IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND LANGUAGE INVESTMENT BY THREE TERTIARY LEVEL CHINESE STUDY ABROAD LEARNERS IN NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

This study investigates how three Chinese English as second language (ESL) learners in New Zealand in higher education negotiate their identities in relation to their language investment. Data were collected from the participants through individual interviews, written reflections, and group discussion, and focused on personal histories, goals and efforts to learn and use English during study abroad (SA). The data were analysed based on case study methodology (Duff, 2012) and grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Drawing on Norton's (2013) notion of identity, this study shows how the SA context provided the sojourners with opportunities to negotiate and construct their multiple identities. For each of them, identity construction and language investment followed a unique trajectory, influenced by the ways they were accepted or not by the host community and by the agency they displayed in navigating their relationship with this community.

Keywords: Chinese ESL learners; study abroad context; identity; language investment

Introduction

China provides a major source of international students worldwide, with around 600,000 students studying abroad in 2017 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). Given the importance of English in the global market, many of these students study in English-speaking countries, including New Zealand, and take courses in English (Middlebrook, 2001). As the SA destinations for Chinese learners become more diverse, it is necessary to conduct more studies beyond the usual destinations of North America (Huang & Klinger, 2006; Zhang & Xu, 2007) and Britain (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Ding, 2009; Gao, 2011; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

There is a small but growing number of studies on Chinese international students in New Zealand. Most focus on challenges these students face such as language barriers (Guan & Jones, 2011) and the lack of knowledge of academic language (Campbell & Li, 2008), and do so from an outsider perspective rather than from an emic view of point. Moreover, studies on Chinese international students tend to depict a stereotype of Chinese study abroad students who are passive (Zhao & Bourne, 2011) and inactive in the classroom (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). In contrast, the present study

adopts an emic perspective and explores the lived experiences of three Chinese ESL students during study abroad (SA) in New Zealand in tertiary education, focusing on the interplay between identity construction processes and language investment within the SA context.

We adopt a poststructuralist perspective through which we treat identity construction as a dynamic process. Moving away from the concept of acculturation which stresses the importance of the influence of the SA context on the learners, this study emphasises the interaction between the SA context and the individual sojourner. Our guiding research questions were:

> 1. In what ways, if any, did the identities of three Chinese ESL students undergo change during and subsequent to their study abroad experience in New Zealand?

> 2. In what ways did the trajectories of identity change of the three students reflect language investment?

The study abroad research context and identity

SA entails various benefits which range from linguistic gains to personal development. However, as Kubota (2016, p. 347) argues, the oft-cited benefits of SA can hide the complexities of in-country experiences, including the ways in which social factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status shape the sojourners' SA experiences. Reflecting this more nuanced view of SA, recent research has moved beyond viewing SA as a unitary and fixed category to viewing it as a social ecosystem (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007; Isabelli, Bown, & Plews, 2018) within which context and learners interact in dynamic ways. In addition, a growing body of research has investigated the influence of SA on various dimensions of learner identity such as personal development (Coleman, 2013; Jackson, 2008), religious belief change (Poag & Sperandio, 2015), and language enhancement (Barkhuizen, 2017; Tomoka, 2014). As Coleman (2013, p. 18) argues, researchers need to consider "the whole person and the whole context", including understanding learners' perspectives and how their identities are constructed within their SA experiences.

Norton (2013, p. 4) defines identity as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future." This definition emphasizes multiplicity and a dynamic rather than static view of identity. It follows then, that as described in Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory, learners can contest the undesirable identities they are positioned into and exercise agency to re-position themselves and their identities. As Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001, p. 145) argue, learners as agents "actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions, of their own learning." In this regard, Kinginger (2015) points out that SA settings provide opportunities for learners to encounter numerous unfamiliar practices that may subsequently challenge their sense of self and lead to identity negotiation.

Kinginger's (2008) study of an American sojourner in French tertiary education showed how the learner disregarded the practices of her classmates and professor. Through negotiating the tension between her national and learner identities she constructed an identity of national superiority which led her to be reluctant to participate in language learning. As Block (2007) argues, when learners form a perception of national superiority they are more inclined to insist on their home identity and thus to distance themselves from the target language. In contrast, Pellegrino Aveni (2005) showed how North American second language learners of Russian on study abroad in Russia were positioned as intellectually inferior by the host communities due to their low proficiency in the target language. This marginalized the learners' identities and limited their access to the target language. Jackson (2008) investigated the identities of a group of leaners from Hong Kong who studied in England for five weeks. While some of the learners insisted on preserving their national and cultural identity and experienced uncomfortable communication with target language speakers, others exerted their agency and constructed powerful new identities in the target communities. Overall, these studies show how looking at SA from a learner identity perspective can provide valuable insights into the complex ways in which identity and SA interact and impact on language learning achievements (Kinginger, 2013).

Language investment

According to Darvin and Norton (2018, p. 2), investment in language learning involves "commitment to the goals, practice, and identities that constitute the learning process and that are continually negotiated in different social relationships and structures of power." This view of investment can be situated within Bourdieu's (1992) theory of capital which argues that languages function as symbolic capital that can be transformed into cultural capital and economic capital. Following this view, investing in language practices is a means to gain more symbolic value (i.e., honor and social networks) and economic value (i.e., material goods, such as money) and enhance learners' cultural capital (i.e., skills and knowledge).

Thus, a learner's desire to learn the target language originates from their perceptions of the symbolic value associated with particular language practices, while the availability of language resources that they are able to access impacts on their language investment. Learners' investment is selective as they assign values to different language varieties or language practices according to how these language resources support their identities. Seen this way, learners' investment in language learning is, in essence, investment in identity (Norton, 2013). As learners invest in particular language resources, this enables them to gain desired positions reflecting their desire to join the target language community. Learners may enact agency by withdrawing their investment in language learning when their legitimate identities cannot be developed. Desired identity plays a significant role in sustaining learners' investment in that learners are able to envision themselves as "ideal selves" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 9) participating in the communities they desire to belong to.

The current study draws on this conceptual background to gain insights into Chinese sojourners' experiences of SA in New Zealand. In the study, we seek to avoid essentializing Chinese ESL learners and instead to tease out the complexity and multiplicity of Chinese learners' identities and language investment in the context of SA.

Methodology

The study adopted grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and case study design (Duff, 2012). The case study data consisted of thick and self-reflective descriptions of participants and allowed comparison of cases (Duff, 2012; Kinginger, 2011) in ways which complement the comparative nature of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

Case study participants

The criteria for selecting participants were that they were Chinese learners who had or were currently studying at a New Zealand tertiary institution for at least one year but had finished primary and junior high school education in China. Participants were selected based on convenience sampling through the first author's connection with the community of Chinese students in Wellington. Table 1 provides a summary of the background of the three students who volunteered to participate in the research. The names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants. All three were from Mainland China. Tim and Eric studied at Victoria University of Wellington and Cass at Massey University. Each of them had taken an IELTS test prior to beginning their study in New Zealand and their scores, as presented below, show that, at the time, their proficiency ranged from 'competent' to 'good' users of English according to the IELTS descriptors for these scores (i.e., B2 to C1 on the CEFR).

Table 1   The three case study participants

Participant Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Major and Current Degree Level	Length of Stay in NZ	English Proficiency
Cass	Female	21	Single	Food technology/ undergraduate	6 years	IELTS 7.5
Tim	Male	26	Single	Accounting/ postgraduate	3 year	IELTS 6.5
Eric	Male	34	Single	Media/ EPP student	1.5 years	IELTS 6.0

Data collection instruments

After obtaining informed consent from each participant, data were collected via questionnaires, two individual interviews and two written reflections from each participant, and a focus group interview. The sequence of data collection is

summarized in Table 2. This sequence was designed to provide cumulative opportunities for us to explore emerging themes in more depth and over time, and to allow for triangulation of data (Brown & Rodgers, 2002). Thus for example, the initial individual interviews and first written reflections provided themes for the focus group interview, with these themes similarly used in the narrative prompts for the second written reflection. All this data informed the questions used in the final individual interviews.

Table 2   Data collection information

Time	Instrument
Day 1	Background questionnaire
	First individual interviews
	First written reflections
Day 6	Group interview
Day 7	Second written reflections
Day 8	Second individual interviews

The data collection instruments are provided in an Appendix. The questionnaire was used solely for the purpose of obtaining demographic information. The interviews (both individual and focus group) were the main data source and were used to investigate the identities, experiences, beliefs, and orientations of the participating students. All interviews were carried out in a study room at the library of a university hall of residence with the first author as interviewee. They lasted around 50 minutes. All were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. Mandarin Chinese, the first language of all three participants, was used throughout, with English also used occasionally.

For all interviews, questions were focused on the participants' experience of language learning and language use, their perceptions and evaluations of those experiences in relation to their sense of self, and their future plans. The second individual interview also served a member checking purpose, in that themes from the first interview and written responses were presented back to each participant for them to confirm, change, or elaborate on. The focus group interview was more open than the individual interviews in that the participants were encouraged to build on each other's responses rather than only responding directly to questions from the interviewer.

Each participant completed two written reflections, the first immediately after the first individual interview and the second some days after the focus group interview but prior to the second individual interview. The written reflections were carried out by participants immediately after their interviews to ensure they could reflect on not only their lived experiences but also on their previous accounts.

Data analysis

Data coding adopted a grounded theory approach. Firstly, I (first author) coded the topics related to the participants' perceptions of their SA experiences. Secondly, I

identified the main categories of identity, investment and imagined communities. Finally, we (both authors) refined the categories and conducted selective coding from which key themes emerged. The results were sent to the participants for member checking prior to the second individual interview. The method for transcribing adopted in the present study is denaturalized transcription which focuses on the content rather than mechanics of conversation. Denaturalized transcription is widely used in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000) as it enables researchers to collect information for theory construction. The recorded data was transcribed and coded in Chinese. Only quotes that were selected for inclusion in this paper were translated into English.

Findings

The following section provides an analysis of the data, which aims to show how the three learners negotiated and constructed their multiple identities in relation to their investment in language learning during their SA.

Cass

Cass (female, 21) came to New Zealand six years prior to her participation in the study for high school study. At the time of the study she was studying at undergraduate level majoring in Food Technology. She was also working as an intern at a local engineering company. She reported that she enjoyed her SA experiences for the most part and planned to apply for New Zealand permanent residency after graduating.

Cass reported making "huge improvements" in English during her studies which enabled her to develop her desired identities as a fluent second language (L2) speaker and "Kiwi English"[1] speaker. She continued to actively invest in language learning, especially in acquiring Kiwi English. Cass perceived the lack of Kiwi English as an obstacle for developing solid relationships with native speakers. As she said:

> I try to do a Kiwi accent and also pay special attention to the slangs that are used here. I think the adoption of Kiwi features of English can bring a sense of closeness to the native speakers. So, I can make more friends so that I won't be a lonely person after being a permanent resident. (Written reflection 2)

Here we see how Cass viewed English as a symbolic resource (Bourdieu, 1992) and anticipated that adopting a native accent and using slang could offer her more opportunities for accessing the target community. Cass related the acquisition of Kiwi English to access to the community of Kiwi English speakers. Wishing to belong to such a community encouraged Cass's investment in learning Kiwi English. As

[1] New Zealand English

Norton (2013) argues, learners make the greatest investment in the target language community which offers access to their desired identities.

Cass experienced marginalized positionings when she was studying at a high school in New Zealand. In particular, her English L1 speaker classmates assumed that she had a low level of English proficiency and did not treat her as an equal group member. As she said:

> I felt a bit discriminated against in high school. When we were asked to form groups for presentation, native speakers avoided to choose us, international students, as group members. I hope teachers can do the random grouping. I studied hard and I did great on my study. I answered questions that other students did not know. I felt quite proud and confident.
> (Individual interview 1)

Cass saw that language learning opportunities in the classroom were constrained by her 'foreigner identity' and by her classmates' assumption that a foreigner cannot speak English well (Shuck, 2006). Thus, despite her desire to participate in her host community, lack of acceptance by her classmates reduced her access to the target language resources. However, instead of accommodating to the identity ascribed by others, Cass chose to contest the incompetent foreigner identity by gaining good subject knowledge and actively answering teacher questions in class. This exemplifies Cass's agency as she struggled for a more powerful identity (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001).The theme of marginalized positioning was reiterated in Cass's account of her undergraduate study at university, as for example when she said:

> Even though I am studying at university now, opportunities to interact with native speakers are still limited. (Group interview)

However, again Cass contested her assigned foreigner identity by seeking more opportunities to interact with New Zealand society. For this, she turned to a church community. She did this initially for language support, but over time she noticed that she also gained emotional and spiritual support from this community. As Cass said:

> I found native people were not willing to initiate a conversation with me, especially when I firstly arrived in New Zealand. Initially, I went to English corner organized by church for practicing English. People there were very nice to me and I gained a sense of belonging there. Finally, I converted to a Christian identity. (Group interview)

Cass's experience illustrates Kinginger's (2011, 2015) point that SA often challenges not just learners' language competency but also deeper aspects of identity. Having initially experienced difficulties in accessing the target community during her SA, Cass actively sought and then embraced a community which welcomed her and gave her a new sense of identity and belonging. As Tastsoglou (2016) points out, religious connection often contributes to greater community participation. Through this

process, Cass re-evaluated her sense of self and her previous lack of religious belief, and ultimately adopted a Christian identity. This case also illustrates a more potentially problematic association between Christianity and English language learning in which, as Pennycook (2005) puts it, "the teaching of English has become a lure to bring nonbelievers into missionary clutches" (p. 139).

Tim

Tim (male, 26) had lived in New Zealand for three years at the time of the study. He viewed SA as a way to gain a valuable credential and an important step for becoming a permanent resident in New Zealand. He first studied in an English Preparation Program for nine months and then began his studies in accounting at postgraduate level. While studying, Tim reported having little difficulty interacting with native English speakers:

> Interacting with native speakers is a great way to improve English. I found that eating meals in the dining hall was a great opportunity to meet local students and practice English. The native speakers would like to slow down their speaking speed and even patiently use some simple words to paraphrase their meanings. (Individual interview 1)

Out of class, he took on part-time paid and voluntary jobs so as to alleviate economic pressure and to prepare himself for job hunting after graduation. However, a part-time job he took on as a waiter failed to meet his expectations for building his identity as an English speaker:

> I dislike chatting with customers as a waiter in a restaurant. The customers talked very fast. Even though some customers were willing to chat with me, I do not think I can learn a lot. (Individual interview 2)

But this negative experience aside, and unlike Cass who complained about limited opportunities to communicate with native speakers, Tim found other opportunities through sports:

> It is not about opportunities. It will be boring if you do not share common interests with your interlocutors. So, I like playing football and chatting with other players. (Group interview)

As Norton (2013) notes, a learner's particular identity that is marginalized in one site may be valued in another one. Tim's selective investment shows his agency in mediating his access to target language resources and therefore appropriating desired identities, both as an international student and a sports player. Tim's case illustrates the important role of sports in providing a common ground for interaction with the host community (Hatzigeorgiadis, Morela, Elbe, Kouli, & Sanchez, 2013).

However, after gaining entry to a university degree course, Tim reduced his investment in language learning:

> When I studied in English preparation program, I studied English very hard as I wanted to study degree-carried courses. After starting learning my major, English learning was not my focus anymore. English skills are not important for accountants. I am satisfied with my current language competency. I do not see any point of allocating time and energy in learning it.
> (Individual interview 1)

We see here that Tim's investment in language learning was dynamic and shifted as he changed his desired identity. To begin with, Tim invested a lot in the English Preparation Program because he wished to attend mainstream university courses. Subsequently, he reduced his investment in learning English because he believed his new desired identity as an office clerk did not require such a high level of English competence. Under the influence of his desired identity of a working professional in New Zealand, Tim chose to put more effort into finding a job than learning English. Here, Tim's decisions on language investment are closely related to his sense of self (Norton, 2013). He discovered that learning and using language in New Zealand was different from learning language in China. Consequently, he began to re-evaluate his language proficiency and himself with his SA experiences:

> People here care about your ideas more than your grammar or your accent. The courage to speak out the language is more important. So, I do not need to worry too much about the grammar problems. I practiced a lot and made evident improvements. I felt that I am more confident than before.
> (Individual interview 1)

As a result of using English for communication Tim changed his view regarding language correctness. He found that people were less concerned with accuracy than he had thought and so he felt encouraged to more easily express his ideas in public and his self-confidence as an English speaker grew (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2012). Tim's case supports Schauer's (2006) findings that learners tend to be less concerned with grammatical errors in an ESL context than in EFL context.

Eric

Before coming to New Zealand to learn English, Eric worked as a journalist for almost 10 years in China. He viewed learning English as good for his career prospects. Once his English had improved, he planned to enrol in an undergraduate course and wanted to become a media designer. Eric had relatives living in New Zealand who assisted him during his SA time. On arrival, his level of English proficiency was low and so he studied English at a private school in Auckland for one and a half years. At the time that Eric was interviewed for this research he was studying in the English Preparation Program at Victoria University of Wellington.

Eric viewed his SA experiences as important preparation for his career in media design:

> I realized the importance of English when I worked in China. Good English competence means a better platform to me. (Group interview)

For Eric, because English was a material resource (Bourdieu, 1992) for building his career prospects, he was determined to invest in it:

> I try to speak English as much as I can. I force myself to speak English in EPP class by taking part in groups consisting of students from different countries. (Individual interview 1)

Eric noticed that the opportunities for interacting with native speakers were varied in different social domains and so he exerted his agency by choosing interlocutors:

> When I first came here, native speakers were not patient to communicate with me, like staff in supermarket. This makes me feel frustrated. So, I try to be more actively interact with people who are willing to speak English with me, like my teachers. I often ask help from my cousin who grew up here.
> (Written reflection 1)

We see here that although Eric was a highly motivated learner he made selective investment in the target language community. Like Tim, in order to form a legitimate English speaker identity, Eric exerted agency and formed a powerful L2 learner identity especially in the academic domain where he actively interacted while in class and in the family domain where he turned to his cousins for help. In this sense, Eric envisioned himself as a dedicated English learner but struggled for acceptance in the public domain as for example when he tried to request help at the supermarket:

> I don't know why but I was treated badly when I asked help from one shop assistant at a supermarket. When the shop assistant found that I was unable to get my meaning across, he became irritated at my questions and was reluctant to help me. (Group interview)

> That shopping experience made me feel very sad. I thought why I bothered to talk with these rude people when I can practice English with my classmates and my cousin. (Individual interview 2)

Although Eric actively sought opportunities to communicate with English L1 speakers, the unpleasant experience he had in the supermarket upset him and so he decided to retreat to safer contexts such as academic study where he was able to gain access to practice opportunities more easily. Eric's experience shows how the degree of acceptance by the host community has a powerful impact on a sojourners' investment in language learning (Jackson, 2008; Norton, 2013).

Studying in New Zealand also enabled Eric to change his beliefs about the influence of his age on his language learning. Eric was in his mid-30s and was initially concerned that he was too old to learn English well. As he said:

> I wanted to keep learning English. But I was under pressure as I was a bit older to learn a language. The younger the easier to learn English. But when I actually started my study in New Zealand, I found that age should not be an excuse. I met many students who are even older than me are dedicated learners. I guess people should not be constrained by their perceptions of age. (Group interview)

Eric acknowledged the struggle between his adult identity and learner identity but was able to resolve this struggle and in doing so he developed a more confident identity:

> It is like playing games and overcoming these difficulties gave me a sense of accomplishment. And I find there are some changes in my personality. I become more confident and more open than before. (Individual interview 1)

Initially, Eric positioned himself as disadvantaged because he believed that his memorization was not as good as that of younger people. But his SA experiences enabled him to gain a new perspective on his learner identity. Through tackling challenges related to his limited English competence he reported developing into a more positive and confident person with more open horizons (Jackson, 2008). Eric's case contrasts with research which show a negative relationship between age and knowledge acquisition (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Martocchio, 1994). In Eric's case it was the study abroad context which provided a site for him to encounter new social practices and ways of being, which in turn allowed him to rethink his attitude to age as a negative factor and to negotiate his identity accordingly (Kinginger, 2015).

Discussion

Cass, Tim and Eric each navigated their SA experiences as Chinese ESL students in New Zealand in unique ways. The findings show that the three learners negotiated and constructed diverse identities through their SA experiences and these experiences both impacted on and reflected their language investment. Three main themes emerged from the data, which are discussed below.

First, despite some superficial similarities as Chinese SA students, Cass, Tim and Eric each engaged with, were positioned by, and positioned themselves in unique ways in the New Zealand community. The study highlights the diverse, dynamic and interactive ways in which sojourners negotiate and form identities in the SA context (Coleman, 2013). For instance, Cass was positioned in a marginalized role in her high school class and this limited her access to the target language resources. But she

countered this by joining a church group through which she found acceptance and richer access to the target community. For Tim, it was in socializing at a student hall of residence and in sports that he found the opportunities to forge new aspects of his identity. In contrast, Eric found that it was more difficult to communicate with New Zealanders outside the classroom than to interact with his classmates and teachers, and relatives. For these three sojourners the SA context cannot be reduced to a unitary factor but instead functioned as a dynamic ecosystem within which they each forged unique journeys and identities.

Second, the ways that the three participants invested in SA language learning were dynamic, changing over time as their identities evolved. Tim reduced his linguistic investment in language learning once he gained admission to degree study, and instead prioritized his identity as a job hunter. In contrast, Cass and Eric appeared highly invested in learning English throughout their respective SA experiences. But while Cass invested in learning Kiwi English and building a Kiwi English speaker identity, Eric actively invested in the community of English language learners and was proud of his learner identity. In sum, the three cases show how learners' investment is selective as they assign values to different language varieties or language practices according to how these language resources support their evolving identities (Norton, 2013).

Third, through the SA experiences, the three students all expressed increased confidence in their second language learner and user identities (Tomoka, 2014). Cass had a sense of belonging to the host community through participation in religious activities. For Tim, the shift of focus to meaning rather than accuracy in English use in SA prompted him to change his perception of the value of linguistic correctness that he had developed prior to come to New Zealand. This allowed him to form a more self-confident identity as an English user and to be less concerned about linguistic accuracy. For Eric, the SA experiences alleviated his concern about the negative effects of his age identity on his language learner identity. These three cases show both commonalities and unique aspects of identity formation during the study abroad experience (Kinginger, 2015).

Overall, these findings challenge the stereotype of the homogeneous Chinese ESL learner in the SA context (Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Zhao & Bourne, 2011). The three learners all formed multiple and dynamic identities during SA and enacted agency as they negotiated and reshaped their identities (Gao, 2011).

Conclusion

This study investigated the lived experiences of three Chinese students during their SA in New Zealand. Our analysis showed that while the identity and language investment of each learner was shaped by the ways in which the host community accepted and interacted with them, they also each displayed agency as they made choices around language investment. In a dynamic, reciprocal and interactive process,

these choices in turn resulted in further shifts and changes in their identities. This study emphasizes the value of seeing the SA context as a social ecosystem rather than a fixed and static entity, within which sojourners navigate their sense of self (De Bot et al., 2007; Isabelli et al., 2018). We see evidence of this in Tim's choice to reduce his language investment as he embraced a new identity as a job seeker. Cass and Eric, on the other hand, continued to invest in their English language learner identities. For Cass this involved investing in Kiwi English, while for Eric it involved a strengthening of his identity as an active learner. For all three learners, SA contributed to increased self-confidence as they made improvements in English and experienced successful communication in English. Further research might take a closer look at the durability of the positive personal identity formed during learners' SA experiences.

In this study, in-depth analysis of learner identity was afforded through the thick data that made up the three case studies. Our analysis sheds light on the interwoven relationship between the learning trajectories and identity construction processes experienced by Chinese SA students in New Zealand. Importantly, each of the learners in our study experienced not only improved language proficiency but also personal development as their identities expanded and were reshaped by the experience of living and studying in New Zealand.

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Appendix: Data collection instruments (translated from Mandarin Chinese)

1. Questionnaire

Name: Age: Gender:
Length of stay in NZ:
Current study program:
How long have you been learning English?
What is your plan after graduating?

2. Individual interviews: sample questions

A. *Previous educational background*

- How long did you study English as a foreign language (EFL) in China?
- What kinds of language skills (for example, speaking, listening, reading, and writing) did your EFL class focus on?
- Which skill was more important to you?
- Why did you think so?
- How did you perceive your previous learning experiences?

B. *Study abroad experiences*

- Do you like study abroad? Why or why not?
- How many hours a day do you spend on learning or practicing English?
- What opportunities have you created to communicate with people in English?
- How frequently have you tried to speak or write in English and in Chinese?
- What makes you develop your English?
- How do you feel about communicating with people in English here in New Zealand? Who would you like to speak English with? Why?
- What are the differences between learning English in China and in New Zealand? Why do you want to learn English as a second language? What is your motivation to master it?

C. *Reflections on the meaning of participants' experience as an English learner and as an English speaker*

- Given that you have been learning English for a while and that you can communicate in English in different contexts, how do you understand the role of English in your life?
- Are you going to keep learning English in the future? Why?
- Are there any instances in which you were able to do things (to act) because you could speak English?
- How do those types of instances affect your life?

- Are there any instances in which you were not able to do things (to act) because people did not understand you when you spoke English?
- How do those types of instances affect your life?
- Do you have any strategies to improve your English? What effects have those strategies had?
- How is English important to your future?
- Do you think there are some situations in which you do not want to use English? Why or why not?
- Do you think there are some people who you are willing to communicate with in a certain language (Chinese or English)? Why or why not?

3.   Focus Group Interview: Guiding questions

- What do you feel when you use English? Can you explain some of the positive or negative feelings that you have when you can communicate in English?
- Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your English proficiency?
- What are the benefits of studying abroad?
- What motivates you to use English?
- What hinders you from learning or using English?
- How do you think the institution you are studying at could better meet
- your needs?
- How do you think your life will be different when you know more English?

4.   Written reflection 1

- Why did you choose to study in New Zealand?
- What is your typical day like?
- Can you think of a time in the past when you felt frustrated because you couldn't communicate in English during study abroad?
- Can you think of a time in the past when you felt happy because you could communicate in English during study abroad?
- What identities do you have? How they influence your study abroad experiences?

5.   Written reflection 2:

- How does study here change you?
- How does study here satisfy your goals set prior to coming to NZ?
- Do you consider yourself as a bilingual person? Why or why not?
- Is there a change between your identity in China and your identity now?