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The Looking Glass Effect: A Phenomenological Study of Graduate Asian Students' English Writing Challenges

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THE LOOKING GLASS EFFECT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF GRADUATE ASIAN STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITING CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Increasingly more students from China are looking to the USA for learning opportunities. Despite being beneficial for both stakeholders, this phenomenon has some deep-rooted issues pertaining to cross cultural language acquisition barriers that may be preventing such learners from reaching their full potential in academic accomplishments. This phenomenological study of five Chinese students in the USA, engaged in the process of English language communication, is a step towards understanding this phenomenon. The study's findings led to the development of a new metaphorical paradigm (Looking Glass Effect Paradigm) to explain the key issues faced by such learners, a new pedagogical approach (Globally Infused Pedagogy), and an innovative teaching strategy recommendation (Customized Learning Camp) to assist Chinese learners in gaining English language competencies.

Introduction

Once upon a time, not too long ago, five students from Asia stepped through the looking glass, and crossed the vast oceans to come to this far away land in the West that they believed was a land of opportunities. They had worked hard to be here, and were prepared to work even harder to stay. While they did meet many people, and made many friends, they were still not quite able to make their voices heard. Despite their best efforts, they encountered struggles that choked their expressions. Does the story sound somewhat familiar? If it does, the information in this paper will take you on an empathetic journey. If it does not, the same information will provide insights to a critical issue prevalent in the US academic world. This is not just the story of five Asian students' struggles to make sense of their learning challenges, and reflecting upon strategies that may help ease their arduous journey through the prickly forest of English writing. This is relevant and important for every person experiencing the phenomenon of being born in a logographic language system like Chinese, facing challenges as they interact with an alphabetical language universe: The English 'languageverse'.

The paper reports the findings of a Phenomenological study on Chinese graduate students' perceptions of their English writing and communication experiences in the United States. The metaphor of the 'Looking Glass' has been used to discuss the findings, which will be explained in subsequent sections. The study focused specifically on graduate students for compelling reasons. Graduate students from China who are in the United States have gone through rigorous English training, both in China (Lin, 2002), and several years of academic experience in the United States. However, despite their exposure to English long-term, the challenges of writing in English remain, which indicates that whatever learning process they had

been through thus far did not work, at least not to its full potential. This could be because the degree of differences between the Chinese and English languages influences the way the native language users perceive, interpret, assimilate and eventually translate information. This creates a unique set of challenges that place Chinese learners who are from a logographic background, within ill-structured spaces when faced with writing assignments in English. The level and uniqueness of this challenge may prevent learners from constructing usable knowledge without appropriate interventions in all stages of learning English, and can eventually prove demotivating. In such cases, providing a bevy of support, including specific and more frequent feedback, may be a better strategy for knowledge transfer.

Additionally, despite efforts to push English language learning for its citizens, the Chinese government is trading quantity for quality. The 'Gaokao System' of English training in China focuses solely on preparing students for test taking, which does not prepare students for real applications of the language in communications (Li, 2012; Wong, 2015). Zhao (2014) argues that the authoritarian nature of Chinese education is responsible for a majority of issues with students' lack of applicable knowledge. "Such an education system, while being an effective machine to instill what the government wants students to learn, is incapable of supporting individual strengths, cultivating a diversity of talents, and fostering the capacity and confidence to create" (Zhao, 2014, p. 9).

Since the exact causes of such challenges are not fully apparent, it is important to look at this phenomenon through the lens of graduate student experience, to identify some reasons for the low competency level despite extensive exposure to English. Finding such reasons would be valuable information that can be applied to redesigning curriculum when training undergraduate level students from this population with respect to English. Thus, this study sought answers to the questions: What are the characteristics pertaining to the phenomenon of Chinese graduate students' experiences of writing in the English language? What are the perceptions of Chinese graduate students regarding support strategies like feedback to facilitate cross-cultural language writing?

There is scant literature on the effects of feedback and other support mechanisms on logographic writing systems users within alphabetical language environments. The exposure of the two languages to each other is relatively recent, which is why there is a dearth of research and literature on how to handle such cross-language barriers in higher education. This study is also valuable in the context of the rapid increase in the population of Chinese students within the USA, coupled with the cultural and financial benefits they provide (NAFSA, 2013). For example, in 2014-2015, there were 304,040 Chinese students in the USA, who collectively contributed $9.8 billion into the U.S. economy through tuition and fees (IIE, 2016). Chinese learners favor the USA as a learning hub, and the USA wants to welcome them warmly due to cultural and financial benefits. Helping such a population will be mutually beneficial for all stakeholders. In addition, the findings discussed in this paper will be valuable for all international learners as a resource for information on enhancing learner experiences and performances.

Literature Review

The investigation applies Och's (1989) Language Socialization Theory (LST) as the framework of inquiry. The selection of LST is based on the definition of theoretical framework as "the application of a theory, or a set of concepts drawn from one and the same theory, to offer an explanation of an event, or shed some light on a particular phenomenon or research problem" (Imenda, 2014, p. 189). LST is a good fit, given this description, as the study seeks to investigate and explain factors within the phenomenon of English writing experiences of Chinese

graduate students. Based on Imenda's (2014) description of conceptual framework as a composite of concepts related to a phenomenon, some critical aspects of cross-cultural language acquisition and application, as supported in literature, are also discussed in this review section. The selection of literature is based on Creswell's (2012, 2014) suggestion to include works that represent the relationships of things to the surroundings, as well as the worldviews of learners or researchers.

Language Socialization Theory (LST): Theoretical Frame

The theory propounds that people learn language through socialization and socialize through language. Thus, language socialization involves simultaneous learning of a language and associated culture. "Many formal and functional features of discourse carry sociocultural information. Part of the meaning of grammatical and conversational structures is sociocultural (Ochs, 1986, p.3). Based on Psycholinguist Nelson's views (1981), Ochs (1989) argues, "children come to understand lexical items first in terms of their role in particular situational contexts of use and later in terms of properties that generalize across contexts of use" (p.3). This is fitting to the context of the study as socio-cultural aspects underpin some of the unique challenges Chinese students face in terms of gaining English language writing competencies. First, the Chinese learners' 'built environment' is radically different from that of the United States' learning environments, in which such learners are placed. 'Built environments', which is the name given to the concept of manmade surroundings designed for human activity, can be seen in physical, social, cultural and psychological realms (Rapoport, 1990). In addition, most Chinese students are novice learners when it comes to English language, given the magnitude of cultural differences and their historical underexposure to the native user culture. "A central tenet of language socialization research is that novices' participation in communicative practices is promoted but not determined by a legacy of socially and culturally informed persons, artifacts, and features of the built environment" (Duranti, Ochs & Schieffelin, 2012, p.4). Language socialization research examines semiotic worldviews of novices' engagement with culture-binding webs of meaning. "Language socialization also subscribes to the idea that a person may be an expert in one situation and a novice in another" (Duranti, Ochs & Schieffelin, 2012, p.17). The study seeks to verify the accuracy of these assumptions, by examining the participants' experiences as novice learners of a foreign language, and its effects on their built environment, in the context of learning English in China and within the academic settings of the USA.

Writing Systems: Logographic versus Alphabetic

Based on the foci of the research questions (RQs), it is important to examine the differences existing between English and Chinese languages' writing systems, as these are defining elements of the ontology of language learning. Even though they are not language in themselves, writing systems are foundational to a culture's communication structure, and plays a key role in acquiring and transfer of language. The Chinese language belongs to the Logographic systems while the English language is housed in the Alphabetical systems (Ager, 2015). The core difference between these systems relates to the characters and scripts used, as well as the internal relationships between them and the ideas they represent. Scripts are primarily classified into logographic (semiotic based) and phonetic (sound based), based on how they represent language. Internal structures of writing systems are unique, and independent of the language being written (Rogers, 2005). Logographic relates to 'logo' or word plus 'graph' or 'written sign'. English scripts are sound based, wherein each character represents a specific sound. Both script systems have their unique processing and reading methods. In English, letters represent sound that in turn, converts to meaning. In Chinese, each character of the script simultaneously

represents a unit of meaning (morpheme) as well as a syllable. It is this characteristic that allows written Chinese to be pronounced differently in different dialects, and even though these dialects can be mutually unintelligible, all Chinese can still share the same language. Such a phenomenon cannot exist in a phonetic (syllable to sound) language like English (Hoosain, 2005).

Native users of English language learn how to translate spelling to sound from their infancy. As learners grow in age, they become more and more proficient in this translation, as they store word recognition patterns that match to the spellings in their long-term memories (Venzeky, 2005). Thus, for proficiency in English usage, the recognition pattern for an alphabetic set of characters representing the script should reside within the users' long-term memory, which is not the case with logographic users, who may have significantly less time and resources to make this happen. In addition, logographic users follow a different pattern of learning their language (Taylor & Park, 2005). Thus, there are clear processing differences between the two writing systems, and this must be considered during any attempt to transfer language skills between the two systems.

Four Challenges of Cross-Cultural Language Acquisition

First, language is a non-genetic cultural trait and habit, which is why it takes longer to de-acquire, since its utility and value is assimilated deeply within the user's consciousness. Foundational linguists like Sapir (1921) believed that language mingling is far more difficult than race mingling. That is because, "Language and our thought-grooves are inextricably interwoven, are, in a sense, one and the same" (Sapir, 1921, p. 103). Acquiring literacy is a lifelong, context bound process, reliant on cultural contents, which is why native users of any language have long-term memories of that first language or L1. This becomes a potential hindrance to the successful acquisition of the second language or L2. Thus, it is exponentially more challenging to acquire competency for a language that belongs to another system and is as radically different as English is from Chinese, as opposed to different languages within the same writing systems as English and Spanish (Durgunoglu & Verhoeven, 2013). Then, there is the issue of lack of family support that non-native language users face when dealing with foreign language acquisition. Even if children learn a foreign language in school, they may not retain that skill for long due to a lack of literacy support within their home environment (Wells, 1989). Second, because learning is situated in learners' social practices, until the learners are fully immersed in the foreign language's culture, meaningful language acquisition may not be possible. This is especially true of the cultures that are too foreign, remote or otherwise disengaged from the original source (Mondada & Doehler, 2004), for example, the Chinese and United States cultures. Using the concept of Ferguson (1965), Khansir (2012) contends, "One of the major problems in the learning of a second language is the interference caused by the structural differences between the native language of the learner and the second language" (p. 1028).

English Language Learners (ELL) face serious constraints as they try to fit in with the expected norms of the dominant, English-focused academic and social communities prevalent in the United States. A large part of this relates to their ability or lack thereof, to interact with peers and mentors. For a non-native, fitting in a community may require long-term immersion (Fuhrer, 1993; Lave, 1993; Pliatsikas & Chondrogianni, 2015). "A socio-cultural pathway to expertise is associated with immersion in a particular social situation over time, and acquiring not only skillful knowledge, but also the facility to engage successfully in the discourse, norms and practices of the particular community of practice" (Billett, 1996, p.266). In the context of ELLs, the absence of language-culture synthesis with the foreign culture may mean greater

difficulties in acquiring competencies.in the foreign language. It may not be enough for ELL students to be just proficient in grammar as an isolated skill. In order to be successful writers, they must also learn the writing culture of native users (Beckett, Gonzales, & Schwartz, 2004). This is critical for Chinese learners, particularly because they belong to a different culture and writing system. In addition, international learners who arrive in the United States are expected to display socio-communication skills equivalent to the natives, which they do not possess. This can be demoralizing for such learners.

In addition, the ways in which native language users decipher and translate foreign languages can create issues of meaning transfer, leading to confusion and gaps in the ELL's ability to express ideas in the way native users do (Quigley, 2009). Four, the language policies of regional and national authorities could determine the fate of native language acquisition. Typically, if a country follows a policy of language segregation, it can become difficult for learners to develop cross-language skills. An example could be the policy of the Chinese authorities to control English language learning, which is detrimental to the true skill acquisitions of English language. English courses in China mostly use the traditional grammar-translation approach that facilitates higher scores, but not necessarily, corresponding higher skills in learners (Li, 2010). When students from this kind of an academic background come to dominantly English speaking countries, they are faced with challenges of critical thinking and communicating at a higher cognitive level when using English.

What Feedback Can Do

Since one focus of the study is on support mechanisms like feedback for the target population, it is important to examine the discussions about feedback available in literature. Feedback provided by peers, teachers, family and/or self, could act as positive or negative reinforcements ((Hattie & Timperely,2007; Hogan & Tudge, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). The value of feedback is directly linked to the learners' ability to use it through a self-regulated process, which in the end can result in behavioral changes (Carver& Scheier, 2013; Förster, Grant, Idson, &Higgins, 2001; Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004).

There are opposing viewpoints regarding the depth and frequency of feedback required to provide effective support to ELLs. The constructivists believe that not providing extensive feedback could facilitate learners' language skills through the process of self-assessments and self-regulation. The argument is that self-regulated learners are higher achievers due to their greater persistence and resourcefulness. In addition, the growing control learners have on their learning allows them, over a period, to let go of the clutches of external dependency on teachers (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2007; Scroth, 1992; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001, 2004). Some researchers argue in favor of extensive feedback, which is most useful if it is a two-way dialogue between receiver and provider, rather than a one-way commentary to tell learners what is wrong and how they can improve (Nicol, Thompson & Breslin, 2013; Nicol, 2010). However, these perspectives do not recognize the degree of challenges that logographic (Chinese) learner's face, which makes such contentions questionable in that context.

Methodology and Methods

The study used Phenomenology as the methodology. Phenomenology focuses on gaining an understanding of social, cultural and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved, including careful and thorough data gathering on how people perceive something, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, and have conversations about it with others (Creswell,2014; Holroyd, 200; Patton, 2015; Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015; Welman & Kruger,2002). "It is a particular way of doing science: doing qualitative research by substituting

individual descriptions for statistical correlations and interpretations resulting from the experiences lived for causal connections" (Sadala & Adorno, 2001, p. 283). Thus, a phenomenology methodology was most suitable for this study, as it examined the lived experiences and perceptions of Chinese graduate students regarding the phenomenon of writing in English and the value of support mechanisms like feedback. This ties in closely with the theoretical and conceptual frames and associated research questions. The study examined if the general factors that contribute to other ELL learners are equally applicable to Chinese learners. This matches the central foci of phenomenology pertaining to reliance on individual experiences versus statistical correlations perceived within a phenomenon.

The participants for this study were five graduate level students from China, who have been in the USA for more than three years. Purposeful sampling was used to identify and select cases that were most rich in information. Graduate students with some academic writing experience using English language, who have resided in the USA for more than three years, were targeted, since this population would have special knowledge, experience and interest in the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Plano Clark; 2011Patton, 2015). To select the final participants, twelve prospective participants were asked to complete a short online survey, using a 12 multiple-choice question set, pertaining to demographic information (age, education level, country of origin, time spent in the USA). Prospective participants were given unique identifiers to protect their confidentiality. The final five participants were selected based on their time spent in the USA, country of origin and graduation level. Denscombe (2003) clarifies the advantage of purposive sampling survey as it allows the researcher to "hone in on people or events which there are good grounds for believing will be critical for the research…. it might not only be economical but might also be informative" (p. 16).

Data sources were semi-structured interviews of approximately one-hour duration, and participant's writing samples for pre and posttests that served as examples of the writing quality, which was essential to the study's intent. Interview questions provided insights into the core research questions, as well as elicited maximum information from the participants on background, perception, feelings and knowledge about the phenomenon (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interviews were recorded and transcribed, verbatim. The interview transcripts analysis drew from Saldana's (2009) recommendations for coding, in that the purpose of coding is not limited to reduction of data, but can also include summarizing, distilling or condensing data.

Although reduction is useful to "organize data in such a way that "final" conclusions can be drawn and verified" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11), it alone may not be enough to retain the authenticity and the viability of the process (Namey, Guest, Thairu & Johnson, 2008). Based on this, Saldana (2009) suggests that because, "A code represents and captures a datum's primary content and essence" (p.3), we should look at "what strikes you" (p.18), Thus, transcripts were first examined with an eye on critical elements relatable to the RQs. Thereafter, they were coded for patterns and then codified, by dividing the codes into primary, and sub categories. "To codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize" (Saldana, 2009, p. 8).

Good research practices demand that researchers employ techniques to establish trustworthiness and validity, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985). In Phenomenology, this is done by ensuring that the findings are accurate from multiple standpoints, including that of the researcher, the participant, and/ or the readers of the study report (Creswell, 2014, Creswell

&Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rolfe (2006) explains that these procedures are important because, "A study is trustworthy if and only if the reader of the research report judges it to be so" (p.306). For this study, Epoché, Eidetic Reduction, and Imaginative Variation techniques were used (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994; Sadala, & Adorno, 2001). Epoché and Eidetic Reduction were done using deep reflexivity and discussing biases, as well as in the interview transcript coding process. Imaginative Variation, which means using varying frames of reference and imagination (Lin, 2013; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994), was achieved using the metaphor of the looking glass, as explained and discussed in the findings section. In addition, Interrater Reliability for coding was established by having two people code separately, and then matching the codes. Member checking was done by sending the raw transcripts and/or analysis script to the participants for verification. Face and content validity of surveys was done via pilot testing using three students. Interview protocols were pilot tested using two students, before proceeding with the actual interviews.

Researcher Positionality

Although Phenomenology does not subscribe to the rigors of objectivity prevalent in quantitative work, it is not an arbitrary display of "idiosyncratic explanations" (Lin, 2013, p. 471), and demands the application of both subjective and objective/critical lenses (Crotty, 1998). A Phenomenologist's intent should be "to discover the universals underlying the inter-subjectively experienced phenomenon" (Lin, 2013, p.471). Researcher subjectivity is also a key aspect of phenomenology. "It is precisely the realization of the intersubjective interconnectedness between researcher and researched that characterizes phenomenology" (Finlay, 2009, p.11). In this context, the authors are deeply empathetic towards the target population, having experienced English language learning as a non-native user. In addition, as a professor of English Language and Composition, the first author had the privilege of teaching large number of students from China. Her close association with them over a considerable period did shape some of the concerns and questions regarding the support mechanisms and pedagogical approaches that are being used in the USA for such students. When engaged within the study's environment, this helped becoming a part of the process and thus established a rich interconnectedness between the researchers and researched. Their intimate association with the phenomenon added to the value of the study, as it added the subjective richness demanded in qualitative research. As the foci of the study was more exploratory, it provided valuable insight that added to the first authors' own understanding of this phenomenon, and emerging from the study, a better-informed educator. In order to balance objectivity with subjectivity, several techniques for trustworthiness and validity as explained in the above paragraphs were used.

Findings and Discussions: The Looking Glass Effect

Some of the ideas reflected within the literature reviews, such as challenges related to specific differences between the languages, and participant's perception of the value of feedback, were substantiated by the findings of this study. However, what was most significant was that there was no evidence that when learners are immersed in the culture of the foreign language, it may increase language competencies, in particular writing skills. To the contrary, it was evident that despite being immersed in the USA culture for three years or more, participants still had serious writing issues, as was evident from their writing samples and confessions within the interviews. Inspired by what the participants revealed, the first author developed three new concepts. One, the experiences of the Chinese learners in the USA was akin to the one's Lewis Carroll's (1896) characters experienced. The first author named it the Looking Glass Effect paradigm or LGE. Then, based on the unique nature of these experiences and resultant learning

challenges, the first author developed the concept of a Globally Infused Pedagogy (GIP), and provided an example model (Customized Language Camp) of its possible application.

Researcher Approach to Discussion of Findings

Literature supports the choice of using creativity to enhance rigor, as a part of the Imaginative Variation process, which is done by including rich, thick descriptions, sharing examples and quotations from the data, and wherever possible, using figurative analysis in the form of metaphors, analogies or the like. These help create greater rapport with the readers, who may find venues of identification, empathy and recognition within such sharing (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008; Burnard, 2004; Slone, 2009; Wills, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss how creative ways of data display and discussion of findings may help to establish transferability and confirmability. Such descriptive and creative analysis allows us to focus more intuitively on the experience, and resonates with the readers' and researchers' psychological and professional sensibilities (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 2007).

Nonetheless, in following this style, extra precautions must be taken to ensure that the discussion does not digress from the RQ foci and the study's intent. Thus, it is prudent to look to literature and other practitioner approaches to support the usage of any metaphor, and fuse it with a candid description of the author's worldview of the metaphor's usefulness within the context of the study. For this study, the findings and associated data have been discussed using the metaphoric lens of the 'looking glass', as derived from Lewis Caroll's (1896) classic novel: Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There. Literature supports the use of metaphors to write qualitative research findings, including Phenomenological research. Some examples used so far are the dance metaphor for qualitative inquiry (Janesick, 1998), learning metaphors used by Chinese students (Xiong, 2015), and metaphors that conceptualized how students visualize their research (Pitcher, 2013). Jensen (2006) suggests that since the language of participants is a means of shared expressions, the data analysis and reporting should be reflective and symbiotic. As discussed subsequently, the metaphor of the looking glass has also been used by some other authors, though sparingly and not in the context of Chinese to English learning. The discussion has been embellished with verbatim quotes from the transcripts, with no changes made to correct grammar issues or make the language clearer. This is so that the authenticity of the speech is retained as that also provides insight into the difficulties participants had in using English language.

Brief Explanation of the Looking Glass Effect (LGE) Paradigm

LGE is the paradigm that represents unique challenges Chinese learners have with respect to learning and/or using English language. The term draws from the adventures or misadventures of the characters in Lewis Carroll's (1896) novel, which provided a metaphorical backdrop to describe these challenges more profoundly than what could be described using a non-metaphorical approach. Using the metaphor may enable readers to identify with these challenges in a more intuitive fashion, because of two reasons. First, there are many similarities between the situations and psychological ramifications depicted in the book and the Chinese graduate students' perceptions of their experiences in learning English. Second, a central theme of the book pertains to language issues, including cross-cultural language problems as well as unique aspects of the English language that can be confusing for foreign users.

Yaguello and Harris (1998) describe in detail several language issues that Carroll's (1896) book depicts, in the context of foreign language users. For example, they discuss syntactic ambiguity, syntax across dialects, and syntactic anomalies, and explain how, "Grammarticality is a fudgy edged concept. Acceptability judgments may also be influenced by

social norms and prescription" (p.118). Beckman (2010) describes how the conversations in Carroll's (1869) book display a very different logic from formal English language, even though the language used is English. In order to facilitate readers' understanding, here is a micro-summary of the story of Alice's journey through the looking glass and a link to the full novel online. Alice is a young girl, who is prone to daydreaming, and within her dreams, she visits fantastical lands. In this story, as Alice is talking to her kittens, she finds that the glass of the mirror in her home has grown soft, and she can step through it to an alternate room in an alternate world, which though very similar to her own home, is also very strangely different. In this world, she faces many challenges, and meets strange characters, some of whom she knows from her own world. In the end, she realizes that this was all a dream, but she is not sure if she was a part of another character's dream, or if they were a part of her dream!

It is the first author's belief that there was an ulterior motive to Carroll's (1896) use of the phrase 'looking glass' instead of the more generic term 'mirror'. That is because, a mirror by its represented definition means a copy of something; that is similar to something else, or a faithful representation of something else (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016; Dictionary.com, 2016). However, the world that Alice stepped into using the 'mirror' was not exactly the same as what she had left behind. In fact, this world was in many ways the reverse of Alice's world. However, her enticement with what she saw through the glass was strong enough to make her feel that things were good on the other side, and encouraged her to step through the glass.

Perceptions of Chinese Students' English Usage Experiences in the United States

The conversations divulged several views that were common and some that were divergent. However, the Looking Glass Effect (LGE) was the underpinning flavor of these conversations, as participants shared accounts of their experiences as ELLs. Several of the participants revealed how they or their families were enticed by the 'American lure' that encouraged them to come to the USA. For example, Harry mentioned, "When I was doing my bachelor degree, I was thinking about… if I can just go to America to see what the first powerful country in this world is like", and Sam disclosed similar feelings, "I think America is very diverse, so I like the diversity". All participants' families encouraged them to study in the USA. The challenge that emerges from such 'looking glass' perspectives is that the realities may not live up to the expectations, leading to negative experiences, feelings, and inferiority complexes. Carroll's (1896) Alice was bewildered and confused to find a world that looked promising, but was not, and this led to many misadventures, anger and frustration. Similarly, the participants' initial worldview of the USA, led to disappointments in several ways, since they had not accounted for the kind of difficulties they could face due to the language barriers.

Chelsea confessed to her high levels of discomfort when interacting with her American peers in high school, as she was unable to figure out if they were making fun of her heritage, were being sarcastic, or were seriously interested. "I have really difficulty to like really understand how people express their feelings Yes, yes especially if dragons were a joke or sarcastic something like that". Harry had issues communicating with his peers in class because, "All of my classmates are English native speakers, so I sometimes feel difficult talking with them… they don't speak like standard English and also because they may speak very fast and use different words which I never learn before, so this make some difficulties for me". Dana expressed similar frustrations, "sometimes I don't know other people's feeling. Uh, I feel it is, like other people don't understand me…. so… in America, lots of people don't understand Chinese". These confessions supported and ratified my assumption, as expressed in the Literature Review section, which is that because the Chinese learners' 'built environment' is so

radically different from that of the USA learning environments, in which such learners are placed, it can create unique challenges for such learners. Galetcaia's (2014) study on ELLs infers similar findings in that participants developed a "wide range of inferiority complexes, thereby diminishing the learner's confidence." (p. 4274), and their "sense of self was diminished by not being able to express adequately their thoughts and feelings" (p.4273).

Magnified Level of Confusion and Resultant Learning Challenges

Another element of the LGE is magnified level of confusion and resultant learning challenges the emanating from the universal differences between the Chinese and English languages and cultures. This may be due to different reasons, such as language structure, grammar rules, vocabulary confusions, and denotation-connotation complexities. Carroll's (1896) Alice faces several such situations in the looking glass world, as do the study participants in the USA. In the context of grammar and rules, let us examine an excerpt from the book, and then compare it with the participant rhetoric.

Book excerpt: I don't care for jam.''It's very good jam,' said the Queen.'Well, I don't want any to-day, at any rate.''You couldn't have it if you did want it,' the Queen said. 'The rule is jam tomorrow and jam yesterday but never jam to-day.''It must come sometimes to "jam to-day",' Alice objected. 'No it can't,' said the Queen. 'It's jam every other day; to-day isn't any other day, you know.''I don't understand you,' said Alice. 'It's dreadfully confusing!' (Carroll, 1896, pp. 65,66).

Carroll's (1896) Alice is "dreadfully confused" due to the nature of the rules of jam eating, since it does not make sense when viewed through the lens of her own experiences. In a similar vein, Chinese students have a tough time making sense of English grammar rules, as nothing comparable exists in their native language. Chelsea made several observations supporting this. "We usually don't use clause. We have little expressions like 'which'. We usually have a long adjective out of descriptive words before the noun. We do not usually say comma, 'which is', 'who is'". For her, this is extremely challenging as, "it is a difficult transition for me, to in my mind, translate it from Chinese". Sam expressed something very similar, "Spanish is very similar to English. Therefore, for those people it is easy to become English, but for us everything is different. We have to forget Chinese first, and then we can speak English. Therefore, it is right. It's a totally different language". Lena provided an interesting outlier in that she believed "English language have rule, very clear, Chinese rule isn't clear". However, Lena's difficulty stemmed from the vast difference in the volume and texture of the vocabularies. "Understanding Chinese is easier if you know the history behind the picture. If you know China vocabulary, 3000, you can read article in newspaper, you can write, but in English vocabulary is more, more, more".

Stereotyping Leads to Lower Self-esteem and Self-efficacy

This is another key LGE element manifested in the way native or non-Chinese writers and reviewers may view how Chinese writers write in English language. In Carroll's (1896) world, such stereotyping is quite rampant in the way different characters view one another, many times in disdain or negatively. For example, let us look at the 'Lion and the Unicorn' Chapter, in which Carroll's (1896) Alice has a curious conversation about other people in general, and the messenger in particular.

Book Excerpt: I see nobody on the road,' said Alice. 'I only wish I had such eyes,' the King remarked in a fretful tone. 'To be able to see Nobody! (p.89). …What curious attitudes he goes into!' (For the messenger kept skipping up and down and wriggling like an eel, as he came along, with his great hands spread out like fans on each side.)'Not at all,' said the King. 'He is an Anglo-

Saxon Messenger-and those are Anglo-Saxon attitudes. He only does them when he is happy (Carroll, 1896, p. 90).

In this passage, the King has a stereotypical notion of the awkwardness of the Messenger's gait. He is also regretful that he cannot see 'Nobody', which could be an allegorical representation of how reality can be warped, as in stereotyping, where 'somebody' becomes a 'nobody' as people assimilate their impressions of targeted individuals to form an impression about the group to which the targeted individual may belong (Rothart & Lewis, 2006; Taifel, 1982). Chinese learners in the USA may also be subjected to lower self-esteem and self-efficacy as they are constantly, and sometimes painfully, aware that when people read their writing, they treat it as inferior, because they may suspect that it was written by a Chinese writer.
This is self-propelled stereotyping that can manifest itself in lessened zeal to do better. Several of the participants provided poignant expressions of this. For example, Chelsea stated, "But sometimes I am not very confident when thinking about… oh.. The one who is reading my article is thinking I'm a Chinese and this has a whole lot of errors and this doesn't make any sense", and how that "kind of blocks me from really wanting to express something". In a similar vein, Sam explained, "I want to write like a native speaker you know. It is very important for me. I do not want people to see my paper and they "Oh this is-- it must be like a non-English speaker write this".

Challenge of Cognitive Reconditioning

Central to the LGE is the challenge of cognitive reconditioning that is required when acquiring a new language. As discussed in the literature review section, the tenets of Language Socialization Theory indicate that language learning during the formative years can create long-term memories, which may hinder rewiring of language concepts or reconditioning. In the context of the Chinese student participants, all five admitted that they began learning English as early as in third grade. Yet, the way in which they learned the language in China during their foundational years may have contributed to this challenge. Metaphorically, Carroll's (1896) Alice experiences such hindrances as she encounters the strange patterns of language usage by the characters in the looking glass land, and she is perplexed that even though they are using English, the connotation-denotation does not match her cognitive memories of what the terms and sentences should really mean. This is very clearly manifested in the "Jabberwocky" poem conversation, as well as the dialogue between the Red Queen and Alice.

Book Excerpt: 'When you say "hill,"' the Queen interrupted, 'I could show you hills, in comparison with which you'd call that a valley.' 'No, I shouldn't,' said Alice, surprised into contradicting her at last: 'a hill can't be a valley, you know. That would be nonsense— ' 'The Red Queen shook her head, 'You may call it "nonsense" if you like,' she said, ' but I've heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary!' (Carroll, 1896, p.29).

Alice is flabbergasted by what she perceives to be warped connotations of perfectly good English phrases and words. Similarly, when she hears the Jabberwocky" poem, which is written in perfect English grammar, but the word usage is nonsensical, Alice resorts to subterfuge to protect her secret that she was just not getting it. "'It seems very pretty,' she said when she had finished it, 'but it's rather hard to understand!' (You see she didn't like to confess, ever to herself that she couldn't make it out at all.)" (Carroll, 1896, p. 20). Yang (2006) examined Carroll's (1869) novel from the perspective of cross cultural language acquisition, and explained that since native users of English use grammar to decipher a combinations of thoughts into their respective combinations of words, it is necessary to have knowledge of not only grammar, but also how to use that to translate thoughts into words. "Grammar is Nature's substitute for telepathy; for it to

function properly, though, we have to pick a particular codebook and stick with it" (Yang, 2006, p. 94). In the case of the Chinese graduate participants, learning grammar at an early age was not enough to develop writing competencies, because their formative training did not prepare them to apply that grammar knowledge to recode their Chinese codebook. All five participants suggested this, indicating that even though they learned grammar, it was focused entirely on providing a rote-for-test skill, and not actual implementation or application of that knowledge. This was also substantiated by the pre and post written tasks submitted (Appendix B). It was interesting to see that although Harry was able to complete all identification-of-grammar-error questions with a hundred percent accuracy, he had more than ninety percent grammar and structural errors in his four paragraph essay! Similar issues were found in varying degrees in all participant essays.

Harry commented on the different approaches to writing between the languages. "In China, we need to use some adjective words before you can really express your ideas. So I think English writing here is more direct and in Chinese, we always want the readers to feel what we want to express". Sam expressed similar feelings, "even like a word choice, for me it is so hard because for you guys you know -- okay these two words are different, what -- why it would be different, right? But for me they mean the same thing you know" This suggests the existence of a critical issue with their current learning process. "Grammar cannot simply be a list of sentences we have previously memorized—Rather, the grammar must be a compact device that encodes the regularities of how sentences are formed in our language, one that we can use to create and understand new sentences" (Yang 2006, pp. 95-96). As is evidently clear from the data, Chinese learners face several unique challenges that support the Looking Glass Effect paradigm.

Chinese Students' Perceptions of Support Mechanisms, Including Feedback

A key focus of the study was to examine the assumption that feedback and other support mechanism are essential to facilitate the Chinese graduate students' English writing process. Since feedback was the most readily available option due to the background of the primary investigator as an English professor, the study included pre, post-writing samples, and associated feedback. Participants unanimously agreed that feedback is vital to their language competency acquisition process, and indicated that the scope of such feedback should be intensive and inclusive of grammar, critical thinking, structure and vocabulary. Appendix A provides transcript samples related to participants' views on what kind of feedback they preferred. The unanimous agreement was that simply pointing out grammar errors is not enough. Having several iterations of the same writing piece was the favorite feedback choice. In addition, Chelsea mentioned how she disliked when professors took her papers and did not give any comments, even if she received acceptable grades. Simultaneously, the interview question number ten focused on the 'other supports': What kind of help, in addition to or other than written feedback, would help improve your English? In response to this question, the participants provided rich data pertaining to support mechanisms. The associated transcript examples for this section are available in Appendix A. Participants listed several items related to technology, personal interfacing and creative pedagogy. as preferred support mechanism other than or along with feedback. These provided the data for supporting the practitioner model of Globally Infused Pedagogy (GIP) for Chinese students, which is discussed in detail below.

Implications and Recommendations

Pedagogical Outcome: Recommendation for a Globally Infused Pedagogy (GIP)

Data suggests that the answer to the critical factors pertaining to the phenomenon of Chinese graduate students' experiences of writing in the English language can be found in the

Looking Glass Effects paradigm discussed above. There is also compelling data indicating the need of the target population to be supported by pedagogy techniques and technologies that can cater to their unique learning challenges. The discussion below identifies the key principles of this suggested pedagogy and associated justification and support.

The First Principle of GIP: Reduce Western worldview on pedagogy. The first principle of GIP is to reduce the dominance of a Western worldview on pedagogy, and instead cater to the unique needs of international students, especially from Asian belts. GIP suggests that an Asian cultural infusion take place within the curricula when dealing with Asian learners. The participant responses regarding their hardships of learning and applying English writing competencies strongly suggest a critical need to rethink our teaching strategies with respect to this population and perhaps develop a new form of pedagogy to handle the issues relative to the phenomenon being investigated. In this context, we must think in terms of a Globally Infused Pedagogy (GIP) that seeks to be consciously cognizant of the needs of the international population that we have come to welcome in the educational arenas of the USA. This suggestion is inspired from the foundational works of Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2000 and 2001), and Banks (2004) who propounded pedagogical approaches that were culturally relevant. For example, Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed the Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy Theory (CRRP), which suggests that all students must get a chance to succeed academically, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. The theory encouraged educators to use students' culture as a vehicle for learning, and design curriculum to reflect a multicultural approach to pedagogy.

Gay (2000) added to this discourse by propounding seven principles of culturally responsive teaching (validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory) as a solution to demolishing Eurocentric beliefs and practices that led to cultural apathy among educators. Gay (2000, 2001) also provided prescriptions for action and expanded on her earlier ideas by advocated creating culturally diverse knowledge base, designing culturally relevant curricula for all categories (formal, symbolic, societal curriculum), building cross-cultural communications and maintaining cultural congruity in instructional practices. In addition, Banks (2004, 2005) emphasized on restructuring teaching practices to accommodate diversity. However, even though literature is teeming with research reports on culture related curriculum design, the research is primarily focused on two marginalized population streams: African-Americans and Latinos. These theories and recommendations do not give precedence to the newest addition to the arena: The International Students. In addition, most of such literature represents a Western worldview, ignoring the uniqueness of the Asian culture counterparts. "We need to explore the possibilities for a new way forward that works from an understanding of these complexities and a genuine attempt to learn from the unfamiliar 'other' (Ryan & Louie, 2007, p.405). As discussed in the Introductions section, the international students are a widely expanding academic population in the USA. As discussed in the sub-questions findings section, the unique challenge this population faces warrants immediate attention, and justifies GIP. The concept of GIP is similar to CRRP in that pedagogy must be culturally conscious, but there is a major difference.

The Second Principle: Rethink conventional thinking. The second principle of GIP is to promote conscious rethinking of some conventional notions of language acquisition phenomenon. The study data indicates that some conventional thinking with respect to language acquisition does not apply to this population, and thus they should be rethought. Some of the previous theories the data contradicts relates to the belief that second language learners can gain

competencies if they are immersed in the culture of the language being acquired for a period. There are different views on what this immersion means. For example, Cummins's (2008) BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) research suggested that one to three years intermingling would give ELLs the social language level of their peers, which they can then use to enhance their academic language competencies. Similarly, Mondada and Daehler (2004) contended that when ELL learners are fully immersed in the foreign language's (L2) culture, meaningful language acquisition might take place. The immersion is also distinguished by type: Total (ELL learn using L2), partial (ELLs are partially engaged with L2), and bilingual (ELLs use both L2 and indigenous language) (Christian, 1996; Kristmanson & Dicks, 2014; Jong &Howard, 2009; Pacific Policy Research Center. 2010). Fusing concepts of LST and Socio-Cultural Theory, Duff (2007) contends, "Learning, knowledge-construction, and socialization – that is, the development of the human mind and the socialized individual – are seen to be processes that are mutually engaged in by members in a community over time" (p.312). However, the study data clearly contradicts this and shows that despite being immersed in the L2 culture, and socializing with it over a substantial period of three years or more, Chinese graduate students failed to develop the competencies as predicted by literature.

The Third Principle: Revaluate feedback techniques. The third principle of GIP is to revitalize feedback strategies to complement the target populations' writing and communication in English needs. The participants unanimously agreed that feedback is the most important intervention that they need to improve their competencies. However, they also unanimously perceived that certain conventional feedback techniques are less effective for their English writing competency needs. This is specially related to the type of feedback. In literature, feedback has been posited as a tool for self and co regulated learning, and associated with constructivism and cognitivism learning approaches (Mccaslin & Hickey, 2001; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). The constructivist approach believes that interventions (like giving feedback) during the knowledge acquisition stage should be avoided so that greater learning challenges can be created, which in turn will help learners to better construct their own learning (Driscoll, 2005; Hill, 2002; Jordan, Carlile & Stack ,2008; Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin 2013; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2007). Some cognitivist approach based research contends that delay in feedback provides more long-term transfer, even though this could slow down the rate of immediate learning (Scroth, 1992). However, as suggested by the data, this may not be applicable to situations where adult learners are engaged in learning languages that have different systemic structures of writing such as in logographic (Chinese) versus alphabetic (English). As displayed in Appendix A, participants indicated that peripheral feedback (pointing grammar errors, providing outside resources, not in-depth) is far less valuable if not married to intensive feedback (close reading, critical thinking, providing different iterations, one-on-one tutoring). This demands taking a fresh approach on designing feedback interventions.

The Fourth Principle: Revaluate teaching techniques. The fourth principle of GIP is to encourage teachers to revamp their teaching ideologies and processes by giving due consideration to the unique challenges faced by the target population. The study data suggests that teachers need to revamp their teaching techniques when it comes to helping Chinese students with English writing. This may also require getting reoriented with the realities of Chinese learners' perceptions of what constitutes valuable techniques, as well as the extent of competencies such learners are seeking to achieve ((Harklau 1994). All participants in this study expressed the desire to become as competent as native English users, which is why they were looking for interventions that went beyond conventional methods and attitudes of hands-free or

total control kind of teaching. For example, Chelsea complained about some professors not giving any feedback, "My adviser gave me some feedback on my writing with papers that we were going to submit for conferences and publication, but for other like course papers I didn't receive anything about my writing. I don't know where it went". For Chelsea, being treated like this was a problem, because it prevented her from gaining the competencies she desired.

On the other side, the data gave some indication that teachers' desire and compulsion to accommodate ELL students can backfire, depending on the level of control teachers may exert on the students' learning process. For example, Chelsea mentioned how some of the professors would give grace points or overlook English errors, and though she appreciated this, she was more comfortable with being told how her work could improve. Teacher accommodations may include giving easy pass, grace points, rewriting papers, having students copy peer work, and generally not giving ELL students learning challenges that match what native users may get. Harklau's (1994) experiment revealed that generally native English speakers were given more vocal time in class activities than Chinese students. In the case of written language, Chinese students were given activities that required single word or phrase responses in fill-in-the-blank and short answer formats. Similarly, in Dooley's (2003) study the teacher offered help to two Taiwanese students, by dictating appropriate paragraphs for the writing tasks.

The point of all this is that there needs to be a balance between extreme support or too little support, and teachers need to reevaluate their teaching strategies when it comes to Chinese students' English language learning. As the data suggests, the Looking Glass Effect (LGE) is a very real experience for such learners and conventional pedagogy has essentially failed to produce desired results. "Professional discourses on 'the Chinese learner' may thus point to real differences: Chinese students may constitute a distinctive group for whom special consideration must be made if pedagogies are to be productive of high quality academic outcomes including intellectual quality and student control of learning" (Dooley, 2003, p. 32). Thus, applying a Globally Infused Pedagogy approach may prove to be more assistive in dealing with LGE issues. The next section describes graphically and textually, a model that applies GIP principles.

Practitioner Implications: Customized Learning Camp: A GIP Application Model

The study's findings implied using a new pedagogical approach of GIP for teaching cross-cultural languages for Asian students. Giving life to the voice of the participants, and based solely on their recommendations, a working model is being suggested that utilizes GIP principles and provides an innovative approach to facilitating English learning for Chinese students. This is valuable since the model has been synthesized from the suggestions of learners belonging to the population it seeks to serve. In a way this is the most appropriate complement to the looking glass metaphor that epitomizes the target population's learning issues, as each participant explores his or her own 'looking glass' world and finds a way out in this vision of dynamic communal learning. The model may be used as a class structure or as a supportive structure to augment the class structure in the context of English learning.

The suggestions were mostly garnered from the responses to the interview question number ten about support mechanisms, other than or in addition to feedback. Chelsea initiated the inspiration to think of this model by her suggestion of having a learning camp for Chinese students, and all other participants provided their own versions that intuitively supplemented this vision. Appendix B has a full rendition of these important transcript pieces. To summarize her vision, the learning camp would be a place where Chinese and non-Chinese students could congregate and participate in socially charged learning activities. They could be supported by "instructors who are hanging around with us and trying to connect the different activities to like some core

elements in language so that I can have a more international feeling of how this language is going on". All camp members would be contributors who come up with innovative ways to help one another learn. Sam supported that vision by suggesting that we create customized learning solutions for Chinese students. Eventually, based on each participant's contribution, six themes emerged from the recommendations, as displayed below.

Conclusion

The five participants of the study provided in-depth, intuitive and compelling data that led to several findings, some supporting existing literature, while others contributing to it. At the end of the study, it was apparent that using graduate students was a more efficient way to assess the English learning issues of the Chinese population in the USA, because their issues are representative of teaching approaches and theories that did not work when implemented at lower levels of academia. The participants went through a rigorous English language learning process, from the third grade in China, through high school and then undergraduate college in the USA. Yet, they did not gain the desired or predicted competencies and continued to have unique issues as described in the Looking Glass Effect paradigm. Appendix B has some snippets taken from the participant responses to the pre and posttests and as is apparent, they have a long way to go before gaining English writing proficiency. Clearly, what we have done so far has not worked efficiently enough, which warrants finding new ways to tackle these issues. Fortunately, the participant responses provided the much needed vision and recommendations.

The birth of new approaches to pedagogy and teaching strategies (Globally Infused Pedagogy, Customized Learning Camp) is significant as it draws from the target populations' vision, born out of a desperate need for solutions to their unique challenges of English learning. Even if at this stage the model is conceptual, it is founded on credible and valid data, making it a viable suggestion. This also provides avenues for future exploration by applying the model and investigating how it can be improved or modified to serve the population needs effectively. In addition, even though GIP and CLC were developed keeping Chinese students in mind, their structures are flexible enough to be tweaked to suit any ESL population from international backgrounds. After all, cross-cultural language acquisition will have some common challenges. "Writing in a first and second language are not the same and… teaching practices from one situation are not necessarily transferable to another" (Hyland, 2000, p. 35).

To conclude, this study was a significant step towards helping international students and their teachers in the USA get a deeper understanding of the issues of Chinese learner population and possible ways to deal with such issues. As researchers, we do understand that there is no shortcut way though the prickly, topsy-turvy forest of English for international learners; no magical pixie- dust to whisk such learners away to a land where they are fully versed in the English language. However, it is precisely for this reason that we also believe that we must never give up, but plod on, researching and trying to find innovative ways to bring our 'lost' learners out of this forest and help them fulfill their dream of being competent English language users. After all, as Dana put it, "Sometimes you face this challenge, have many problems, sometimes you want to give up, … yea, but I don't want to give up, because it's a long time life, you know, if you give up, like, you can blow up future".

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