

SECOND LANGUAGE LITERACY PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF A CHINESE STUDENT IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract: This article discusses the second-language literacy practice of an ESL student in Australia. It firstly explores the literacy practices (reading and writing) exercised both in China (the subject's home country) and in Sydney, Australia, where the subject was taking an academic preparation course prior to her master study. Secondly, this article delves into literacy practices conducted inside and outside the classroom in the same contexts. This research aims to contribute to the existing literature on literacy practices by expanding the focus of investigation beyond writing and by bringing up a specific case study, which is hardly addressed in the literature: a Chinese student in non-American education setting. Through analyzing the results of semi-structured interview, it is revealed that the participant adopted several different literacy practices in reading and writing due to different learning objectives and contexts.

Keywords: literacy practice, reading and writing inside and outside the classroom, threshold level

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Literacy practices among ESL learners especially Chinese in English-speaking countries is worth investigating as Chinese students make up a large number of international students in these countries, such as, in the United States (Tan, 2013), and in Australia (Institute of International Education, 2014). The Chi-

nese international student mobility to English speaking countries means that on one hand, they need to adjust to a new literacy environment and on the other, the universities in the English speaking countries need to consider their academic and socio-cultural backgrounds when treating them.

The concept of literacy is often defined “as a set of social practices” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8) inferable through written texts which capture social events. While this definition is very broad, this paper will focus on reading and writing practices of one Chinese student doing an English preparation course prior to her enrolment in a master’s program at the University of Sydney, Australia. Narrowing literacy on reading and writing is triggered by the notion that one of the best ways to understand and to expand our knowledge on literacy is through teachers’ and students’ reflection on their own daily practices (Barton, 2000). Focusing only on a student’s reflection of reading and writing practices, this paper explores the following two questions: how reading and writing practices were exercised both at home and in the school in China and secondly, how reading and writing were conducted inside and outside the classroom at a university in an Australian setting. Linking the reading and writing practices both outside and inside the classroom, according to Burns (2003), is beneficial “to gain student oriented insights about classroom teaching for literacy development” (p. 18) and to see whether or not there is a transfer of strategies from L1 (first or native language of the learners) literacy practices to L2 (second language) literacy practices as researched by Mu and Carrington (2007).

As mentioned earlier, a research on this topic in an Australian setting is worth conducting as in 2014 there were 91,089 students from China studying in Australia, which equals to 33.8% of all international students (Institute of International Education, 2014). Thus, it is important for Chinese students’ academic adjustment and Australian universities to get academic and learning support as academic system in these countries are different so that the academic expectations are dissimilar (Mu & Carrington, 2007).

A number of studies on Chinese students have been conducted on different foci, such as, different learning strategies used in UK (Gao, 2006), Chinese students’ adjustment in UK (Wang & Byram, 2011), Chinese students’ perceptions of Australian universities (Briguglio & Smith, 2012), Chinese learners in New Zealand university environment (Tait, 2011-2012), pedagogy to empower Chinese students in Western learning context (Savaranamuthu & Yap, 2014), etc. However, there are only limited studies found comparing the reading and

writing practices of Chinese students in their home country and in English speaking countries where they study. Among the scarce resources are Kong (2006) on reading in Chinese and English in the American setting, and Mu and Carrington (2007) on Chinese and English writing in Australian context.

Kong (2006) examined the reading strategies employed by four Chinese adult readers (all Chinese native readers and ESL learners). He reported that in general, the participants exerted a variety of strategies such as comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary through memory recall, decoding the component of words and inferring from context. Furthermore, the participants also benefited from the organization of the text and text structures, activating background knowledge, predicting, evaluating, monitoring and translating (Kong, 2006).

Mu and Carrington (2007) investigated the writing strategies of three Chinese postgraduate students in Australia and the differences between English and Chinese writing process. The findings reveal that by employing rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies, all the students had the same ideas that an English text should have the common structure such as “good introduction” and “well defined organization”. However there was disagreement on how to write a conclusion (Mu and Carrington, 2007).

The reading and writing practices reported in Kong (2006) and Mu and Carrington (2007) demonstrate that writing in English and Chinese is distinct in their own ways. The writing in both languages is governed by complex aspects including academic conventions, genres, and sociocultural backgrounds. These differences required students to apply different strategies.

The scarcity of references which discuss the comparison of reading and writing practices is also found with studies concerning practices outside and inside the classroom carried out by Chinese learners. Only two studies were found: Burns (2003) and Williams (2007).

Burns (2003) conducted a research project investigating Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in Australia. One of the three research participants was a Chinese woman who had lived in Australia for six years and had joined several AMEP classes at the time of the research. Williams (2007) explored the literacy practices of two undergraduate female students in UK, with regard to their leisure and study time. The study shows that the students retained their own learning tradition e.g. collaborative learning but they also accepted the learning culture in UK: being independent.

In my study, the Chinese student from mainland China was selected purposefully because it aims to expand the former study conducted by Mu and

Carrington (2007) on the literacy practices of Chinese students in Australia which only focused on writing in L1 and L2. The relationship between reading and writing practice of Chinese students attempting to pursue master's study in English speaking countries has also been underexplored. Furthermore, no study has been conducted on female Chinese students' reading and writing practices in Sydney context. Thus, the study is expected to provide some new insights into second language literacy studies.

METHOD

The subject of this study is Sara¹, a 27 year-old Chinese woman studying general English at Centre for English Teaching (CET) of Sydney University. The General English class at CET was usually held for four and a half hours from Monday to Friday involving a number of teachers. Sara had been learning English since secondary school, and, at the time of study, had been living in Sydney for five months. She held a bachelor degree in education, and her purpose of attending the course was to prepare herself to continue her study in a Master's program on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and for her future employment. Sara speaks Chinese and English.

The data for the study were collected primarily from a semi-structured interview and on site follow-up questions. The interview questions had been collaboratively prepared by a senior academic with TESOL expertise and her students (I was one of them) undertaking *Literacy and Language Teaching* course, which was one of the subjects in the Master of Education program in TESOL at the University of Sydney, Australia. The first ten questions concerned, in particular, the learner's background information, such as, gender, age, level of English proficiency, length of study, length of time spent in English speaking country, level of education, current place for learning English, reasons for learning English, native language and possibility of learning other languages. Other seven questions were made to explore the literacy practices outside the classroom and eight questions were constructed to investigate the literacy practices done outside the classroom. Overall, the interview questions explored the kinds of reading and writing strategies employed by Sara in her home country (China) and in Sydney, Australia. Threshold hypothesis in L2 reading was also

¹ A pseudonym

investigated. Samples of the interview transcripts are included in this article and are not presented verbatim. Nevertheless, the content accuracy of the transcripts is well maintained.

This research employs case study design to allow me to explore this particular case more thoroughly.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings on the literacy practices of the learner are categorized into reading and writing both outside and inside the classroom.

Reading Outside the Classroom

Based on the interview, Sara slightly shifted her 'outside-classroom reading' literacy practice by no longer reading English novels for study as she did in China. Instead, she was more engaged in reading newspapers, novels and magazines for pleasure. This was mainly because her immediate goal in learning English is to pass the course in order to qualify for her Master program. It shows that her reading is confined to a specific learning objective and context. Following is more detailed discussion of this finding.

When asked about the length of time spent outside the classroom in a week, she answered:

If not for the purpose of learning English, I spent two to three hours a week (for reading texts in English). (Q1a)

The above answer shows that the time spent for reading was associated with English learning. Since she did not give examples what she meant by "English learning", it is possible to assume that English learning refers to the English materials given by the teachers in the classroom. The above answer also signals that Sara was typical of a task-oriented student as she would do extra learning if she was given some tasks. When asked about the type of English material she read outside the classroom, she mentioned:

Newspapers and magazines, like Time... (Q2a)

Living in Sydney did not change her reading habit in her L1 because she still read Chinese novels through online media.

No, I still read Chinese novels, but online. In China, I read English novels but just for study. No English diaries, no activities for pleasure... I just read novels and magazines here. (Q4)

Her answer that she continued reading Chinese novels led to further question on whether she enjoyed reading in L1, to which she provided the following response:

Yes, sure. I am familiar with my first language. I get all information from there, but in English, I don't think so. Sometimes I need to check dictionary and try to understand. It is a little difficult. (Q5a)

Reading novels in Chinese language obviously did not pose any linguistic and socio-cultural constraints, so it was easy for her to understand the content. On the other hand, reading in English for Sara was not enjoyable.

I just want to learn. I don't enjoy it, but if I can use English more fluently, I will be attracted to the culture and I will read more. But now, it is still a period of learning. (Q6a)

This excerpt indicates that the linguistic or socio-cultural backgrounds of the English language inhibits Sara's reading process, which is often the case for EFL learners, as stated by Grabe and Stoller (2011). Sara might still be struggling to employ her metacognitive knowledge, so that she did not enjoy reading in English.

Reading Inside the Classroom

Moving to Sydney and enrolling in CET course allowed Sara to experience reading of different purposes. She also employed a variety of different strategies for different reading purposes. In addition to the general reading strategies such as guessing the meaning from context and understanding main ideas, Sara made use of her L1 as a way to help her understand a difficult text. The following discusses her reading practices in the new context.

The next quote describes Sara's reading experience in her family and school environments in China.

When I was in primary school, my parents asked me to recite some poems, or passages, as they thought it would be useful for my later studies. I just recited something in the classroom. It is the same thing. The teachers asked us to recite everything, like textbooks and beautiful sentences. This happened in all subjects. Teachers asked us to recite and try to do filling the blank exercises. (Q7a)

Sara's reading history in the family and school, where recitation was stressed, portrays audio-lingual method implemented in China during the 1980s. Adamson and Morris (1997) reported that between 1977-1993, audio-lingualism and grammar translation method in English learning were implemented in China. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 57) explain that drilling and providing the correct responses were the core activities done in Audiolingualism. Drilling is believed to "enable learner to form correct analogies".

In literacy perspective, what Sara's parents asked her to do and what her teacher(s) instructed in the classroom was parallel: recitation. Therefore, Sara gained benefits from her home literacy practice. In other words, Sarah's parents indirectly "prepared" Sara for the literacy practice at school. This fact underlines that home and school literacy practices mutually support each other. The conformity of home and school literacy practices in Sara's case underlines Vacca's (2009, p. 147) argument that parent's interest in "helping and supporting their children" would result in students' growing interest in learning "because they did not see the gap between their reading and writing experience in the course and at home".

When asked about the differences between the way Sara learnt reading in her L1 and L2, Sara answered the following way:

I don't find any differences... CET teachers teach us reading in the same way that our teachers did in China. CET teachers analyze texts and find some key words and try to paraphrase them and sometimes, they asked us to make (sic) main ideas in paragraphs. (Q7d)

Sara's reading experiences above characterize three different purposes of reading. Finding some key words is the feature of "reading to search"; looking for main ideas is the attribute of "reading to learn" while paraphrasing is the component of "reading to integrate information, write and critique texts"

(Grabe & Stoller, 2011, pp. 7-8). While “reading to learn” is typically done in the “academic and professional context” (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 7), reading to write and critique texts are the “common academic tasks” (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 8), the forms of assignments in the university context. So what Sara experienced in reading in CET class is logical in the context where the program she was enrolled in was to prepare her to embark on the master program where the skills to find main ideas, to paraphrase as well as to critique texts are essential.

During the class, Sara usually read a range of articles provided by the teachers. The articles varied in topics, such as agricultures and international issues. She spent around four hours a week in doing so (Q2c, 2d).

They took some articles from magazines or books. (Q2c)

No, just articles in every area, such as, in agricultures, international issues... (Q2d)

The teachers in the CET, when giving various articles from magazines and books, seemed to be aware that reading widely would broaden Sara’s knowledge in general, and in literacy perspective it would be beneficial for Sara to compose a text as reading could facilitate writing. After all, one of the objectives of such readings is to “integrate information, write and critique texts”, the typical tasks in academic context (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, pp. 7-8).

Sara also described that when reading, she rarely tried to understand every word in the text as she argued that it took time. Moreover, she also usually tried to comprehend the main ideas of text and read texts quickly (Q5a, b).

It’s rare because it costs a lot of time. (Q5a)

When being asked whether or not she tried to understand the main ideas from the text, Sara said the following:

I usually do that. (Q5b)

The above quotes indicate that she is a “text user” or “text participant” (Freebody & Luke, 1990, pp. 9-10) who “understands what to do” after reading and is able to use text for social purposes as well as for participating in the social context in which text was created (Burns, 2003, p. 19). Furthermore, as a text participant, she is able to infer meaning from the text and to relate it with

his/her own experiences and knowledge including being able to identify the figurative meaning emerging (such is as defined by Burns, 2003).

Sara, at times, used guessing strategy to understand the meaning of words in addition to asking teachers or friends.

Sometimes, guessing... Sometimes, asking the teachers and other students... (Q5b)

When reading, Sara employed guessing, one of the reading strategies (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 10), but she might ask about “technical words” of a specific field outside her background knowledge to her teachers and friends. She also once mentioned that to understand one of the readings titled *Stem Cell*, she had to check the version written in her native language to help her understand the English version better.

The act of guessing the meaning here signaled that Sara’s English proficiency was above the *threshold hypothesis*; a certain level of proficiency required to be able to use L1 knowledge, skills and strategies in L2 reading (Cummins, 1976). She also preferred using a web tool to find the meaning of words rather than electronic dictionary as she argued that electronic dictionary did not help her significantly in searching for certain meanings. Her preference for the web tool might also be caused by the fact that web tool is more regularly updated with new vocabulary entries, and is available in different varieties.

Furthermore, Sara should be aware that word meaning might change depending on the contexts or subjects, and that the Internet provides a wide range of meanings from diverse fields. Sara’s use of the Internet was one of the examples on how ICT had impact on literacy practices (Vacca, 2009). Vacca suggested that technology such as ICT should be used appropriately to enrich reading and writing practices (Vacca, 2009).

However, Sara reported that she, especially in reading difficult paragraphs, translated part of the text into Chinese. Later on, her translation strategy was abandoned as the teacher at CET said that this strategy would “harm” her English learning.

O’Malley and Chamot (1990, cited in Upton, 2001) described that the roles of L1 in L2 reading, among others, are translation, prediction, and confirmation of comprehension of a large text. Her willingness to abandon the strategy upon teacher’s reminder indicated that she highly respected teacher’s authority, which is typical in Chinese culture, where teachers tend to dominate

the classroom while students listen and respond passively (Tan, 2007). The word “harm” in Sarah’s sentence to express her teacher’s reminder that translation “harms” learning might be linked to her teacher’s beliefs that English should be the only language used in the ESL classroom. There was a movement in the U.S. to promote English only in the ESL classroom where other languages should not be used (Auerbach, 1993). However, this English-only belief among ESL educator, as Auerbach (1993, p. 9) argued, is “neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound”. Therefore, the CET teacher’s claim that Sara’s use of L1 would harm her learning is debatable and needs to be proven.

In reading a text, Sara often used the ‘title’ to guess the content of the text (Q5h). She also underlined important words and sentences that contain important ideas (Q5j).

Yes, I often do that. (Q5h)

Yes, I often do this. (Q5j)

The (Q5h) quote highlights Sara’s cognitive strategies to activate mental process. It also indicates her higher-level text processing because in the process of guessing the meaning from text and underlining words and sentences which have important ideas, her ability to infer and evaluate the text was used. Grabe and Stoller (2011) explain that higher-level text processing is the ability to infer, form attitude and evaluate the text.

Sara seemed to have also utilized *executive control processing* by mentioning that she usually asked herself questions about the texts she was reading (Q5i).

Yes I do that, but at home, not in class... (Q5i)

Yau (2009) notes that the high performing readers typically “orchestrate a variety of strategies to solve the problems that occur in reading” (p. 231) through the integration of higher and lower cognitive strategies such as “paraphrasing, mentally translating, drawing inferences, linking with prior knowledge etc...” (p. 231). What Sara did seemed to be “mentally translating” – the activity to cognitively draw her resources of L1 and L2 and allowed L1 as a strategy for comprehension especially to understand difficult texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2011), and drawing on previously read references as she consciously engaged in a reading process. Sara also mentioned in the interview that when

she encountered a difficult text in English, she tried to translate it into Chinese (See Q5c).

Sara reported that understanding uncommon vocabulary items and extremely long and complex sentence structures were the most difficult learning process for her. To solve her issues with this, she recited the vocabularies, separated the sentences and transferred them into Chinese.

Maybe vocabulary... sometimes, also sentence structure... To understand complex sentences, I usually recite the vocabulary, separate the sentences, and then transfer it to my first language. (Q8a)

I mean, I can't (understand) some really difficult sentences and complex and long sentences. And at this time, I try to cut them to pieces then try to translate them into my own language and then try to organize this in Chinese. (Q8b)

In this context, Sara used *bottom up model*, where reading “follows a mechanical pattern” as she focused on recognition of words and sentence comprehension via their syntactic structures, etc. (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 25). Her activities of reciting vocabularies can be associated with word recognition, and separating sentences (syntactic parsing) might ease her in the reading comprehension process as she understood the syntactic meaning unit. Translating English into her Chinese language confirmed that L1 facilitates L2 learning process, as also found in Kong's (2006).

Maybe lack of background knowledge... such as last week, we learned about stem cell, (laugh) I had no idea about that... it was difficult for me. I tried to find some background knowledge in Chinese and then tried to understand it in English... because it is easier for me to understand the articles in Chinese than in English. (Q8b)

In the above answer, Sara's L1 helped her understand English material. It has been argued that the facilitation from L1 to L2 learning occurred through ‘semantic processing’ (Ochi, 2009, p.133). Sara processed the meaning of “Stem Cell” from material in Chinese to help her understand the English version. In similar vein, three participants in Kong's (2006) also utilized their prior knowledge to understand English texts through circus visualization and suicide analogy. Sara's difficulties to understand English text which, in her opinion, had “long” and “complex” sentences might be because she and other stu-

dents were not involved in the selection of the texts so that the texts might be above their proficiency levels. This could be demotivating for her. Completing careful research, Guthrie and Humenick (2004) found four factors that motivate students to read. Those factors are: knowledge goals, student choices, interesting texts and collaborations. In CET classroom, the teachers solely decided the text selection based on their own interests.

Due to different literacy settings and educational backgrounds, Sara's reading practices showed dissimilarities with the Chinese participant in Burns' (2003) study. Sara employed guessing, translation, syntactic parsing, paraphrasing and others, while the participant in Burn's (2003) study learned from the scratch, spelling alphabets. If compared with the participants in Kong's (2006) study, Sara's use of prediction, translation, and use of cognitive strategy shared affinity with the reading strategies in English employed by participants in Kong's (2006) study. However, Sara's use of syntactic parsing was not done by the participants in Kong's (2006) study.

Writing Outside the Classroom

Sara's writing practices in China was situated in two different domains: hobby and examination demand. Under the new academic context in Sydney, her writing practices altered. Sara wrote diaries in English and Chinese. These diaries served dual purposes: a method of learning and self-expression. The followings are the details.

When asked whether she enjoyed her writing in L1, Sara recalled her primary school memories.

Yes, I like that. It is just a habit...a hobby. When I was in my primary school, my teacher encouraged us to write in Chinese about what we felt every day or every week. I think he wanted us to improve our writing because I need to pass the exam, but when it becomes a hobby, it is not only for study but to express myself. (Q5b)

The fact that her teacher suggested that she write in Chinese as routines (everyday) suggests that it involved repetitions and drilling, the basic notion of audio-lingual method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) applied in China in 1980s (Adamson & Morris, 1997).

Living in Sydney, Sara developed a new habit, writing two versions of diaries.

Many times, I have just two versions of diaries: English and Chinese versions. They tell the same thing. I just want to improve my English, so I write English... So the first aim is learning, and the second aim is to express my feeling. If you say 'enjoy', I am not sure... (Q6b)

The above excerpt proves that literacy is "intimately bound up with lives outside classroom" in a complex "cultural, social and personal ways that affect one's L1 and L2 identities" (Burns, 2003, p. 22). Sara's use of L1 in diaries was likely to reflect her personal feeling and L1 identities through expressive languages. However, when writing diaries in English, although the goal was to improve her English, she might not be as expressive as in her L1 because when starting to use English, she did not only use the other language, but she also entered 'the new world', the other way of representing her identities.

Sara's writing of diaries in two languages indicates that the 'shuttle' from one language to another language (target) language has proven effective despite her uncertain feeling about enjoyment on the diary writing. So, in this regard, Sara had been successful in the first aim, but not yet fully successful for the second aim. Sara's coming to Australia also, to some extent, lessened the use of her writing in Chinese, except for writing diaries and chatting (Q4b).

For writing, I seldom do that, but maybe sometimes, in online chat with my friends, I use Chinese. (Q4b)

This excerpt supports Gao's (2006) similar study that Chinese students who did postgraduate studies in UK adopted different learning strategies of English due to different demands and contexts. Accordingly, in China the demand of learning English was for a national exam while in UK, the demand was for coursework assessment. Moreover, Gao (2006) also revealed that learning from language teachers, experts and friends in China had caused students to adopt memorizing strategies, while in UK students used "social and interactive strategies" with supportive native friends (p. 63). In Sara's case, her new learning context required her to socially interact with native speakers. This seemed to be the determinants of her seldom use of Chinese in her writing.

Writing Inside the Classroom

Unlike the slight changes that Sara made on reading practices, she learnt a lot of things when she was learning writing at CET class. She was struggling to adjust with the new context which proclaimed plagiarism was strictly prohibited. She also found it difficult to write her own voice as she had not been taught to do so.

Contrary to Sara's answer that writing in her primary school became her hobby, this time she expressed that writing was boring.

So maybe diary is another thing. Yeah... Because our teacher encouraged us to do so... Maybe he will check it as a homework. So we wrote down. I think it was boring at that time but we always kept.... He encouraged us to imitate passages in our writing. For example, if teacher thought the passages were good, he encouraged us to follow the patterns. (Q7b)

There are some important issues in the above statement. Firstly, Sara's feeling bored, despite its contradiction from her former statement, might indicate that the lessons given in her classroom was monotonous, which could partly be attributed to the audio-lingual method practice employed in her previous education levels. Secondly, the fact that imitation in writing was allowed, showed that in China (at least in her school), plagiarism was not introduced as an issue. Hu and Lei's (2012, p. 842) study reveals that "some Chinese students" regard that "textual borrowing practices are acceptable in examination". Referring to Hu and Lei (2012), it was possible that Sara's experience of being encouraged to imitate was the indication of the tolerance of the "textual borrowing practices" (p. 842). The fact that "beautiful words", literary style of writing, were appreciated in examination (as Sara mentioned) showed that Chinese schooling system (at least in Sara's school) appreciated literary writing style as also explained by Mu's and Carrington's (2007) research participants.

When asked about whether Sara enjoyed writing in her L1, she expressed the following statements:

Yes, sure. I think I am familiar with my first language. I get all information from there. But in English, I don't think my English is good. Sometimes I need to check dictionary to understand. It is a little difficult (Q5a).

Her enjoyment while writing in her L1 was partly because of the absence of linguistic or cultural constraints. Enjoyment in this case was that Sara was fully engaged in the topic she was writing. However, writing in English, Sara felt uncertain and uneasy because she was linguistically and culturally constrained. Sara's case in writing was an example supporting Hyland's (2003) argument that L2 writers were confronted with two burdens concurrently: thinking about ideas and also about the language. When asked about how Sara experienced writing in Chinese and English, she confidently stated:

But in writing, it is different. In Chinese we were just encouraged to imitate but here, it is called plagiarism, so it is totally different. The teachers in CET encouraged us to express our opinion in Chinese. It is not strict... you can follow other people's opinion... In English, you must show your own voice and if not, they will think that you don't have critical thinking. And you can follow the pattern, but you can't use the same sentences or same expression; otherwise, they will say you are plagiarizing. (Q1d)

Sara, in the above excerpt, made two important conclusions. The first point was imitation in China versus plagiarism in Australia. Secondly, she recognized voice in writing as an indicator of critical thinking in Australian academic setting. She was able to spot that the two above issues were very crucial academically. Sara showed awareness that academic conventions were governed by socio-cultural differences. Further, Sara was also mindful that there was schematic structure (genre awareness) that she needs to follow in Australian writing as a way of participating in the community. Sara's genre awareness shows similarity with the participants' awareness in Mu's and Carrington's (2007) study. All the participants in the study showed genre awareness even though the foci of the genres that they paid attention to were dissimilar. What Sara did is also similar to two female students in William's (2007) study as Sara and the two students adjust to literacy practices in English speaking countries by recognizing the academic practices applied in the setting where they study.

With regard to plagiarism in ESL learners, Swoden (2005, p. 226) stated that students should be given chance to understand plagiarism concepts due to different cultural concepts, in which having one's own voice is necessary in English writing, while it may not be as important in their original academic setting.

When I asked Sara about the type of text that she learned in the classroom, she said the followings:

It's about essay which links to our main courses... we have learnt about argument and discussion essay, two essays we focus on... (Q2f)

Sara's answer above indicated that argumentative and discussion essays were her main courses. These two essay types were given to prepare the CET students to embark on the university academic lives in which making one's own voice in writing, according to Sara (Q1d), was considered by the teacher as an indicator of student's critical thinking. Argumentation and discussion are essential parts of the learning process in the tertiary level; particularly, the teaching of argument is associated with critical thinking (Hillock, 2010). In the university, one way to assess critical thinking is through assessment of written works (Wade, 1995). Critical thinking is also considered an important skill for university graduates (Biggs & Tang, 2007, cited in Lun, 2010)

In the classroom, Sara sometimes received peer feedback from other students. In relation to feedback, Mendoca and Johnson (1994, cited in Hyland & Hyland, 2006) described that peer feedback could encourage more self-control and self-autonomy for students. However, since there was no example of the peer feedback given in Sara's classroom, further judgment could not be made on the impact of feedback for Sara.

Sara also reported that she usually wrote texts together with another student.

Usually do that, more than often. (Q 3e)

In a relatively current study, Storch (2011) notes that collaborative writing, if carefully done, will foster "reflective thinking, and a greater awareness and understanding of audience" (p. 276) because when composing writing together, the writers can read each other's part and provide peer feedback. The reflective process during the collaborative writing process as argued by Storch (2011) also indicates the process of knowing (Park, 2013) as students could mutually engage the shared topics and actively construct the writing essay and maintain the readership level (Hyland, 2009).

Another activity that Sara often did in the class was to learn the structure of a text (Q3f). Learning the structure of a text is argued to facilitate compre-

hension because readers can “anticipate and predict the direction of a plot or argument, thereby facilitating attention to the larger meaning of the text” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000, p. 240).

Even though her teacher suggested that Sara should plan the text before writing, she said that it did not help her much. So she just planned the writing upon teachers’ requests.

Sometimes my teacher said, here, it will help you, but I don’t find it helps me... If they don’t ask, I don’t do it...

Yeah... according to their requirement...but I seldom do it (Q6a)

The fact that Sara seldom did planning in writing shows that she might not fully understand the reason why planning would help the writing process. Sara’s attitude toward planning in writing was similarly shared by participants in Silva’s (1993) study. Silva (1993) described that “L2 writers did less planning and had more difficulty in setting goals, generating and organizing material” (p.13). This unplanned writing resulted in unfocused writing. The following is Sara’s acknowledgement on the issue:

I have no plan, yes...that is a problem. I always write into another direction. That is really a problem. (Q6b)

Sara’s action of not planning her writing might also mean that she was not fully aware of the benefits of making an outline to help her focus her writing. It may reflect her former writing experience in China where planning in writing was not mandated, so it might take a while for her to get used to the new academic writing which promotes planning.

The remarkable change in Sara’s literacy practice was that she rarely wrote sentences in L1 and then translated into L2 as she had done previously.

Rarely now, but before I came here, I often did this... thinking of the sentences in the first language and trying to translate them into English. (Q6c).

Sara’s vocabularies and rhetorical skills might have improved considerably, so that she did not have to translate from L1 to L2 again.

In another related statement, Sara further reported that her coming to Australia had changed her belief in a way that she directly wrote in English, while in the past, she used to write in her L1 and then translated it into English. This

means that she had found ways to express her ideas better and more easily, a different way which speeds up her writing. Her exposure to English in her course and daily social interaction with native speakers should give her authentic language inputs which benefit her in expressing her ideas better inside and outside the classroom. Carsons and Loghini (2002, cited in Gao 2006) revealed that due to the rich target language environment and continuous communicative demand, language learners use more meta-cognitive strategies. In the above case, Sara might have evaluated that her habit of thinking in Chinese then translated it in English was not helpful in the authentic context where she was exposed to English language rich environment. This indicates the application of a metacognitive strategy feature.

Furthermore, Sara reported that she just followed the patterns given by the teachers in writing the essay, so her writing did not always change.

I just try to follow the pattern my teacher gives us. I just follow argument and discussion essays, so not always change... My consideration is to pass... (Q6d)

The excerpt demonstrates that the writing taught at CET was very much guided. Sara's "instrumental motivation", loosely related context dependent motives (Dornyei, 1994, p. 279), seemed to dictate her, in this case, to pass the exam, as she had experienced in China. Her not reading the previous sentence before moving to the next sentence showed that she did not engage in meaning making process in L2 as she experienced in L1.

However, Sara followed the generic structure of texts (e.g. argumentative essay, discussion essay) to organize her ideas and to formulate her essay.

Yes, I often do that. I have to say my teacher taught us about that, and they said that you don't have your own ideas... you have to paraphrase... (Q6f)

This strategy corresponds to the rhetorical strategy of writing, in which a writer attempts to organize ideas and put it into acceptable genre convention of the target language (Mu & Carrington, 2007).

Sara also reported that she only re-read the text before handing in assignments and when the teacher returned them, and she was not sure whether the text made sense.

No, I'm not sure if it makes sense. I'm just writing it, rereading, maybe, when handing it in and when getting my homework back. I always make no sense inclusion (*sic*), the end of the essay... you should repeat the ideas (Q6g).

I clarified to Sara about what she meant with the word "inclusion". When I asked her whether what she meant was "conclusion", she confirmed it. In the above answer, Sara stated that she was not used to re-reading the assignment, which indicates that she did not maximize her metacognitive strategy, that is, evaluating her work prior to submission. Based on Sara's statement "I always make no sense inclusion" (made unclear conclusions), we can say that Sara might feel it difficult to synthesize the main ideas she wrote in the body paragraphs and restate them in a concise manner.

In CET, Sara was confused with different suggestions given by different teachers and whose suggestion she would take.

...but in writing, I am confused... Sometimes different teachers said different things... You have to write like this, and other teachers say that it is not academic words... I don't know which one to follow. (Q7a)

In Sarah's case above, CET teachers, when giving feedback, did not seem to have the same focus.

Sara seemed not to have firm ideas on how to improve her writing skills, but she mentioned that her parent's (her mother's) suggestion may work especially concerning reading more frequently.

I have no ideas... My parent suggested me to read more. She said that there are common points when learning English and Chinese. (Q7b)

Sara's reference to parent indicated that her parent was still an important role model for her despite her moving to Australia.

Furthermore, Sara acknowledged that knowing the typical structure of how native speakers organize their essays would help her to compose her own.

I mean to get familiar with the people in English speaking countries... how they organize their essay.... then I can naturally do it in my essay... (Q7c)

Sara's statement about the typical structure of native speakers' essays resembles the awareness of genres of texts among the participants in Mu and

Carrington's (2007) study. The three participants in Mu and Carrington's (2007) study, however, showed more understanding about writing convention in Australia, such as, the structure of report of an experiment, the structure of the journal published papers, and others. This was because they were post-graduate students, while Sara was still doing her preparation course for Master's program. This indicates that studying in new literacy contexts, especially in different cultural backgrounds, would encourage someone to identify the required academic conventions in order to survive.

The most difficult thing to do for Sara in writing was to voice out her own ideas and be direct.

The most difficult thing is to voice out, to have own voice...

How to express your opinion directly is another important thing, to have your own voice...now I learn to paraphrase others' voices into my own. To write directly, I need more practice. When I was in China, we were told that we can't let the reader guess what we want to say in the beginning, but in English we must let readers know in the introduction (Q8d).

Sara's above confession shows the results of her previous studies in China, in which student's voice in writing was usually not prioritized. Moreover, she claimed that the non-direct way of writing in L1, to some extent, inhibited her from writing in a succinct way. This explained that the structure of writing in L1 can influence the structure of writing in L2. Kaplan (1966) illustrates that Asian people including Chinese tend to be indirect (not straightforward) in their writing.

Sara's reading and writing practices both outside and inside the classrooms in two different settings demonstrate complex relationships. Her reading and writing practices were constructed by the different academic and sociocultural settings. Not only was she aware of the different academic demands, but she was also alert on how to struggle in her transitional academic setting. While in reading Sara seemed to have no serious problem, in Australian academic writing, she was still working to progress.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Sara's enrolment in the academic preparatory course necessitated her to adjust and change her reading and writing practices. In CET, she learned three

different forms of reading: reading to search, to learn and to integrate information and write texts. During the reading process, the 'long and complex' sentences and unfamiliarity with English texts posed difficulties for Sara. To understand long and complex sentences, Sara broke the sentences into several parts so that she could learn the meaning of the sentence bit by bit. To learn unfamiliar English texts, Sara resorted to texts in Chinese with similar topics.

Sara's ability to address her problems in reading English texts was not parallel with her endeavor to solve English writing problems. Writing her own voice and writing succinctly was the most difficult thing for her. The difficulty in having a voice and making concise writing was the result of culturally different writing practices in China where the concept of voice and straightforward writing was not recognized. To address this, Sara kept on practicing to have her opinion in the first sentence.

One interesting thing about Sara was the fact that she still considered her parents as a reference or role model for her learning to overcome her writing problems in English, as she said that she needed to read more and more to improve her writing as suggested by her mother.

Sara's use of syntactic parsing as her reading strategy and her reference to her parents' advice were not found in the previous studies discussed in this article. This suggests that syntactic parsing and the role of parents should further be taken into account when researching Chinese students who are doing academic preparation for Master's study in English speaking countries.

Furthermore, universities in English speaking countries should wisely consider Chinese students' cultural understanding on voice and plagiarism when teaching writing. The universities need to ensure that Chinese students experience smooth learning transition, especially when requiring the students to comply with the concepts of voice and plagiarism in academic writing as applied in the universities. This should lead to providing better learning support for Chinese students as well as other international students of different countries with similar characteristics.

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