He planned to continue his Chinese education immediately after ACC in Taiwan for the first semester of the 2009-2010 academic year. Throughout the duration of the summer term at ACC, Eric’s oral proficiency level improved one level from Advanced Medium to Advanced High.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>ACC Level</th>
<th>Language Background</th>
<th>Initial Motivation for studying Chinese (as reported by the students)</th>
<th>Pre-Program</th>
<th>Post-Program</th>
<th>Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>Spanish (13 years in school)</td>
<td>Academic – interest in sociology and education Personal – enjoyed learning Spanish in Mexico, wanted to learn new language</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td>IH</td>
<td>Two levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2nd year – 3rd year*</td>
<td>Spanish (2 years college)</td>
<td>Academic – econ major goes well with Chinese, language requirement at Yale Personal – interested in learning languages, Chinese: popular, interesting, useful, business prospects</td>
<td>IH</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Two levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>Spanish (1 year college) Latin (7 years elementary – high school)</td>
<td>Academic – political science major Personal – very interesting language (no intention of studying Chinese previous to college)</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>German (9 years as child in school) Latin (4 years high school/college)</td>
<td>Academic – use Chinese in future occupations Personal – speak with native speakers, particularly Chinese friends and boyfriend met at Hamilton</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhira</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>Indian (10 + years at home and elementary school) French (3 years high school)</td>
<td>Academic – none provided Personal – Regret at not having studied it better when she lived in China during high school</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>French (3 years high school) Vietnamese (spoken at home)</td>
<td>Academic – be able to read books (specifically, sophisticated higher level texts) in Chinese Personal – interest in Chinese (Cantonese) since child: watching historical dramas</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>AH</td>
<td>One Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting High-Level Speakers are Characterized by the Ability to:</td>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
<td>Advanced Mild</td>
<td>Advanced High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporter</th>
<th>Supporter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Low</td>
<td>Advanced Mild</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intermediary-Level Speakers are Characterized by the Ability to:</th>
<th>Intermediary Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novice Low</td>
<td>Novice Mild</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.2 ACTFL Proficiency Levels Reproduced from Brown-Sanderson, Lowe, Miles, and Swander (2000)

- interlocutors, when provided with guided conversations with relevant topics, can respond to simple questions in the most common genres of daily life.
- convey meaningful meanings in interlocutor expressed with delexicalized phrases.
- utilize isolated words, lists of words, memorized phrases and some personalized phrases.
- satisfy a very limited number of immediate needs.
- participate in simple, direct conversations on generally predictable topics related to daily activities and personal environment.
- combine linguistic elements in discourse sections and strings of sentences.
- obtain and give information by asking and answering questions.
- sustain and bring to a close a number of basic, uncomplicated communicative exchanges.
- satisfy the demands of work and/or school situations.
- provide a structured argument to explain and defend opinions and develop effective positions.
- discuss issues concisely and effectively.
- maintain a high degree of linguistic accuracy.
- satisfy the linguistic demands of professional and/or scholarly life.
- high proficiency in formal and informal settings on topics.
- participate fully and effectively in conversations in formal and informal settings on topics.
- develop communication by using with suitable accuracy and confidence, connected discourse.
- satisfy the demands of work and/or school situations.
- participate actively in conversations in most informal and some formal settings on topics.
- personal and public interest.
- agreement, uncertainty, and disagreement.
- satisfactory personal needs and social demands to survive in the larger language culture.
- when asked to make a request, make a request in a respectful mode.
2 Themes

In addition to considering each student’s strategy use, the following themes will be examined throughout the analyses as they pertain to the specific experience of each student. These themes were developed in consideration of the findings presented in the literature review as they apply to the analyses of the cases examined in this study. Aligning with the previous discussion of the general framework guiding this research, these themes will be separated into two sections: the first dealing with metacognitive activity involved in self-regulation and the second dealing with the students’ socio-affective states.

Metacognitive Self-Regulation:
1. explicitness
2. the evolutionary nature of self-regulation
3. merging goals.

Socio-affective Self-Regulation
1. notions of reconstructing the self
2. negotiating the fine line of anxiety between success and failure
3. the American bubble social setting.

3 Strategies

The strategies listed below have been identified as those most pertinent to the six students’ language learning experiences. It is by no means offered as a complete (or even semi-complete) taxonomy of learner strategies in any sense. Rather, these strategies were identified by the extensive degrees to which they were made salient through the individuals’ interview responses and the classroom observations. It should be made explicit however, that these strategies are not present in every student’s repertoire. Instead, each student’s language learning experience is understood to be a
selective amalgamation of strategies, used in differing frequencies, unique to each individual student. Therefore, these strategies are deliberately designed to be flexible, and will provide the basic framework to build the understanding of each individual’s approach to language learning.

**Metacognitive Self-Regulation of:**

1. Motivation
   - Setting specific goals
   - Identifying specific interests
   - Perseverance/continued adherence

2. Learning – creating explicit plans
   - Explicit definition of the benefits of certain relationships
   - Explicit identification of most beneficial study methods

**Socio-Affective Self-Regulation of:**

3. Anxiety – Students’ relationships with success and failure
   - Realistically gauge success and failure in own language learning
   - Correctly identify areas of difficulty
   - Come to terms with/accept the necessity of failure
   - Resolve to succeed

4. Anxiety – establishing a sense of comfort
   - Overcome language/culture shock
   - Redefining a sense of self (now, with globalization and technology often avoided completely)
4 Case Studies

4.1 Benjamin: The Success of Individualism

4.1.1 Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Benjamin, from the first interview, exhibited a set of specific interests, refraining from broadly citing “culture” when asked about the reasons for his interest in the Chinese language. He had bound his academic pursuits into the motivational factors, which provided the impetus for his foray into the Chinese language. He began by his experiences in Mexico where he went to learn Spanish, a language he has spent thirteen years with.

I thought it (learning Spanish in Mexico) was very fun and interesting so I wanted to learn another language. Chinese is useful and learning about other societies is very interesting to me. My major is Chinese and education, especially societal education.

That he identifies this connection between his two majors provides an interest sophisticated enough to be intellectually engaging and thus introduces a sustained source of motivation. His academic interests display that he did expend a non-trivial amount of thought, seeing as how at the least, they relate to his personal goals and in his mind stand distinct from the program’s goals.

The specificity of his interests is more evident in the direct manipulation of his language learning and the control, which he takes in directing its path. He picks and chooses elements of his surroundings, which would prove beneficial to furthering his own interests and goals.

Today’s conversation class content was the gaokao. My majors, like I said, are Chinese and education so I feel that the gaokao is very interesting. I couldn’t say much during class since there are set vocabulary and grammar structures we have to practice but I was intrigued. So after class, I looked up some articles in English to see what the Gaokao is actually about.
Benjamin’s sense of explicitness extends also to his personal beliefs regarding what would prove to be most beneficial to his study methods. The “problems” he identifies within ACC’s curricular design are those, which most hinder his personal learning experience. The most prominent problems for Benjamin included the insufficient amount of “practical application of studies” in the form of native speaker interaction and his feelings of the “dehumanizing intensity” of the program:

I still believe interacting with people a little more and studying in my room a little less than I do would be most helpful (to my oral proficiency). But because of the program, I don’t have as much time to go out and interact with native speakers. Interacting with native speakers is important to oral proficiency, but not more important than studying through books. Still, you need both because speaking is the practical application of studies.

I feel ACC is too intense. Sometimes I just don’t do it because sometimes… the more intense it is, the quicker you can study Chinese but sometimes if it’s too intense, you don’t have time to chat or make friends, it can be a little dehumanizing. For example, in class, you have a different professor every day for each class. So when I’m in class, this makes us feel that the professors are interchangeable and is also a little dehumanizing. Now, it’s not so big of an issue because I know most of the professors but it’s still a problem.

But in addition to the explicitness evident in his explication of these problems, the explicit nature of his beliefs regarding effective language learning is easily discernable in explications of his goals regarding the four classes featured by the program’s curriculum. He elucidates exactly what he seeks to attain and what his intentions in each class are:

My goals during daban and xiaoban ke are the same as those of the program and the professors. These two classes will definitely improve my Chinese proficiency. Sometimes, they are not boring but make me a little angry, and not want to study Chinese. So if I have a chance to make a joke, I will. It’s not all the time, but twenty five percent of the time, it’s boring. It’s not for fun but I take every opportunity to make it fun.
They are all (the four different classes held each day) helpful to my oral proficiency. Each has a different influence but in dabanke I can listen and understand, xiaobanke I can practice saying it out loud, and duihua and danbanke, I can really use the grammar points and vocabulary we learned. Daban and xiaoban are important though to help me learn and become accustomed to the new vocabulary and grammar points.

When asked whether interacting with native speakers was more helpful than interacting with professors he refrained from making any direct value judgments and instead replied:

Well, they’re not the same. With native speakers, it’s more authentic and with professors it’s more formal and academic. Also, professors and native speakers have different perspectives toward students, a professor will always correct your mistakes and they understand better the limits of our language.

Regarding the language pledge, he states:

Yes it has been helpful. But many of the students think the language pledge is the most important aspect of the program. But I don’t think so. I think it’s the fact that ACC is so intense, the professors are intense, the students spend a lot of time studying. The intensity is the most important thing. The language pledge is important but not the most important.

One of Benjamin’s favorite topics, the oral presentations (koutoubaogao) often featured in the conversations held during the interviews and further serves to depict the explicitness of his beliefs regarding learning Chinese.

I can use the vocab and grammar that I’ve studied in the koutoubaogao so I feel like it helps me place these things in my own speech. I’ll probably memorize about half of the koutou baogao, so when I give the koutou baogao, I’ll say one sentence exactly like I’ve written, then improvise the second sentence...

It becomes evident that his notions of success are strictly limited to the fulfillment of his personal intentions. Throughout all of the interviews, Benjamin rarely factored grades into the articulations of his experiences; they existed only as a peripheral factor in his language learning process. He established himself as the sole
arbiter of success. Failure furthermore, didn’t seem to occupy a place in all of this. He exhibited a bold lack of anxiety, not often witnessed in students who study abroad, and which will be discussed in the following section.

He also extends his learning experience to considerations of personal health. He speaks as though there is a balance to be found among all the individual variables, which would facilitate optimal learning conditions. He considers himself possibly less prepared for class, yet is unwilling to allow this to be detrimental to his health. He refuses to allow the burden of the program to completely dictate his experience abroad; his self-regulation, which could not proceed without his health, is done on his own terms.

I still spend most of my time studying. If not in my room, then somewhere else, but it’s still mostly studying. But even though I feel I spend a lot of time studying, I still feel like I should do things and activities every day, eat well, rest, interact... Maybe I don’t prepare as well. I probably spend about 5-8 hours studying. I mean, even though I think studying is very important, it shouldn’t be done at the expense of personal and mental health, I feel I should still eat real food...

It is easily apparent that Benjamin enjoys a strong sense of self-regulation, but Benjamin’s case is unique in that this self-regulated language learner does not operate under strict norms or regulations. His study habits and plans do not display much so-called perseverance; rather his actions strictly adhere to his own beliefs regarding what would be most beneficial to him.

Next Monday, I’m doing the extra credit presentation. I’m doing it to get the credit, but I think koutoubaogao is the most interesting and it’s the thing I like doing the most. What I mean is, for example, yesterday, I didn’t finish preparing for the lesson and probably won’t finish preparing Tuesday, so sometimes I don’t finish what we are supposed to do. But I spend most of my time doing things like koutoubaogao because it seems to me the most important part. It’s very helpful to my oral proficiency. Also, I will prepare very well
because I think it’s very interesting. I like doing it so it should be helpful to my oral proficiency.

Obviously his beliefs do not entail denigration of authority or formal learning, it merely displays his ability to direct his language learning down the specific trajectory that would prove most beneficial to him. This affords his self-regulation a measure of flexibility; an easy-going nature seems to be mirrored in his very disposition resulting in a well suited language learning process converging on multiple points of benefit.

4.1.2 Socio-Affective Self-Regulation:

The accommodating coherence of action and theory seen in Benjamin and his relaxed approach to learning the language further acts to effectively eliminate most of the anxiety, which such an intensive endeavor as ACC’s study abroad program exact as its toll. But Benjamin seemed immune to feelings of anxiety; he reported that from one to ten his confidence levels when speaking to peers, professors, and native speakers were nine, nine, and eight respectively, regardless of the meager poor/fair self-appraisal of his own Chinese level. Instead of having to deal with feelings of anxiety and to actively use strategies or beliefs to tame them, Benjamin’s specific strategy seems to be to eliminate the feeling altogether.

His lack of anxiety and easy-going nature extends to an eager willingness to seek the benefits attached to engaging with native speakers and experiencing multiple settings, not just that of the dorm. He explains:

Last Sunday, my roommate, his friend, and I went to yuanmingyuan. We took a public bus. He didn’t really tell us where we were going, he just said we’ll meet up and go and I said ok! (laughing) We spent an hour and a half there. And I also went to Qianmen with my host family last weekend.
His fluidity also results in a willingness to navigate different identities and perspectives even if this means a little bit of English slips in. Benjamin seems to understand implicitly the cultural understanding crucial to learning a language.

Yes I plan to stick to the language pledge the entire time I am here, but if any Chinese friends I make or my Chinese family wants to speak a little English, it’s acceptable.

The comfort with which he approaches interaction with the native environment further serves to facilitate the pursuit of his sociological academic interests.

It’s getting easier to speak with other people. For example, in Datong we ran into a girl on the street and we asked her some questions. She was very excited because she thinks foreigners are very interesting. So we walked with her for about two hours, we asked a lot of questions, and she spoke a lot.

While in Datong, I engaged many of the people in conversation, asking whether or not they have been to Beijing, a big city completely different from the Datong countryside. I’m a sociology major like I told you before, and I was interested to know their different perspectives; the distance between rural and urban Chinese people.

Benjamin, at the beginning of the program was by far the student with the worst level of proficiency among all the student participants starting at Intermediate Low. Nevertheless, the gains in proficiency he exhibited by the end of the program established him as one of the three students who even made any gains according to the post-program OPIs.

Benjamin exhibited the most specific interests of all the students. His fascination with Chinese extended beyond the language to his interest in education and educational policy. This was further supplemented by his enthusiastic engagement with society. He would often go alone to meals only to end up making a new Chinese friend at the supermarket restaurant across the street from the campus’s North Gate.
He understood well the restrictions of his language and his low starting proficiency but this did not limit him in the slightest, and he never exhibited any indication of anxiety throughout his learning experience; a testament to the efficacy of the self-regulatory method he uses to address his affective state.

His study habits and the gains he experienced were not considered to be the most ideal by his professors, since his methods did not conform to their specific notions of language learning, but they served him well in attaining his own notions of success. He did not let the magnitude of the workload or the difficulty of the language get to him which often meant he decided not to finish the work assigned for a particular day focusing instead on the tasks which he believed to be the most beneficial. For his personal disposition, this form of language study was ideal and though it is impossible to compare the degrees to which each individual succeeded, it seems safe to say that Benjamin’s specific and extremely personalized method of language learning should be considered a success.
4.2 Stanley: Eager Overachiever

4.2.1 Metacognitive Self-Regulation:

Stanley was very prone to long stretches of monologue, which at first seemed to be the incoherent babble of a conversationalist easily swayed by the many whims of his stream of consciousness. But it quickly became obvious that the lengthy responses he provided during the interviews reflected his extensive attention to details, which he offers in rapid succession, speaks to his tendency to consider thoroughly all the different facets of an issue. When inquired about the reasons for his decision to study Chinese, he replied:

I need to study language at college, it’s a requirement at Yale, but I’m also very interested in learning languages so... I studied Latin for four years in high school, but obviously I can’t use it. I decided I wanted to study Chinese or Arabic but Arabic has so many dialects so I felt like it wasn’t the best choice. But Chinese is very popular, interesting, useful...Yale has a good Chinese program and my major is econ so I have a little interest in using it for business.

Stanley’s response makes salient an interesting point regarding the strategy of identifying explicit interests to fuel motivation and self-regulation. It is obvious that personal interests did not inspire Stanley’s decision to pursue Chinese, rather he was driven by extrinsic pressures: his university’s requirements. However, Stanley seemed to have aligned his personal interests with the language learning experience. Though it did not begin as a primary interest of his, his general curiosity of learning Chinese eventually developed into a serious endeavor for him. This is evident in the unfailing emphasis he placed on making explicit the details of his perspectives:

Most importantly, I came to China to improve my Chinese level, also I haven’t been to Beijing before, and I like to travel... I heard Beijing is an interesting city. I have faith in the program; if everyone is willing to participate in language pledge, that means everyone is very willing to study, there’s a good environment at ACC.
Stanley’s thoughts noticeably proceed in a haphazardly tangential yet very inclusive manner. Furthermore, though his speech is often characterized by swift turns in topic, Stanley often carries on in an “if...then” manner. He operates within a framework of reason and automatically thinks things through fully, considering as many factors as he can. His individual mental processing thus seems very conducive to language learning, which is an evolutionary individualized process requiring constant specific re-evaluation.

Stanley’s process of metacognitive self-regulation often incorporated significant changes to his approach and to his specific learning plan. It is important to note however, that he never displayed a lack of explicitness. The most significant of his changes is arguably his decision after the second week of the program to jump from second year to third year.

The most important reason for skipping to third year is... since the reason I came to China was to study Chinese, of course I want to take a more difficult class. There was a period of time when I thought I shouldn’t change to 3rd year. But a friend told me, you went to China to study, you probably won’t get the opportunity again. I also discussed with Ma laoshi, she told me “if you’ve been studying for two years and have class five times a week, you definitely can skip to third year”. Basically, I think skipping to third year will be beneficial to my Chinese.

We see here glimpses of the pride, which significantly influences his affective state (discussed in greater detail below) in his recounting a friend’s advice to take the opportunity for increased academic progress. Stanley often conceives of many aspects of the study abroad experience in terms of seizing opportunities as they present themselves; “carpe diem” sort of moments in which he feels compelled to “seize the day” and constantly reach for greater heights, an engagement which would require a
continuous reevaluation of one’s process of self-regulation, which in Stanley’s case was an intensely conscious active action.

Third year has too many students. But it’s not too boring since whenever the professor asks any question, I always respond in my mind. It’s never a passive act, always an active one. I think active acts are the only way to improve my Chinese level.

Examples of Stanley’s active process of his self-regulation include: a shift in focus from oral proficiency to listening proficiency;

I think it’s changed (the importance of oral proficiency to him). But this change is because my oral proficiency has increased. I think my listening proficiency is still a big problem. So my focus has shifted to that, my listening proficiency needs the most work, the most effort. Also, I think this is the part that makes me the most nervous. I know that after the program, opportunities for practicing my listening comprehension will decrease a lot. Of course I plan on continuing to study Chinese and I can go to the Chinese tables but it’s not the same.

Gradual processes of problem resolution, which exhibit the agency he consciously asserts in his language learning process through his belief that whatever issue he is dealing with can eventually be resolved and success achieved;

Of course, among third year students, my proficiency is a little low. But I have the same problem. I always don’t hear clearly the professor’s questions. It’s not an issue with listening comprehension, if she asks another student, I always understand, just when she asks me, I don’t. I don’t know, maybe it’s because I’m a little nervous, there’s too much pressure. But I don’t think this is too serious of an issue, I’ll slowly solve the problem.

And active changes to his study habits like beginning to take a notebook to class.

Lately, I’ve been taking a notebook to class. I realized it’s difficult to ask questions during class, I don’t want to bother the flow of the class. For example, with grammar and vocabulary that have already passed, I write down the questions in my notebook.

It is evident that one of Stanley’s strongest points is the explicitness of his tendency to think things through in great detail. This is exhibited mostly by the
emphasis he himself places on having thorough definitions of his perspectives toward each of the four daily classes.

I have two main goals in dabanke and xiaobanke. The first is to practice that day’s vocab and grammar. But of course I don’t get that many opportunities to practice since there are other students. Also, you have more opportunities to practice using your own personal experiences. I like xiaobanke because they often use previous lessons’ material with that day’s grammar.

Dabanke and xiaobanke in third year are making my Chinese better much more quickly. My two biggest problems are listening comprehension and the speed of my spoken Chinese. In danbanke and duihua, the professor can change his/her words to better fit your level but in dabanke and xiaobanke, it’s a more intense environment and I get more practice speaking and improving my listening comprehension.

Duihua ke is very helpful, since we have to prepare homework beforehand, I never read directly, this is good practice, you have to use your own words. You don’t have a professor telling you practically the entire sentence.

Stanley further displays a distinct sensitivity to the necessity for focused effort and clear ideas. He pursues what he believes to be the most productive method possible, which in this case should be guided by the experienced students who have been through the process before.

If you don’t know how to speak a language, you don’t know how to study it either. So you need other people who have already studied it before to tell you and guide you in terms of what are the best study methods.

But he also makes explicit reference to the necessity of fluidity:

I feel if your study plan is too thought out and preplanned, this is also not good. Language is such a broad topic, there are so many parts, so many factors. But I think ACC’s structure is pretty good. Daban xiaoban are very planned out but for example, a couple times in duihua, we didn’t even discuss that day’s content.
4.2.2 Socio-Affective Self-Regulation

Stanley seems to be fueled to a rather large extent by the enjoyment he incurs in attaining more concrete forms of success. He takes pride in the somewhat romantic ideal of striving for greater heights and seizing the opportunity. The thought of linguistic failure is a source of anxiety for him in more than one context; he is driven to embarrassment when certain interactions demand a superior proficiency to his. When he was asked whether he ever felt embarrassed or hesitant to speak Chinese he replied:

It depends on whom I’m speaking with. Yesterday I ran into some college students here (who attend CUEB) and felt very embarrassed because I often can’t understand what they’re saying. I’m studying abroad in China so I should have a higher level of Chinese, and I feel embarrassed when speaking. It’s the same feeling with my Chinese family. But it’s different with ACC professors because ACC’s intention is to improve our Chinese proficiency.

His shortcoming translates for him into a blatant negation of his success; that he should have a higher level of Chinese indicates on some level for him that he has failed. Stanley also conveyed that he experiences feelings of anxiety in the classroom.

Of course, among third year students, my proficiency is a little low. But I have the same problem I had when I was in second year. I always don’t hear the professor’s questions clearly. It’s not an issue with listening comprehension, if she asks another student, I always understand, just when she asks me, I don’t. I don’t know, maybe it’s because I’m a little nervous, there’s too much pressure.

But these minor apprehensions reflecting his general fear of failure are silenced in light of his overachieving disposition. His reasoning is simple: setting higher standards will result in higher overall achievement and success even if he may not be able to meet them in the end. Thus the hindering anxiety of real failure is made null and replaced with the motivational anxiety of overachievers: that which stems from failure to achieve overambitious notions of success.
Though Stanley’s initial Oral Proficiency Interview deemed his proficiency level as second to worst during the initial Oral Proficiency Interviews, he refused to allow his linguistic shortcomings to hinder his progress. He exhibited the most energy among the participants during his interviews regardless of how tired he was and was the most willing to respond and elaborate, often doing so without encouragement. He approached the entire study abroad experience with constant excitement and a tireless eagerness, for some, even to the point where it bordered on annoyance. He was generally known to be “a little over the top”. Nevertheless, Stanley after having initially been placed in second year skipped into third year and successfully completed the term, meanwhile exhibiting high gains in oral proficiency moving from Intermediate High to Advanced Medium.

His excitement led him to certain very beneficial metacognitive beliefs; he considered the language pledge to be “a game” and constant adherence to the language pledge “a challenge” instead of a burden. Like many other students, he spent the majority of his time in his room studying but this was not so much a burden to him as it was what his personal goals and notions of success demanded. Though his language learning process seems to be fueled primarily by the joy of overcoming the challenge and exhibiting his ability to seize the opportunities presented to him and not learning the language itself, his significant gains in oral proficiency can be attributed to his extreme motivation. His language skills progressed by riding on the coattails of his all-encompassing drive to succeed.
4.3 Colin: The Backseat Learner

4.3.1 Metacognitive Self-Regulation:

For Colin, studying Chinese began as an afterthought. He provides responses citing some rather broad underdeveloped reasons, which prompted his decision to undertake study of the Chinese language.

I think Chinese is a very interesting language. I had no intention of studying Chinese when I started attending Hamilton, but then I found out Chinese department was very good so decided to start. I’m also a political science major so maybe it will be useful later. Language is the most interesting but of course you also have to study culture.

His lack of explicitness was made evident in the simple one or two sentence responses he mustered out when articulating his typical schedule

After class, I get some lunch, study a little, relax, go to the gym (about two hours), then study again until sleep.

And when he explains dealing with speaking issues,

Sometimes I encounter difficulties speaking but if I don’t know how to say something I’ll just avoid the topic.

This lack of explicitness was evident throughout his interviews and are probably attributable primarily to something he shed light on in our very first interview:

My opinion is probably different from those of students from other universities since Hamilton’s Chinese program has a study abroad requirement. I probably will spend most of my time studying in my room, not interacting with people on the street because the grades Hamilton students receive at ACC affect their GPAs.

His approach to the study abroad experience was predominantly governed by his concern for his grades rather than gains made in oral proficiency. Book study for Colin was prioritized over interaction with the environment by default, as the grades
formed the core of his experience. But for him this was justified by the inherent primacy of GPA over the language learning process itself. Though Colin may conflate high grades with linguistic gain, the tendency to do so introduces many detrimental elements to the language learning process. The most serious of the repercussions is the tendency discussed above to conflate the individual’s goals with those of the study abroad program. Perhaps this would be better articulated as an acceptable way to engage in a complete lack of initiative and of active regulation of the language learning process. It is an easy way to avoid having to expend the energy of formulating an explicit method of self-regulation including explicit goals, interests, methods...etc.

There’s nothing I would change about ACC...maybe the language practicum but other than that, nothing.

4.3.2 Socio-Affective Self-Regulation

Feelings of anxiety did not bother Colin from the beginning. In Colin’s case, this lack of anxiety probably arose from a number of sources, most significantly, his complete trust in the efficacy of the program evident in his statement that there is nothing he would change about ACC eliminates any anxiety which comes from the prospect of failure. Participating in ACC essentially amounts to a guarantee of success for Colin; a folklinguistic theory, which encourages taking a backseat position in the task of regulating learning and is severely detrimental to language gain.

The social setting, which Colin operated in, clearly delineates the specific nature of the way in which students operate within a bubble. Though Colin’s case may seem to be a more extreme one, it is in reality, very common for students to set up limiting social spheres similar to Colin’s. Firstly, it is important to note Colin’s specific take on the language pledge,
The language pledge is helpful yes, but not that helpful, you may become more comfortable speaking Chinese because you talk more to your peers but it will solidify your mistakes and maybe even increase them to include your classmates' too.

which also displayed the inconsistencies that sometimes surfaced in discussions of his beliefs.

I don’t know whether or not other students’ errors make my proficiency increase or decrease. Sometimes it helps sometimes it doesn’t but I think their tone problems make mine more serious as well.

But more importantly, he primarily interacted with only a very specific set of people who allowed him to maintain a closed off, distinctly American social space surrounding him.

I mostly stay in my room studying or doing other things. I’m closest to two other students and my roommate. I speak more to the people and trainers in the gym than I do with professors since I spend about 2 hours in the gym. For example, there’s one guy from California, we talked about basketball.

Colin’s case makes salient the rather serious issue of the nature of study abroad programs and the gains in oral proficiency they claim to engender. Many students participating in these study abroad programs tend to belong to the upper echelon of students to whom good academic performance is of crucial importance. These students tend to focus primarily upon the grade and neglect the importance of setting one’s own specific goals. Although the goals of the program (of which achievement is presumably measured by grades) roughly reflect those of the students, as both are striving for language gain, it is necessary to make explicit one’s personal goals whether they converge with the program’s or not.

In Colin’s case, no oral proficiency gain was measured between the pre-program and post-program oral proficiency interviews, which attests to the danger of
the tendency to merge goals. The fact that we see Colin following this tendency is not surprising given the nature of his personality. He seems to be an easy going and soft-spoken individual. When asked whether he struggles to speak Chinese on a day to day basis, he replied:

I struggle a little with speaking Chinese but it gets better day by day. Everyone feels embarrassed but mistakes occur often so why should we continue to be embarrassed?

His attitude indicates that he is in fact probably in a good position to learn a foreign language given that open-mindedness is essential to the understanding of another language, another framework of expression. Furthermore, his understanding of the benefit of native speaker non-native speaker interactions to oral proficiency is not lacking. Fundamentally, he understands that “interacting with native speakers is most helpful to gains in oral proficiency”. He stated that if he “was not a Hamilton student, he would consider interacting with native speakers the most important aspect of the program”.

Many of his comments reflect those of an intelligent individual with a definitive capacity for deep reflection regarding the language learning process. The capacity itself aside, however, Colin’s failure to engender successful gains in proficiency invoke the sense that something else must be hindering him. In the end, Colin’s lack of gains in proficiency it seems must have been due to his neglected personal interests.

In many cases such as Colin’s, students tend to digress in complexity (as exhibited by Chao’s study of Daniel), since the main form of personal expression has become severely limited with the imposition of the language pledge; and they
simultaneously become completely dependent on the language program to guide them through learning the language. However, such an intensely personal and individual experience as learning a language (if it is to be conducted in the best way possible) must be fine-tuned to a degree that only that individual can determine, that a universal guideline will never be able to successfully do for a group of such individualistic heterogeneity as study abroad participants.
4.4 Christina: The Stable Learner

4.4.1 Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Christina exuded a strong sense of comfort and ease in navigating the study abroad context. This was her second experience being at ACC; she assisted Professor Hong Gang Jin, the director of the ACC program and Professor of Chinese at Hamilton with a research project on error correction and its correlation with student proficiency levels during the previous summer. But in addition to her familiarity with living in Beijing as well as with the program’s setting, she had a very clear sense of what her self-regulatory process of language learning needed to entail. Christina had a very specific and rigid conception of the benefits and detriments of certain relationships, and avoided certain situations, which she believed would probably prove injurious to her progress.

Sometimes, speaking with other students can improve my own proficiency but sometimes they use English grammar with Chinese words so that is probably detrimental. These students sometimes break the language pledge or they have friends that are more willing to break the pledge so I try not to associate with them.

I went to the countryside (rural parts) with my host family so we had a lot of opportunities to speak Chinese with native speakers. But a lot of times, they want to know how to say the English word. But I don’t think this is helpful to my Chinese proficiency. I told them I have a language pledge and don’t really have a choice.

When asked about her specific goals for learning Chinese she consistently cited two throughout the interviews: to use Chinese in work after graduation and to be able to speak with her many Chinese friends (sometimes she extended this to all native speakers). Though she does not go into much detail regarding these goals, the consistency of her response reflects a sense of stability in Christina. This stability
often manifests as explicit study methods, which Christina utilizes in actively directing and self-regulating her language learning.

I read the entire essay two or three times. Then I write down the most important points and use those to practice saying it a couple times. Also, they’re too long to memorize. I use a specific method to prepare, but sometimes something happens (a phone goes off or something... and I forget where I am so I need some sort of structure.

She frequently makes reference to her study “methods” which she seems to conceptualize as fixed structures.

Actually, I think this week was very troublesome. I haven’t been able to find a good study method not to forget all of the vocabulary. I feel like my oral proficiency is higher and higher but for example, when I write essays, they tell us to use previous lessons’ vocabulary but I can only remember the vocabulary from the latest lessons so it’s still difficult.

But a good study method not to forget all of the vocabulary indicates her idea that a good method would be one that ensures consistent success every time. It would further be one which the program and the professors sanction.

I’ve been interacting a little more with professors lately since I already know them. We both have the same intentions and goals.

Though she seems to understand that a certain degree of flexibility is necessary to the process of language learning, to the extent that she adopts the intentions and goals of the professors and the program, she implements a rigid regimen upon her language learning process which ensures her a sense of stability and perseverance conducive to learning languages. Nevertheless, Christina’s case inspires a bit of confusion. Why would it be such that a student who is considered by the professors to be a successful language learner to the point where she was encouraged to skip from 3rd year to 5th year, exhibit no gains in her OPI scores? It is not that she neglects to engage in serious introspection of these methods and their suitability for her individual
language learning needs. Perhaps it is because the flexibility she envisions when she says that she has not yet been able to find a “good method” for vocabulary is one, which is still limited by the suggestions and beliefs she perceives in the professors and the program. Of course she has realized the importance of picking and choosing which study methods are most beneficial to her, however she is limited by the assumption that her specific needs for the most optimal language learning experience will be fully met by the guidance of the program.

Dabanke and xiaobanke are good for clarifying the lesson, we can’t always learn so well on our own (italics mine)

We definitely need both a plan and a natural aspect to our study methods. They should teach us and emphasize what the best ways to learn vocabulary and grammar structures are.

However, it is still rather unclear why a student who seems to approach language learning with a sufficient amount of motivation and willingness for introspection would exhibit no gains in her pre and post-program OPI scores. The answer I believe, lies in the realm of Christina’s socio-affective self-regulation, the importance of which the following section will make especially salient.

4.4.2 Socio-Affective Self-Regulation

Christina finds a rather significant source of anxiety in interacting outside of her comfort zone. She naturally dislikes imposing and normally does not engage with strangers.

Usually, I don’t really talk to people unless they’re friends or I’m trying to make friends with them. But I’m more willing to speak with strangers. I think this shows I have a little more confidence.

I know if they’re not answering our questions, they’re preparing for tomorrow’s lesson so I don’t want to bother them. They’re very hardworking but I still chat with professors. I go to office hours often.
I can always speak more with native speakers. But I don’t really want to. I feel like speaking with strangers,… it’s not impolite,… it’s just a little weird. I have a few friends who can speak with strangers very easily. But I’m not the type to make friends right away. It’s just my personality. But I know making more friends with Chinese people is definitely helpful to my Chinese level. But for example, I just went out to eat with two Chinese friends I can chat with them, and I can chat with my boyfriend, he’s Chinese. But sometimes I feel a little weird because I know they have their own lives, they don’t necessarily want to speak with a foreigner.

The professors don’t often make me nervous. Even if I don’t know how to say something and they get angry, there’s nothing I can do. I don’t feel uncomfortable speaking with my Chinese friends but most times my proficiency is not high enough so we can’t really discuss.

Her remarks indicate a distinct duality that she introduces into her perceptions of the people around her. The side that incurs anxiety includes strangers and her discomfort in imposing. The side that doesn’t incur anxiety distinctly excludes anyone she is not familiar with. Her social setting is thus characterized by the similar ties with a comfortable social identity that she shares with those she chooses as her primary company. Her professors are used to teaching specifically American students in a distinctly Americanized institution abroad. Her friends and her boyfriend (though they are Chinese) furthermore, all attend Hamilton College where they all first met and became friends. Her endeavor to implement stability is also related to this side of the dichotomy.

As shown above, many of Christina’s responses regarding the nature of her self-regulation derive their stability and clarity from the demands of the program and the professors rather than her own introspection. One indication of this is that she measures her success by grades and professors’ appraisals. In response to an inquiry
regarding whether she felt her oral proficiency had improved, she replied in the third interview:

I’m more comfortable speaking with native speakers… Also, I don’t know if you know our grades but I think this week’s grades have seen some improvement.

In response to the same question in her last interview, she responded:

We took the fenban kaoshi (refer to program description) again today. I could read a lot more of the characters. It was pretty ok. But oral proficiency it’s a little harder to tell.

Oh I think I should tell you. Ma laoshi told a few third year students that they can probably become fifth year students next semester. But I don’t know if that will happen because there aren’t enough fifth year students so there might not even be a fifth year class… But a lot of times professors will tell me my accent is pretty good but sometimes they criticize me. I don’t know…

Nevertheless, her notions of current and future success are such that they are both within her grasp being that there are correct ways to do things and though she has not been able to figure out what some of these right ways are, she has only not been able to realize them yet. There is a non-trivial safety imbued into this assumption, one that is strikingly similar to that of Colin’s backseat learner method. Essentially, her comments translate into an overall articulation of the unquestioning belief in the efficacy of the program and of formal learning. Furthermore, having previous experience with both German and Latin, as well as with the specific ACC context, placed her in a position where she would naturally adopt this approach to language learning.

Yea I’m pretty content with the program. They emphasize teaching methods but the way that they do things sometimes doesn’t make sense. We have to write about 6000 characters to prepare for the final. There are three parts and for one of the parts we have to prepare four questions but will only be asked two of them. Also, for example, we took the fenban kaoshi yeseterday but
there was no listening comprehension part and we were only given 50 minutes instead of two hours. Sometimes the way they do things is not helpful to our Chinese.

Still, ultimately her concerns are reduced to mere trivialities and, it's the professors, not herself who know best.
4.5 Adhira: Debilitating Anxiety

4.5.1 Metacognitive Self-Regulation

The majority of Adhira’s responses throughout the interviews were one word or short phrases consisting of a few words. She consistently did not elaborate on her views or on whatever claims she made regarding her experiences. Her explications of her study methods were extremely generalized and obtained not without some prompting on the part of the interviewer for further elaboration.

My study method at ACC is the same every day. Study words, listen to the recording, then do the homework.

Regarding her goals and intentions in class she states simply:

Dabanke is for vocabulary and xiaobanke is for grammar

Her elaborations furthermore, reflect a sense of incapability to regulate her study methods and direct them toward success.

I practice saying my essay many times, practice my tones, write note cards, I get up early in the mornings to prepare but I still have not been able to get a good grade.

The first time I prepared, I thought “oh I probably won’t need to study for that long” but the third time, I spent so much time preparing and I got the same grade, which I don’t really understand.

Adhira understands the necessity for some consistency and for explicit identification of this notion of a “definitive plan”. But she relegates her responsibility in identifying what the “good system” would be for her and instead assumes that the task should solely be assigned to the program. It is very telling that she considers mere increases in the time spent on a task enough to significantly alter her levels of success. It seems that she has interpreted ACC’s message (with its heavy workload) to be that success in language is a function of the volume of material acquired, and subsequently
that increasing the time spent studying will increase the volume of material acquired, and she doesn’t understand when this does not result in success and a good grade.

I feel like if there isn’t a definitive plan, there won’t be very much improvement. Of course if you live in Beijing and don’t go to class, then you will still have some improvement but tones and grammar won’t be so good. So I feel that there should be a good system.

there are too many professors. It’s good in that there are a lot of professors to interact with but since every professor has his/her own method, it’s very frustrating to me. I don’t know how this would be remedied because there are both good and bad things about it.

Surprisingly, though Adhira notices the individualistic nature of the professors’ teaching methods, she fails to extend this to her own experience of learning. Her frustration at the lack of universality between the professors (a product of the fluidity of language) blinds her to the possibility of using the same method in her learning. Unfortunately, when this vague and over generalized approach to her language learning process fails to incur success, she becomes immobile and her progress is made to stagnate under the debilitating gaze of her anxiety.

4.5.2 Socio-Affective Self-Regulation

Adhira’s approach to language learning primarily hindered her success because of a single factor and this was her inability to regulate her anxiety and navigate the necessary role that failure must play in language learning. Her self-reported proficiency levels of Chinese serve as a harbinger of the incapacitating anxiety she experiences throughout her study abroad experience. Though she studied Hindi for over 10 years, and speaks it at home, her self-reported proficiency is limited to being good. Of all six students interviewed, Adhira reported the lowest levels of confidence
when operating in the target language. She provided the following as general measures of her confidence levels:

    How confident are you on a scale of 1-10 speaking Chinese:
    with your peers? 6-7
    with your professors? 3-4
    with native Chinese speakers? old: 5 young: 6-7

She was constantly tormented by the anxiety, which the thought of failure brought into her. She did not seem to understand the fluid nature of language and rather irrationally understood her professors’ every correction to be an indication of her failure. She regularly admitted that she always felt very nervous in class or when speaking to professors, and reported that professors too often corrected her tones. She is by nature extremely reserved and soft-spoken and was very quick to put herself down.

    When I speak, my tones are very bad, often making the professors criticize me, so this makes me feel embarrassed. (nervously laughing). Because I’ve spent so long learning Chinese, I feel very embarrassed that I still can’t speak that well.

    (I get embarrassed) when I speak with professors, when I am in class. I feel that in comparison with my classmates, I feel like my spoken proficiency is much lower than theirs so I’m very embarrassed. I often feel really nervous.

when I’m preparing for koutou baogao, I pay very close attention to my tones because I know they’re really bad, but afterwards, the professor said my second tone was very bad. I don’t know how to fix this tone problem, it seems a little impossible. I attended the pronunciation class but it’s only once a week and I don’t feel like there was any improvement.

I feel comfortable speaking with my peers. I don’t think that their errors will influence me, all the other fourth year students’ proficiency levels are much higher than mine so speaking with them will be beneficial. I don’t often speak to other fourth year students though; I only speak with my roommate.

I often feel nervous in class, but they all still criticize me, I’ve tried every method and nothing has worked. I don’t know...I don’t often speak with professors.
I don’t really speak with native speakers. Sometimes when I get food, I say a few things but not really...

Adhira: The Oral presentations will improve my spoken proficiency. But I think it’s very difficult. Because my own oral proficiency is very low in comparison with that of my peers.
Interviewer: Why do you feel this way?
Adhira: Because I can hear it myself!

I’m still very nervous every day in class because the professors correct me so often.

The very basic words that I studied five years ago are still always wrong. I don’t know...I’m very disappointed. I really feel like I’m losing face, and I’m very embarrassed. I feel that since I’m in fourth year, at the least, I should be able to speak well.

Since she spent a few formative years in China during high school, her ability to deal with her anxiety showed not in any indication of culture shock, rather in her inability to navigate the notions of success and failure in her language learning process. Adhira further exhibits a clear disregard for congruency in some of the claims she makes in her interviews. For example, she states that she does not feel nervous anymore on two occasions in the third interview, stating that her “temperament has changed”.

The first week, I was very disappointed. But now I’m thinking forget it, there’s nothing I can do. I’ve given up and my temperament has changed.

Now, I don’t feel very nervous when I’m in class. But I still feel, there’s no way to improve my spoken proficiency so I don’t feel nervous anymore.

Yet, in the very same interview, attests twice to her recurring feelings of nervousness.

I’m still very nervous every day in class because the professors correct me so often.

I really feel like I’m losing face, very embarrassed. I feel that since I’m in fourth year, at the least, I should be able to speak well.
which would undoubtedly further confuse the already muddled sense of self-regulation she employs in her language learning.
4.6 Eric: Paradigm of Perseverance

4.6.1 Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Eric’s method of metacognitive self-regulation was probably the most rigid of all the students’ individual methods. He never failed to be explicit; even after having provided what would seem a rather general answer, he provides clear explications of what exactly he meant. Referring to his goals for the program he says:

As long as there’s improvement...It’s gotten better speaking to native speakers since the last time I came to China, but of course some problems still arise, especially when their accent is too strong. But if I can speak with words that are a little more sophisticated, be able to debate, and discuss political issues...I can now, but if I can discuss them a little more easily, I would be happy.

The extent of his introspection led to such an easily discernible sense of explicitness in his method and surfaced throughout many of the interviews. When asked about his interest in the Chinese language he provides the whole history of his dynamic interests.

Of course I’m very much affected by Western influences but I think I’ve also been exposed to a lot of Eastern influence. For example when I was growing up, I watched a lot of historical dramas in Cantonese, at the time my interest was to be able to understand TV shows but now I would like to be able to read books in Chinese.

I’m especially interested in Chinese society, particularly Chinese perspectives after the communist party was instated.

His study habits and plans were also markedly explicit and rigid in comparison to the rest of the participating students. Eric would spend an average of seven to seven and a half hours a day studying in his room allowing eating to be his sole distraction. Not even office hours were enough to pull him away when he was “in the zone”. Eric exhibits a level of confidence in his own plan and ability rarely encountered among students. Although he mentions his “lack of energy” and “sleep deprivation” as
hindrances, they do not affect the sustained stubborn persistence he employs in
directing his self-regulation. Regarding his method of study, he states:

I pretty much try to memorize the lesson.

Obviously the core of his study plan is supremely simple, in his fondness for the word
zhangwo, which means to grasp or to master. It is easy to see that his goal is not
merely understanding but rather mastery, which explains the unwavering prominence
which memorization plays in his study method. However, the ways in which he goes
about doing this and the conditions of completing the task in a manner satisfactory to
him stand in a sharp explicitness complementary to this simplicity. He cannot consider
himself finished until all the vocabulary is memorized, until he has mastered the text,
and fully grasped every single grammar point that he is charged with remembering.
His explicitness is most evident in his fear of missing something. To prevent this from
happening, he never fails to carry a notebook for quick jots in any situation, and makes
sure to make note of any questions or points lacking sufficient clarity.

He often operates in dichotomies pushing himself toward one extreme until he
realizes that his balance may be compromised, at which point he slows down to re-
stabilize himself and go at it again. This process is by necessity often slightly tweaked
to better fit the affective state, which factors largely in its influence on Eric’s
experience. Thus, Eric devises and impressively adheres to his specific notions and
methods of the most effective self-regulatory measures, facilitative of language
learning not only because of his explicitness, but also as a result of the specific duality
of dynamism and determined perseverance he uses to develop his proficiency in
Chinese.
This dynamism, flexibility for change is further visible in his willingness to adopt new beliefs if they prove superior to those he already has. He says regarding his views on the efficacy of the language pledge,

I thought it was very bothersome before, but now, I can’t deny that it has its benefits. I thought “I can see its benefits for lower grade students but I can already say all the simple things” but now I see that it’s beneficial for me as well.

and on his relationships with his professors,

It was weird before to think of them as friends but now, it’s not a problem at all.

But the sense of dynamism in Eric is most palpable through considerations of his method of socio-affective self-regulation.

4.6.2 Socio-Affective Self-Regulation

The most significant indication of the benefit of his specific conception of how flexibility and rigidity should be simultaneously incorporated into his method of self-regulation is evident in the socio-affective strategies he uses to de-legitimate the anxiety and frustration he feels from the insufficiency of our ability to intrinsically measure language gain. He attaches to the idea of a “hump” in the timeline of the progression of his language proficiency. Before going on the mid-term travel trip he said:

I’m encountering a lot of problems. My accent, my tones, my fluency don’t seem to have progressed. I feel like regarding spoken, the more I study, the lower my proficiency becomes.

But in the interview conducted immediately after the students’ trip, he states:

I feel better after having gone travelling. I remember Zhang Laoshi telling us there will be a hump. I think I’ve passed it now.
Eric was referring to what most understand as the plateau effect in which (usually at higher levels of proficiency) language gain is unnoticeable for a period of time until one can “get over the hump” of the plateau and begin to notice gains once again.

Nevertheless, he states shortly afterward:

Still, even if I have progressed, I can’t exactly tell myself…. Right now, I feel like I’m in a room, there’s a window and you can see the sun…you know you’ll reach freedom one day but not yet…Even though there are obstacles to our speaking but I know that later, I will be able to grasp these vocabulary words and grammar, that it’s only temporary. Language is a process, and one day I will be able to speak, but I definitely can’t give up.

There is a lot of work but there’s really no other way. I think if it weren’t this way, we wouldn’t progress. When learning a language, there will be a period of time that you feel very disappointed but no matter what, you can’t give up. You have to flood your mind with the language. Of course there are always things you can’t remember but the more you flood your brain, the more will stick.

This indicates that he also understands the variability of language. This further displays in his concurrent understanding that language gain then also cannot proceed in a static fashion and that he should not expect consistent small successes but rather an eventual fluency, which for him embodies the success of language learning as a whole. He therefore doesn’t let the fact that his progression toward fluency is not always discernible discourage him. Complaint was a recurring theme during his interviews; his responses abound with comments, which usually referred to the workload at ACC, and concurrently to the extent of the severity with which his will power and perseverance were tested.

There have been a few times I’ve found that I’m completely incapable of speaking Chinese. My brain kind of shuts down. Sometimes I get very lazy, very tired, and I don’t want to go to class. You know there was one day this week when there were 170 words??
When I don’t want to speak Chinese, my brain will start to use other languages. It gets unbearable sometimes, but at this point I can’t do anything but continue. Otherwise I would be wasting the opportunity I have now. Sometimes I make concessions for example, I’ll sleep a little earlier, or go to the gym or something, listen to English music.

I really feel like my oral proficiency has gone down. I can understand but I can’t speak out. I’m too tired.

We need a few days to absorb the words. There are just too many words to memorize. The day passes too quickly and I’m too tired, sometimes I can’t continue and have to wake up early in the morning.

I know there are a lot of words that I know now that I didn’t know before but overall I don’t feel like I’ve made any progress. I feel like my language proficiency gets lower and lower.

When he is pushed to the breaking point, he retreats temporarily into his music. He ensures that he maintains his rationality by stepping away for a bit, but always with the active and uncontested intention to return shortly to the task at hand.

I really think if I didn’t have my music (English), I would die. Sometimes I take an hour and don’t do anything, just listen to music or take a nap because I’m just too tired. I know I shouldn’t since the homework is still going to be there after I wake up or get up, but I don’t have a choice sometimes.

At the end of the program, during our last and second to last interviews, he offered the following comments, which are telling of the success of his method.

I feel like I completely recovered. I feel more comfortable and I think I’ve started to improve again. I’ve stopped feeling so disappointed.

Whether this anxiety free state of mind transpired as a result of his own expectations (in other words, whether he himself either unconsciously or consciously engendered this) or not, he has identified a system that works for him individually and which evidently led to significant gains in oral proficiency.

As evident in many of his responses, Eric engages in a very deep level of introspection regarding his language learning experience. He often provides rich
visual descriptions incorporating metaphors to his understanding of the self-regulatory process and how he believes it should proceed.

Learning Chinese is like a game. I know I complain a lot but these grades don’t matter, there’s really no pressure. It’s just what I feel like I should do, it’s like my hobby.

As the program began, it became clear that Eric’s previous experience in China participating in Duke University’s Chinese study abroad program well equipped him in terms of what to expect. He exhibited a level of comfort navigating through the rigors of ACC that must have been attained through familiarity not only with the country but also in terms of what to expect from the program. However, his previous experiences are not the sole reason for his success; he was considered by the professors to be one of the most successful learners within the program and also exhibited significant gains in oral proficiency from Advanced Medium to Advanced High as determined by the pre- and post-program Oral Proficiency Exams (OPI).

It seems that Eric would fit the bill of the archetypal ideal Chinese student: completely undaunted by ceaseless memorization and equipped with an endless source of motivation to stick to the plan even when he can’t feel any improvement, in the ultimate faith that progress will ensue eventually and inevitably. His perseverance in directing his studies is not easily matched. Thus, his successes at ACC and his gains in oral proficiency are not surprising. His motivation stemming primarily from his disposition is then further propelled by his specific history with Chinese (his mother introduced Cantonese to him at an early age) and his subsequent interest in Chinese culture “specifically the perspectives and influences wrought by the Cultural Revolution”.
CHAPTER 5:
DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1 Discussion

I initially began this study with the notion that increased interaction with the native speaker community and thus in the native language will lead to greater gains in proficiency. Given that the study abroad community has a general sense of faith in the role that interaction with native speakers plays in gains made during study abroad, I made the likely assumption that those students who reported more significant and longer interactions with native speakers would exhibit far greater gains in proficiency. Although this is true to a certain extent, the students’ cases seem to show that this is not the deciding factor and that the simplicity of such a perspective detracts from the efficacy of analysis, for the infinite extent to which the language learning process is individualized, necessitates the use of a holistic view for studies of this nature.

For example, we can see clearly in Eric’s case that the increased exposure to native speaker interaction afforded by study abroad, which has commonly been understood to be the crux of researchers’ and instructors assumption in the efficacy of study abroad, is in fact not the sole indicator of success. Witnessing the success of a student like Eric who spends the vast majority of his time abroad engrossed in his books within the confines of his room, it becomes evident that native speaker interaction is not the sole method for engendering successful gains in language proficiency in the study abroad context.

One major reason the entire process of language learning is so individualized is due to the fact that the methods used to engender gains for that specific individual must
undergo constant change to adapt to his/her current specific level of proficiency, vocabulary, personality, and interests. Thus, explicitness is necessary but is difficult to attain due to the multi-faceted nature of language learning. Nevertheless, students must be encouraged to constantly consider the process of language learning, as it is most beneficial to them individually. Thus, considering the necessity of such individualized explicitness, it follows that recognition of the evolutionary nature of self-regulation (regardless of whether this recognition is implicit or explicit) is crucial to the sustained efficacy of students’ self-regulation and may partly fuel perseverance. The case studies presented here have fully attested to the accuracy of this notion. Those students who exhibited such explicitness and constant re-evaluations of their self-regulation processes exhibited greater success.

There was also a distinct tendency among the participants to merge their individual goals with broadly conceived notions of the program’s goals for the students. Given that improvements in language proficiency are understood to be the agenda common to all those within the program, students and professors alike, many students automatically avoid setting explicit goals for themselves which would correspond to their individual academic and personal interests, opting instead to focus exclusively on grades (a more operational measure of success open to easy manipulation; all it takes it hard work). That the students become primarily concerned with grades is even more understandable considering the context of such an intensive language program. This concern is a necessary variable within the total motivational formula, but when students neglect to explicitly define their own goals, the fulfillment of curricular expectations can be misunderstood to be language learning in its entirety. Such
students relinquished governance of their individual experiences of language learning over to the professors, those who direct the program.

In light of such findings, the ever-increasing importance of identifying specific individualized trajectories of language learning, which would prove most beneficial to the individual student becomes especially salient. This notion is furthered to an even greater extent when the socio-affective realm of language learning is brought into play. The role that anxiety plays in the dialectic of interaction between society and individual is a crucial consideration, and throughout the research, it became clear the different ways in which notions of success and failure and American bubbles affect the constructions of identity that this dialectic requires.

The assurance of success is necessary for sustained motivation and similarly, is necessary for positive conceptions of self-efficacy and capability. After all, what would be the point in continuing an endeavor with no hope of success? It would not be unexpected that students with no sense of success, those void of notions of self-efficacy, yet forced to finish the program, would exhibit little to no gain in language proficiency. Even if success for a certain individual was wholly dependent upon grades, or upon adherence to the program’s standards, the motivational impetus which success acts as is unparalleled in influence. The repercussions of the anxiety wrought by unreachable success are extremely severe and perhaps account partly for the fact that study abroad has not proven to be the guarantor of success it is often taken to be.

Encouraged both by nationalistic sentiment and technological capability, students maintained their American social identities. Though frustration at the distance was not an uncommon sentiment, the students regularly spoke to friends and
parents back at home, and didn't even think twice of adopting aspects of a new identity. The inherent American-ness imbued into the students' identities creates a very static affective state of perception no doubt influencing the entire process of language learning.

An Americanized version of a Chinese dorm furnished with mostly American peers, American teaching practices, American college culture, and American perspectives cannot constitute complete immersion. Creating this American bubble in China cannot be conducive to learning Chinese merely by virtue of the fact that the bubble itself is located in China. The trickle of real Chinese culture fostering deeper understanding; the type, which often escapes articulation that flows into most participants in the group examined here, is minimal.

I hope it has become clear that since students seem to be ill-equipped in the way of strategy use appropriate to a study abroad context, the question in need of answering is not whether or not study abroad is effective, but rather why is it that students are unable to use strategies that would take advantage of the opportunities for language gain in immersion contexts of study abroad. Understanding how best to remedy this lack of expected language gain must reflect a shift in our notions of the language learning process in all of its variation in both the metacognitive and socio-affective realms.

1.1 Limitations

The rather large scope of this study which attempted to tackle both metacognitive and socio-affective self-regulation was both necessary yet in ways, debilitating. Such an ambitious project would be better suited with an extended period
of time and multiple volumes; nevertheless, nothing other than holistic analysis would have sufficed in good faith for the theoretical claims of this research.

The use of the OPI for measures of language gain in the study abroad context is also not ideal for multiple reasons most importantly the possible compromise of accuracy. Nevertheless, it does provide the only possible platform for comparison between students and as such was used nevertheless to account for measurements of language gain.

Finally, it would have been useful to consider the effect of differing levels of proficiency when examining the different amounts of language gain as well as the effects that proficiency levels/grade levels would have on the self-regulatory process. However, given time and space constraints, this aspect was neglected. Further research should incorporate this dynamic.

2 Conclusions

Many students’ notions of the very nature of language and of language learning are flawed in a way, which will undoubtedly prove detrimental to their language learning process. There is a distinct inability to determine which strategies in what frequencies will be most beneficial to each individual student, for the specific highly individualized combinations can be revealed only through a rigorous, ever vigilant process of self-regulation that many students have distorted notions of or neglect to partake in.

Benjamin’s case serves as a strong indication of the necessity to consider each individual student within a unique context. Benjamin’s singular disposition, which inclined him toward a more flexible approach to his language learning coupled with his
consistent and rigid overarching beliefs may be interpreted as a lack of seriousness or commitment, when in reality it exemplifies an intrinsic understanding of the dual necessity for both explicitness and for a dynamic method of self-regulation that best applies to the particular individual. Though he was successful in engendering gains in language learning, many other students’ failures to do the same reflects on the necessity to re-evaluate students’ notions of language learning and why these notions are proving unsuccessful in engendering significant gains in the study abroad context.

In addition to these concerns of students’ notions of the nature of language and language learning, existing/interacting within a new language brings about significant issues of limitation. Especially for intelligent eager students, the fact that learning a language reverts them back essentially to the status of children, given the limitation of expression is extremely difficult to deal with. This issue is then further compounded by the need to adjust to a new environment requiring the expense of more energy, which is generally lacking due to the workload. The very act of participating in a language intensive study abroad program such as ACC necessitates the supremely challenging task of creating a new self, working within a limited linguistic framework.

The findings that students’ proficiency levels do not show significant increase may be due to the fact that we are not viewing students’ language proficiency levels as holistically as we should, and not only to the fact that there seems to be a general lack of interaction with the native speaking environment. As such, the lack of interaction seems to point to a deeper issue: the perpetuation of the American mindset prevents students from actively considering the second language to be a real medium of communication. Treating everything as classroom interactions, students seem to
conceive of the second language not as a real language but rather, solely as something to be learned for a grade. These students fail to engage in the creation of a new identity (serious engagement in such an act would be tantamount to absurdity if the language is not even "real") and thus do not partake in the communicative side of language learning.

As such, students’ metacognitive and socio-affective self-regulation must be guided along toward a general goal as they are left to determine for themselves what specific trajectory would prove most beneficial, an understanding that cannot come about correctly otherwise.
APPENDIX I

Interview Session: Question Template

Student name:

• How important is speaking proficiency to you? (Relative to other aspects of language?)

• Do you have specific goals for attending this program in terms of speaking? If yes, can you elaborate?

• What do you find most difficult about speaking at your current proficiency level?

Motivation for studying Chinese and (if different) for coming to China

  o Why did you decide to start taking Chinese?
    ▪ Interest, business, encouraged by someone…etc.
  o What (if anything) about China do you like, are you especially interested in, want to study further?
  o Why did you come to China?
    ▪ Better proficiency, parents, interaction with native speakers, school requirements…etc.?

Confidence level (when speaking in the target language):

• How confident are you on a scale of 1-10 speaking Chinese
  o With your peers?
  o With your professors?
  o With native Chinese speakers?

• How would you rate your overall Chinese level on a scale of 1 to 10?

• Are you often hesitant or embarrassed to speak Chinese? In what types of situations? Examples?

Beliefs in effective learning in a study abroad context

• Do you try to speak as much Chinese as possible (with whom)?

• How important is it to you to interact with the environment, especially with native speakers to improve your oral proficiency? Does it become less important than finishing all your book study in a program like this because of the work load?

• What do you plan to do to interact with the local community or the resources provided by the local environment (e.g. radio, tv, movies, music)? What have you done so far?

• How helpful do you think the language pledge is when you interact with your peers, native speaker community, instructors? Do you think this will actually improve your speaking ability?
APPENDIX I (cont.)

Linguistic proficiency
- Given your current level of proficiency, do you think concentrated book study is a more effective use of your time or do you find interacting with native speakers contributes more to your oral proficiency?
- Do you struggle to speak Chinese on a day to day basis?

Expectations for the Program
- How severe do you think the work load will be?
  - Will you spend most of your time working in your room?
  - Does the expected work load make you nervous?
  - Do you plan to stick to it the entire time you are here?
    - How easy/difficult do you think this will be?
  - Do you think the amount of work the program assigns will prevent you from taking advantage of the environment to improve your speaking?
- Interactions with your fellow classmates
  - Do you think speaking Chinese with your peers will help your oral fluency?
    - doesn’t often explicate no specific goals
- Interactions with Instructors
  - How often/when do you speak with your instructors in the target language?
  - Do you try to make friends with your instructors or is it strictly a professional relationship?
  - Do you go to office hours to ask questions? Or maybe even just to talk?
  - Are you intimidated by your instructors?
    - Does this prevent you from interacting with them freely either in or out of class?
  - Are you more comfortable talking to your instructors or to native speakers?
    - Which do you think is more helpful to your spoken Chinese?

I will ask these questions after they take part in the field trip and language practicum.
- Are you planning your own field trip(s) during the designated break period?
  - Or are you going on the ACC pre-planned trips?
  - How do you plan on using the opportunities provided by these field trips to improve your speaking skills? By interacting with native speakers?
  - Do you think seeing these different parts of China and interacting with their native speakers contributes to your spoken Chinese?
- Language Practicum
  - How effective do you think these language practicum will be?
  - How important do you think the language practicum is to improving your oral proficiency? Why?
APPENDIX II

Consent Form

Metacognitive and Socio-affective Strategies of Self-regulation in a Study Abroad Context: A Case Study Involving American Learners of Mandarin Chinese

As a participant in the Associated Colleges of China (ACC) summer 2009 term, I hereby consent to participate in this research study. I understand that:

1. This study will be carried out by Patricia Cho, under Cecilia Chang, Professor of Chinese in the Department of Asian Studies at Williams College.

2. This study intends to investigate Mandarin language learners’ strategies to improve oral proficiency in a study abroad context.

3. The results for this study will be published for a thesis in the Department of Asian Studies at Williams College.

4. I will participate in two Oral Proficiency Interviews which will be conducted by Wang Chen, Professor of Chinese at Associated Colleges in China once at the beginning of the program and once at the end to measure gains in my oral proficiency throughout the duration of the program.

5. I will participate in weekly interviews that will be conducted between me and the researcher.

6. The researcher will conduct 8 sessions of classroom observation, consisting of two sessions for each of the daily classes.

7. My participation is fully voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

8. Any data collected for the study will be used strictly for research purposes.

9. My identity will be kept strictly confidential between myself and the researcher and any information regarding my personal identity will not be divulged without my consent.

10. I will not be personally identified in the final report of the study.

Participant name _______________ Participant signature _______________

Date _______________ Researcher Signature _______________
References


