

**UNDERSTANDING THE CHOICE OF CHINESE GRADUATE STUDENTS'
ENGLISH LEARNING STRATEGIES IN A CANADIAN CONTEXT**

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Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

This study, entitled “Understanding the Choice of Chinese Graduate Students’ English Learning Strategies in a Canadian Context,” explores the English learning strategies employed by six graduate students from China after their arrival in Canada, and documents and analyses changes in their learning strategies. These Chinese students encountered a change of language context because when in the unilingual Chinese environment they spoke Mandarin and upon their arrival in Canada, they were obligated to use English to communicate with Canadians and other international students. These students employed different English learning strategies in the Canadian context from what they were accustomed to in China. Thus, the researcher’s central objective in this study is to discover and document those changes in learning strategies and to investigate the factors accounting for the changes. In the process, the researcher aims to fill a gap in research exploring the learning strategies of Chinese students in foreign contexts, and create valuable new knowledge to benefit prospective Chinese international students, policy makers at the international universities, and English educators in China.

The theoretical framework of this research is the qualitative co-constructivism paradigm along with narrative inquiry. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of collecting data in this study, beginning with individual interviews, and followed by a focus group interview. The data collected through the interviews showed that the six participants’ reliance on the memory and cognitive strategies employed in China were abandoned in favor of utilization of compensation strategies and social strategies after moving to Canada. Furthermore, these participants were more open to making mistakes and taking risks during interactions with others in English. Moreover, these participants made these changes mainly because they desired to use the English-speaking environment in Canada to improve English proficiency. An important finding of my research is that their immersion in the English-speaking environment inspired these participants to employ different English learning strategies that led to significant improvement in their English proficiency.

Keywords: Chinese graduate students, language context, English learning strategies, improvement of English proficiency

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

After Chinese students' arrival in Canada, they encounter different language contexts because when they are in China, they utilize Chinese. In Canada, English is necessary for these students to communicate with Canadians and other international students. In this context, these students may employ different English learning strategies than those they used in China. Therefore, an integral part of my study is to determine how Chinese students change English learning strategies and the possible factors accounting for these changes. After Chinese students choose to study in Canadian universities, they will deal with a total different language environment from in China upon arrivals. These changes may be closely related to their English learning in China.

1.1 The Unique English Learning Environment in China

The English learning environment in China is different from the EFL environments in other countries. The number of English learners in China is huge. In China, the English learners in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools were approximately 100 million (Ministry of Education, 2006). The large number of English learners results in teacher-centered mode in public school English classes. In China, most English teaching happens in public schools. An English teacher in a public school may need to take care of at least 50 students in an English class. It is very difficult for this English teacher to give the class based on every student's needs of English studying. If English teachers put students at the centered position, the teachers cannot give classes within a limited time. Moreover, one-child policy has rendered huge pressure in English learning for learners who are from one-child families. Although the one-child policy has been changed in China, a large quantity of English learners in China still grows up in one-child families. Because they are the only child in their families, their parents have high expectations and requirements on their academic performance (Zheng, 2004). English, as the most important global language, plays a key role in Chinese students' success in academic studies or jobs searching (Liu, 2007). Parents from the one-child families usually encourage or even force their children to learn English better. As a result, these children feel stressful if they acquire insufficient performance in English learning.

1.2 The Reasons for Choosing Canadian Universities

Several factors are present in Chinese students' choice of Canadian universities. Zhou (2012) attributes Chinese students' choice of pursuing post-secondary education in Canada to "academic credibility, research environment, family connection, less discrimination, less requirement of English proficiency, visa availability, potential benefit for the future, and the avoidance of disadvantages conditions in their home country" (p. 99). Also, the students' personalities and family connections are two key contributors to their choice of studying in Canada. Students who have strong personalities and who have zeal for challenges are inclined to study abroad. If they are with families who have settled in Canada, it will be easier for them to become attuned to life in a foreign country. This is a prominent cause of their applications for Canadian universities (Zhou, 2012).

Compared with universities in the U.S. and European countries, studying in Canada is less expensive for Chinese students (Zhang, 2011). The tuition fees and living expenses in Canada are less and the students will be provided with more, or at least the same, opportunities to access academic programs with the high-quality and research opportunities they are interested in; lower admission requirements of language proficiency; faculty members who have the ability to aid the students in academic enhancement; and degrees that are recognized throughout the world (Zhang, 2011).

1.3 The Change of English Learning Context

Despite the above reasons, all these students are confronted with a similar problem: the change of language context. In China, Mandarin (the only official language) is used by all students. They learn English as a subject and rarely use it in their daily lives. In this context, they learn English as a foreign language (EFL). If they become international students in Canada, English will be the second language for them (first language is Mandarin) because English is one of the two official languages in Canada. The context will become an ESL (English as a second language) context and Chinese students are bound to use English to converse with others in an English-speaking context.

In this study, how the participants use English better is closely linked to how they learn English. The idea is relative to my research because in the ESL context, "second language learning and second language use were not identical, it was often difficult or impossible to

separate learning the second language from using the second language in actual practice” (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002, p. 377). This means that Chinese students improve English proficiency during the process of employing the language in their lives. A case in point is that when Chinese students converse with their Canadian colleagues, they incorporate new words from the conversation in their next dialogues. They use English for communication and use the opportunity to learn English from those conversations.

1.4 The Necessity of Changing English Learning Strategies

In the EFL context, Chinese students are motivated to learn English in order to find more promising jobs and meet the language requirements needed to apply to foreign universities. Individuals have a preference for the strategies they use, for example, writing new words several times to remember. These strategies enable them to acquire high scores in English proficiency tests that play a crucial role in the applications for jobs in China and for universities in English-speaking countries (Rao, 2006). However, a number of studies have demonstrated that the traditional strategies employed by Chinese students in the ESL context are not as useful as in the EFL context (Liu, 2011; Rochecouste, Oliver, & Mulligan, 2012; Storch & Hill, 2008). In order to adapt to English-speaking environments, employing different English learning strategies are in the best interest of these students. However, being immersed in an English-speaking environment does not lead to improving English proficiency naturally. Effort made by learners is an essential part of learning English in the ESL context (Derwing, Thomson, & Munro, 2006). For example, these learners should seek opportunities for socializing with English native speakers. For Chinese students, if they do not change English learning strategies to achieve higher English levels in Canada, they will struggle in their studies and life in this country.

1.5 Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The researcher aimed at discovering what different English learning strategies Chinese graduate students employed after they came to Canada and the reasons why they made the change in the choice of English learning strategies. Based on the purpose of the study, the central research question is: after the change of language context, how did Chinese graduate students learn English and why? Then the following sub-questions guided the process of the study:

(1) How did Chinese students learn English in China? (2) What were reasons for their choice of these language-learning strategies in China? (3) What are the changes of employing English learning strategies in Canada? (4) What are possible explanations for these changes?

1.6 The Significance of the Study

There are two reasons why my research is valuable. First of all, my study will fill a void in research because little research focused on how Chinese students choose different English learning strategies with the change of language contexts. Secondly, the findings of my research will be valuable from the perspectives of present Chinese students at Canadian universities, prospective Chinese students who plan to apply for the universities, policy makers at the universities, and English educators in China.

The participants in this research have engaged in their academic programs in Canada for at least six months. Insufficient English proficiency is one of the greatest hindrances they encounter in Canada. Not only will the findings of my study enable them to reflect on their own English learning, but they will also have clearer directions in their English learning.

The findings of my study will aid prospective Chinese students in making plans to facilitate their English learning in Canada after they arrive in Canada, which will make it easier to become accustomed to the English-speaking environment.

Policy makers should realize the importance of providing assistance for Chinese students in enhancing English proficiency because the students represent an integral part of international students' admissions. The quicker students are able to remove the language barrier, the more likely it is for them to maximize their academic outcomes. Incorporating implications from my study into the process of making related policies will assist in tackling language problems faced by Chinese students.

Offering useful tips to students for obtaining high scores in English tests has been a major concern for English educators in China. Meanwhile, the importance of practicing English has been neglected. My research may remind these English educators that if they only focus on linguistic details practice and ignore the practice of English communicative skills, their students' will struggle in English-speaking contexts.

1.7 Definitions of Terms

To avoid the ambiguous meanings and indications of terms that were used in my study, the definitions of the following terms have been provided.

1. Mandarin—the official Chinese language (The Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2008);
2. Chinese graduate students—“International students from mainland China who are Chinese nationals enrolled in masters or doctoral programs in a specific Canadian university” (Zhang, 2011, p. 13);
3. International students—“University students who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents” (Zhang, 2011, p. 14);
4. Graduate programs—“Degree programs beyond the baccalaureate level” (Zhang, 2011, p. 14);
5. ESL settings—“Students learn English in the contexts ‘where it is learned because of its social and communicative functions within the community’” (Oxford, 1990, p. 6);
6. EFL settings—“Students learn English in the contexts ‘where it is learned without social and communicative functions within the community’” (Oxford, 1990, p. 6);
7. EFL learners—“Language learners study English ‘in their native (non-English speaking) country or region’” (Bedell & Oxford, 1996, p. 48);
8. ESL learners—“Language learners study English ‘in an English-speaking environment such as the US or the UK’” (Bedell & Oxford, 1996, p. 48);
9. SILL—strategy inventory for language learning. One version of the inventory with 80 items was designed for English speakers learning a second language or a foreign language. Another version of it with 50 items was for English learners whose first language was not English (Oxford, 1990);
10. LS—“Learning strategy were specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8).

1.8 Assumptions

Six assumptions were present in this research.

1. Constructivism was the appropriate paradigm of my study. Under the guidance of constructivism, employing qualitative method would lead to valuable findings.
2. Chinese graduate students were the most suitable population of the study because it was group I belonged to. It was easier for me to establish trust with participants, provide inner perspective, and construct the knowledge with participants together.
3. The participants of this research answered the questions of interviews honestly instead of just providing the data I hoped to acquire.
4. Based on literature review, interviews would be assumed a valid and reliable method to collect data.
5. Adequate data of participants' choice of English learning strategies in different contexts would be obtained.
6. After moving to Canada, participants employed different English learning strategies from those they used in China.

1.9 Delimitations of the Study

My study had the following delimitations.

1. The participants were delimited to Chinese graduate students who were registered as full-time students at a specific Canadian university.
2. The sample size of the study was delimited to six participants.
3. The method of collecting data was delimited to interviews (six semi-structured individual interviews and one focus group interview).
4. The reviewed literature was delimited to articles, books, and my unpublished manuscripts related to international students' language learning from 1974 to 2013.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

The findings of my study were only applicable to the six participants of this research in a specific Canadian university. In addition, the literature related to the change of language learning strategies in different contexts was scant. So an appropriate theoretical model was not available for the shift of English learning strategies of Chinese graduate students. Lastly, this study was conducted in 2014. This study was limited to interview subjects and any

changes to their English learning strategies were not included in this study from this time period.

1.11 Organization of the Dissertation

The researcher introduced the background of this research in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, the researcher emphasized literature works that were reviewed. The researcher presented theories and methodology in Chapter Three. The researcher reported the data collected during this research in Chapter Four. The analysis of the data were provided and discussed in Chapter Five. Chapter Six included conclusions and discussions of implications arising from this research.

1.12 The Researcher's Story

As a Chinese graduate student in the University of Saskatchewan, my experience is valuable to this research. I preferred to use memory strategy and cognitive strategy to learn English in China. After moving to Canada, I chose strategies that enabled me to rely on myself to improve English proficiency and interact with native English speakers. In Canada, no one instructed me how to learn English like my teachers and parents did in China. All instructors I have met in Canada encouraged me to determine the methods of learning by myself. I felt lost at the beginning stage, but I gradually found optimal ways to adjust to the English-speaking environment in Canada. I was motivated to improve English in Canada because I was interested in Canadian culture. Improving English proficiency enabled me to access the meaning of Canadian culture. Furthermore, if I was not a proficient English learner, my life and studies in Canada would be bogged down by my insufficient English proficiency. Lastly, since I am in a rich-input English environment, I desire to gain the most benefits from the context and make progress in my English proficiency. After staying in this English environment for a year, I decided to share my experience as an international student with others by conducting research. The following chapter demonstrates the literature I have reviewed for conducting the research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the researcher elaborated literature related to the classification of language learning strategies (LLS), the relationship between the choice of LLS and language proficiency, how Chinese students learn English in China and then study abroad, the changeable attributes of LLS, and the factors affecting the choice of LLS.

2.1 The Classification of LLS

A number of researchers have offered classification schema for language learning strategies (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1981; Stern, 1983). Based on the literature examined, most researchers employed O' Malley and Chamot's classification (1990) or Oxford's taxonomy (1990) as a theoretical framework in their studies.

2.1.1 O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) Classification

The taxonomy of O' Malley and Chamot (1990) is widely used as a theoretical framework in several research studies (Li, 2002). The system of language learning strategies is based on Anderson's (1985) theory of cognition and memory. LLS are classified into three categories by O' Malley and Chamot (1990). These categories are meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. The first category of LLS facilitates language learners to pay selective attention to language tasks, as well as planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning. The researchers give priority to meta-cognitive strategies in their classification of LLS because they consider it to be at a higher level than the others. Their conception about meta-cognitive strategies is in line with some other researchers' findings (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983). The second category of LLS, cognitive strategies, is "operated directly on incoming information, manipulating in ways that enhance learning" (O' Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 44). Concrete examples of the strategies include connecting images with new verbal information, employing known linguistic information to better understand the new information, and summarizing what has been learned to retain information. The last category of LLS is social/affective strategies. Learners employ strategies of the category to "involve interaction with another person or ideational control over affect" (O' Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 45). A case in point is the cooperation of peers to do language tasks. Data collected from the interviews of experienced participants and

inexperienced counterparts on psychological tasks provided O'Malley and Chamot (1990) with a multitude of materials to analyze.

2.1.2 Oxford's (1990) Classification

So far, Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of LLS has been the most comprehensive, detailed, and systematic one compared to its peers (Ellis, 1994; Vidal, 2002). A large number of researchers have recognized the significance of the taxonomy and utilized it to undertake their studies (Alhaisoni, 2012; Li, 2002; Magno, 2010; Mochizuki, 1999; Park, 1994). The system is divided into two general classes of LLS: direct and indirect. "These two classes are subdivided into a total of six groups: memory, cognitive, and compensation under the direct class; meta-cognitive, affective, and social under the indirect class" (Oxford, 1990, p. 14). When learners employ direct LLS, the target language must be involved directly with the learning process. However, when indirect LLS are used, the learners are aided in learning languages without directly involving the target language. Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) provided the definitions of the six categories:

Memory Strategies for storing and retrieving information, Cognitive Strategies for understanding and producing the language, Compensation Strategies for overcoming limitations in language learning, Meta-cognitive Strategies for planning and monitoring learning, Affective Strategies for controlling emotions, motivations, and Social Strategies for cooperating with others in language learning. (p. 403)

Oxford's (1990) classification is the cognitive category with the most strategies. The reason for this is because the category consists of various strategies that enable learners to process deeply new information, such as analyzing, summarizing, and deductive reasoning (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

2.1.3 The Strength of Oxford's (1990) Classification

Both the methods of the classification of LLS are assets to research in this area. Nonetheless, in my study, I incorporated Oxford's (1990) taxonomy rather than O' Malley and Chamot's (1990) in my research because of its precision, interrelationships among categories of LLS, and wider acceptance with many research studies. Figure 1 displays Oxford's (1990) classification.

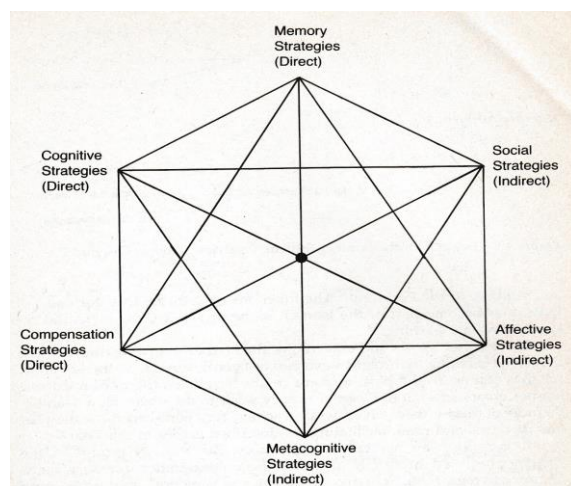


Figure 1: Oxford's (1990, p. 15) Classification of Language Learning Strategies

As shown in figure 1, Oxford (1990) divides language learning strategies into six categories. And every category of language learning strategies is interwoven with others.

2.1.4 The Precision of Dividing LLS Categories

Although the two systems share some common features (especially in the classification of meta-cognitive strategies), Oxford's system is more precise because it separates memory strategies and compensation strategies from cognitive categories, as well as affective strategies from the affective/social category. The researcher supports this separation because these strategies make contributions to language learning by their "very clear, specific function" (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002, p. 371). Memory strategies enable learners to memorize new information for a long time and retrieve the information when they need to remember it. Meanwhile, learners benefit from compensation strategies when they miss key information. In the situation in which key information is not acquired, they take actions to guess the information based on the context, such as other related words, or other people's gestures. Therefore, compensation strategies also serve language learning in a specific way. The functions of memory strategies and compensation strategies are specific enough to be separated from cognitive strategies (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). As for the separation of affective strategies and social strategies, it is appropriate because the two categories of LLS play different roles in assisting learners in language learning. The former category aids learners in managing emotions while the latter one provides learners with assistance in cooperating with others. According to LLS' specific function, Oxford (1990) classifies them into different categories instead of combining them together.

2.1.5 Interrelationships among Categories of LLS

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) do not believe that different groups of LLS are interwoven with language learning. Instead, in their system, meta-cognitive strategies are “higher order executive skills” (p. 44), while the other two categories of LLS have less importance. In contrast, Oxford (1990) stated that direct strategies collaborate with indirect strategies to facilitate language learning and “each strategy group is capable of connecting with and assisting every other strategy group” (p. 14). It means that in Oxford's system, every group of strategies is as crucial as others. Since language learners profit from every group of LLS in different ways, their relationships should be interrelated rather than one holding a higher place.

2.2 Successful and Unsuccessful Language Learners

Individual differences do exist in second language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). For instance, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) discovered that second language learners who had positive attitudes towards the target language learning are more willing to keep learning. But it is difficult to predict a second language learner's success in the language learning based on these individual differences because these differences are related with each other to affect the language learner's learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Lightbown and Spada (2013) provided a salient illustration for this statement. A second language learner may be asked does he/she learn the language outside of classroom. This question indicates whether the learner is motivated to learn the language. However, when the learner's answer is yes, it may be possible that this learner does not have the motivation to improve the language proficiency. He/she learns the language outside of classroom maybe because it is easy for him/her to access the language environment. In this example, the factor “motivation” and another factor “the opportunity of practice in the language environment” are interwoven together. It is difficult to assure which factor affects the language learning or they combine together to exert the effect. Therefore, the relationship between individual differences and language proficiency has not been clear.

Qingquan, Chatupote, and Teo (2008) noted that the relationship between the choice of LLS and language proficiency is also not known, although a number of researchers, such as

McIntyre (1994) and Bremner (1999) have endeavored to solve it. However, no “precise formula for effective language learning exists” (Rivera-Mills & Plonsky, 2007, p. 543). Researchers who aim at probing successful LLS have acquired outcomes. They hope that the findings of their research contributes to helping unsuccessful learners learn the language (Gan, Humpheys, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Gerami & Baighlou, 2011; Qingqan et al., 2008; Takeuchi, 2003; Wong & Nunan, 2011).

2.2.1 Preference for Using More LLS

Proficient language learners prefer to employ various LLS more than their peers with low proficiency (Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2008; Philips, 1991). A prominent cause is that the proficient learners have a deeper awareness of how pivotal using various methods is to mastering a foreign language, especially English. Another possible explanation is that the better achievements gained by employing various LLS motivates the proficient learners to continue trying (Qingquan et al., 2008).

2.2.2 Special Attentions to Meta-cognitive Strategies

In Oxford’s (1990) system, meta-cognitive strategies make contributions to language learning by planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Takeuchi (2003) undertook a study to discover the common features of Japanese citizens who had a good command of a foreign language, and wrote a book about how they learned the language. Takeuchi analyzed 67 related books and advocated that meta-cognitive strategies are valued by successful foreign language learners (in a Japanese context). The author described how he employed meta-cognitive strategies in his books as follows: “having a concrete need/plan for learning”; “learning regularly”; and “maximizing opportunities to use the language” (p. 387).

2.2.3 The Choice of Deep LLS

Memory and cognitive strategies include deep strategies that “make connections among things: unknown to known, among unknowns, new connections among knowns” (Leaver, Ehrman, & Shekhtman, 2005, p. 84), as well as surface strategies that do not enable learners to involve the materials being learned as much as possible (Leaver et al., 2005). Qingquan et al. (2008) invited 184 freshmen from a university in China to participate in a study. Participants were divided into three groups based on the results of the Nation-Wide College-Entrance Test for English: high-proficiency level, medium level, and low-proficiency level.

The high level group and the low level group completed SILL (strategy inventory for language learning). The results revealed that successful English users utilized deep LLS in memory and cognitive categories, such as “improving English through reading and looking for patterns in English” (Qingquan et al., 2008, p. 343). In contrast, surface strategies, such as “word-for-word translation and remembering English by repeating” (Qingquan et al., 2008, p. 343), were popular with unsuccessful English learners.

2.2.4 Positive Attitudes towards Language Learning

Gan et al. (2004) stated that having a positive attitude plays a key role in language learning. In the study conducted by Gan et al. (2004), participants who excelled in English in an EFL context not only enjoyed learning English, but also spared no efforts to overcome the roadblocks they were confronted with. There is a different picture of unsuccessful learners. They were inclined to ignore the difficulties when they felt frustrated by English learning. As a result, “they tended to adopt a laissez-faire attitude” (Gan et al., 2004, p. 237) towards learning English.

2.2.5 Communicative Orientation

More effective learners and less effective learners refer to English users with high proficiency and low proficiency respectively in Wong and Nunan’s study (2011). The researchers suggested that using English for communicative purposes is valued by more effective learners. Not only do the learners pay attention to observing how native speakers speak English, but they also maximize opportunities to practice the target language in an actual communicative context. A case in point is that more effective learners tend to learn by conversation. Conversely, less effective learners rely on teachers and textbooks. The difference in English learning was because the more effective learners prefer to manage their English learning by themselves while the less effective group had not prepared to control their English learning through their own efforts.

2.3 How Chinese Students Learned English in China

English is considered to be the most popular global language in China (Pan & Block, 2011). The increasing number of English learners in China has given rise to a multitude of studies to probe the patterns of these English learners (Gao, 2006; Gisberg, 1992; Liu, 2007; Rao, 2002; Xu, 2003). The results of these studies show that methods widely-used by

Chinese students center on the following: depending on teachers; being motivated to learn English; employing memorization and repetition; and focusing on linguistic skills instead of communicative skills.

2.3.1 Teacher-centered English Classes

Gisberg (1992) noted that in English classes in Chinese schools, students are passive receivers of knowledge taught by teachers who decide the content of the classes and the method of teaching. For instance, the participants in one study by Gao (2006) suggested that in Chinese schools not only did students in English classes follow the teachers' instructions, but they also had insufficient courage to question the teacher's authority.

These "teacher-dominated" (Rao, 2006, p. 495) English classes lead to difficulties for Chinese students who study abroad. These students have problems adjusting to English-speaking educational environments that tend to emphasize independence and self-reliance. Dzau (1990) described the attitudes most Chinese students have towards their teachers as "one of respect, obedience, and reliance, a reliance that is often dependence" (p. 83). International students whose first language is not English share the common problem with Chinese students studying abroad. Most of these international students feel a sense of loss and frustration because their former teachers failed to tell them how to learn the target language in foreign countries (Amuzie & Winke, 2009).

Researchers considered the root cause of Chinese students' dependence on English teachers was linked to the effects of Confucianism (Rao, 2006; Xu, 2003). According to the traditions of Confucianism, people at low status in a hierarchical society should obey those who are of higher status. As an authority in English classes, teachers control everything. Students are bound to abide by instructions given by teachers (Xu, 2003).

2.3.2 Chinese Students' Motivation to Learn English

It is worthwhile to highlight the viewpoint that Chinese students' motivation to learn English can be classified into two categories: integrative orientation and instrumental orientation. Integrative orientation refers to learners who are motivated to learn English in order to assimilate into a culture by learning the language from the culture. Instrumental orientation implies that learners are motivated by acquiring pragmatic benefits (Liu, 2007). If students learn English to acquire more information related to Western culture, they are

oriented by integrative motivations (Liu, 2007).

2.3.3 The Effects of Western Culture

The popularity of English in China is linked to the Western culture in China. Su (1995) stated that with the increasing popularity of Western culture in China, many Chinese students become attracted to learning English because it is the major carrier of Western culture. The open-door policy, a series of policies that made by the Chinese government in 1979 to open Chinese business markets to foreign companies (Wei, 1995), has been implemented for three decades and plays a key role in facilitating the popularization of Western culture in China. With the growth of openness to investments from foreign corporations, English has become increasingly acceptable to Chinese people. The popularization of English in China has enabled China to become more globalized and internationalized (Pan & Block, 2011). Aside from their interest in Western culture, Chinese people are motivated to learn English because of practical benefits that arise from being proficient in this language.

2.3.4 The Desire for Practical Benefits

In China, English learners with high proficiency benefit from having a good command of English. Not only do they have advantages in the entrance tests for higher academic degrees, but they also are more competitive when searching for jobs (Liu, 2007). This point is emphasized by Su (1995): “There have been a growing number of job opportunities for people who are able to use English” (p. 168). Moreover, mastering English is crucial if students desire to pursue further studies in English-speaking countries. To acquire these practical benefits and learn English, students are motivated by an instrumental orientation (Liu, 2007).

2.3.5 The Tendency for Memorization and Repetition

A feature of Chinese students’ English learning is memorization and repetition (Scovel, 1983; Yu, 1984). Memorization and repetition are deemed effective methods to improve English proficiency by Chinese students who believe that making errors shows that a student is not spending enough time memorizing and repeating new vocabularies (Allen & Spada, 1982; Zhang, 1982). Penner (1995) declared that actually, Chinese students have their own viewpoint on the relationship between memorization and creativity. The viewpoint is reflected by a famous Chinese saying: “When one can memorize 300 Tang poems, he is sure

to be able to compose poems of his own even though he is not a poet” (Penner, 1995, p. 5).

Chinese students prefer integrating repetition strategies into language learning to memorizing new information. The related strategies of “write a word repeatedly to remember it” and “read and write a word simultaneously to remember it” were preferred by more than half of the participants in Rao’s research (2006). Rao (2006) explained that the use of repetition strategies to learn English can be traced to the method of learning Chinese characters. Chinese students traditionally rely on practicing the large body of Chinese characters repeatedly to remember them.

2.3.6 The Imbalance between Linguistic Details and Communicative Skills

The language learning behavior of English learners in China has been discussed by a number of researchers. These researchers have found that English learners pay attention to linguistic details but ignore communicative skills (Gan, 2013). These students endeavor to improve their reading ability to establish the foundation of learning a foreign language; they have high requirements for accuracy in spoken and written English, but they invest much less time in promoting the development of communicative skills than the time in practicing linguistic details (Barlow & Lowe, 1985; Harvey, 1985; Maley, 1983; Scovel, 1983). A study conducted by Rao (2002) also discovered that non-communicative practice in English classes is preferred by Chinese English learners.

In fact, English learners in China have gained awareness of the need for proficient communicative skills in studying English. However, for several reasons, they still focus on linguistic details. Regardless of their English proficiency, students who took part in Yang and Gai’s (2010) study recognized the importance of using communicative skills to remove barrier when speaking English. Nonetheless, they seldom practiced the skills in their own lives (Yang & Gai, 2010).

Chinese students ignore communicative skills for several interrelated reasons. One possible reason is a lack of confidence. Even proficient learners are not confident enough to converse with others in English. The problem is exacerbated with females (Rao, 2002). Also, Yang and Gai (2010) asserted that EFL contexts in China restrict Chinese students from accessing an authentic English-speaking environment and native English speakers to improve communication skills. Another reason is the failure of curriculum design to consider the

enhancement of communication skills. The designers have not incorporated the practice of communication skills into the curriculum content (Compbell & Zhao, 1993). A third and possibly more central reason is the “exam-oriented education system” (Rao, 2006, p. 502), which researchers agree is the root cause of the ignorance of communicative skills (Jin & Yang, 2006; Lee, 1996; Pan & Block, 2011; Rao, 2006; Zhang, 2005). The most pivotal English test for Chinese university students is the CET (College English Test) band 4 because if they do not pass the test, they are not qualified to acquire the certificates of their first degrees (Shao, 2006). However, the test emphasizes checking students’ linguistic skills instead of communication skills. As a result, to pass the test, English learners are compelled to focus on linguistic details and omit communication skills.

2.4 How Chinese Students Learn English after Studying Abroad

Even if Chinese students have met the language proficiency requirement for entry into Western universities, they are confronted with challenges while studying and living in an English-speaking environment (Han, 2007). International students’ weak listening and speaking skills, reading, writing, and note-taking skills, coupled with limited vocabulary, are all a hindrance to learning English (Lee, 1997; Lewthwaite, 1996; Senyshyn et al., 2000). To overcome the language roadblock, Chinese students must change English learning strategies to become more competent learners.

2.4.1 Making A Strong Effort

Immersion in an English-speaking environment contributes to English learners’ English proficiency. Exposure to English develops learners’ proficiency in speaking, listening, vocabulary, grammar, and it also improves their motivation to learn the target language (Cadd, 2012; Pellegrino, 2005; Segalowitz, Freed, Collentine, Lafford, Lazar, & Diaz-Campos, 2004). However, without a strong effort by the learner, simply being immersed in an English-speaking environment fails to lead to the natural enhancement of English proficiency (Coleman, 1997). A strong individual effort is required because students need to generate output to make progress even in an input-rich environment (Storch & Hill, 2008). Part of this effort for Chinese students should include the use of language learning strategies to learn the target language. These strategies enable them to rely on themselves--not on others, such as parents and teacher--to learn the target language.

The individual effort made by Chinese students is actually the actions they take to adjust to the English-speaking environment. These actions play a role as agency during Chinese students' improvement of English after moving to foreign countries. The notion of agency is defined as the process where students "take actions and make adjustments to existing knowledge structures based on the outcome of those actions" (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012, p. 346). And individuals take these actions based on their personal needs (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012). In this research, Chinese students staying in Canada will encounter challenges of adapting to the language environment. These challenges will encourage these students to employ some strategies to remove the language obstacles, which will lead to their improvement of English proficiency. Employing these English learning strategies is the action taken by Chinese students to being adapted to the language environment.

2.4.2 Valuing the Importance of Social Strategies

Zhou (2012) asserted that Chinese students prefer to spend time with other Chinese students and stay in Chinese communities, no matter how long they have been in English-speaking countries. However, the importance of socializing with English native speakers cannot be ignored because it plays a key role in enhancing English proficiency (Fischer, 2013; Rochecouste et al., 2012). Language learners study how to speak English appropriately from watching and listening to native speakers' talk (Bakhtin, 1981).

The importance of interacting with local people is reflected in the study conducted by Derwing, Thomson, and Munro (2006). The study traced the progress in English of two groups of students learning English, one from Slavic countries and the other from China. The Slavic group made great progress with their English accent and fluency because they strove to converse with English native speakers. In contrast, the Chinese group's accent and fluency stayed at the same level because their members downplayed the importance of practicing English with English native speakers. In a related study, Ma and Li (2013) demonstrated how another group of Chinese students successfully reduced language barrier when they were at an American university. The most popular learning strategy this group used to tackle their language problems was to have "more contact with natives to achieve more communication in English" (Ma & Lin, 2013, p. 70).

2.4.3 What Will Occur If without Changes of LLS

Making changes in LLS is in the best interest of Chinese students after studying abroad. If they do not make these changes, two negative consequences may ensue. Being trapped in the traditional English learning method like they were in China may result in insufficient English competence to handle their studies and lives abroad. The first effect is the slow adjustment to English-speaking environments. The more obstacles Chinese students are confronted with in using English, the more comfortable they feel interacting with other Chinese people rather than with native speakers. Consequently, their adjustment to the English-speaking environment is impeded due to the lack of interaction with native speakers (Hechanova-Alampay, Beetr, Christiansen, & Vanhorn, 2002). Also, a lack of English proficiency hinders Chinese students' participation in classes. Chinese students' reticence in classes is akin to other students with Asian backgrounds. The silence in classes implies that Asian students are inclined to play the role of quiet followers rather than active leaders (Chen, 2003). Asian students who pursue further studies in Western countries "perceived their English ability to be inadequate for participating in class discussions in fast-paced and interactive classrooms" (Lee, 2009, p. 147).

2.5 LLS Are Changeable Because of Different Contexts

The fact that language learners change LLS in different contexts has been borne out by a number of studies (Carson & Longhini, 2002; Gao, 2003; Gao, 2006; Kojic-Sabo & Lightbown, 1999; Lo Castro, 1994). These researchers pinned down the relationship between the choice of different LLS and the change of language learning context.

2.5.1 The Change of Language Learning Beliefs

Amuzie and Winke (2009) invited 70 international students from two American universities to participate in a study that aimed at providing insights on how studying abroad affected international students' language learning beliefs. Participants were asked to reflect on their previous beliefs when they were in their home countries, as well as the change of beliefs after they went to America. The results showed that the experience of pursuing further studies abroad decreased international students' belief in the reliance on teachers to learn the target language. The longer they studied in American universities, the less they believed in the importance of teachers' dominance in language learning. A prominent cause for this

realization was the insufficient opportunities to converse with native speakers. Amuzie and Winke (2009) articulated that the frustration of interacting with native speakers urges the international students to believe that eliminating dependence on teachers and relying on themselves to improve English proficiency are in their best interest. Since language learners' attitudes, motivation, and behaviors are affected by their conceptions of the target language (Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995), their choice of LLS is bound to change after they move to a different language context.

2.5.2 LLS Are Changeable Over Time

The diary study conducted by Carson and Longhini (2002) revealed that "in the language immersion situation, a learner's strategies were variable over time" (p. 402). The research was based on how Joan, the diarist, described her sojourn in an authentic Spanish environment. Joan completed SILL (Oxford, 1990) three times during the study at equal intervals. The diarist made great progress in Spanish within only eight weeks. It is worthwhile to highlight that Joan's frequency of employing meta-cognitive strategies and social strategies improved after she was immersed in the language environment. Joan employed the meta-cognitive strategies most frequently at the second stage and then decreased slightly at the final stage. The more frequent use of social strategies was because of her need to communicate with others in such a naturalistic environment. The result of the study is a salient illustration of the changeable attribute of LLS. However, a researcher should notice that the participant in the study was a beginner learner of Spanish while the potential participants of the future study will be Chinese graduate students. They must be at least medium-level English learners because they have met the language requirements of admission. Therefore, the participants' choice of language learning strategies was different from Joan's. For example, the participants of this research employed less meta-cognitive strategies than Joan after moving to Canada because they have learned how to manage their English learning during universities in China.

2.5.3 The Influence of Different Contexts

Despite the confirmation of the changeable quality of LLS, research into how different contexts affect the choice of LLS is scant. This is the reason why the following works are assets to my future study.

Kojic-Sabo and Lightbown (1999) invited two groups of participants to determine the influence of different contexts on the choice of LLS of vocabulary. One group was the ESL group that consisted of 47 undergraduate students from Concordia University, Montreal. None of them spoke English as their first language. The second or the EFL group was composed of “43 students enrolled in the final year of preuniversity schooling in Northern Yugoslavia” (p. 180). The researchers elicited responses from informants through a questionnaire that probed students’ vocabulary learning method, a set of tests for the evaluation of vocabulary knowledge, and a cloze test for measuring general language proficiency. The ESL group was more inclined to depend on themselves to incorporate new vocabulary from the English-medium environment than the EFL counterpart. Also, in the ESL setting, “students showed a greater creativity in the selection of reviewing techniques, such as reviewing words in daily conversations, whereas almost all EFL students reviewed by employing the traditional methods, for example, repeated reading their notes” (p. 183). Kojic-Sabo and Lightbown (1999) attributed the difference in vocabulary learning strategies to the different learning settings.

Gao’s (2003) research is the keystone of contexts’ influence on the choice of LLS. In the research, Gao conducted interviews to explore how 14 Chinese students utilized different vocabulary learning strategies and factors that led to the changes after their arrival in the UK. Compared with the experience of learning vocabulary in China, participants had less zeal for understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words. Only when the words played a key role in their academic studies or social lives were they urged to learn them. They also employed more varied strategies to understand words, such as confirming the meaning by conversing with native speakers. Another approach to enforcing the understanding of vocabulary was to practice it through use. Factors contributing to changes were classified into two categories. The first group was “learner factors: motivation, learning beliefs, and proficiency” (p. 46). The second group was “contextual factors: prior learning experience, language input, language production opportunities, learning needs, academic priorities, academic culture, and application of technology” (p. 46). The study revealed that Chinese students changed the strategies of learning vocabulary to meet the needs of changing contexts.

Three years later, Gao (2006) reinterpreted the data acquired from the above research.

The latest interpretation shed light on factors influencing Chinese students' choice of LLS from three perspectives: mediating discourses, mediating objects, and mediating agents. Mediating discourses means that participants recognized the significance of learning English in China in the discourses between researchers and participants. More specifically, Chinese students considered English a tool to "achieve educational promotion, better employment opportunities, or overseas opportunities" (Gao, 2006, p. 58). The majority of informants devoted themselves to improving English proficiency. However, after they moved to Britain, the usefulness of the tool was not so obvious because they had met the language requirement to become enrolled at British universities. Some of them were less motivated to master English than they were in China. Moreover, mediating objects represented the observation that the participants learned English for different purposes with the change of contexts. Compared with English exams in China, course assessment was more crucial for Chinese students to use various strategies in the British context. Lastly, language teachers and families could be mediating agents who exerted influence on the participants' language choice. For instance, as the major mediating agent in China, teachers compelled the participants to recite texts and review vocabulary, whereas "supportive English speakers were important in facilitating changes in these learners' strategy use towards more regular uses of social and interactive strategies in Britain" (p. 63).

Another prominent study is one conducted by Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008). American students who studied Spanish engaged in the study. The participants were divided into two groups. One group included 48 students studying the target language in a five-week intermediate Spanish course in a Spanish-speaking environment, while the other 92 students took part in a similar course in the home country. Prior to the course, all subjects completed a survey and a listening comprehension test. The instruments were administered again after they finished the course. The researchers compared the results of the surveys and the tests. The findings interestingly showed that the group studying abroad did not excel in listening comprehension skills more than their home country peers. Due to the short period of immersion in a Spanish-speaking environment, the students studying abroad had not become accustomed to the target language environment or utilized suitable approaches to improving Spanish proficiency. Nonetheless, students being immersed in the Spanish environment had a

preference for meta-cognitive strategies. For instance, they reminded themselves to stay focused when they practiced listening comprehension and evaluated their performance in the practice. Also, they were more likely to employ social strategies, such as asking for other people's assistance in understanding the content of the listening task. Another difference was that when they were confronted with roadblocks to comprehension, the subjects of abroad group tended to use "top-down cognitive strategies, such as predicting and summarizing" (p. 166) while their peers in home campus learned Spanish by employing "bottom-up cognitive strategies, such as listening for specific words and recognizing prefixes" (p. 166). Furthermore, because the abroad group capitalized on a large number of opportunities to interact with native Spanish speakers, they fostered more confidence in listening comprehension skills than their peers in America.

2.5.4 The Synthesis of Three Studies

The following three studies have consensus on one viewpoint that LLS employed by international students in their home countries may not contribute to the language learning after their arrival in foreign countries (Liu, 2011; Rochecouste et. al, 2011; Storch & Hill, 2008). The study of Storch and Hill (2008) was conducted to investigate whether international students' English proficiency was affected by studying in a medium English-speaking environment for one semester. There were 39 international students who shared a common East Asian background and made contributions to the study. Students who spoke Chinese represented the largest group of the participants (n=29). They completed the writing and reading sections of the same diagnostic English Language assessment (DELA) at the outset and end of a semester in 2004. Prior to taking the DELA again, they filled out a questionnaire about their background information. A small group of the informants volunteered to be interviewed. The comparison of the scores of both DELAs displayed that their reading and writing skills profited from the immersion in a medium English-speaking university. Storch and Hill (2008) articulated that the improvement of English proficiency should be interpreted in a broader educational context instead of focusing on an immediate English environment. International students should acquire opportunities to practice language skills in classes and out of classrooms. The various approaches include utilizing the target language to interact with native speakers in classes and asking for feedback on writing

assignments.

Liu (2011) described her experience as an international student in a Canadian university to reflect on her English learning in Canada and provided useful recommendations for other international students, especially those from East Asia. The author had strong confidence in her English proficiency prior to moving to Canada. However, the greatest hindrance that confronted Liu in Canada was inadequate English skills. Then Liu realized that learning English according to how teachers told students to do so in Chinese schools would not facilitate the enhancement of English proficiency in the new context. Investing individual efforts in English learning outside of classes and socializing with native speakers played a key role in developing adequate English skills. Thus, the author volunteered, worked a part-time job, chose to live with a Canadian family, maximized opportunities to make public presentations, and joined in leisure activities pertaining to using English, such as watching English movies.

Almost 800 international students who did not speak English as their first language from five Australian universities provided data for the study conducted by Rochecouste et al. (2012). Chinese students accounted for the majority of the participants (38%). The researchers acquired informants' responses from an online survey that aimed to obtain "demographics; language and language learning background; strategies for continuing to develop English; motivation; attitudes and beliefs about learning English; and academic learning strategies. These data were then matched with normalized measures of the participants' academic achievement" (p. 1). The sources for acquiring this qualitative data used open-ended questions in the online survey and interviews. The comparison between the data and the measure of academic achievement (Grade Point Averages or GPA) showed that two items had a positive bearing on academic success. The two items included "item 13, if I can't think of an English word, I use another that I think means the same thing and item 23, I participate in campus activities where I can mix with English speakers" (p. 4). Rochecouste et al. (2012) stated that these strategies enable international students to employ various approaches that lead to achieving the goal of communication. However, some vocabulary strategies, such as "using rhymes; making lists; creating a wall chart" (p. 6) have a detrimental influence on academic studies. The majority of international students tend to use

these strategies due to their rote-learning experience of English in their home countries. If they insist on using these traditional learning methods, their struggles for academic success will ensue.

Unlike the other two studies exploring international students' English learning experiences through surveys or interviews, Liu (2011) shared her own stories as an international student in an English-speaking environment. Storch and Hill (2008) highlighted the importance of learning English outside of classrooms and interactions with English speakers. Similarly, Rochecouste et al. (2012) acknowledged that a key factor in integration into a new language context is to mix with local people.

2.6 Factors Influencing the Choice of LLS

Factors related to LLS usage have been contested by a number of researchers. The factors include but are not limited to culture background, gender, major, motivation, proficiency level, and age. Literature of these factors will be elaborated on in the following section.

2.6.1 Culture Background

The learner's culture, nationality, or ethnicity plays a key role in the usage of LLS (Hess & Azuma, 1991; Reid, 1995; Rossi-Le, 1989; Wharton, 2000). Bedell and Oxford (1996) defined culture as "how and why one thinks, learns, worships, fights, and relaxes" (p. 47). Politzer (1983) articulated that Hispanics attempt to use LLS that facilitate them to mix and interact with others, while Asian participants are still stuck in traditional memorization strategies. However, there is a different picture in the study conducted by Grainger (2012). The Asian participants of this study developed similar approaches to learning Japanese to their Australian peers because they assimilated by interacting with the language learning environment in Australia.

2.6.2 Gender

Although Nisbet, Tindall, and Arroyo (2005) asserted that male and female participants in their research do not show any differences in the preference for LLS, more results of research tend to hold the sentiment that females employ a wider range of or much more LLS than their male counterparts (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1995; Rivera-Mills & Plonsky, 2007). Female learners are also more inclined to use

social strategies than male learners (Alhaisoni, 2012). This is attributed to females' desire of being approved by others in their society (Oxford, Nyikos, & Ehrman, 1988).

2.6.3 Academic Major

Researchers who strive to determine how language learners' majors affect the choice of LLS usually divide participants into two groups. One group commonly consists of humanities students and the other is comprised of science/engineering students. It is the members of the former group who employ a wider range of LLS than their peers in the latter group (Lee, 1994; Park, 1999).

2.6.4 Motivation

Several researchers have reached a consensus on the significance of motivation in LLS. Among all factors, motivation exerted the strongest influence on choosing LLS (Mochizuki, 1999; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Generally speaking, the more a learner is encouraged to learn a language, the higher proficiency the learner will acquire. Also, learners will find it more enjoyable to master a language instead of considering learning language as just a process of accumulating linguistic details (Gan et al., 2004).

2.6.5 Proficiency Level

The results of several studies have borne out that the greater usage of LLS is linked to language learners' higher language proficiency levels. Specifically, more proficient learners tend to use more strategies (Al-Buainain, 2010; Green & Oxford, 1995; Li, 2005; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Furthermore, Liu (2004) observed that experienced learners combine one strategy with others to make progress in language learning, whereas less proficient learners hardly employ the combination, or even one strategy. Moreover, learners at different levels favor different LLS. A prominent cause of this difference is that with the improvement of language proficiency, intermediate level students are more aware of the enormity of meta-cognitive strategies (Prokop, Fearon, & Rochet, 1982).

2.6.6 Age of Learner

It has been acknowledged by Magogwe and Oliver (2007) that younger learners have a tendency for social strategies while elder learners prefer to use meta-cognitive strategies. The finding is consistent with the results of studies conducted by Lee (2000), Oh (1992), and

Touba (1992). This suggests that the choice of meta-cognitive strategies is correlated with the age of language learners.

2.6.7 Asian Students' Choice of LLS

Several studies that employed SILL as the instrument claimed that the stereotype of Asian students' preference for memorization strategies is incorrect. The compensation category was mostly favored by Korean students who took part in the study undertaken by Lee and Oxford (2008). Also, the studies on Chinese students in New Zealand (Li, 2005), in Singapore (Goh & Kwah, 1997), and in the U.S. (Chang, 1990) all argued that the strategies in the compensation group are most frequently utilized. An explanation of this choice is that the compensation strategies enable Asian students to "make up for missing knowledge in the English learning. It also reveals the effort exerted by learners in overcoming the limitations they encounter in speaking and writing" (Ok, 2003, as cited in Magno, 2010, p. 45).

Compared with the popularity of the compensation strategies, the memory category is least utilized by Asian students (Alhaisoni, 2012; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Yang, 2007). This is because of the various definitions of the memory strategies. Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) noted that strategies in the memory category of SILL focus on "acting out new vocabulary, using rhymes, and creating a mental of spatial image (p. 409) instead of rote learning that is characterized by rote memorization of words, phrases, and sentences (Politzer & McGroarty, 1985). Consequently, the results of studies that utilized SILL as instruments may not align with the real situation of Asian students' language learning.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher emphasized literature that presented the classifications of language learning strategies, the strength of Oxford's (1990) classification, the features of successful and unsuccessful language learners, how Chinese students learn English in China and after studying abroad, the changeable attributes of language learning strategies, and the factors influencing the choice of language learning strategies.

However, little researchers paid attention to the changes of Chinese students' English learning strategies. Little research reported these changes, as well as possible reasons for these changes. The results of this research filled the gap in this area. Also, this research provided implications for prospective Chinese students, English educators in China, and the

policy makers in Canadian universities.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher focused on the methodology used to undertake this study. The crucial components of the methodology included the constructivism paradigm, qualitative research characteristics, purpose sampling, ethical issues, validity and reliability, data collection and analysis, instrument, procedure, and narrative inquiry method.

3.1 The Paradigm of the Study - Constructivism

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined constructivism as “an assumption that social reality is constructed by the individuals who participate in it” (p. 21). In other words, constructivism recognizes the significance of participants and their contributions to the construction of society. In contrast, positivists believe that “physical and social reality is independent of those who observe it, and that observations of this reality, if unbiased, constitute scientific knowledge” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 16). Therefore, positivism is characterized by being objective and not involving researchers in the construction of knowledge. Researchers who are guided by the constructivism assumption also endeavor to probe the world of participants by interactions with them (Schwandt & Marquardt, 2000). These interactions are acquired by observing, interviewing, reading documents produced by the participants, and finding the most appropriate descriptions of the activities (Eichelberger, 1989).

Qualitative researchers choose constructivism because what constructivists believe is akin to the researchers’ perceptions. These researchers attempt to establish trust and friendship with participants. This is consistent with constructivists’ emphasis on interacting with participants. Moreover, an obvious characteristic of constructivism is the participation of observers. Both participants and observers make contributions to the construction of knowledge. A similar picture is present in qualitative researchers. These researchers endeavor to incorporate their experience into the findings of research (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Since believing in constructivism is a tradition for qualitative researchers (Gall et al., 2007), the researcher is well-advised to employ constructivism as the paradigm.

Because the interactions between the researcher and participants played a key role in this research, the researcher constructed the knowledge of this research by collaborating with the participants. The researcher and the participants were considered as two members of the

study group. Compared with self-construction that emphasizes eliciting responses from either member, co-construction is defined as the contribution made by both members (Jeong, 2009). Roschelle (1992) articulated that collaborating with others to learn is the process of seeking the convergence of explanations in shared knowledge. A similar picture is present in this study. As a graduate student who strove to be attuned to the English-speaking environment in Canada, the researcher believed the English learning experience resonated with that of the participants’.

Face-to-face interactions, such as interviews, have been borne out to facilitate members in constructing shared knowledge (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). It is an optimal way for both researchers and participants to construct knowledge together because they can “observe each others’ behaviors and attributes from the presence of verbal and non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, postures, and emotional mannerisms” (James & Busher, 2012, p. 163). In this way, the co-construction of knowledge will generate data. Therefore, in this research, the interview process consisted of sharing English leaning experience and opinions of learning English in Canada. During the process, the researcher and the participants found the patterns of English learning strategies together. Each member learned from others’ experiences when others shared their own experiences (Jeong & Chi, 1997).

3.2 Why Qualitative Research

Quantitative research refers to “a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study, ask specific, narrow questions, collects numeric data from participants, analyzes these numbers using statistics, and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner” (Creswell, 2005, p. 39). On the other hand, qualitative research focuses on “the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words from participants, describes and analyzes these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner” (Creswell, 2005, p. 39). This research was qualitative instead of quantitative because of the following reasons.

3.2.1 The Importance of Participants

Participants are the key contributors to data collection in qualitative research. This is aligned with constructivism that the interactions between researchers and participants provide

access to understanding social reality. During the process of undertaking qualitative research, participants and researchers are likely to become friends (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

3.2.2 The Depth of Inquiry

Quantitative approaches most often allow a sample of data to be considered and allow relationships between different factors to be examined. Qualitative researchers seek to provide insight into the experience of people involved in such relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). In this research, providing insight into participants' English learning experience is to discover the changes involved in their English learning strategies and the reasons for these changes.

3.2.3 The Insider's Perspective

Another characteristic of qualitative research is the special attention to the researcher's personal experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). An insider researcher is found in "a situation where the researcher is a part of the topic being investigated" (Given, 2008, p. 433).

As a Chinese graduate student who has been in Canada for almost three years, the researcher was one part of what this study investigated, as well as the researcher who undertook it. It was possible that the researcher may impose the researcher's own experience onto participants' when interpreting their accounts; the researcher may consider that their sojourns in Canada were similar to the researcher's and ignore what they really expressed. Despite this, being an insider researcher brought more benefits than drawbacks to this study. Not only would being an insider researcher facilitate the selection of participants, because the characteristics of potential participants were clear, but my involvement would also play a key role in the establishment of the support and trust between the participants and myself. Furthermore, my experience enabled me to better understand participants (Zhou, 2012). Therefore, the position of an insider researcher strengthened this study. The researcher was the most qualified to conduct this research because the researcher was part of a Chinese graduate group and provided an inside lens to this study.

3.3 Narrative Inquiry in Qualitative Research

In recent years, narrative inquiry has been increasingly popular with qualitative researchers in various fields (Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Wallace, & Stock, 2007). The researcher also employed narrative inquiry to undertake this qualitative study. Clandinin and Connelly

(2000) indicated that “narrative inquiry involved the reconstruction of a person’s experience both to the other and to a social milieu” (p. 8). Zhou (2012) defined narrative inquiry “a process of the recounting and reporting of the story” (p. 47). Interviews in narrative inquiry framework are deemed an efficient way to collect data when participants enjoy sharing their stories with researchers and researchers are also interested in telling the stories (Creswell, 2005).

3.3.1 Chronology Nature of Narrative Inquiry

Designing qualitative research with a narrative inquiry frame has the characteristic of reporting and reconstructing the stories with a chronology (Creswell, 2005) because individuals’ experiences are considered to occur continuously in a sequence (Cortazzi, 1993). Since narrative research design focuses on reconstructing stories, necessary elements in stories, such as time, place, plot, and the struggles of characters, should appear in the narratives of experiences (Carter, 1993; Colyar & Holley, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Although these elements exist independently in people’s lives, they constitute a whole story when researchers reconstruct a story based on an individual’s descriptions (Polkinghorne, 1988).

3.3.2 Narrative and Story Telling

Narrative is not equal to telling stories. Researchers strive to elicit meanings and implications from these stories (Zhou, 2012) instead of just retelling the stories verbatim. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) demonstrated that the goal of the reconstruction is to contribute to an individual’s future experiences. Not just participants, but also researchers acquire useful thoughts from the process of reconstruction (Ming & Kwok, 2011). Morris (2002) declared that the most crucial difference between stories and narratives is that the latter refers to thinking with stories:

The concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Think about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative...but allow narrative to work on us (p. 196).

When researchers engage in sharing participants’ stories, what the stories really imply is the key contributor to the construction of knowledge. And when both the researchers and

participants learn from the implications, the accounts of stories will become narratives. Xu and Connelly (2009) elaborated the process of thinking with stories as “using one’s mind to imagine life spaces that flow in time, that consist of personal and social interactions, and that move from place to place” (p. 225).

3.3.3 Why Narrative Inquiry in This Study

Employing narrative inquiry brought multiple benefits to this study. Firstly, narrative inquiry is an optimal method of acquiring a better understanding of participants’ experiences because it provides a deeper view of what storytellers say instead of just focusing on their accounts (Clough, 2002). In this study, Chinese graduate students shared their experiences of learning English in Canada. The researcher endeavored to probe the information they convey. Furthermore, narrative inquiry enabled me to pay attention to participants’ inner feelings of their sojourns in Canada, which were not just limited to what they learned in English. Since narrative inquiry was the process of reporting stories, the researcher recorded not only participants’ words, but also their gestures, facial expressions, and behaviors to construct different characters in the stories.

3.3.4 Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

Compared to the approaches of quantitative research, the findings of narrative inquiry research are limited to small populations because researchers invite a small number of participants to engage in these studies. The fewer participants engaged in a study, the less generalization can be applied to the population of the study. Moreover, limited times of interviews constrain narrative inquiry research from collecting more data through participants. In this research, conducting only one individual interview for each participant and one focus group interview may hinder me from understanding the entirety of participants’ experiences. Additionally, the tendency for convenience is a potential limitation of narrative inquiry research. Narrative inquiry research is characterized by obtaining what participants convey from their interactions with researchers in interviews. Facial expressions, gestures, tones of voice, and accounts of experiences are all crucial components for researchers to understand participants’ inner feelings and experiences. Thus, face-to-face interviews are the most suitable approach to conduct research. To conduct face-to-face interviews with participants, researchers tend to invite participants who are able to engage in the face-to-face interviews

with the researchers.

3.4 Participant Sampling

Purposeful sampling was employed as the method of selecting participants in this study. In this study, six participants were selected based on the purposeful sampling. A few participants enable researchers to acquire better understanding of participants' experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) because they are "knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 397). Employing purposeful sampling means that the choice of sample should be consistent with the purpose of the study (Gall et al., 2007). Therefore, the participants were chosen based on the criteria as detailed below.

3.4.1 Chinese Graduate Students

The participants were full-time Chinese graduate students between the ages of 22–30. They were from different provinces of China and registered as full-time graduate students in different departments of the University of Saskatchewan. The researcher invited six Chinese graduate students to engage in this study. These participants consisted of males and females.

3.4.2 The Period of Time Being in Canada

The participants resided in Canada for at least 6 months to allow for adaptation to the English-speaking environment. During this period of struggling to adapt to using English like local people, they employed various approaches. It was difficult to explore the changes in English learning strategies from those who just arrived in Canada or only are immersed in the English-speaking environment for short time.

3.4.3 The Informal and Formal Learning

The differences between learning the target language in formal and informal settings in Canada and in China may lead to changes of English learning strategies. Some of the participants learned English in formal class settings, such as ESL classes in Canada, while others should seek to improve their English proficiency by studying and living in Canada. All of these participants have learned English in China in English classes. The experiences in English classes in China influenced the English learning of these participants after they went abroad.

3.5 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues that may arise during a study, and how to deal with them, are concerns for every researcher. Johnson and Christensen (2000) defined research ethics as “a guiding set of principles that are to assist researchers in establishing goals and reconciling conflicting values” (p. 63). The following actions have been taken to address any ethical concerns that might arise in this research.

3.5.1 Informed Consent

Before interviews, participants received an informed consent form that should include what they would do while participating in this study, what information they would provide for the researcher, and where the data collected would be used (Gall et al., 2007). It was the participants’ right to refuse to engage in or withdraw from this study without any penalty. In the informed consent, the researcher asked to record interviews. Before conducting interviews, the researcher confirmed again that participants agreed to be recorded by an audio recorder.

3.5.2 Confidentiality

It is possible that participants may feel uncomfortable as their inner feelings are disclosed to the researcher or the readers of a study (Gall et al., 2007). The researcher should protect participants from this sense of insecurity by ensuring the confidentiality of their identities. To ease such discomfort participants selected pseudonyms for themselves in interview transcripts and taped recordings so their identities were difficult to be discovered by others, and their personal information was private from the public (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

3.5.3 Privacy

Another measure of protecting participants’ personal information was conducting the interviews in a private and quiet place. The researcher suggested participants meet with the researcher in such a place so that both the participants and the researcher would not be distracted and so be better able to focus on the discussion.

3.6 Trustworthiness

To ensure this study was trustworthy, the researcher strove to reduce research bias, conduct pilot testing and member checking, and improve the trustworthiness in data

collection and analysis.

3.6.1 Researcher Bias

The researchers of qualitative research show a propensity for incorporating their personal experience insights into the studies. Such bias may be shunned by the reflections of a researcher. One of the most powerful reflections is “negative-case sampling” (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 207). It means that a researcher endeavors to search for the findings that contradict the researcher’s previous assumptions and expectations of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). To reduce bias, the researcher reflected on the examples that implied opposite results to assumptions.

3.6.2 Pilot Testing

Conducting a pilot study is an indispensable part of a reliable and valid study. Not only would it enable a researcher to acquire ideas that may be useful to the findings, but it would also assist a researcher in being familiar with the procedure of undertaking a study (Borg & Gall, 1989). In this study, the researcher undertook a pilot study in which two Chinese students were invited to participate. They met the criteria of selecting participants of this study. These two participants did not engage in the main study because they would know what the researcher would like to find and therefore may have intended to answer in ways that would support my predictions about what is occurring.

3.6.3 Member Checking

Member checking is known as “a process of in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (Creswell, 2005). This study benefited from conducting member checking because participants were able to point out which part of interpretations were not fair or accurate (Creswell, 2005). Asking participants to check the interpretations occurred during the interviews or after data collection in informal situations (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). In this study, after transcribing participants’ words verbatim, the researcher provided them with transcripts. They modified the parts of the interpretations that were not consistent with their real opinions.

3.6.4 Trustworthiness in Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher recorded interviews after participants agreed. Employing mechanical equipment to record data plays a key role in improving the validity of research (McMillan &

Schumacher, 1997). Depending on a researcher to write notes may result in the neglect of some vital information during interviews. A researcher might focus too much on writing notes to ask questions in a timely way. Furthermore, mechanical equipment, such as audio tape recorders, video tape recorders, and cameras, can record every account of participants. A researcher can review participants' accounts multiple times after interviewing. The recorded accounts also allow others to check what has been said by participants, which is helpful to build trustworthiness.

3.6.5 Peer Translator

To assure the accurate translation of participants' accounts from Chinese to English, a peer translator assisted me in checking this translation. This translator was from China and completed a Master's degree in Education in Canada. Therefore, this translator had adequate knowledge of both Chinese and English, which qualified her to check the translation.

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher utilized interviews as the method of collecting data in this study. With regards to research probing participants' language learning strategies, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) stated that collecting data by interviews is in the best interest of this kind of research if participants are willing to share their achievements or constraints of language learning with the researcher.

3.7.1 Interviews

The interviews in this study consisted of two parts. The first part was one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The conversations in the interviews were in Chinese because the language was the first language of both participants and me. Conversations in Chinese facilitated the process of collecting data. Each interview took approximately 90 minutes to obtain adequate data. Gall et al. (2007) articulated that semi-structured interviews "involve asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information" (p. 246). In this study, structured questions were designed to discover changes of English learning strategies and factors leading to these changes. Another part of the interviews was a focus group interview. Creswell (2007) asserted that a researcher is well-advised to conduct focus group interviews when the discussion among all participants will elicit rich information. With a common background of

Chinese graduate students in Canada, participants shared their experiences of learning English in a different context with others. During the focus group interview, a researcher should not be a domineering leader, but a participant who poses questions for discussion (Gall et al., 2007). Although the focus group interview had similar questions with the individual interviews, the questions for the former interview were based on the preliminary analysis of the data from the latter one. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews first to establish trust and friendship between me and each participant through individual interview. Another reason was to improve the quality of data. After one-on-one interviews were conducted, a focus group interview was used to collect richer and deeper data in the same topic as the data from the individual interviews.

3.7.2 Analysis

The first step of analyzing data was the transcription of participants' accounts. Transcription refers to "the process of transforming qualitative research data, such as audio recordings of interviews or field notes written from observations, into typed text" (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 426). The researcher transcribed data from audio recording into texts on a computer. The original recording data were kept in a safe place after the transcription. Then the researcher coded the data. The process of coding data was to "mark segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names" (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 427). The next step was identifying themes in the transcripts. Lastly, the researcher wrote the thesis according to the analysis of data.

3.7.3 Data Collection Method

Interview was the method employed to collect data in this study. The one-on-one semi-structured interview began with casual conversation to create a comfortable environment and establish participants' trust in me. Some questions were asked to confirm participants' background information, such as how long they have been learning English and how long they have been in Canada. The most vital part was to discover what different English learning strategies the participants employed in Canada, compared to when they were in China, and why they made such changes. Focus group interview was conducted after all one-on-one interviews were completed. All participants were invited to the focus group interview to discuss with peers. Patterns of Chinese graduate students' English learning strategies in

Canada were confirmed by the focus group interview.

3.7.4 Procedure

The procedure of this research was divided into seven steps: First, selecting two Chinese graduate students to engage in the pilot study; second, conducting the pilot study and discovering valuable insights for the main study; third, inviting another six Chinese graduate students to be the participants of the main study; fourth, interviewing the participants in a one-on-one format and focus group format; fifth, confirming the accuracy of the interpretation by asking participants to participate in member checking; sixth, inviting a peer translator to aid in checking the accuracy of the translation of participants' accounts; seventh, analyzing data collected from interviews.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented the methodology that was adopted for this research. This was qualitative research with the method of narrative inquiry in the paradigm of constructivism. The participants of this research were six Chinese graduate students from a Canadian university. The data of this research were collected through individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview. Conducting interviews was expected to provide insight into Chinese graduate students' changes of English learning strategies after moving to Canada.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES

In this chapter, the researcher reported the narratives of participants. To protect their identities, a pseudonym was used for each participant. They were named as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant E, Participant F, and Participant G. The researcher hopes to share the researcher's story with other participants, as well as the readers of this paper.

The stories of these participants were collected through semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group interview. All participants supported this research and provided rich data. We had revealing communications. Although these communications shared commonalities, each participant had a different story to tell. Each participant's story is narrated in two parts: in China and in Canada, to show the significant changes of their English learning strategies in two different contexts.

Participant A is a 23-year-old student who studies in a MBA program. Participant B is a 24-year-old student studying Biochemistry. Participant C is a 27-year-old doctoral student at the College of Public Health. Participant E is a 24-year-old student who is participating in a Chemical Engineering Master's Program. Another engineering major student is Participant F who is 25 years old. Participant G (23 years old) belongs to the college of Geography.

The data were collected through one-on-one interviews (each about 90 minutes) and a focus group interview (about 90 minutes). All these interviews were conducted in the places where these participants felt comfortable and where privacy was assured. The researcher audio recorded these interviews based on participants' consent and then transcribed their accounts from these audio recorded interviews into texts through a computer.

4.1 Participant A

4.1.1 Participant A's English Learning Experiences in China

A is from a southwestern city of China. She started learning English in grade 5. After graduation from elementary school, she participated in a foreign language secondary school. This kind of secondary school was characterized by an emphasis on the importance of foreign languages, especially English. The students of the foreign language secondary school had morning English classes three days a week and night English classes from Monday to

Thursday. During the English classes, A was asked by teachers to memorize new words and recite texts. To memorize this new information better, A listened to tapes that introduced new words and texts. She believed memorizing new words was an optimal way to establish a solid foundation in her English learning. Besides learning linguistic details, A was encouraged by her English teachers to play roles in texts to imitate the intonation and pronunciation from tapes. The group that imitated the tapes the closest won a prize. English teachers also showed English documentaries pertaining to the content of texts in classes. For example, there was one text about areas near the Alps so teachers showed a short documentary pertaining to countries around the Alps.

Outside English classrooms, A enjoyed listening to English songs, watching English movies, and playing English computer games. Listening to and singing English songs was one way A used to learn English. Singing English songs provided A with an opportunity to practice spoken English. A reflected, “Although I only sang English songs with several close friends, to some extent, I was speaking English.” A also enjoyed watching English movies. When she was a child, she liked watching English cartoons. Her affection for English movies gradually changed from cartoons to romantic movies, including *Titanic*. A watched English movies with Chinese and English subtitles. If A knew some English vocabulary or expressions from English movies, she would have a sense of achievement. A began playing computer English games in grade eight. A reflected, “I was a fan of English computer games, such as Minecraft. I learned a great deal of English words from these games, especially nouns, such as soil and sand.”

A accessed native English speakers through her foreign teachers at high school and visiting school groups from foreign countries. A foreign teacher English class was arranged once every week. A thought one class every week was not enough for her to practice spoken English. Furthermore, A spent some time with a visiting school group from Germany. The members of the group were the teachers and students of a German high school. They engaged in English classes with A’s class. A chatted with them about their lives in Germany. A considered her English proficiency was the highest in Grade 11 when she was in China because she was confident to talk with native English speakers.

However, in Grade 12, A had to invest a lot of time in English exercises to prepare for

the College Entrance Examination in China. She barely had time to read English stories, watch English movies, and play computer English games. These English exercises included reading comprehensions and grammar choice questions. If A did not obtain a satisfactory score in a practice English test, she would feel upset. She recorded the mistakes she made in the test in a notebook and marked the mistakes with a red marker on the test paper.

A was enrolled in a prestigious Chinese university. A spent little time studying English in her first year of university. When she was a sophomore, she started watching American TV shows because many of her friends recommended she watched them. Her English skills benefited from watching these TV shows. First, her English listening became enhanced because she was accustomed to the intonation and pronunciation of North American English by listening to people's speech patterns in these shows. Secondly, she learned how to use English correctly and appropriately from watching American TV shows. A said, "remembering set phrases, like to do or doing after a verb, was difficult for me. But it would be easier if I saw them in American TV plays. People in these shows used them in specific contexts."

A participated in several English proficiency tests during university. These tests were composed of domestic English proficiency tests (CET4 and CET6, which are College English Test Band 4 and Band 6) and foreign English proficiency tests (TOEFL and GMAT, which are Test of English as A Foreign Language and Graduate Management Admission Test). A passed the domestic tests without preparation. She believed that using traditional methods, such as memorizing vocabulary and doing exercises, was not an efficient way to enhance English. Watching American TV shows, however, was deemed by A to be an optimal way to increase English proficiency, which enabled her to be ready for these domestic English tests.

A desired to participate in a Master's program at a North American university. To apply to North American universities, A decided to participate in foreign English proficiency tests. The first one she took was TOEFL. A attended a TOEFL training course at an English tutoring school, where she learned tips and techniques for these tests. During two weeks before attending the test, A also did some exercises from past TOEFL exams. Because her second major was related to business she applied for graduate programs in the business department in North American universities. This was the reason why A took part in GMAT

test. This test was more difficult than TOEFL for A because it emphasized testing the ability to analyze logical relations in English. After obtaining satisfactory scores in TOEFL and GMAT, A applied to several universities in America and Canada. She ultimately chose to attend a Canadian university.

4.1.2 Participant A's Sojourn in Canada

A arrived in Canada in September, 2013. She lacked the courage to talk with others in English because she felt she did not have enough vocabulary to accurately express her opinions. If others did not understand what she was trying to say, she would feel embarrassed and nervous. It would be more difficult for her to explain her opinions accurately under embarrassment and strain. Furthermore, A's academic learning was impeded by her insufficient listening ability during classes. During group work, A had to discuss the project with her colleagues for every class. Some of her Canadian colleagues spoke English too fast and some of them had Canadian accents. A could not understand all of what they were saying. Despite her insufficient English proficiency, A felt less pressure in improving English in Canada than in China. In Canada, it was not compulsory to participate in any English proficiency tests.

It took A about three months to be accustomed to the English-speaking environment in Canada. During this period, an organization called *Power to Change* provided assistance with her assimilation into the language environment. Power to Change is “a student group that specializes in discipleship and evangelism” (2009, facebook). This student group organized activities regularly for university students to acquire information about Christianity. A said, “Although I did not have any faith, this organization provided international students with a great opportunity to interact with each other and with Canadians. I really enjoyed these interactions.” After staying in Canada for three months, A was adjusting to the English-spoken environment in Canada. Talking with others in English was no longer a daunting task for her. A strove to improve her English proficiency to express her opinions in English accurately. If others did not understand her, she would not feel that embarrassed and nervous. Instead, she would explain things in another way, or draw what she wanted to say on paper. A also improved English proficiency by interacting with her colleagues in classes. Collaborating with others in group projects was usually used as an assessment method in

classes in her graduate program. To complete a project, A positively engaged in group meetings and gave presentations to the whole class. A reflected, “I forced myself to discuss with my group members. If I did not gain the most benefits from the English-speaking environment here, it would be not likely to improve my English anywhere.”

4.2 Participant B

4.2.1 Participant B’s English Learning Experiences in China

B is from a southern city in China who started learning English in grade three. The English classes she took in her elementary school were introductory classes and only taught students some patterns of English pronunciation. Therefore, B had formal English classes since grade seven.

Under the guidance of her English teacher at the junior high school, B was dedicated to improving her English pronunciation. B subscribed to English magazines that came with complimentary English tapes or CDs. She imitated appropriate English pronunciation from these materials. The teacher also encouraged students to enhance English pronunciation by playing roles. B benefited from participating in playing roles in English movie voicing competitions. She played one role in a classic English show *CATS*. Her team won the second prize in the English movie voicing competition. This experience bolstered her confidence in her English learning.

B continued using English learning strategies she’d used in junior high school when she was in high school. The importance of imitating authentic English materials was still valued by B. She grabbed every opportunity to participate in English activities. Unlike most Chinese students, B did not consider that taking a large number of English exercises would assist with the examination. B only did English exercises arranged by teachers. She repeated reading English texts until she was able to incorporate all the information from the texts.

B was enrolled in a university located in northern China. She attended public English classes and oral English classes during university. In the public English classes, teachers usually analyzed a long text. In the oral English classes, the instructors showed English movies. Students played roles in these movies at the final exam of the oral English classes.

B showed an interest in studying abroad during university. Her university collaborated with the Canadian university in some projects where B is currently doing her Master’s degree.

Therefore, B had enough access to all the information about these projects. When the faculty of the Canadian university visited B's university, B welcomed them. Then B decided to apply for the Master's program in the Canadian university and was enrolled.

4.2.2 Participant B's Sojourn in Canada

B arrived in Canada in December, 2013. Insufficient English listening ability constrained B from being attuned to the Canadian English-speaking environment. She learned that English in Canada was different than what she learned from textbooks in China. English from textbooks in China was formal and often outdated. Consequently, if Canadian people spoke informally or used modern English with B, she had problems understanding them. B reflected, "The colleagues in my lab invited me to have dinner with them. When they chatted, I had no idea what they were talking about." Even if B understood others, she did not know how to respond in appropriate English due to her lack of knowledge of common English expressions.

B attended a large number of presentations and seminars in her Master's program. She was capable of understanding only 10% of what others said. Another obstacle B was confronted with was the reading of professional articles in her major. Reading professional articles requires knowledge of language, terms and background of a specific field. If B read an article in a field that she had never touched before that included new terms, it would take her two days to read an article.

B was immersed in an English-speaking environment when working and studying in the building of her lab. She and two other girls were the only Chinese students in the building. Others were Canadians and international students. B conversed with them in English. It was common for B not to speak a word of Chinese in any given day. Every time she greeted her colleagues, technicians, or cleaners in the building, she engaged in small talk with them. B realized if she responded to their greetings, she would have more opportunities to chat with them. Through these interactions, she learned how to use English appropriately. The next time she talked with others, she applied what she learned from previous interactions. Furthermore, the staff in her building was friendly and helpful to B. They often invited B to engage in their activities. For example, B was invited to join in an eight-day trip to an island. During those eight days, B was totally immersed in the English-speaking environment. These

people offered B great opportunities to interact with native English speakers. Every time B did not understand what they said, she asked for a detailed explanation. These colleagues were patient to pin down what B did not understand. If B did not know how to say something in English, she would describe this thing in detail. B said, “One time I tried to say a word ‘bridesmaid’. But I forgot the word in English. I described the word in a sentence ‘the lady stands beside the one who is going to be married.’”

To complete assignments, B read a multitude of professional articles. She learned appropriate ways to write professional papers from the authors of the articles. Her supervisor and colleagues assisted her in reviewing and polishing her assignments. Her reading speed benefited from reading a large number of articles. B also organized and highlighted her reading. She would read the abstract of an article before reading the main body of the article. From the abstract, B acquired the information that would tell her where she could find the parts she was looking for, which she read intensively. B commented, “I think the efficiency of reading means reading with an object and obtaining information that I need.” In addition, her vocabulary of terms increased thanks to her efforts to verify the meanings of the terms. B combined the task of memorizing a term with its meaning in an article. When the term appeared again in another article, B would know the meaning of the term.

B still endeavored to be attuned to the English-speaking environment. She has made great progress in her English proficiency. She has confidence that her English proficiency will improve gradually. Her colleagues commented that she has been capable of understanding what they say even when they use informal English expressions and idioms. If no new words appear in a conversation, B is able to understand completely what her colleagues are saying. B can also understand approximately 80% of the content of presentations and seminars. Additionally, B works to improve her skills in reading professional articles. She participated in some courses to be familiar with the background of her research field. With the increasing vocabulary of terms and the knowledge of the background, it takes her two hours to finish reading a professional article in her research field. B thinks she should still strive to enhance her spoken English as she is still not confident she can fully express her opinions accurately in English.

4.3 Participant C

4.3.1 Participant C's English Learning Experiences in China

C came from a northern city in China. In grade three, she started learning English. During her elementary school period, C memorized new words by reciting texts. She developed a special method of reciting texts as she imagined she was telling a story when she was reciting a passage of text. C's father not only encouraged her to recite texts, but also provided assistance in improving C's English pronunciation. He bought a multitude of English tapes for C and asked her to imitate pronunciation from these tapes. By listening to C's text reciting, he reminded her that she should rectify the pronunciation mistake of phoneme "th". C reflected, "When my father told me I made mistakes in the syllable 'th', I thought it was so ridiculous because English teachers never told me I made mistakes in this syllable. But right now I really appreciate my father's help in my English pronunciation." At her high school, C did not spend as much time learning English as she did at junior high school. She only regarded English as a compulsory subject. Except for completing the assignments for English classes, C invested her time in learning the subjects she was interested in.

After attending university, C realized the importance of adequate English proficiency. This realization was generated by several frustrating experiences, one of which occurred when she attended a public English lecture. The lecturer was a native English speaker. During the question and answer section, C asked the lecturer a question in English. The lecturer had difficulty understanding C's question. C felt embarrassed and frustrated. She reflected, "I have learned English for more than ten years. But a native English speaker still could not understand my English. I felt what I have learned had been wasted at that moment."

C had a strong motivation to study abroad during her college study in China. Her major in Master's level was in veterinary science and she was interested in conducting further research in this field. Therefore, she determined to apply for doctoral programs in this field to Western universities. To meet the language requirement for applications, C employed a variety of approaches to improve her English proficiency.

The first approach focused on increasing vocabulary. To memorize new words, C copied words from vocabulary books. However, she quickly forgot words that she copied.

Then she recited articles every morning. She memorized the meaning and the usage of every new word in these articles. Another method of applying English to actual use was the reading of English magazines. When reading English magazines, C came across some English words and expressions that she'd read before. The discovery provided C with an opportunity to strengthen her understanding of these words and expressions because they appeared in articles with specific contexts. C reflected,

Combining the contexts with these words and expressions was an efficient method of understanding and memorizing the English words and expressions. Every time I discovered familiar words and expressions from an article, I felt glad because it was actually a way of applying English.

C also practiced her English pronunciation during her morning English reading. She imitated the pronunciation of words from the tapes of short fairy tales. After three months, she made noticeable progress.

4.3.2 Participant C's Sojourn in Canada

Because of her efforts in learning English, C acquired a satisfactory score on the language proficiency test. C chose to participate in a doctoral program at a Canadian university. She arrived in Canada in September, 2012 and has stayed in Canada for almost two years. During the process of adapting to the English-speaking environment in Canada, C's English accent made her interactions with colleagues in her lab less smoothly. These colleagues were composed of international students and Canadian people. When C conversed with them in English, they had difficulty in understanding C's English.

C strove to improve English by using English in everyday life. She maximized opportunities of using English. To begin with, C made efforts to interact with her colleagues in the lab. Most of her colleagues were international students. C took initiatives to interact with them. She invited her colleagues to have lunch or coffee together and conversed with them in English. If C did not know how to say a thing in English, she would describe the thing to make it easier for the other person to understand. In addition, C liked participating in social activities. For example, she attended sermons in a church. At the beginning, C was just intrigued by religious culture. She gradually made friends with other people who also went to church and enjoyed spending time with them. Moreover, C lived in a university residence on

campus where she shared a unit with five roommates, who were all from different countries. Some of them were Canadians, and some of them were from China. Others were international students from other countries. C's English proficiency benefited from having roommates from different countries. C said,

We share the living room in our unit. I enjoy chatting with my roommates in the living room. I learn a great number of authentic English words and idioms from interactions with my roommates. If I do not know a thing in English, they will tell me. I will also ask them how to speak English.

With her efforts, C's English proficiency improved after staying in Canada for almost two years. The first obvious improvement was in her listening ability. C was not hindered due to not being able to understand what other people said in English. When C undertook listening comprehension exercises for the TOEFL test in China, she felt exhausted from the exercises within 20 minutes. However, in Canada she felt energetic even if attending a one-hour lecture or watching a two-hour movie. More progress was made in spoken English. C was capable of speaking English more fluently. Her English accent was gradually removed because of her immersion in an authentic English-speaking environment while working and studying in her lab, as well as socializing with friends from the church and with her roommates. In addition, C obtained enhancement in academic English writing. C benefited from the assistance of her supervisor and a summer student. C reflected, "This summer student provided assistance for me in the revision of my academic writing." Lastly, her improvement in the reading of professional articles should be highlighted. In China, it cost C four days to read an article. She can read an article within one day now.

4.4 Participant E

4.4.1 Participant E's English Learning Experiences in China

E's hometown is located in northwest China. His English learning could be traced to grade four. His elementary school started teaching English classes for students. Meanwhile, he began learning English from his mother, who is an English teacher. His mother taught him the phonetic symbols of English. Then, she used a well-known English textbook in China, *New Concept English*, to teach E English. She analyzed texts for E, which was followed by E to memorizing new words and texts from *New Concept English*. E spent a great deal of time

reading texts aloud and memorizing them. Finishing after-class exercises was also a part of lessons with his mother. E's mother sometimes invited his peers to engage in their English classes. Every student played a role in the dialogues of the texts. To remember new words, E spelled every word letter by letter. Authentic English materials also played a key role in E's experience of learning new English words in China. E's mother retained some authentic English materials, such as English fliers and instructions. E read these materials casually. If he saw a new word, he verified the meaning of it and remembered it with its context in the English materials.

Because what E learned from his mother was at a higher level than what school teachers taught, E outperformed his peers in spoken English. E reflected, "My mother told me to create a natural English environment even if I was in China." A way of creating natural English environment was to watch English shows. E enjoyed watching *Outlook English Talent Competition*, *Action English*, and *Top Talk*. The competition show displayed how English learners at different ages competed to win the final prize. *Action English* introduced the most common idioms and expressions in English. *Top Talk* was about interviewing the important members of different countries' governments. E said,

These shows were spoken in English but with Chinese subtitles. If I did not understand what they said, I could discover the meaning from these subtitles. Watching these shows played a key role in the enhancement of my English listening ability in China.

When E was in high school, he acquired opportunities to interact with native English speakers. A volunteer program supported by the United Nations was organized to improve Chinese students' English proficiency. During summer holidays, volunteers from America visited high schools to have interactions with Chinese students for approximately one month. E was matched with volunteers in his first and second year of high school. During summer holidays, E accompanied the volunteers on a trip around his hometown. He conversed with these volunteers every day and really enjoyed interacting with native English speakers in China.

Because of his higher English proficiency compared with his peers, Participant E did not often attend public English classes. E reflected,

The public English classes in my universities were similar with the English classes at

my secondary schools. To enable students with low English proficiency to obtain higher scores, which emphasizing testing vocabulary, the instructors changed their focuses at the classes. The instructors spent more time on vocabulary.

E had a clear plan on his English learning during his university period. He planned to take all English proficiency tests before his fourth year at university. He designed a procedure for preparing for these tests. Firstly, he memorized vocabulary required for a test. Secondly, he did reading exercises of the test. Thirdly, for foreign English proficiency tests, such as IELTS, TOEFL, and GRE, he attended tutoring classes to learn some tips about taking these tests. Lastly, before taking a test, E undertook exercises from past tests.

E's mother had always encouraged E to study abroad to experience a variety of cultures since he was in junior high school. Additionally, during E's university period, a large number of his peers planned to study abroad after graduating from the university. Therefore, E was urged to participate in foreign universities because of his mother's encouragement and peer pressure. E applied to Canadian universities because he desired to be a permanent resident of Canada after graduating from a Canadian university, and due to huge living and working pressures in China.

E eventually decided to attend a Canadian university where he acquired a scholarship that basically covered his living expenses and tuition fees. The province where the university he attended had the least requirements for permanent resident applicants.

4.4.2 Participant E's Sojourn in Canada

E arrived in Canada in September, 2012. Although he has been in Canada for almost two years, he still feels he has not adjusted to the English-speaking environment in Canada. The reason why he has not adjusted was the existence of so many differences between the backgrounds and cultures of China and Canada. E said, "Assimilating into Canadian culture is considered as being truly adapted to the language environment here." E was confronted with several obstacles when adapting to the language environment. He could not understand what the professors were talking about in his the major courses. Furthermore, he was unable to express his opinions fluently and accurately in English. Without knowing the topic before starting a conversation, he could not prepare himself to speak English fluently. Using English to express his opinions accurately was hindered if he did not have enough time to think about

how to express himself. In addition, his English reading was problematic within limited time frames. A case in point was the undertaking of exams in English. During exams, if E had insufficient time to verify the meaning of every word he encountered, there would be repercussions for his whole understanding of the questions in the exams.

To improve his English proficiency in Canada, E exposed himself to the English-speaking environment. Unlike in China, where he was coerced into learning English with the purpose of acquiring satisfactory scores in English proficiency tests, he enhanced his English proficiency by using English every day in Canada. E met his supervisor regularly. If he encountered a pivotal word or an expression that he could not understand, he would ask for his supervisor to explain it in an easier way. E employed the same strategy when he conversed with colleagues in his lab. The majority of these colleagues were international students. He asked for a detailed explanation of the pivotal word he had problems understanding from the colleagues whom he conversed with. For a non-pivotal word or an expression, he guessed the meaning based on the context. Another indispensable part of E's enhancement of English proficiency included interacting with his roommates. In the first term, E lived in a university residence building. None of his roommates were capable of speaking Mandarin. During their interactions, they used smart phones as a device to help them understand unknown words. For instance, if E was going to shop at a grocery store, and his roommate asked him to buy an item E did not know, his roommate searched the images of the item on Google. Then E knew the appearance of the item, as well as the corresponding English word of the item.

To acquire more knowledge of writing correctly on academic assignments, E attended a part-time advanced English writing course at an ESL center. The purpose of the course was to facilitate English learners' academic writing. For example, the course taught students how to write emails, as well as the differences between formal and informal writing. E's experience in this course was different from the English classes he attended in China. The advanced English course was more casual and flexible. At the beginning of every class, the instructor of the course distributed the outline of the class to students. Although the outline was established, the content of the class varied based on the interactions between the instructor and students. The instructor also designed a variety of activities for students to apply what

students learned in the class. In contrast, the content of English classes in China was completely decided by teachers; the paucity of activities in the class made the class monotonous and discouraging. However, E admitted that the root cause of the tedious English classes in China was the large number of students in every class. The number ranged from 50 to 100. For an English class with at least 50 students, it was logistically difficult to facilitate class participation.

After staying in Canada for almost two years, E has made great progress in English proficiency. Spoken English is the part where he has made the greatest progress. With improvement in vocabulary, E's spoken English is fluent because he can find the appropriate words to express his opinions during conversations. In his research area, he is capable of talking with his supervisors and colleagues without any obstacles. Furthermore, E tends to use English in a Canadian way. Through the application of what he learned from interactions with his supervisor, colleagues, and roommates, E realizes that the English he learns in Canada is different from the English in the textbooks in China. The English he learned in China was outdated and too formal for conversations. Another obvious improvement in English was E's listening ability. He can now understand Canadian English. For others with accents, he can understand what they say if they speak English at a slower speed. His progress in writing and reading is not as great as it is in speaking and listening. E said, "The opportunities to practice writing and reading are less than the opportunities to speak and listen to English."

4.5 Participant F

4.5.1 Participant F's English Learning Experiences in China

F is from a northern city that is with more than ten million people living there. F started learning English from grade three at an elementary school. English teachers at the school emphasized students' abilities to recite texts and memorize vocabulary. Students spent the majority of time in English classes following teachers to read texts and memorize new words. To memorize new words, F listened to English CDs while repeating the pronunciation of these words. Also, F participated in after-class tutoring English classes from grade three to grade five at the elementary school. The instructors of these classes employed a textbook called *New Concept English* to give English classes based on the traditional methods. F

reflected, “The scenarios at the after-class tutoring classes were similar with the English classes at the school. Teachers guided students to recite texts and memorize vocabulary, which was tedious and monotonous.” F was reluctant to participate in the tutoring classes. However, he was coerced into taking these classes due to pressure from his parents. His parents heard from relatives that their children attended and benefited from these classes. These discouraging English classes in schools and after-class tutoring schools adversely affected F’s motivation to learn English. F learned English using these traditional methods while in secondary school. English teachers checked students’ English exercise books regularly. If teachers summarized English grammar for students, F would take notes and memorized the summaries.

F was enrolled in a university located in his hometown. His major for his bachelor’s degree was computer science. The computer science courses did not have any requirements for English proficiency. Additionally, F considered public English classes were as tedious as the English classes at his secondary schools. Analyzing texts and guiding students to memorize new words were still instructors’ major tasks. Consequently, F barely invested time in learning English in the first year of university. A paucity of time in learning English resulted in his difficulty for acquiring a satisfactory at IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test.

F desired to acquire a satisfactory score at IELTS test because he planned to engage in the cooperative program that offered participants an opportunity to study in a Canadian university for one year. To meet the language requirement to participate in the program, F engaged in IELTS test. The result of the first IELTS test frustrated F because the score was too low to meet the language requirement. F decided to undertake the second IELTS test and spent two months preparing for it. He designed a study plan for the test. Every day, F learned English based on his study plan. F checked the vocabulary by dictating the vocabulary with assistance from software. While the computer software was showing the pronunciation of words, F spelt these words on paper. Furthermore, F got assistance from proficient English users. He engaged in one-on-one English classes at a well-known tutoring school. The instructors of the classes assisted him in enhancing English writing and speaking. To improve spoken English, F met a foreign teacher who was from New Zealand and conversed with the

teacher. In addition, F made efforts to practice English in natural contexts. He conducted dictation exercises from BBC news and the transcripts of IELTS listening sessions.

4.5.2 Participant F's Sojourn in Canada

F's score in the spoken section of his second IELTS test did not meet the requirements to participate in the program at the Canadian university. He obtained a probationary admission from the university with the requirement that he attended a part-time English class during his first term at the university. F received the admission and arrived in Canada in September 2013. After moving to Canada, the lack of opportunities to interact with native English speakers was a constraint for F's English improvement. Participation in the part-time English class required by the university, and English activities held by a local church or an organization known as *Power to Change* enabled F to access native English speakers. F's English proficiency benefited from the part-time English classes at the ESL Center of the university. The biggest difference between the part-time English classes and the English classes in China was the arrangement of seats in classes. In China, students sat in rows. But in the English classes in Canada, students were divided into several groups. Students studied by collaborating in groups in every class. F said, "I preferred the group studying method because it provided me with opportunities to interact with other students from different countries." These interactions facilitated his ability to adapt to a variety of English accents. Also, the instructors of the part-time English classes taught students slang and idioms in specific contexts. Therefore students knew how to use these idioms and slang in the appropriate way. There was also a complimentary English class organized by a local church every Sunday morning. The instructors of the English class were Canadian people who volunteered to assist international students in enhancing English proficiency in Canada. Participants were separated into several groups. Every group was led by an instructor to discuss a passage from the Bible. These instructors also provided assistance in revising participants' papers. After the completion of the revision, the instructor would explain the revision to improve participants' English writing. Additionally, F engaged in activities arranged by an organization called *Power to Change* on Friday evenings. These activities included having suppers, chatting, and playing games with native English speakers and other international students. F made friends through participating in these activities.

In the second term, F transferred from the cooperative program to his current Master's program in the Engineering College. His supervisor was from China. Most of his colleagues working with the supervisor were Chinese students. Consequently, F was confronted with the lack of ample opportunities to interact with native English speakers. To overcome this roadblock, F decided to get a part-time job in the summer at a store whose employees were from different countries. F conversed with them in English. F said, "Although I have stayed in Canada for nine months, My English proficiency still did not meet my expectation. I hope my working experience at the store will contribute to my English proficiency." After staying in Canada for nine months, F has made progress in his spoken English and listening ability. He was able to converse with native English speakers fluently and understand what others said in English. If F encountered obstacles to a specific English word during interactions, he would describe the word with sentences to help people understand what he was trying to say. F considered the most progress he made was in his social ability. In China, he did not enjoy socializing with his friends. However, in Canada, he was forced to search for opportunities to interact with native English speakers and converse with them. To improve English proficiency through interactions with native English speakers, F seized every opportunity that enabled him to interact with these people. In Canada, no one pushed F to learn English. Actually, in his Master's program, the achievement of academic courses was not related to English proficiency. F did not have to make efforts to improve his English proficiency, but one of his purposes to be in Canada was to improve his English proficiency. F said, "I engaged in any activities that enabled me to converse with native English speakers. I chatted and interacted with them. I invited them to hang out together. Not only my English proficiency, but also my social ability was enhanced."

4.6 Participant G

4.6.1 Participant G's English Learning in China

G accessed English from an after-class tutoring school instead of a public school. There were no English classes at G's elementary school. G and his sister attended an after-class English course that emphasized Cambridge's *Young Learners English*. G experienced English classes at a public school, which could be traced from his junior high school. The content of the English classes was guided by the high school entrance examination. English teachers

required students to do listening comprehension exercises, memorize vocabulary, and write compositions. G reflected, “At the first, I resorted to rote-learning to memorize vocabulary. I spelt out every letter of a word. I gradually increased my knowledge of English words’ roots, which really contributed to my vocabulary learning.” The same scenario was true of English classes at G’s high school. To enable students to acquire high score at the college entrance examination, English teachers assigned a large number of exercises in connection with English linguistic details for students to practice. With a solid foundation of English linguistic details, G succeeded in acquiring a satisfactory score at the English part of the college entrance examination. Then he was enrolled in a renowned university.

At the first two years of university, G attended public English classes. The content of the public English classes was similar with the English classes at secondary schools. English teachers analyzed texts and guided students to memorize words. G reflected, “Those public English classes played a little role in enhancing my English proficiency. I have mastered the words learned at the English classes at my high school.” However, in the last two years of university, English courses instructed by a foreign teacher played a key role in G’s enhancement of English proficiency. Only students in G’s class were entitled to attend this course because these students excelled their peers in GPA (Grade Point Average). In every class, the foreign teacher distributed some materials to students and divided students into groups. The members of a group discussed with each other the distributed materials in English. G commented, “I really enjoyed this course that provided me with opportunities to practice my spoken and listening English with my peers and the foreign teacher, a native English speaker.” In addition, the foreign teacher not only provided suggestions about G’s English learning, but also assisted G in writing the personal statements and curriculum vitae of his applications for foreign universities.

G’s parents encouraged G to prepare for studying abroad since his first year of university. With encouragement from his parents, G determined to apply for a Master’s program to a North American university. To meet the language requirements for the applications to North American universities, G decided to participate in GRE (Graduate Record Examination) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) Test.

G devoted two months to prepare for the GRE. During these two months, G was absent

from major courses at his university. He rented a room to study, where he memorized GRE vocabulary and did GRE exercises. In terms of the writing section in GRE, G remembered composition templates. He practiced the templates and excellent expressions he learned from GRE readings while doing composition exercises. With regards to reading comprehension, G adopted two strategies to improve GRE reading. The first one was to do reading comprehension exercises as much as he could. The second strategy was to read a passage with purpose. G experienced huge stress when he prepared for GRE. Listening to music aided G in relieving the pressures of preparing for GRE. Despite the assistance from music, the stress had a detrimental influence on G's health. G reflected, "I puked up several times when I reviewed the GRE vocabulary. But I overcame this difficulty." G's efforts in preparing for GRE Test contributed to his English proficiency, which enabled him to save time in learning English for TOEFL.

4.6.2 Participant G's Sojourn in Canada

G was enrolled in a Canadian university. He was provided with scholarship that basically covered his living expenses in Canada. G arrived in Canada in September, 2013. G was confronted with several difficulties due to his insufficient English proficiency. To begin with, he had problems understanding what professors said during classes. Two reasons were responsible for G's problems in classes. The first reason was inadequate vocabulary in the terminology of his current major. The second reason was lacking knowledge of classes' backgrounds. G said, "The major of my Bachelor degree was Geology. But the current major of my Master degree is Geophysics. The transfer from Geology to Geophysics generated my insufficient knowledge of the backgrounds of my current major." Furthermore, being unable to understand Canadian-style jokes hindered G's communications with his supervisor and colleagues. G said, "I can understand every word, however, I still don't know why others were laughing." G considered the root cause of the problem was the differences between Chinese culture and Canadian culture. As a Chinese boy who'd grown up in China, G had not accessed Canadian culture before he studied at the Canadian university. Despite these difficulties, G enhanced his English proficiency gradually in Canada.

Four factors played a key role in G's enhancement of English proficiency in Canada. The first factor was his experience attending a part-time English class. Because G did not

meet the language requirement in the spoken section, he was required to attend the part-time English class at the first term. G learned the commonly used Canadian idioms and expressions from the class. Additionally, another part-time English course arranged by a local church facilitated G's English improvement. This English class was instructed by Canadian volunteers from a church on Sunday mornings. These volunteers released tapes of Bible stories, distributed the transcripts of the stories, and discussed with participants about the stories. The class sometimes focused on English idioms and expressions. Moreover, participation in the activities organized by a local organization known as *Power to Change* was an indispensable part of G's English learning in Canada. These activities were held on Friday evenings. The staff of the organization offered dinners and played games with international students. Participating in these activities provided G with opportunities to speak English with other international students and Canadians. In addition, G improved English through interactions with friends from gyms. G enjoyed doing exercise at the gym and he made friends with Canadians who also had zeal for body building.

Through interactions with Canadians and international students in English, G made great progress in English listening and speaking. Most of G's Canadian friends were young people who spoke English at a fast speed. G said, "Conversing with my Canadian friends facilitated my adaptation to English speakers who also spoke English fast." In terms of progress in spoken English, G learned the most up-to-date English expressions and idioms through interactions with his friends. What he learned from the conversations with one person would be applied to the conversation with others. G did not improve as greatly in English reading and writing. He had acquired an excellent English reading ability before he studied in Canada. The stagnant level at English writing was due to the requirements for academic writing of G's Master's program that did not require students to have a high English writing ability. G said, "The most common academic writing I conducted was to write a report that analyzed data and explained charts. The report was of short length and not difficult to write."

4.7 The Researcher's Story

4.7.1 The Researcher's Story in China

I am from a southern city in China. I started learning English when I was in grade one. My parents realized the vital importance of mastering English so they encouraged me to

participate in an after-class tutoring English class. The instructor of the class was a retired English teacher. She guided students to learn English phonetic symbols, read texts, and memorize new English words. The scenarios of English classes at the elementary school and junior high school were similar with the after-class tutoring English class. The analysis of the texts was the biggest difference between the English class at the junior high school and at the elementary school. The English teacher at the junior high school analyzed the grammar included in the texts, while there was none of this in the English classes of elementary schools. Thirdly, the English teacher required students to dictate English vocabulary. She said the Chinese meaning of a word, and then students wrote the word on exercise books. Another vital part of English classes was to conduct English exercises. The English exercises focused on reviewing knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary from the textbooks.

I was gradually intrigued by English during high school. Although English teachers at schools still employed traditional methods of imparting English knowledge, I was motivated to learn English through my participation in after-class tutoring English classes. The English classes employed a textbook known as *New Concept English*. The instructor of the class played a key role in motivating me to learn English. She adopted a creative way of assisting students by incorporating the information from texts into her classes. She designed several pictures of every text and led students to recite the texts combined with these pictures. When students combined memorizing these pictures with reciting a text, it actually provided students with the context of the text. This method not only contributed to increasing students' motivation to learn English but also facilitated students' command of English knowledge from the texts. Furthermore, the instructor integrated authentic English materials into her classes. She would show the clips of English movies or TV shows without subtitles and asked students to fill the blanks of movie lines. It was my first time seeing English movies and TV shows.

Under the inspirational teaching from the instructor, I realized the central importance of learning English naturalistically. In other words, I needed to access authentic English materials. I watched a large number of English movies released at local cinemas. Furthermore, I subscribed to some bilingual magazines with English and Chinese. These magazines included readable English articles that focused on various fields, such as English movies and

news. Most of these articles were excerpted from foreign magazines. I read the English parts first and then compared my understanding with the translation of Chinese. Reading these English articles enabled me to expand my vocabulary and acquire knowledge of Western culture.

Because of my interest in English, I chose English as my major of my Bachelor degree. I expected that the courses of my major would facilitate my ability to use English, especially spoken English. However, the instructors of the courses still adopted traditional methods to impart English knowledge, like my English teachers at secondary schools. These courses and instructors frustrated me. Therefore, I decided to improve my English proficiency through my own efforts. The first strategy I conducted was listening to BBC or VOA news in the morning and imitated the pronunciation from the news. Conducting dictation practice of English news was another method of incorporating information from English news. Moreover, watching American TV shows made great contributions to my enhancement of English. During my university, I was intrigued by American TV shows. These TV shows not only entertained me, but also contributed to my English pronunciation and knowledge of the most updated English expressions and idioms. In other words, when I watched an episode of a TV show, I imitated the English pronunciations from the voice of the actors.

Under the influence of English movies and TV plays, I aspired to study abroad upon graduating from university. My parents supported and encouraged me to study abroad. To meet the language requirement of applying to foreign universities, I participated in IELTS tests. At the first time of participating in the IELTS test, I prepared for the test in the same way that I studied for previous English tests. I memorized a great deal of vocabulary, conducted exercises of past IELTS examinations, and recited writing models for the writing section of IELTS tests. I acquired satisfactory scores in listening and reading sections but low scores in speaking and writing sections. To improve my spoken and written English, I engaged in an online course that enabled me to practice spoken and written English with native English speakers. In every online spoken English class, a native English speaker corrected the mistakes of my English pronunciation and provided suggestions on how to use some English expressions and idioms in an appropriate way. My English writings were evaluated by native English speakers. The evaluator edited my writing and provided me a

score based on the evaluation standard of IELTS test. A Chinese teacher explained the editing for me and trained me how to write English academically and formally. I spared no efforts to prepare for the IELTS test and finally improved my scores in spoken and written sections.

4.7.2 The Researcher's Experiences in Canada

I was enrolled in a Canadian university and arrived in Canada in August, 2012. Before going to the city where the Canadian university was located, I visited my uncle, the cousin of my father who lived in Calgary. I stayed with my uncle and his family for one week in Calgary. After one week, I went to the city where the Canadian university was located. I began my studies at the Canadian university. The biggest obstacle I was confronted with was my inadequate English listening and speaking abilities. Most courses of my Master's degree program were instructed in the mode of a seminar. Instructors invited students to discuss during the class. Students were sometimes divided into different groups to conduct group discussions. I had difficulties understanding what my colleagues said in the classes. Another difficulty I had was that I was unable to speak English fluently and appropriately. As a result, I was reticent to speak in the classes.

A part-time English course assisted me in removing the English barrier. Because I did not meet the language requirement in the spoken section of IELTS test, I was required to participate in a part-time English course at the language center of the Canadian university. The participants of the course were international students who were from various countries. Conversing with these international students in the class enabled me to adapt to different English accents. Furthermore, the teaching method employed by the instructor of the course was different from English teachers in China. English teachers in China usually play a dominant role at the class. Students are only passive receptacles of knowledge imparted by teachers. The knowledge focuses on linguistic details that were the central part of English examinations instead of practical English. In contrast, the instructor of the part-time English course encouraged students to learn English through group discussions. To facilitate students' adaptation to the English-speaking environment, the course emphasized the most commonly used English expressions and idioms. A variety of activities were undertaken at the class. For instance, to bolster students' confidence in speaking English, every student was encouraged to conduct a presentation. The course was engaging and useful for acquiring knowledge of

practical English.

With assistance from the part-time English course, I took initiatives to be involved in the discussions in the courses of my major. I carefully reviewed the papers that would be discussed in class and prepared my opinions in advance. Despite my habit to be reticent during discussions, I encouraged myself to express my opinions. The instructors welcomed every participant of the course to ask questions. I overcame my shyness to ask questions. In terms of a presentation task, I recited the transcripts of presentation and practiced giving a presentation a large number of times. The practice facilitated my performance at the formal presentation. All the efforts I made bolstered my courage in conversing with English speakers in English.

I aspired to take advantage of the English-spoken environment. To achieve the goal, I searched for opportunities to interact with English speakers outside classes and watched English movies. To begin with, I engaged in volunteer activities. I visited local websites that released volunteer information and volunteered for a variety of events and organizations. Additionally, I held a part-time job at a fast food restaurant. The employees of the restaurant consisted of people from different countries. I conversed with them in English. Another method of immersing myself in the English-spoken environment was to watch movies. The movies released in Canada were without any subtitles. My English listening capability benefited from watching English movies because I needed to count on English listening to understand movies without subtitles.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher focused on six participants' English learning experiences in China and in Canada. These six participants were Chinese graduate students who were between 23 years old and 27 years old. They are participating in different graduate programs, such as engineering and geology in a Canadian university. These participants used different English learning strategies in two contexts. The memory strategies and the cognitive strategies were mostly adopted by these participants to learn English in China. After moving to Canada, these two categories of strategies were replaced by compensation strategies and social strategies. More details on these changes and the reasons for these changes are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the researcher analyzed participants' narratives through Oxford's (1990) classification on language learning strategies. The narratives analyzed in this chapter consisted of two parts; Participants' English learning experiences in China and in Canada. The participants in the ESL (English as a second language) context revealed significant changes in the choice of English learning strategies. In this chapter, the researcher also attempted to synthesize those changes and to analyze these in relation to the literature on language learning strategies.

5.1 Participants' English Learning Experiences in China

In the EFL (English as a foreign language) environment of China, these six participants used a variety of English learning strategies to learn English. All participants were motivated to acquire high scores at English proficiency tests, which enabled them to keep strong motivation on improving English. However, this strong motivation compelled them to emphasize vocabulary. This is not an appropriate way of improving practical skills of a language.

5.1.1 Strategies in Vocabulary

In China, participants employed five key strategies to improve vocabulary. First, they used repetition, a cognitive strategy that involves "saying or doing something over and over" (Oxford, 1990, p. 45). The examples of repeating include listening to something several times and imitating a native speaker. For example, Participant E used repetition when he spelled every word letter-by-letter several times to memorize it. Participant A and Participant F listened to recorded words repeatedly while they strove to memorize those new words. Participant C memorized words by copying them from vocabulary books and repeatedly reading them.

A second strategy used was structured reviewing, a memory strategy defined as "reviewing in carefully spaced intervals" (Oxford, 1990, p. 45). In secondary schools, participants' English teachers had them review vocabulary by reading and doing dictation. Participants E and G spent significant time reviewing vocabulary when preparing for their GRE (Graduate Record Examination) tests. Over the 15 months, Participant E reviewed the

vocabulary book for the GRE test five times. Participant G also reviewed this vocabulary book multiple times. He gradually mastered the vocabulary; therefore, he spent less time reviewing the book as he progressed with his learning. Participant G wrote down words he had difficulty memorizing on cards and took these cards with him to periodically review the vocabulary cards whenever he was able.

A third strategy, also a cognitive strategy, was “analyzing expressions” or “determining the meaning of a new expression by breaking it down into parts” (Oxford, 1990, p. 46). With this strategy, Participant G learned the meanings of prefixes, suffixes, and roots in order to learn new words.

A fourth strategy, another memory strategy, was “placing new words into a context” where language learners “place a word or phrase in a meaningful sentence, conversation, or story in order to remember it” (Oxford, 1990, p. 41). For example, Participant C initially tried memorizing new words by reciting texts but found this to be a daunting task. Participant C eventually developed a special method of reciting texts: while reciting, she imagined she was telling a story. Participant B also combined memorizing new words with reciting texts because it provided the contexts of using these words and expressions.

A fifth strategy, another cognitive strategy, was translating, which is defined as “converting a target language expression into the native language; or converting the native language into the target language” (Oxford, 1990, p. 46). For participant F, the only activity in English classes during secondary schools was translating competitions, where every student was given a sheet of paper with Chinese definitions of new words on one side and blank spaces on the other side. Students who filled in the blanks with the correct English words would get rewards.

5.1.2 Learning English in a Natural Context

Learning English from authentic English materials contributed to participants’ English enhancement in China. Participants “practiced the new language in natural, realistic settings” (Oxford, 1990, p. 45). This cognitive strategy was named as “practicing naturalistically” (Oxford, 1990, p.45). Participant A read short stories from Oxford Bookworm Series. She read these world-famous stories at home. Sometimes she brought them to the school and read them in night classes or before sleeping. Participant A considered that reading English stories

enabled her to strengthen what she had learned in English classes as well as outside. Furthermore, listening to and singing English songs were vital to Participant A's practice of English naturalistically because it helped her to practice learning orally. Participant F practiced English naturalistically by watching English movies and playing English computer games. He practiced English by listening and imitating the pronunciation of English dialogues. English movies with English and Chinese subtitles facilitated his practice. Playing English computer games played a key role in enhancing Participant F's English vocabulary. Participant E also watched English shows with English and Chinese subtitles. These shows included *Outlook English Talent Competition*, *Action English*, and *Top Talk*.

5.1.3 Strategies in Preparing for English Tests

Participants depended on numerous strategies to acquire satisfactory scores in a variety of English proficiency tests. The first one was "reasoning deductively" that is described as "using general rules and applying them to new target language situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 46). This strategy is an integral part of cognitive strategies and facilitates Chinese students' English proficiency tests. English proficiency tests in China mostly consisted of multiple-choice questions and emphasized evaluating participants' ability to use English grammar knowledge. To improve the ability, Participant F devoted a large amount of time to undertaking English exercises that required applying English grammar knowledge.

To meet the language requirements of applications to foreign universities, participants desired to acquire satisfactory scores at foreign English proficiency tests, such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), and GRE. These participants employed meta-cognitive strategies in preparation for their foreign English proficiency tests. The meta-cognitive strategy some participants used in preparing for their tests was "organizing". "Organizing" refers to "understanding and using conditions related to optimal learning of the new language" (Oxford, 1990, p. 139). Participant G designed a study plan for his GRE test. He organized his English learning based on his study plan. For instance, he would calculate in advance how many days it would take to review a GRE vocabulary book once. Through his efforts, G gained a command of the GRE vocabulary before he attended the examination. Participant F also organized his preparation for the IELTS test based on his study plan. For instance, he spent four hours in a

day reviewing vocabulary and another four hours doing exercises. Furthermore, Participant E and Participant G employed a compensation strategy to facilitate the reading comprehension part of their GRE tests. They guessed the meaning of information based on the logical relationship between the sentences appearing in the reading part. This strategy “using linguistic clues” is part of the compensation strategies (Oxford, 1990, p. 49).

Another variant of the meta-cognitive strategy was “setting goals and objectives”, which denoted “setting aims for language learning including long-term goals or short-term goals” (Oxford, 1990, p. 139). Participant E excelled in using this strategy. He set an overall goal for his English learning during university, which was to undertake all English proficiency tests before the fourth year of university. Following this, he established short-term goals for every English proficiency test. For instance, he sought to master the vocabulary or finish doing reading comprehension exercises of a test by a specific month.

5.1.4 The Social Strategy Used by Participants

The singular social strategy used by participants in China was “cooperating with proficient users of the new language” (Oxford, 1990, p. 147). The proficient users could be native English speakers or other proficient English users (Oxford, 1990). Participants realized the importance of practicing English with native English speakers. Participant E welcomed and accompanied volunteers from U.S. to visit his hometown in summers during his high school. These volunteers provided assistance in English for students at Participant E’s high school. He conversed with these volunteers in English throughout the summers. Participant F and Participant G obtained opportunities for interacting with native English speakers through their foreign teachers. Participant F’s foreign teacher invited students to have coffee with him and spoke English with students. Participant G benefited from his foreign teacher’s suggestions on his English learning during university. Participant B volunteered to greet faculty members from a Canadian university and interacted with them about Canadian universities in English. Participant F searched for assistance from proficient English users in China. When he was confronted with difficulties in spoken and written English, he participated in one-on-one English tutoring classes. The instructors of the classes aided him in enhancing his spoken as well as written English.

5.1.5 Endeavoring to Search for Practice Opportunities

Participants took initiatives to “seek practice opportunities” (Oxford, 1990, p. 139). This strategy falls under the category of meta-cognitive strategies, which is defined as “seeking out or creating opportunities to practice the new language in naturalistic situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 139). For example, Participant F released the sound of American TV plays when he was doing other things. This provided him an opportunity to be immersed in English-speaking environment. Participant C enjoyed joining in the activity of English corner. The English corner was the activity where Chinese students gathered together and spoke English with others. C seized every opportunity to engage in the English corner because she could practice her spoken English if she met a peer whose English proficiency was at least at the same level as hers.

5.1.6 The Utilization of Affective Strategies

In China, the scores on English proficiency tests played a key role in participants’ opportunities for further education. For instance, the score of the English part at the college entrance examination was vital to participants’ application to prestigious universities in China. The huge stress stemming from the need to obtain satisfactory scores at these tests generated negative feelings, such as anxiety and frustration. To overcome these negative feelings, participants employed affective strategies. The strategy “discussing feelings with someone else” (Oxford, 1990, p. 144) enabled Participant C to share her frustration in English learning with her friend who supported and encouraged her. Participant G used music to keep him distracted from the negative feelings of English learning. Participant A vented her frustration and anxiety through crying. Participant F dealt with these negative feelings by throwing away pens.

5.1.7 Summary of Chosen Strategies

The participants of this study employed a variety of English learning strategies to improve their English proficiency in China. These English learning strategies are divided into six categories of strategies on the basis of Oxford’s classification (1990): memory strategies, cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies, compensation strategies and social strategies. The most two popular categories of strategies employed by these participants were cognitive strategies and memory strategies. Moreover, participants valued

the importance of learning English from authentic English materials. They sought to improve English by watching English movies and TV shows, reading English books, listening to English songs, and playing English computer games. This strategy was named as “practicing naturalistically” (Oxford, 1990, p. 45) as part of cognitive strategies. Furthermore, participants integrated meta-cognitive strategies into their preparation for English proficiency tests. For instance, they designed study plans and prepared for these tests on the basis of these plans. Additionally, in China where there was a lack of an English-speaking environment, participants still made efforts to “seek practice opportunities” (Oxford, 1990, p. 139). A case in point was to consciously think in English. In addition, participants valued the importance of “cooperating with proficient users” of English. They also employed “reasoning deductively” by means of cognitive strategies to facilitate the acquisition of satisfactory scores in English tests. Moreover, confronted with huge stress on account of English proficiency tests, participants adopted affective strategies to cope with their negative feelings.

5.1.8 The Reasons for the Imbalances

An imbalance between linguistic details and communicative skills was a significant factor among participants’ English learning process in China. These participants spent a large amount of time mastering English linguistic details but little time practicing communicative skills. They subsequently realized the importance of practicing English communicative skills. For example, Participant C engaged in the activity of English corner to practice English communicative skills with peers. Participant F and Participant G conversed with their foreign teachers in English. However, these participants’ English communicative skills were still impeded due to the EFL environment in China and the pressure of the English proficiency tests. Yang and Gai (2010) asserted that Chinese students’ ignorance of practicing English communicative skills could be traced to the EFL learning environment in China. The EFL environment in China contributed to participants’ limited exposure to an English-speaking environment. English proficiency tests were also responsible for participants’ unsatisfactory acquisition in English communicative skills (Jin & Yang, 2006; Pan & Block, 2011). Most English proficiency tests in China focused on evaluating participants’ ability of linguistic details but had ignored their communicative skills. Consequently, to acquire satisfactory scores at these tests, participants had to sacrifice their time in practicing English

communicative skills for undertaking exercises related to linguistic details.

5.1.9 The Discussion of Strategies Used in Learning Vocabulary

The strategy “repeating” (Oxford, 1990, p. 45) was popular among participants who memorized English vocabulary. Scovel (1983) and Yu (1984) noted that Chinese students had a tendency for memorization and repetition in their English learning. Rao (2006) discovered that half of the participants in research depended on “writing a word repeatedly to remember it” and “reading and writing a word simultaneously to remember it”. English learners should employ various methods to learn English instead of overly using traditional methods (Rao, 2006). The participants in this research also employed the strategy “repeating” to have a good command of English vocabulary. These participants’ utilization of repetition as the primary method to learn English could be traced to English teachers’ traditional teachings at schools in China. Before attending universities, the English teachers at schools always told these participants that the most efficient way to master English vocabulary was to repeat reading or writing those words, which was one of the major tasks in English classes and for after-class assignments. Consequently, repetition was deemed as an optimal way of learning English vocabulary by these participants.

However, the strategies employed by these participants to master English vocabulary were not limited to repetition. They valued the importance of the meanings of words and the contexts of using the words. Participant G learned new English words through discovering the roots, the prefixes, and the suffixes of words. Participant B, Participant C, and Participant E integrated learning English vocabulary by incorporating new information from texts or English stories.

5.1.10 The Stress from English Proficiency Tests

Most participants experienced huge stress while learning English in China because acquiring high proficiency of English in China facilitated these participants’ inroads into further education. In China, English proficiency tests were geared towards preparing students for entrance test from elementary school onwards. A case in point is the college entrance examination. The higher scores of English proficiency tests participants could obtain, the more likely they would be admitted into prestigious universities.

Due to the pressure of English proficiency tests, some participants suffered from

negative feelings, such as anxiety and frustration. These participants adopted affective strategies to deal with these negative feelings. Unlike the participants in Rao's (2006) study who encouraged themselves to overcome the difficulties from tests, the participants of this research listened to soothing music, sharing feelings with friends, and venting frustration through crying or throwing pens. These participants did not undertake any initiatives to prevent the negative feelings by encouraging themselves. Instead, they had to deal with these negative feelings when they felt anxious and frustrated.

The participants who studied English because of interest in Western culture were more likely to enjoy English learning despite the stress. Participant A was intrigued by English because she was interested in Western classic music and oil paintings. Participant B was curious about the differences between Chinese and English when she imitated English pronunciations from English movies. Participant F's interest in learning English could be attributed to his interest in English computer games. The researcher was motivated to learn English because the researcher was intrigued by English movies and TV plays. These participants and the researcher enjoyed acquiring increasing knowledge of English and Western culture although they felt frustrated or stressed due to insufficient performance at English tests.

5.2 Participants' English Learning Experiences in Canada

After moving to Canada, these participants learned English in an English-speaking environment. They encountered various difficulties improving English in Canada.

5.2.1 Participants' Difficulties in the Adjustment to the Language Environment

These participants were confronted with difficulties in blending into the English-speaking environment. The first difficulty was due to their insufficient English listening ability. These participants could not understand what instructors and colleagues said in majority of classes or seminars. The speaking pace of these English speakers was too fast and they used a large number of terms. Participant G could not understand some part of what professors said at seminars because of his limited knowledge of terms and background on given topics. Participant B's after-class interactions with other English speakers were also affected by her insufficient English listening ability. The English that Participant B learned in China was formal and outdated. If English speakers used informal and updated idioms or

expressions during interactions with her, she had difficulties in understanding what these English speakers said.

Furthermore, it was difficult for participants to converse with English speakers fluently and clearly. The concerns for making mistakes in speaking English hindered Participant A and Participant G's interactions with others. Participant E was unable to use English to express our opinions accurately and fluently due to a lack of the knowledge of appropriate English terms and expressions.

Moreover, the differences between Chinese culture and Canadian culture impeded Participant G and Participant C's interactions with English speakers. Participant G's supervisor enjoyed telling jokes in classes and during interactions with students. Every time when the supervisor told jokes, Participant G was unable to understand why the joke was funny. The same situation occurred during his interactions with his colleagues. He considered the difficulty may be traced to the differences in cultures. Participant C had a problem of having deep communications with Canadians. She considered the root cause of the problem was the differences in living and cultural backgrounds between China and Canada.

Also, some participants encountered barrier to academic readings. These academic readings included a large number of terms. Inadequate knowledge of these terms hampered Participant B and Participant C's understandings of academic texts. In the first few months, it may take them several days to finish reading an article. Participant E was confronted by difficulties in completing academic readings within a limited time, such as participating in a test. When he was taking a test, he had no time to discover the meaning of every word he did not know.

5.2.2 Strategies in Removing Language Barrier

Participants adopted various strategies to overcome these difficulties. The first strategies group was compensation strategies. Li (2005) noted that compensation strategies provided Chinese international student assistance in overcoming roadblocks to interacting. For example, to understand what others said in English, Participant E attempted to guess the meanings when listening. When he conversed with other English speakers in English, he guessed the meanings based on the English words that he had known during conversations. This strategy is often described as "using linguistic clues" (Oxford, 1990, p. 49). Another

strategy employed by Participant E was to guess the meanings based on the contexts of topics and others' gestures. For example, if he talked about research in his field with others, the familiarity with the context of the topic facilitated his understanding of the conversation. This strategy is known as "using other clues" that enabled language learners to "seek and use clues that are not language-based in order to guess the meaning of what is heard or read in the target language, in the absence of complete knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, or other target language elements" (Oxford, 1990, p. 49).

Additionally, some participants "asked others for help" (Oxford, 1990, p. 50). Participant E, Participant G asked our colleagues to explain the information they did not understand during conversations. Moreover, participants employed the strategy "using physical motion" (Oxford, 1990, p. 50) to indicate what they attempted to express. When conversations were constrained by a lack of vocabulary, Participant A drew pictures of the things that she tried to convey in English. Participant B used gestures to indicate the laboratory apparatuses. Participant E employed another strategy of "using a circumlocution or synonym" to reduce the barrier during conversations. This strategy is referred to as "getting the meaning across by describing the concept (circumlocution) or using a word that means the same thing (synonym)" (Oxford, 1990, p. 51). Participant E's interactions with his colleagues in the lab were initially strained by his limited English vocabulary of laboratory apparatuses. He described the appearance of a laboratory apparatus if he did not know how to name the apparatus in English. Then his colleagues told him the accurate word of the apparatus' names in English.

Social strategies were also popular with these participants. The first social strategy employed by these participants was "asking for clarification or verification" that was defined as "asking the speaker to repeat, paraphrase, explain, slow down, or give examples; asking if a specific utterance is correct" (Oxford, 1990, p. 146). When discussing with colleagues, Participant B would ask them to explain words or expressions for her if she did not understand some words or expressions used by them. Her colleagues provided an explanation by using simple words. The second social strategy was "asking for correction in conversation or writing". Participant E benefited from using this strategy to improve academic writing. His supervisor provided him with assistance in improving his written English. The supervisor

revised and polished Participant E's assignments regularly. In this way, he learned how to write English assignments in a formal manner.

The third strategy "cooperating with peers" aided some participants to enhance their English proficiency through "working with other language learners to improve language skills" (Oxford, 1990, p. 147). Participant F and G engaged in a part-time spoken English class during the first term. They improved spoken English when they discussed with classmates who were from different countries and with various accents. Another English course organized by a local church made contributions to Participant F and G's improvement of spoken English. They discussed Bible stories with other international students, which allowed them to practice spoken English. Here, the importance of "cooperating with proficient users of the new language" merits special attention. In Canada, the proficient users include native speaking Canadians or other proficient English speakers. Participant C enjoyed interacting with her roommates who were Canadians and from other English-speaking countries. She learned a large number of useful and relevant English words during her interactions with her roommates. The researcher conducted a language exchange with a Canadian. The researcher taught the Canadian Chinese meanwhile he answered the researcher's questions in English. These experiences of mingling with English speakers contributed to the researcher's English proficiency.

In addition, some participants strove to "develop cultural understanding" that denoted English learners "try to empathize with another person through learning about the culture" (Oxford, 1990, p. 147). Participant A invited her colleagues to have a supper at her home. During the supper, she chatted with them about American TV plays and her future plans for several hours. She felt she had more knowledge of Canadian culture after this supper. Participant B enjoyed spending time at Canadian style restaurants and pubs with her colleagues in lab. B made good friends with these colleagues and gained access to Canadian culture during her interactions with them.

Meta-cognitive strategies were also vital to some participants' English learning in Canada. Participant B depended on the strategy "identifying the purpose of a language task" (Oxford, 1990, p. 139) to improve academic reading efficiency. This strategy was known as "deciding the purpose of a particular task" (Oxford, 1990, p. 139). Confronted with a large

number of articles, Participant B read the abstract of an article before reading the main body of the article. She found the information she needed from the abstract and read the article with the purpose of seeking the corresponding parts with the information. Furthermore, the researcher adopted the strategy “planning for a language task” that assisted in “planning for the language elements and functions necessary for an anticipated language task or situation” (Oxford, 1990, p. 139). To facilitate the participation in group discussions in classes, the researcher read the articles that would be discussed and prepared a speech related to the articles in advance.

Confronted with difficulties due to inadequate English proficiency, affective strategies proved helpful to some participants’ ability to control and manage their emotions. Participant A “made positive statements” to “feel more confident in learning the new language” (Oxford, 1990, p. 143). It was challengeable for Participant A to finish academic readings at major tests within required time. She felt frustrated when she was unable to do that. At this time, she encouraged herself and became confident that she was capable of finishing the academic readings in her next test through persistent practice. Also, Participant A and Participant G gradually overcame the shyness and anxiety of making mistakes. They “pushed ourselves to take risks in a language learning situation, even though there is a chance of making a mistake or looking foolish” (Oxford, 1990, p. 144). Participant A forced herself to express her opinions during group discussions regardless of making mistakes. Participant G was braver to converse with proficient English speakers although he may have sometimes used inappropriate English.

5.2.3 Summary of Chosen Strategies

All participants’ adjustment to the English-speaking environment in Canada was constrained by their inadequate English listening and speaking abilities. To remove this barrier, participants mainly used compensation strategies, social strategies, and meta-cognitive strategies. Compensation strategies were vital to participants when they had difficulties in being understood or understanding what others said. Additionally, social strategies enabled participants to improve English by collaboration with others in Canada. In addition, some participants benefited from using meta-cognitive strategies. The strategy of “identifying the purpose of a language task” (Oxford, 1990, p. 139) facilitated Participant B’s

academic readings. Another meta-cognitive strategy of “planning for a language task” contributed to my participation in group discussions at classes. Also, affective strategies enabled some participants to feel confident by encouraging themselves and have more courage to practice English in spite of making mistakes.

5.2.4 A Possible Reason for Participants’ Inadequate English Proficiency

Several researchers, such as Lee (1997), Lewthwaite (1996), and Senyshyn et al., (2000) have stated that international students’ English improvement in English-speaking countries is impeded by their inadequate listening, speaking, reading, note taking abilities, as well as limited vocabulary. The same scenario holds true for this research. The participants in this research encountered challenges of adjusting to the English-speaking environment in Canada because they were not proficient in listening, speaking, reading English and had not acquired sufficient vocabulary. However, in this research, some of these problems could be traced to these participants’ English learning experience in China. The examination-centered system in China compelled participants to focus on the accuracy of the English they used. As a result, after these participants moved to Canada, they did not have the courage to converse with others in English as it required skills other than accuracy. In addition, the English these participants learned in China was formal and outdated. But the English used by Canadians was informal and current. Consequently, when these participants interacted with Canadians, they had difficulties in understanding what others said. Due to insufficient knowledge of the informal and updated vocabulary, these participants were unable to express their opinions accurately and appropriately.

5.2.5 Having Exposure to the English-speaking Environment

All participants agreed on the importance of making individual efforts to be exposed to the English-speaking environment while staying in Canada. Without individual efforts, simply staying in an English-speaking environment would not facilitate the improvement of English proficiency (Coleman, 1997). In this research, the more exposure the participants had to the language environment, the more beneficial it was to their English improvement.

The use of social strategies played a key role in all participants’ efforts to be exposed to the English-speaking environment. Participants asked for assistance from proficient English speakers, interacted with them, and attempted to assimilate into Canadian culture. But these

participants found it difficult to have deep conversations with Canadians. In other words, these participants hardly resonated with Canadians emotionally. They considered how the problem could be traced to the cultural differences between Chinese culture and Canadian culture. The cultural differences had manifested mainly in terms of values, which was reflected in the difficulty faced by Chinese students in having unhindered communication with Canadians. For instance, some participants found it difficult to find common topics with their Canadian friends during conversations. Even with common topics, participants still discovered the huge difference in culture was a hindrance to their interactions with Canadians.

For these participants, the differences in culture led them to seek emotional support from Chinese friends. They felt more comfortable when they stayed within the Chinese community. But they did not think this would have detrimental influence on their English improvement in Canada because they were capable of balancing their time between Chinese friends and mingling with Canadians.

5.2.6 The Differences between Strategies Used in China and Strategies Used in Canada

These participants changed their English learning strategies after moving to Canada. Table 5.2 demonstrates the strategies used by participants in China and Canada.

Table 5.2: Participants’ choice of English learning strategies in two different contexts

| | Memory Strategies | Cognitive Strategies | Compensation Strategies | Meta-cognitive Strategies | Affective Strategies | Social Strategies |
|-----------------|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| In China (EFL) | Placing new words into a context, Structured reviewing | Repeating, practicing naturalistically, Reasoning deductively, Analyzing expressions, Translating, Taking notes, | Using linguistic clues | Organizing, Setting goals and objectives, Planning for a language task, Seeking practice opportunities | Using music, Discussing your feelings with someone else | Cooperating with peers, Cooperating with proficient users of the new language |
| In Canada (ESL) | Placing new words into a context | Practicing naturalistically | Using linguistic clues, Using other clues, Using mime or gesture, Using a circumlocution or synonym, Asked others for help | Identifying the purpose of a language task, Planning for a language task, Seeking practice opportunities | Taking risks wisely, Making positive statements | Asking for clarification or verification, Asking for correction in conversations or writing, Cooperating with peers, Cooperating with proficient users of the new language, Developing cultural understanding |

As shown in this table, the first change was reducing the usage of memory strategies and cognitive strategies. Instead, compensation strategies and social strategies played central role in participants' English improvement in Canada. They employed compensation strategies to guess the meanings of conversations or writings, as well as overcoming roadblocks to their interactions with proficient English speakers. These interactions were also facilitated by using social strategies. This shift in strategies was closely related to the decreasing number of English proficiency tests that participants undertook. English proficiency tests in China forced participants to focus on linguistic details. Memory strategies were defined as strategies for "storing and retrieving information" and cognitive strategies were known as strategies for "understanding and producing the language" (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006, p. 40). Thus, these two categories of strategies facilitated participants' command of linguistic details. However, in Canada, participants were not required to take any English proficiency tests. In contrast, these participants were encouraged to practice English through everyday application because they needed to overcome the roadblocks to education and living in Canada.

The second change was their increasing willingness to make mistakes and take risks in English learning. Most participants were worried about making mistakes in spoken English during the first few months of staying in Canada. Conversing with others in English was a daunting and intimidating task for them because they felt embarrassed and frustrated when they made mistakes, which led to miscommunication. These participants had high expectations for accuracy, particularly in spoken English. The reason for the high expectation was their strong motivation to acquire satisfactory scores at English proficiency tests in China. They strove to make as few mistakes as possible during these tests so that they were able to acquire satisfactory scores. The high requirement for accuracy had put them under enormous pressure. Another reason was a lack of opportunities to practice spoken English in China. Inadequate practice hindered their courage to take risks in spoken English. However, after these participants moved to Canada, they gradually discovered that making mistakes was acceptable during interactions as long as others could understand what was said. And with more practice, these participants felt increasingly confident when speaking English. Therefore, they were willing to take risks when conversed with others in English and felt less

stressed about the accuracy of their English.

5.2.7 Participants' Progress in English Proficiency

The participants made great progress in listening, speaking, and reading English. All participants improved their English listening ability. Participant A has made considerable adjustments to the speaking speed of Canadians. It was easier for her to understand what professors and colleagues said during group discussions. Participant B acquired feedback from her colleagues that she was more engaged in their interactions because she obtained more knowledge of informal and everyday use of English. Collaborating with other international students in labs enabled Participant E and Participant C to adapt to different accents of English. Participant F and Participant G's adaptation to different English accents benefited from the participation of a part-time English course. Furthermore, all participants improved their spoken English. These participants were capable of speaking English fluently. With the increasing knowledge of vocabulary, they spoke English accurately and appropriately. Their accents were gradually eliminated. Additionally, Participant B and Participant C developed their efficiency of reading professional articles. These two participants' command of terms, their increasing knowledge of the research background of the articles, and their efforts in practice made contributions to their improvement in reading professional articles. Lastly, Participant F made rapid improvements to his social communication by engaging in activities organized by some local organizations. He was an engineering student when he was in China. He was not good at socializing with others until he engaged in these activities.

5.2.8 Participants' Motivations to Improve English Proficiency in Canada

All participants attributed their improvement in English proficiency to the changes in English learning strategies. Compensation strategies assisted them in understanding what others said and in overcoming limitations during interactions. Social strategies facilitated their incorporation of appropriate English and enabled them to practice English with proficient English users. These participants strove to improve their English proficiency in Canada by changing English learning strategies for various reasons. Gao (2003) stated that facilitating studying was a key contributor to Chinese students' motivation to change English learning strategies in foreign countries. Participant C's thrust for making these changes was

inspired by her desire to study in Canada. She was the only doctoral student among participants. She dealt with a large quantity of experimental data, participated in a multitude of research seminars, and read a large number of professional articles. To improve the performance in her research area, Participant C strove to remove language barrier in studying. Financially supported by the Chinese government, she would dedicate herself in her research area in China upon graduation. To acquire updated information in the research area in the world, she would need to read English articles and participate in international conferences. Excellent English proficiency would be vital to Participant C's acquisition of the research information.

In addition, the motivation to be a permanent resident of Canada contributed to Participant E's changes in English learning strategies. This participant had planned to immigrate to foreign countries, such as Canada during his university period. He understood that English proficiency was a key factor in his successful application for a permanent resident status in Canada. Excellent English proficiency not only enabled him to acquire high score in the language part of the application, but also assisted him in finding a promising job in Canada. Also, Participant A and Participant F were motivated to make their objectives more enjoyable through the improvement of English proficiency. Participant A was intrigued by Western oil paintings and classic music since she was in China. After moving to Canada, she was attracted to books about medicine. Participant F was interested in English computer games. The development of English proficiency enabled these two participants to understand their interests in a more articulate manner.

Lastly, all participants showed strong motivations to gain the most benefits from the English-speaking environment in Canada. These participants cherished the opportunities to study and live in Canada because not every Chinese student was qualified to study in a Canadian university. And most of their families invested large sums of money in their education and living in Canada. Not only their families, but the students themselves expected that the English-speaking environment would contribute to their English proficiency. Therefore, these participants yearned for excellent English proficiency since they have been immersed in the English-speaking environment.

5.2.9 Transmission from a Teacher-centered to a Learner-centered Mode

These participants' English learning experiences in China have proven the characteristic of teacher-centered English classes in China. In English classes, teachers played a dominant role and students did everything based on the teachers' instructions. This characteristic was more obvious during participants' secondary schools than during their universities. The common procedure of English classes at secondary schools consisted of several steps. English teachers typically guided students to read and review vocabulary. Then the teachers analyzed texts for students, which was followed by having students undertaken exercises related to linguistic details.

English teachers barely involved students in learning activities in the classes. And the opportunities for engaging in these activities were further reduced during high schools due to the pressure of the college entrance examination. Participants considered English classes offered at their schools to be monotonous and demotivating. However, before attending universities, the idea of not following English teachers' instructions never occurred to them. In universities, because the numbers of English classes were drastically reduced, these participants were finally able to manage their time in learning English. Participant E, Participant F, and Participant G excelled in employing meta-cognitive strategies to manage time in learning English. These three participants designed study plans and learned English based on their plans, as well as by setting short-term or long-term goals. And all participants chose the English learning strategies that maximized the results of learning based on their personal needs.

An interesting finding of this study is that the participants involved in the research did not feel lost or frustrated due to a lack of instructions from teachers or parents after moving to Canada. Gao (2006) stated that Chinese students depended on their teachers and parents to tell them how to learn English in China. The research of Amuzie and Winke (2009) discovered that without assistance from teachers, international students would feel lost at the beginning but would decreasingly rely on teachers to improve English after moving to English-speaking countries.

However, the participants in this research did not feel lost or frustrated when no English teachers instructed them on how to improve English in Canada. These participants had realized the importance of managing English learning through their own efforts during

their study in Chinese universities. These experiences enabled them to be adapted to the English learning environment without assistance from teachers or parents in Canada. In other words, these participants' English learning has transmitted from the teacher-centered mode to learner-centered mode gradually since their university period. They finally completed the transmission after moving to Canada, which means that they are capable of constructing the knowledge of English in their own ways. Despite the language barrier, these participants understood that the optimal way of improving English proficiency in Canada was to blend into the English-speaking environment and socialize with proficient English users. Therefore, negative feelings, such as the sense of being lost or frustrated, did not have detrimental influence on these participants. They enjoyed learning English in Canada also because they were not required to participate in any English proficiency tests. Without the pressure of those tests, these participants found it enjoyable to learn English in Canada.

5.2.10 Participants' Opinions on the Efficiency of English Teaching in China

All participants conceded that English teaching in China made contributions to the improvement of English vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and listening ability. For example, participants were capable of reading English articles and watching English movies with this foundation. However, Participant C and Participant F considered the traditional methods of teaching English too monotonous and demotivating. These two participants felt stressed and unmotivated to learn English due to the tedious methods of teaching English. Additionally, all participants were disappointed about their inadequate spoken English ability when they learned English in China. The English teaching did not assist them in enhancing their spoken English ability. This revealed that English classes in China placed undue emphasis on linguistic details instead of practical skills.

Some participants had the experience of engaging in formal English classes in Canada. Participant F and Participant G attended a part-time spoken English course in the first term. Participant E engaged in a written course. Compared with the English courses in China, the English courses these participants attended in Canada had more diversity in the method of instruction and had more practical contents in teaching. The instructors of these courses usually divided students into groups. Students learned English through collaboration with other group members. This method facilitated these participants' adaptation to different

accents and provided them with opportunities of interacting with others in English. Furthermore, these instructors designed various activities to strengthen what the students had learned and adjusted time in assigning tasks based on the interactions between instructors and students, which motivated students to learn English and met students' needs from their feedback. Also, the courses emphasized teaching students the most common used English expressions, the skills of giving presentations, or the differences between formal writing and informal writing. What these participants learned from these courses contributed to their improvement of spoken English and written English.

5.2.11 The Relationships among Three Factors

An important finding of this research is that with the agency role of the different English learning strategies, the English-speaking context was a key contributor to improving these participants' English proficiency. The research conducted by Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008) proved that international students being immersed in a target language speaking environment were more inclined to employ social strategies than when they were in home countries. Storch and Hill (2008) claimed that international students' English proficiency benefited from being immersed in an English-speaking environment. In this research, the shift of English-learning context led to the changes of English learning strategies. And then the improvement of English proficiency occurred. Figure 2 presents the relationships among ESL context, changes of English learning strategies and the development of English proficiency.

Figure 2: The relationships among three factors

ESL context \longrightarrow changes of English learning strategies \longrightarrow development of English proficiency

As displayed in figure 2, the English-speaking environment provided the changes in English learning strategies, which led to the development of participants' English proficiency. The English-speaking environment provided a large number of opportunities for the participants of this research to practice English naturalistically, to ask for assistance, and to interact with proficient English users. It was easy for these participants to watch English movies and TV shows and read English books. The supervisors, colleagues, and volunteers from some local organizations assisted these participants when they encountered difficulties

in English learning. Through mingling with Canadians and other international students, these participants learned how to use English accurately and appropriately.

Furthermore, these participants strove to adapt to the English-speaking environment. Ample opportunities of practicing English and the strong motivation of improving English proficiency led these participants to employ different English learning strategies from what they used in their home country. They endeavored to practice English through interacting with proficient English users. If these participants were confronted with any difficulties during interactions, they would employ compensation strategies to guess the meanings and overcome limitations. Some of them were shy because they were too worried about making mistakes to converse with others in English. But they gradually eliminated the shyness and took initiatives to converse with others. These changes of English learning strategies facilitated their incorporation of appropriate English, brought them more opportunities of mingling with proficient English users, and bolstered their confidence of using English. And then these participants' English proficiency gradually improved.

5.2.12 Support between Canadian and Chinese Contexts

The progress these participants made in English in the Canadian context is closely related to the Chinese context. The English learned by these participants in China provided foundation for their improvement of English proficiency in the Canadian context. In China, participants strove to impart knowledge of English linguistic details, such as English grammar. After moving to Canada, with the solid foundation of English linguistic details, participants' transition from Chinese context to Canadian context would be smoother. They could focus on increasing English vocabulary and developing English communication skills, which contributed to their English proficiency. The progress made by these participants in English enabled them to reflect on the English they learned in China. They realized the English they learned in the Chinese context was formal and outdated. These characters constrained them from understanding others and using English accurately in the Canadian context. The challenges encountered by these participants indicated how English education in the Chinese context could be significantly improved.

When participants learned English in China, all of them experienced stress of taking formal English tests. The goal of English teaching in China was to enable students to acquire

high scores in examinations. The stress of acquiring high scores, to some extent, encouraged participants to learn English harder. With the stress, some participants even considered their English proficiency reached the highest level during the period of preparing for college entrance examinations when they were in China. However, in Canada, the stress mostly came from academic performance and daily interactions. They had difficulties in understanding what other said and expressing their opinions accurately in English. Although these participants did not take part in any English proficiency tests in Canada, they still felt stressful due to their insufficient English proficiency. But the stress these participants experienced in China was greater than the stress in Canada. Therefore, the greater stress assisted these participants in getting accustomed to the stress in such an English-speaking context. It was easier for them to deal with the stress in Canada since they had experienced greater stress in China.

5.3 Summary

The participants of this research employed six categories of strategies to improve English in China with cognitive strategies and memory strategies playing the most pivotal role in these participants' English learning. The preference for these two categories of strategies revealed these participants' limitations in English learning between linguistic details and communicative skills. Though they had realized the importance of developing communicative skills, they lacked the opportunities for practicing communicative skills in the EFL context of China. And they spend little time in the practice because they had to invest a large amount of time in preparing for a variety of English proficiency tests. Despite the imbalances, these participants attempted to combine mastering English vocabulary with understanding the structures and the using contexts of the vocabulary.

After moving to Canada, all participants were confronted with problems in adjusting to the English-speaking environment due to their insufficient English proficiency. They could not understand what others said and could not speak English appropriately. The high requirement for accuracy resulted in their being less willing to speak English. The inadequate knowledge of informal and updated English hindered their proper usage of English. It was difficult for some participants to engage in academic readings. The cultural differences restricted some participants to understanding some Canadian-style jokes. To overcome these

limitations, these participants employed compensation strategies, social strategies, affective strategies, and meta-cognitive strategies. Social strategies contributed to their exposure to the language environment. The exposure made these participants realize the vast gap of culture between them and their Canadian friends. The gap of culture generated their difficulties in finding emotional resonance with their Canadian friends. Consequently, these participants were inclined to stay and communicate within the Chinese community. However, they were confident that they were able to find the balance between staying and communicating within Chinese community and being immersed in the English-speaking environment. They have made great progress in being adapted to the language environment by far, although most participants felt they still needed to improve their English proficiency.

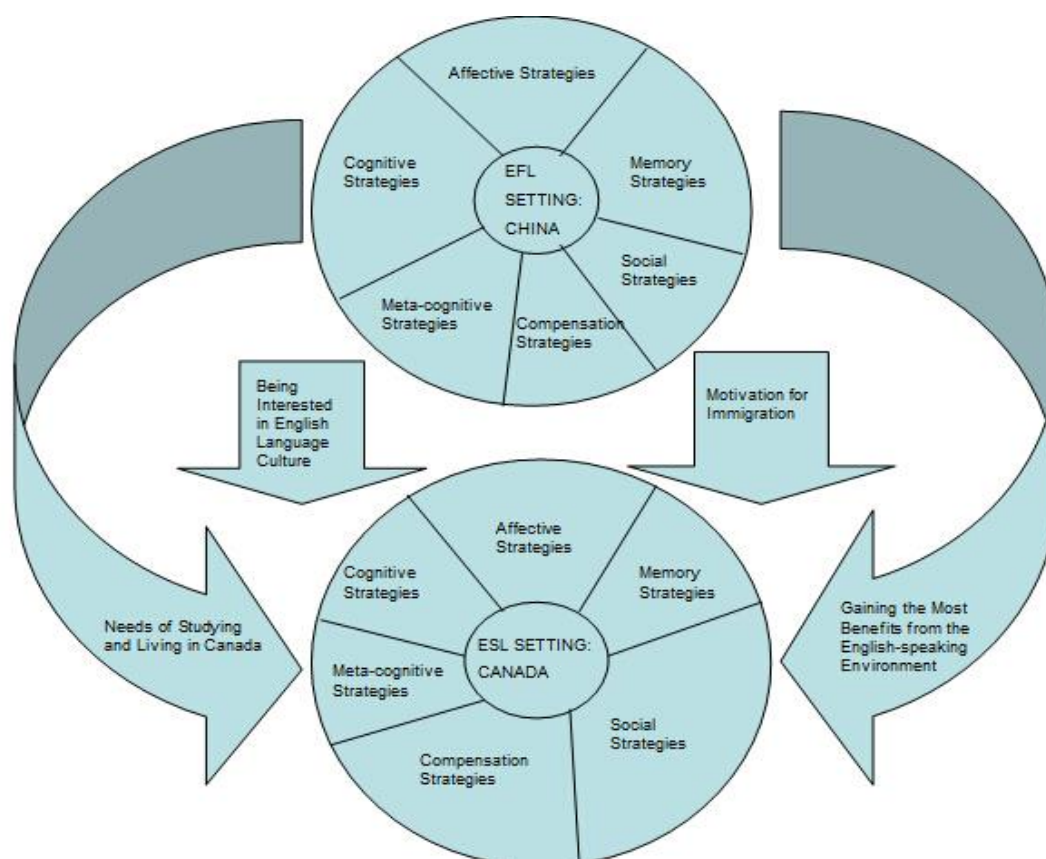
Being immersed in the language environment encouraged these participants to make changes to their English learning strategies. The usage of cognitive strategies and memory strategies were complemented by compensation strategies and social strategies. These participants were aspired to take risks during interactions with others. These changes made contributions to their improvement of English proficiency. These participants desired to improve their English proficiency in Canada for different reasons, but their common reason was to improve their English proficiency. Furthermore, an interesting finding of this research is that these participants did not feel lost when no teachers or parents assisted them in learning English. This may be attributed to their increasing ability to managing their English learning during their time in universities in China.

Some participants' experiences of attending part-time English classes in Canada led them to think about the efficiency of English classes in China. The part-time English classes in Canada focused on teaching students practical skills while the English classes in China emphasized developing students' ability of memorizing linguistic details. All participants recognized the contributions made by the English classes in China, however, they also pointed out the monotonous and demotivating character of these English classes due to the dominant role of teachers. These participants' English learning at primary and secondary schools was characterized by being teacher-centered. English teachers dominated the English classes and barely designed activities for students. The emancipation from the teacher-centered classes during universities encouraged these participants to manage their English

learning. They started transmitting from teacher-centered mode to learner-centered mode during this period and completed the transmission after moving to Canada.

The findings of this research indicated the Canadian context and the Chinese context support each other. Some findings of this research support the literature review that has been discussed in the chapter two. English teachers played a dominate role in English classes and these participants found the English classes were tedious. Despite the tedious character of those English classes, to acquire high scores at English proficiency tests, these participants strove to increase vocabulary by repetition and memorization. With the strong motivation to learn English, they suffered from huge stress due to English tests. After moving to Canada, these participants depended on compensation strategies and social strategies to improve English proficiency. The conceptual framework was created to demonstrate these participants' changes of English learning strategies in two different contexts and the factors that may lead to these changes.

Figure 3: Conceptual framework



The researcher designed this conceptual framework based on Oxford's (1990) classification of LLS, my personal experience, and observation on my Chinese graduate student peers. Oxford (1990) divided LLS into six groups: Memory Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Compensation Strategies, Affective Strategies, Social Strategies, and Metacognitive strategies. The two settings in this conceptual framework were EFL settings and ESL settings. EFL settings are contexts where students learn English "without social and communicative functions within the community" (Oxford, 1990, p. 6). ESL settings are defined as contexts where students learn English "with its social and communicative functions within the community" (Oxford, 1990, p. 6). In terms of the four factors that may lead to the changes of English learning strategies, the interest in English culture and gaining the most benefits from the English-speaking environment are summarized according to my personal experience. The other two factors, needs of surviving and studying and motivation for immigration are based on my observation on my peers.

This conceptual framework displays that memory strategies and cognitive strategies provided participants with more assistance in learning English than other groups of strategies in the EFL context. After moving to the ESL context, these participants preferred social strategies and compensation strategies rather than other groups of strategies. These participants made these changes to improve English proficiency. Some participants were interested in English culture since they were in China. The improvement of English proficiency enabled them to access the essence of English culture. Furthermore, some participants planned to be permanent residents of Canada upon graduation. Excellent English proficiency played a key role in their application of permanent residents and finding promising jobs in Canada. Additionally, all participants encountered challenges in their studying and living in Canada due to their insufficient English proficiency. To have better academic performance and assimilate into Canadian life, these participants strove to enhance their English proficiency. Lastly, all participants were international students who dedicated a large amount of money and time to studying in Canada. Since they had been in such an English-speaking environment, they desired to be exposed to the language environment as much as possible to improve English proficiency.

In this research, the researcher discovered some inspiring findings that differed from

the literature works in chapter two. These participants employed a variety of learning strategies to master English vocabulary rather than only repetition and memorization. Strategies that enabled them to know the contexts of using vocabulary were included in their English vocabulary learning. Moreover, participants were more willing to take risks when they conversed with others in English. Making mistakes were acceptable as long as the communications went well. In addition, these participants changed their English learning strategies in Canada because they desired to be adapted to the English-speaking environment. These changes they made played a role as an agency between the language environment and the improvement of their English proficiency. Without making changes in English learning, simply staying in the English-speaking environment would not lead to the improvement of English proficiency. Lastly, two strategies employed by these participants are not included into Oxford's (1990) classification of LLS. The first one is venting emotions. This strategy was used when participants felt huge stress. Some of them cried or threw away pens to feel released from the stress. Venting emotions should belong to Affective category under Oxford's (1990) classification. The second strategy is rote memorization which should be under memory category. Some participants repeated spelling an English word letter by letter to memorize this word without knowing the actual using context of it.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the researcher provided implications and summed up the findings of this research. The contributions of this research and the suggestions on future research were also included in this chapter.

6.1 Implications

In this section, the researcher focused on the implications from the participants' narratives and the findings of this research. It discussed implications for prospective Chinese students, English educators in China, and the policy makers in Canadian universities.

6.1.1 Implications for Prospective Chinese Students

The prospective Chinese students who plan to study in Canada are well-advised to practice English with authentic English materials. It is convenient to find these materials in China currently. Prospective Chinese students can improve their English proficiency through watching English TV plays, listening to English songs, and reading English newspapers despite the EFL context of China. Learning with these authentic English materials will enable the prospective Chinese students to know the proper usage of English in specific contexts. In addition, increasing the vocabulary of academic terminology is vital to these Chinese students, which will facilitate their academic studying after moving to Canada. Moreover, overcoming the fear and the shyness of conversing and socializing with proficient English users in Canada will make great contributions to the Chinese students' English improvement.

To assess Chinese students' improvement of English proficiency, in this research, the most useful assessment method is how well these participants can perform in the English-speaking context. These performances could include self-assessment by participants and the feedback from their friends and professors. After staying in Canada for at least six months, all participants felt more confident in their English proficiency. They were able to understand others better, as well as using English more appropriately. Their friends, other English speakers, also provided positive feedback of their English proficiency. For example, these participants could understand what others said even if several English idioms occurred in conversations. And these participants' accents were significantly reduced. Moreover, these

participants' communications with their professors were smoother and they improved their written skills in academic assignments.

6.1.2 Implications for English Educators in China

An increasing number of Chinese students will be intrigued by English if English educators involve more activities and integrate multimedia into English classes. For example, students are divided into groups to study or watch videos related to the content of class. Additionally, these English educators should pay more attention to the importance of practical English skills, such as spoken English, instead of only focusing on teaching students for acquiring high scores on tests. The undue emphasis on the techniques of acquiring high scores has rendered these participants' difficulties in being adjusted to the English-speaking environment because of their inadequate English proficiency. The teaching of practical English skills will facilitate prospective Chinese students' adjustments to the language environment if they study and live in an English-speaking country.

6.1.3 Implications for Policy Makers in Canadian Universities

Canadian universities are expected to be more supportive in Chinese students' adaptation to the language environment in Canada. Chinese students who are enrolled in Canadian universities must meet the language requirements. However, although meeting the language requirements, the participants in this research still encountered difficulties in being adjusted to the English-speaking environment in the first few months of arriving in Canada. And they did not receive enough assistance from the university in their English improvement. To better assist Chinese students, providing English workshops or part-time English classes will absolutely facilitate prospective Chinese students' adaptations to the language environment. Furthermore, these participants found it difficult to assimilate into Canadian community due to the cultural differences. If Canadian universities search for Canadian volunteers who are willing to assist prospective Chinese students in assimilating into Canadian culture, these students will benefit from such a volunteer-based initiative.

6.2 Conclusions

In this thesis, the researcher employed qualitative narrative inquiry method to probe six Chinese graduate students' English learning experiences in China and in Canada. The data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview.

The researcher discovered that these participants had a preference for using the compensation strategies and the social strategies in Canada compared with the memory strategies and the cognitive strategies in China. These participants gradually overcame their shyness and eliminated the impediments to learning English with accuracy. They were more likely to take risks during interactions with others in English. Moreover, these changes played the role as agency between the English-speaking context and participants' improvement of English proficiency. Participants' desire to adapt to the language environment inspired them to make changes to their English learning strategies. The different strategies these participants used assisted them in developing English proficiency.

These findings provided important implications for prospective Chinese students, English educators in China and policy makers in Canadian universities. Data collected from participants suggest that prospective Chinese students are advised to practice English with authentic English materials in the EFL environment in China. They are also encouraged to interact with proficient English users in Canada as much as possible to improve their vernacular English. Additionally, English educators in China should innovate their approaches to language instruction, adopt more engaging pedagogical strategies to increase students' interest in learning English and pay more attention to improving students' practical English skills. Furthermore, the findings from this research suggest that policy makers in Canadian universities should provide more support for Chinese students in particular through arranging a volunteer assistance program and providing appropriate English workshops.

6.3 Significant Contributions and Suggestions for Future Research

In this research, the researcher employed the narrative inquiry method to probe participants' English learning experiences in China and Canada. Through discovering the changes of English learning strategies and the reasons for these changes, this research shed light on Chinese students' changes of English learning strategies after moving to a new language context. The researcher obtained some interesting findings. For example, the participants of this research did not feel lost in English learning even without the assistance from teachers or parents in Canada because they learned how to manage their English learning during universities. The findings of this research have provided valuable data for qualitative research in this area.

The participation in this research enabled all participants to reflect on their English learning through discussions with other participants. As the insider researcher, the researcher collaborated with other participants to complete this research, as well as acquiring insights into my own English learning.

The researcher hopes the future research will probe Chinese students' English learning experiences with larger samples, wider range of participants, and a range of data collection methods. The number of participants will be more than six and the participants will be selected from more than one Canadian university. A mixed methods approach to data collection is recommended and this integration of quantitative methods into conducting future research will ensure greater power and reliability for the findings. Furthermore, future researchers would be advised to include policy makers and the instructors of universities as research participants to gain insight into their experience working with Chinese students and acquire their recommendations on how to better support Chinese students in Canada.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Hello, I am Huizhi Wang, the researcher of the study. Thank you for coming to the interview. The visit is not the evaluation of your English proficiency or your graduate program. I would like to know more about how you change your English learning strategies to adapt to the English-speaking environment here (if no changes, why). The major topic is the changes of language learning strategies. I have some questions to discuss with you. The whole interview will be recorded.

1. Background

- a. What is your nationality in China?
- b. How long have you been in Canada?
- c. What is your age?
- d. Which department and graduate program are you in at the University of Saskatchewan?
- e. Do you have any families who have settled down in Canada?

2. The Adaptation Process

- a. What is your motivation to study in a Canadian university? (Interested in Western culture? university reputation? academic atmosphere? Families in Canada?)
- b. Do you think you have become accustomed to the English-speaking environment here? How long it takes you? (One-two months? Three-four months? More than four months?)
- c. If you have families who have been in Canada, do they assist you in adapting to the studies and lives in Canada? If not, who provides you with the greatest assistance in the adaptation to English-speaking environment?

What are their effects on your adaptation to the English-speaking environment?

What was your expectation of your English proficiency in Canada before you came here?

Talk like native speakers?

Understanding conversation in English without any problems?

Expanding vocabulary?

d. What impediments do you have to get used to using English to study and live here?

Being shy to communicate with native speakers?

Being not confident in English pronunciation?

Being unable to understand professors' words in class?

Finding difficult to read textbooks and articles of your major in English?

Insufficient opportunities to speak with Canadian people?

3. English Learning Strategies You Used in China

a. Do you think which level your English proficiency was when you were in China?

The score of any English proficiency tests (IELTS, TOEFL)?

Self-evaluation: Beginning, intermediate, advanced?

b. How effective English instruction in China was?

c. Which category of English learning strategies you used most frequently in China?

Did these learning strategies improve your English proficiency? Why did you strive to improve English in China? (Interested in Western Culture or practical reasons?)

If not, what were the reasons for that? (Teacher-centered classes, insufficient opportunities to practice, or examination-center educational system?)

4. Learning English in Canada

a. Do you think which level your English proficiency is after you have been in Canada for ...months?

The score of any English proficiency tests (IELTS, TOEFL)?

The completion of any English courses at language learning centers?

Self-evaluation: Beginning, intermediate, advanced?

b. Do you employ different strategies from those you used in China to learn English in Canada?

(Prefer to use social strategies rather than others? Realize the importance of individual efforts?) what are those changes, and why?

Do you believe that being exposed to an English-speaking environment leads to improving English proficiency without individual efforts?

Do these learning strategies improve your English proficiency?

If they do, which part of English is enhanced most significantly? (listening, speaking, reading, writing)

c. Do you think what other efforts you should make to be more proficient in English?

5. The Reasons for the Changes of English Learning Strategies

a. Are you interested in learning English and English culture?

Is it one of your reasons for choosing to be an international student in Canada? (will ask this question if the participant chooses to a Canadian university because of external factors)

b. Do you think the English-speaking environment here is the key determinant of developing your English?

Do you think it is possible to learn English well in EFL settings?

c. If you desire to become a permanent resident here, what skills do you think are the necessities? Do they include English?

d. Do you think improving English proficiency facilitates your studies and life here?

6. Could you give some advice to

Prospective Chinese graduate students of the U of S on English learning?

English instructors on the language teaching in China?

Canadian university policy makers who may provide support for Chinese students' language enhancement in Canada?

Appendix B

Explanation of Pilot Study

I invited two Chinese graduate students to participate in the pilot study. These students were selected because they are my friends and in Saskatoon. The convenience enabled me to invite them to engage in one-on-one interviews. Through the face-to-face interviews, not only did I verify my interview questions, but I also acquired useful advice from them.

The selection of the participants of the pilot study aligned with the following criteria. First of all, these participants were from China and currently registered as full-time graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan. They were the subset of the population of my main study. Secondly, these participants have stayed in Canada for one year and 14 months respectively. The length of time enabled them to adapt to the English-speaking environment in Canada. Thirdly, one of them is a male who has not engaged in any formal English learning after his arrival in Canada. The female participant took part in several courses of English writing during her staying in Canada. The differences in gender and formal English learning background in Canada would provide my study with rich data.

I telephoned the participants and explained the purpose and the significance of the study to them. Both of them were supportive to my study and showed interest in participation. Then I emailed the explanation of my study, the questions for semi-structure interview (in English and in Chinese), an informed consent, and an invitation letter to each of them. I interviewed the male participant in his office on January 21, 2014. The interview lasted for about one hour. The interview with the female participant was conducted for approximately one and a half hours at her home on January 24, 2014. At the beginning of the interviews, I provided them with the hard copies of the materials that I had sent them by emails and ensured that they agreed to engage in the study, as well as confirming that they were comfortable with being

recording during the interviews. The following step was to interview them based on the semi-structure interview questions. At the end of the interviews, I inquired that whether they could provide suggestions for the questions. Both of them provided valuable advice on the interview questions.

After I transcribed the participants' accounts, reviewed the transcripts, and coded themes and patterns from the transcripts, I discovered that the data collected from the pilot study provided me with insights into these two participants' English learning experiences in Canada. Therefore, the data are with high quality and will contribute to the main study.

I also edited questions for semi-structure interviews based on the piloting interviews. For participants who have no families in Canada, I will ask who aid them in their adaptation to the English-speaking environment. Additionally, I realized that participants may still use the same or similar learning strategies with those they used in China even if they have been in Canada for a period of time. Thus, a question about this will be asked. Furthermore, the two respondents engaging in the pilot study suggested that prospective students were well-advised to make individual efforts in English learning after their arrival in Canada. A question about whether participants have the awareness will be added.

Appendix C
Invitation to Participants
Huizhi Wang
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Email: huw521@mail.usask.ca

March 20, 2014

Dear (Name of Participants)

Re: Intent to conduct research study

I am Huizhi Wang, a Master student in the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Conducting research to write a thesis is required for the acquisition of my Master degree in Educational Administration. This letter is to invite you to participate in my Master research.

The title of my research is: "Understanding the Choice of Chinese Graduate Students' English Learning Strategies in a Canadian Context". The biggest concern for the research is to explore how Chinese graduate student employ different English learning strategies from what they use in China to improve the target language proficiency in Canada. The findings of my research will not only provide useful advice for potential Chinese graduate students, but they will also be valuable to English instruction in China and facilitate the support from Canadian institutions to Chinese students.

I am interested in your contribution to my research because you are one part of the Chinese graduate student community at the University of Saskatchewan. Your English learning

experiences in China and Canada are assets to my research and will provide my research with rich data. You will take part in an individual interview (about one and a half hours) and a focus group interview (about 90 minutes). In one-on-one interview, you will discuss with me about your experience. In the focus group interview, you will share your stories with other participants of my research. My observational field notes written during interviews and a personal reflective journal will also be crucial components in the interview data. All interviews will be conducted in Chinese.

Two copies of informed consent are enclosed. If you make decision to be a part of my study, please sign the two copies of consent with the date. Return one copy of the consent to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope or by email. Please keep another copy for your records. After obtaining contact information from the informed consent, I will email you and then telephone you to explain the purpose and the significance of the study. If you are still interested in being the participant of my research, I will provide you with a written explanation of my study, a copy of the questions for semi-structure interview, a copy of the questions for focus group interview, and a consent form implying your rights.

There is not any foreseeable risk for the participants of my research. The selection of the participants will abide by the regulations of Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) at the University of Saskatchewan, the (Name of School Division). It means that you have the right: (a) to refuse to take part in the study; (b) to withdraw from the study without any penalty in any form; (c) to ask me to destroy any data relate to him/her and exclude the data in the study if the participant withdraws from the study, and (d) of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. I will assure your rights through this invitation letter and a signed consent form. After the study is completed, Dr. Michael Cottrell, my supervisor will maintain all documents, notes, taped recordings, and transcripts in his office for six years for security consideration.

The protocol of my research has been approved on May 8, 2014 by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan. For questions pertaining to ethical issues,

please contact the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) at (306) 966-2975.

Thank you for your consideration on participating in my study. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Huizhi Wang

Appendix D

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

You are invited to be a part of a study entitled “Understanding the Choice of Chinese Graduate Students’ English Learning Strategies in a Canadian Context”. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask me any questions you might have.

Researcher

Huizhi Wang, a M.Ed student, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 241-1298, huw521@mail.usask.ca

Purpose, Significance, and Procedure

The title of my research is: “Understanding the Choice of Chinese Graduate Students’ English Learning Strategies in a Canadian Context”. The biggest concern for the research is to explore how Chinese graduate student employ different English learning strategies from what they use in China to improve the target language proficiency in Canada. The findings of my research will not only provide useful advice for potential Chinese graduate students, but they will also be valuable to English instruction in China and facilitate the support from Canadian institutions to Chinese students.

You will take part in an individual interview (about one and a half hours) and a focus group interview (about 90 minutes). In one-on-one interview, you will discuss with me about your experience. In the focus group interview, you will share your stories with other participants of my research. My observational field notes written during interviews and a personal reflective journal will also be crucial components in the interview data.

The copy of the questions for semi-structured individual interview has been enclosed. I will contact you to make an appointment to meet you at your convenience in a private and quiet place after you send me your written consent. I will record the interview if I acquire your permission. Also, you are well-advised to review transcripts to check whether my interpretations are consistent with the information you really intend to convey. Depending on the length of the transcript, you may spend from about 20 minutes to an hour reviewing the transcripts.

Potential Risks

I will dedicate to protecting you from any risks resulting from engaging in the study. You have right to only answer questions which you are comfortable with. Your withdrawal from the study at any time is without any penalty in any form. If you decide to withdraw from the study, any data pertaining to you will be destroyed and will not appear in the study.

Storage of Data

During the period of conducting my study, all data and documents, **excluding the signed consent forms and master list**, will be secured in the place where I live. The consent forms and master list will be kept separately in my supervisor, Dr. Michael Cottrell's office. Based on the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, after the completion of my study, all materials pertaining to my research including field notes, transcripts, taped recordings, and my reflective journal will be locked for six years at the University of Saskatchewan and then be destroyed.

Confidentiality

To protect participants' confidentiality, you will choose a pseudonym to replace your real name in transcripts. Furthermore, any information which may refer to your identity, such as the Chinese university where you acquired undergraduate degree, will be removed. I will also make every effort to ensure your confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy. **However, it should be paid attention that you may expose your identity to the public by your**

accounts in the interviews.

Although the data of the study may be disclosed to the public at professional conferences and in academic journals, as well as being quoted in my thesis, participants' identities will be highly unlikely discovered. The reason is that participants will be selected from a large population of the study, Chinese graduate students. The estimated number of Chinese graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan is 880. A large number of individuals in the population share the common features with prospective participants so they may not be identifiable.

Right to Withdraw

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to be a part of the study at any time without any consequences. If you withdraw from the study, all data collected related to you will be destroyed and not be used in the study.

Questions

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask me at any time via my cell phone or email.

Huizhi Wang
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huw521@mail.usask.ca

The protocol of my research has been approved on May 8, 2014. by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board in the University of Saskatchewan. For questions pertaining to ethical

issues and your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Beh- REB) at (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888)-966-2975. I will be pleased to provide you with a copy of the results of the study upon the completion of the study if you desire.

Consent to Participate

I have read the above description and understood that I may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. I have acquired satisfactory answers to my questions concerning the study. I consent to participate in this study. I have been provided with a copy of the consent form for my own records.

(Name of Participant) (Date)

(Signature of Participant) (Signature of Researcher)