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EXPLORING THE BILINGUAL LINGUISTIC FUNCTIONING OF FIRST-SEMESTER
CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: MYTHS AND REALITIES

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Abstract

Exploring the Bilingual Linguistic Functioning of First-Semester Chinese International Students:

Myths and Realities

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Bilingual international students' ability to function linguistically has been found to be closely associated with their academic performance (Karuppan & Barari, 2010; Rowntree, Zufferey, & King, 2016) and social adjustment (Andrade, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003). While most previous research has focused on the language and education experiences of graduate international students (e.g., Cheng & Erben, 2011; Jiang, 2014; Lin, 2006; Xue, 2013), it remains unclear how undergraduate students, especially newly-arrived college freshmen, function linguistically during their transnational, translingual, and transcultural experiences.

Drawing upon Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985), this one-semester-long qualitative study explored the linguistic functioning and first-semester college experiences of twelve international freshmen from China. The guiding research questions were: (1) How did the twelve Chinese international students from different disciplines function linguistically in academic and social settings at the beginning of their first semester in college? (2) How did they meet the oral and written linguistic demands in academic and social settings throughout the semester? (3) What has changed regarding their linguistic functioning over the course of one semester?

The participants were twelve first-semester Chinese international freshmen majoring in eight disciplines. Multi-modal data were collected through a combination of a 4-month digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016) using a culturally-relevant social media application software *WeChat*, along with traditional qualitative data collection methods including semi-structured interviews, bilingual language logs, writing samples across genres, talks around texts, and informal communication. Three themes emerged based on data analyzed following applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), including linguistic functioning in academic and social settings, the students' coping strategies initiated, and their perceptions of support received. While the students' previous language and education backgrounds played an important role in their ability to function linguistically in college, internal factors such as motivation and agency also helped to shape their first-semester college experiences. Although Chinese was frequently adopted as a bridging tool earlier in the semester, its popularity naturally decreased overtime throughout the semester.

In questioning eight commonly held misconceptions, this dissertation has unpacked the within-group variability and tensions among Chinese international students and drawn attention to their initial transitional, translingual, and transcultural experiences from a developmental perspective. Based on the findings, I present (1) suggestions on how American higher education could better serve the unique linguistic and academic needs of its growing international student population to facilitate their long-term success, (2) implications on research methodology, and (3) directions for future research.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter

Portia Clementine Wu.

Always remember, mama loves you forever!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

With globalization and the rising power of English as a Lingual Franca (Jenkins, 2006),

more and more students travel overseas to English-speaking countries in pursuit of tertiary

education. Among them, a considerable number have chosen to go to the United States, the top

host country for international students in the world (Park, 2016). According to a recent report

from the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2018), in the academic year between 2017 and

2018, the total number of international students enrolled in American higher education has

reached its peak at 1,094,792. With an increase of over 3.6% in comparison with the previous

academic year, China has been consistently ranked as the leading place of origin for international

students ten years in a row (33.2%), followed by India (17.9%), and South Korea (5.0%) (IIE,

2018).

Chinese international students' journey in American higher education encompasses both

opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the new experiences in an English-speaking

Western country could familiarize them with cutting-edge research and knowledge, endow them

with a global vision, and prepare them to be cultural ambassadors in the process of globalization

(Jiang, 2003). On the other hand, the different cultural and language environments and the

transition from secondary to tertiary education may pose challenges to their adaptation and

acculturation, especially during the early stage of their overseas studies (Bayley, Fearnside,

Arnol, Misiano, & Rottura, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of this journey, particularly regarding the language experiences of Chinese international undergraduate students at the initial stage of their overseas studies. Based on the findings of the study, I questioned eight commonly held misconceptions including (1) Chinese international students represent a homogenous group; (2) the Chinese students' TOEFL results accurately predict their ability to function linguistically upon college arrival; (3) American higher education needs an English-only Policy to help bilingual international students to improve their English proficiency; (4) First-year Writing course guarantees successful writing performances in content-subject courses; (5) office hour consultations are always helpful to students; (6) socioeconomic status is always positively correlated with students' academic outcome; (7) the large influx of foreign students is always a negative phenomenon; and (8) external factors determine Chinese international students' college experiences. It is hoped that findings of the dissertation will shed light on ways American higher education could better address the needs of its growing international student population in order to facilitate a smoother linguistic, cultural and academic transition during their translingual, transcultural, and transnational experiences.

Problem Statement

Although Chinese international students are required to pass certain thresholds in gatekeeping English proficiency standardized tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) prior to college entry, they are often found to be linguistically under-prepared, and have difficulty functioning[1] linguistically in authentic English-speaking college

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[1] For the purpose of this dissertation, *linguistic functioning* is defined as the ability to draw upon all language resources available to navigate through and meet the linguistic demands in both academic and social settings.

environments (Wang, 2016; Xue, 2013). The challenges in linguistic functioning are particularly remarkable during the initial stage of their overseas experiences (Bayley et al., 2002).

In other words, a mismatch can be identified between Chinese international students' ability to pass gatekeeping standardized English assessment and their inability to function linguistically upon arrival. This is likely because, to function successfully in American higher education, students are required to not only perform discrete academic English skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing (as emphasized in standardized tests such as the TOEFL), but also demonstrate their ability to apply those language skills to function in authentic academic and social contexts. Nevertheless, the kind of English international students learned back in China has failed to prepare them for the authentic linguistic demands in American higher education, as it is often generic with its main focus on reading and writing; little emphasis has been put on disciplinary written, oral and conversational English (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). Furthermore, the English grammar is usually taught solely based on written grammar in China, which is inauthentic and distinct from the grammar of conversational English (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). Last but not least, the teacher-centered and passive-receptive education culture in China tend to perpetuate a lack of confidence in their participation in the authentic English-speaking environment (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004; Sawir, 2005; Wong, 2004).

According to previous studies in Psychology and Counselling, the difficulty in linguistic functioning is not only "the most significant prevalent problem for most international students" (Mori, 2000, p. 137), but also a major source for their academic and acculturation stressors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Since international students' linguistic functioning is closely associated with their academic performances (Andrade, 2006; Karuppan & Barari, 2010; Rowntree, Zufferey, & King, 2016; Yeh & Inose, 2003) and social adjustments

(Andrade, 2006; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003), it is of urgent importance to understand the linguistic challenges nonnative English-speaking international students are faced with in academic and social settings (Zhang & Mi, 2010), especially during their initial overseas education experiences (Bayley et al., 2002).

Despite the urgency and significance, different from American K-12 education, there is no clear national, district, or regional policies regulating how higher education institutions should provide customized linguistic support in response to the increasing international student population. Furthermore, among existing studies focusing on the language and education experiences of tertiary-level Chinese international students, the vast majority have focused exclusively on graduate students (e.g., Cheng & Erben, 2011; Jiang, 2014; Lin, 2006; Xue, 2013). It remains unclear how undergraduate students, especially newly-arrived Chinese international college freshmen, function linguistically during their transnational, translingual, and transcultural experiences.

Purpose of the Study

Drawing upon Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985), this one-semester-long qualitative study has aimed to explore the linguistic functioning and first-semester college experiences of twelve international undergraduate students from China. With a close examination of the participants' linguistic functioning in academic and social contexts during their initial stage of overseas studies in an American higher education institution, the findings of this dissertation have challenged eight commonly held misconceptions about Chinese international students and shed light on how American higher education could better serve the linguistic and academic needs of its growing international student population so as to facilitate their long-term success.

Key Research Questions

The guiding research questions of the dissertation are: (1) How did the twelve Chinese international students from different disciplines function linguistically in academic and social settings at the beginning of their first semester in college? (2) How did they meet the oral and written linguistic demands in academic and social settings throughout the semester? (3) What has changed regarding their linguistic functioning over the course of one semester?

Overview of Methodology

This study was conducted at a private university, Hillside[2], located in a suburb in the Northeast of the United States. Hillside University has witnessed an increase of 100% in its international student enrollment from the academic years of 2009-2010 to 2016-2017, a significant proportion of whom are from China. To tap into the key research questions, twelve first-semester Chinese international college freshmen majoring in eight disciplinary areas were recruited as participants of the study.

This one-semester-long qualitative study collected a corpus of multi-modal data including (1) two semi-structured interviews with each of the twelve participants at the beginning and also the end of the semester (N=24); (2) writing samples from the participants' course assignments across disciplines (N=29, covering 4 genres); (3) talks-around-texts interviews with each participant to debrief about their writings (N=24); (4) digital ethnography observations (Pink et al., 2016) of the participants' usage of a popular Chinese social media application software *WeChat*[3] throughout the semester; (5) two 24-hour language logs documenting each participant's bilingual usage in academic and social settings (N=24, covering a total of 576 hours); (6)

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[2] Pseudonyms have been used throughout this dissertation.
[3] *WeChat* is a multi-purpose social media application software created by Tencent, one of the leading technology companies in China. Details about this application software will be introduced in Chapter 3.

informal conversations with the participants; and (7) research memos based on on-going analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

I adopted a combination of deductive and inductive data analyses. Utilizing a deductive approach, I conducted analysis following the guidance of Brisk's (2015) genre-based writing rubrics informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985). Conversely, in the inductive process, I explored patterns and themes that have emerged from multiple sources of data, conducted applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), and strived to come up with a new framework in understanding the linguistic and academic experiences of Chinese international students during their initial stages of undergraduate studies in America.

In conducting this research, I have taken an insider-outsider researcher position (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), during which I simultaneously drew upon my insider identity as a Chinese international student, while maintaining an outsider stance to place the participants "at a distance" (Kessen, 1991, p. 189) through constant member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Krefting, 1991).

Significance of the Study

Research on the linguistic functioning of undergraduate Chinese international students during their initial cross-lingual, cross-cultural transition is needed to understand what the linguistic demands are to function successfully in American higher education, and how universities could support the academic and linguistic adaptation of nonnative-English-speaking international students.

This study provides a snapshot of the linguistic demands bilingual international students are faced with in their initial experiences studying in an American higher education institution. By triangulating multi-modal data from various sources, this study has contextualized the

challenges these students encountered and drawn attention to their initial transitional, translingual, and transcultural experiences from a developmental perspective. Finally, this dissertation has questioned eight commonly-held myths and unpacked the within-group variability and tensions among Chinese international students.

Based on the findings of the study, I close the dissertation by providing (1) concrete suggestions on how American higher education could better serve the unique linguistic and academic needs of its growing international student population to facilitate their long-term success, (2) detailed discussions on methodological implications, and (3) five promising directions for future research.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into 7 chapters. Chapter 1 offers an overview of the study and illustrates the importance to explore the linguistic functioning of Chinese international students during their initial college experience in America. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on relevant topics, and introduces the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach by introducing the study design, the context of the study, participants, data sources, data collection, data analysis and researcher positionality.

Chapters 4 through 6 present findings of the dissertation. While Chapter 4 provides close portraits of the 5 focal participants' first-semester journeys through story-telling, Chapters 5 and 6 present patterns and themes with regards to the twelve Chinese international students' overall language and academic experiences throughout three phases of their first semester in college. Finally, based on the findings presented in Chapters 4 through 6, answers to the key research questions, discussions, an updated theoretical framework, and implications of the study are presented in the closing chapter.

Definition of Terminology

Linguistic Functioning

For the purpose of this dissertation, *linguistic functioning* refers to the ability to draw upon all language resources available to navigate through and meet the linguistic demands in academic and social settings. These linguistic demands extend far beyond the four discrete areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and require students to be able to not only demonstrate proficiency in the four skill areas but also use those skills properly and effectively to function in authentic academic and social contexts. Common linguistic demands in relation to college international students may include but not limited to orally participating in course discussions within and beyond classroom settings, producing written work as required by college-level courses, raising questions and seeking support from professors orally and in written forms (i.e., through email), reading academic or nonacademic articles and online resources, communicating with peers face to face or through online platforms, ordering food, negotiating for rent, and interviewing for internship.

Chinese International Students

Chinese international students refers to non-immigrant students[4] from mainland China. Students coming from other China-related regions and districts such as Hong Kong and Macao are beyond the scope of the study, considering the differences in heritage languages, educational policies and sociopolitical factors that may influence students' linguistic functioning in college.

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[4] Details regarding the differences between Chinese international students and Chinese American immigrants are presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter opens by presenting a review of the literature to examine previous studies that help frame and situate the key research questions regarding Chinese international students' linguistic functioning during their first-semester studying in an American university. The major topics covered in the literature review include (1) English as a foreign language education in China, (2) academic English in American education system, (3) Chinese international students' linguistic challenges in American higher education, (4) Systemic Functional Linguistics in tertiary education settings, and (5) the distinctions between Chinese international students and Chinese Americans. Toward the end of the chapter, the theoretical framework of the study will be introduced.

English as a Foreign Language Education in China

English Fever

With China's political orientation in reforming and opening up to the outside world, English has been considered one of the most important skills in the 21st century. The necessity of teaching and learning English has been associated with not only the successful modernization of Chinese society (Shen & Feng, 2005; Yu, 2004), but also China's competitiveness in the process of globalization (Jiang, 2003) and development (Feng, 2005; Song & Yan, 2004). Furthermore, increasing the overall English proficiency among Chinese people has also been regarded as a crucial approach to enhance China's capability in absorbing advanced knowledge from the

Western world (Qian, 2003; Zhang, 2003) and exerting political and economic power in the international arena (Zhu, 2004).

As a country with the largest population of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in the world (He & Li, 2009; He & Zhang, 2010), high quality EFL education in China is considered "a bridge to the future" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, p. 53), and a "prerequisite" to transform leading cities such as Shanghai into "a world-class international metropolis" (Shanghai Curriculum and Teaching Materials Reform Commission, 1999, p. 3).

For over 1,000 years, the Chinese government has been exerting tremendous influence on educational curricula, course materials, assessments and textbook selection in public schools (Feng, 2007; Pan, 2007; Neuby, 2012). In response to the rising needs of improving the overall English proficiency among Chinese people, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of China has put great emphasis on EFL education. Not only has EFL education been placed as one of the central pieces in promoting quality education (Shen & Feng, 2005; Song & Yan, 2004; Yu, 2004), but also English has been included as a mandatory subject in elementary and secondary school curriculum and instruction. In the past four decades, it has also been listed as one of the three compulsory subjects along with Chinese and Mathematics in the National College Entrance Examination, the most high-stakes exam in China.

Educational Reform: Communicative Language Teaching

Ever since the beginning of the 21st century, MOE has gone through multiple reforms to enhance the quality of EFL education in China. One of the mostly mentioned themes in those reforms has been to advocate for communicative language teaching (CLT). According to the 2001 Chinese National English Language Curriculum for elementary and secondary education implemented between 2001 to 2005, the EFL pedagogical focus has shifted from being heavily

grammar-focused to being more student-centered and task-based with the adoption of CLT. New textbooks and curricula have been designed and implemented in the hope of promoting CLT in EFL education throughout China. Additionally, to support CLT and the development of students' overall competence in English, EFL teachers are encouraged to resort to formative rather than summative assessment during their instructional practices.

In spite of all these efforts, CLT implementation in China is greatly challenged by a series of contextual factors which include but not limited to large EFL class size, low English proficiency among EFL teachers, a shortage of instructional and human resources, and the examination-oriented educational culture (e.g., Li & Baldauf, 2011; Nunan, 2003; Tran & Baldauf, 2007).

After interviewing 73 elementary and secondary EFL teachers working in urban, suburban and rural public schools in China, Li and Baldauf (2011) reported that given the limited educational resources, elementary and secondary public school classroom sizes usually range from 40 to 80 students; the large class size has posed substantial challenges to the feasibility of adopting CLT on a daily basis. Additionally, teachers' lack of confidence in oral English and their lack of access to in-service teacher training has made them feel intimidated by the CLT-oriented textbooks and curricula, which further resulted in their reluctance to implement CLT (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Because of this, CLT was only considered something EFL teachers were able to use during "special occasion[s]" such as when they were being observed during teaching demonstrations (Li & Baldauf, 2011, p. 797). As one teacher put it, "I don't think I can teach my students using CLT if my English remains this poor…" (Li & Baldauf, 2011, p. 797).

Moreover, although MOE calls for a transition from summative to formative assessment during instructional practices, there have been no corresponding policy innovations in place to

transform the overall testing system; the examination-oriented educational culture thus remain unchanged (Li & Baldauf, 2011). This has added another layer for the implementation of CLT. As one teacher put it, "[U]nder the examination-oriented education, any educational reform will be in vain if the testing system does not change. And no matter how the curriculum reform is promoted, you are a loser if your students cannot get high marks!" (Li & Baldauf, 2011, p. 799).

Academic English in the American Education System

Academic English, or English used in academic contexts, has been referred to as the "hidden curriculum" of schooling and is in essence "at the heart of teaching and learning" (Christie, 1985; DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014, p. 446). Although linguistic demands within and across disciplines are seldom made explicit during content area teaching and learning, disciplinary content knowledge is expressed in language and digested by students via language. Drawing upon Christie's (1985) work, DiCerbo et al. (2014) have concluded that "success in school is largely a matter of learning the patterns of discourse through which academic concepts and skills are developed, explored, and expanded" (p. 447). In this process, the mastery of academic English is crucial, especially for those nonnative English-speaking learners who are studying in the American educational system.

The Definition of Academic English

Academic English is defined as a set of linguistic resources that are necessary for teaching, learning, and communication in school settings to facilitate students' knowledge acquisition (Bailey & Heritage, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2004; Snow & Uccelli, 2009). It is viewed as "a culturally shaped resource for making meaning" in academic settings (Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, & Swann, 2005, p. 11).

One of the pioneering scholars in examining academic English is Cummins (1980, 1981), who proposed the concepts of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS, often referred to as social language, focuses on the conversational fluency of the target language. CALP, often referred to as academic language, relates to "students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school" (Cummins, 2008, p. 71). In the case of Chinese international students in American higher education, BICS and CALP speak to their ability to function linguistically both in social and academic settings. To be specific, they would need to utilize BICS to facilitate language usage in social settings, such as communicating with roommates, buying groceries, and participating in extracurricular activities. Meanwhile, they are also expected to draw upon CALP to meet the expectations from professors and participate effectively in team work.

Cummins' (1980, 1981) classic work has set a solid foundation for later research on academic language. Despite its influence, however, the concepts of BICS and CALP are criticized by some scholars as a dichotomous perception of language use (Scarcella, 2003), which fall short in capturing the characteristics of the language of schooling and could potentially lead to a deficit view of social language, or the linguistic resources students bring into classrooms (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2003).

Bailey (2007) commented that social and academic language are both valuable resources for students; they differ from each other mainly in the complexity of their language features. Based on this idea, Bailey and colleague (Bailey & Heritage, 2008) have categorized academic English into School Navigational Language (SNL) and Curriculum Content Language (CCL). SNL is defined as "the language to communicate with teachers and peers in the school setting in

a very broad sense" (Bailey & Heritage, 2008, p. 15). In contrast, CCL is defined as "the language used in the process of teaching and learning content material" (Bailey & Heritage, 2008, p. 15).

Despite its great potentials, the notions of CCL and SNL seem to have perpetuated another dichotomy and fail to account for many academic practices which integrate the application of both skills. For example, common tertiary education practices such as visiting professors during their office hours and collaboration with teammates in group work require a combination of CCL and SNL skills. The blurred boundary between CCL and SNL has made many scholars (e.g., Schleppegrell, 2004; Turkan, De Oliveira, Lee, & Phelps, 2014) cast doubt on the existence of the so-called academic language; instead, they propose that language of schooling should be viewed a set of registers in various disciplinary contexts, be it in Math, Science, or History.

Linguistic Demands in Content Subjects

Academic English can be expressed in oral and written forms. While written academic English facilitates reading and writing and functions as the major approach for academic performance evaluation (Bailey, 2007), oral academic English promotes communication and enhance understanding, which in turn fosters the growth of academic literacy (Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Research on academic language targeting K-12 education has summarized the different linguistic demands required in various disciplinary subjects. Below are examples of linguistic demands in Math, Science, and Social Studies.

The linguistic demands in Mathematics.

Drawing upon Schleppegrell's (2007) work, Brisk and Zhang-Wu (2017) summarized that "math expresses meaning through a multi-semiotic system that includes oral language,

symbolic representations, graphs, diagrams, formulas, and written language" (p. 88). The language of Mathematics challenges students primarily from two angles: vocabulary and grammar (Dale & Cuevas, 1992). On the one hand, not only does math require mastery of technical jargons (e.g., hexagon, decagon), but also it involves everyday words with disciplinary-specific meaning (e.g., root, face, row). On the other hand, the language of Mathematics features challenging grammatical structures, featuring frequent presence of passive voice (e.g., X is divided by Y), logical connectors (e.g., if…then…), comparatives (e.g., greater than), prepositions (e.g., divided by, added on), and long noun groups (e.g., the surface area of a sphere with a radius of 5 inches).

The linguistic demands in Science.

Norris and Phillips (2003) have commented that language and literacy is "inextricably linked to the very nature and fabric of science" (p. 226). Fang and colleagues (Fang, 2005, 2008; Fang, Lamme, & Pringle, 2010) proposed four features of the language of Science: informational density, abstraction/nominalization, technicality, and authoritativeness. To meet the disciplinary standards in science, students are expected to navigate through and get familiar with all the four features.

Informational density is usually measured by the index of vocabulary density, or the number of lexical words in each non-embedded clause (Halliday, 1993). While average lexical density in written language is approximately between 4 and 6 lexical words per clause (Halliday, 1993), the lexical density in science texts could be as high as over 10 lexical words per clause (Fang, 2005). Abstraction and nominalization is the process of turning verbs and verb phrases into nouns and noun groups (e.g., construct→construction; protect rainforest→the protection of rainforest), which is common in the language of science. Technicality speaks to the frequent

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presence of disciplinary-specific jargon in the language of science (e.g., paleontologist, geosphere). Lastly, authoritativeness speaks to the fact that science texts are usually expressed in a way that distance its author (i.e., absence of first person expressions such as "I believe/think").

The linguistic demands in Social Studies.

Similar to the linguistic demands in Science, the language in Social Studies features high lexical density, abstraction/normalization (e.g., colonize→colonization), and technicality (e.g., massacre, prosecution). In addition to the linguistic demands posed by the three aforementioned aspects, the language in Social Studies also requires students to be able to understand logical connectors to establish cause and effect relationships. Last but not least, students are required to interpret meanings of words in contexts (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017). For instance, the word "call" has different meanings in *The Great Depression, as it was called, lasted from 1929 to 1939* (history text) and *I plan to call him tonight* (everyday language).

In conclusion, research in K-12 education has found that academic discourses across disciplines are difficult due to the abstract meanings expressed, complex sentence structures, dense vocabulary and demands for precise and succinct expressions (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017; Fang, Lamme, & Pringle, 2010; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). According to Christie (2012), all students, native English-speaking and nonnative speakers alike, are faced with more complicated and abstract academic language when they go through the schooling transition from primary to intermediate grade levels.

By the same token, when it comes to the transition from secondary to tertiary education, students tend to be challenged by even heavier linguistic demands. The denser disciplinary-specific vocabulary, oral discussions that require higher-level thinking, and more abstract content knowledge altogether intensify the academic language demands for all college students. Such

challenges are likely to be even greater when it comes to nonnative speaking international students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Compared with the situation in K-12 education, college students are posed with significantly higher linguistic demands in all dimensions of college studies, particularly in relation to academic writing. College students are required to master disciplinary-specific genres in academic writing so as to function linguistically in their specialized fields. Table 2.1 below presents an outline proposed by Coffin and colleagues (2005), summarizing the corresponding linguistic demands regarding genres of writing in various disciplinary areas. This outline helps contextualize understandings of written linguistic demands across disciplines in higher education.

Table 2.1.

An Outline for Disciplines and Corresponding Genre Demands

	Examples	Typical text types
Sciences	Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geology	Laboratory reports, project proposals and reports, fieldwork notes, essays, dissertations
Social sciences	Sociology, Education, Geography, Economics, Politics, Cultural and Media Studies, Psychology	Essay, project reports, fieldwork notes, dissertations
Humanities/arts	English, History, Languages, Classics, Fine Art, Religious Studies, Nursing	Essays, critical analysis, translations, projects
Applied disciplines	Business and Management, Philosophy, Music, Engineering, Health and Social Welfare	Essays, case studies, dissertations, projects

(Adapted from Coffin et al., 2005, p. 46)

In addition to the aforementioned genre knowledge, college students are also required to understand the language in professors' rubrics across disciplines and perform academic writing as expected. Table 2.2 presents a list of common action verbs used in assignment rubrics and their corresponding definitions. Those key action verbs indicate the expectations from professors of different disciplines regarding the desired genre and academic writing students produce. Failure to understand the academic writing expectations behind those key words may lead to unsatisfactory academic performances (Coffin et al., 2005).

Table 2.2.

Common Action Verbs in Assignment Rubrics

Key Words	Definitions
Account for	'Account for' means explain, while 'give an account of' asks you to describe and analyze a series of events
Analyze	Separate a question or idea into its parts and discuss their relationship
Apply	Use concepts, theories, or methods to consider a particular case, piece of data, problem or issue
Assess	Evaluate or estimate the importance of something
Compare	Look for similarities and differences an perhaps reach a conclusion
Contrast	Set in opposition in order to bring out differences
Criticize/critique	Give your judgment about the merit of theirs and opinions, or about the truth of facts; support your judgement with a discussion of evidence or of the reasoning involved
Define	Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase; in some cases, examine different possible or often-used definitions
Describe	Give a detailed or graphic account
Discuss	Investigate or examining by argument; sift and debate; give reasons for and against
Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth of something
Examine	Look at something closely, questioning and exploring it
Explain	Make plain; interpret and account for; give reasons
Explore	Consider causal factors, ideas, possibilities
Focus on	Choose a particular aspect or strand of a problem or issues to consider
Illustrate	Use a figure or diagram to explain or clarify, or make clear by the use of concrete examples

Interpret	Expound the meaning of; make clear and explicit, usually also giving your judgement
Justify or prove	Build a case for an idea or perspective; use supporting evidence if logic reasoning
Outline	Briefly discuss or sketch the main issues or arguments about a topic
Report on	Give an account of a series of events that have already occurred, usually with little judgement or evaluation
State	Provide the main points about a topic
Summarize	Briefly put into your own words the main points from someone else's text

(Adapted from Coffin et al., 2005, p. 90-1)

Academic Language Instruction

Unlike the situation in K-12 education, despite the importance to place academic language instruction at "the centre of teaching and learning" in tertiary education, it remains to be "an invisible dimension of the curriculum" (Coffin et al., 2005, p. 3).

While researchers in K-12 education have argued that it is beneficial to integrate academic language instruction into content-subject teaching, so as to promote students' success at school (e.g., Christie, 2012; Fang, Lamme, & Pringle, 2010; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014), there are few clear national, district, or regional policies on how higher education institutions should provide linguistic support to their students, particularly in addressing the needs of the increasing population of nonnative-English-speaking international students. The degree of academic language support varies based on universities, usually ranging from no support at all to one or two English for Academic Purpose (EAP) courses, the quality and disciplinary relevance of which depends on a case by case basis.

Chinese International Students' Linguistic Challenges in American Higher Education

The English fever in China has substantially boosted Chinese students' interest in pursuing overseas study in English-speaking countries. In fact, China has remained to be the top

sender of international students to U.S. colleges and universities consecutively for 10 years in a row (IIE, 2018). By the academic year of 2017-2018, there are 363,341 Chinese international students studying in the U.S., accounting for 33.2% of the entire international enrollments (IIE, 2018). This number is almost twice as much as the total number of international students from India (17.9%), the second largest exporting country for overseas students.

Previous studies on graduate-level nonnative English-speaking international students' language experiences have reported significant challenges in their linguistic functioning during overseas studies (e.g., Cheng & Erben, 2012; Wang, 2016; Xue, 2013). Terminologies such as *language barrier* (Wang, 2016), *incompetent* (Jiang, 2014), *language difficulties* (Yeh & Inose, 2003), *deficiency in English* (Xue, 2013) are frequently used to describe bilingual international students' difficulties functioning linguistically in authentic English-speaking contexts.

For instance, in her case study of three graduate Chinese international students studying in a large research university, Wang (2016) has found that the participants had significant difficulties in meeting the linguistic demands in both academic and social settings; this has resulted in their low self-esteem and lack of confidence. Similarly, Xue's (2013) qualitative study focusing on the group work experiences of 14 Chinese graduate international students has shown that all the participants were concerned about the language barriers they were facing, especially their lack of competence in English reading and speaking; this has not only reduced their confidence in oral participation, but also impeded their overall capability to contribute to group work during their overseas studies in American higher education.

The linguistic challenges that Chinese international students are faced with can be largely explained by three factors: the distinct educational cultures and practices between China and the U.S., the nature of the TOEFL test, and test preparation for the TOEFL.

Distinct Educational Cultures and Practices between China and the U.S.

When Chinese international students transition from EFL to authentic English-speaking contexts, their previous EFL learning experiences, strategies, and knowledge not only transfer, but also influence their overseas academic experiences in American universities. In this process, the different educational cultures and practices between the U.S. and China pose challenges on Chinese international students' linguistic functioning in American higher education institutions (Cheng & Erben, 2012; Wang, 2016; Xue, 2013).

While discussion and collaboration is emphasized in American education culture, exerting high linguistic demands on oral English, Chinese EFL educational policies and practices are more test-oriented (Yu & Suen, 2005), didactic (Wong, 2004) and passive-receptive (Hellsten, 2002), emphasizing memorization of written grammatical rules and vocabulary. Thornbury and Slade (2006) have pointed out, there are considerable distinctions between oral and written grammar; since Chinese international students have been taught English with the written grammar basis, they tend to have difficulties speaking up in American classrooms. This partially explains the graduate Chinese international students' struggles in meeting the oral linguistic demands in American universities found in the two aforementioned empirical studies (i.e., Wang, 2016; Xue, 2013).

Additionally, despite MOE's strong advocate for CLT in enhancing Chinese students' communicative competence, which could potentially enhance their capability to function linguistically in the U.S. education system, it seems that such pedagogical innovation is unlikely to be fully put into practice in the short term. Because the implementation of new curricula and teaching practices are severely impeded due to limited resources and a lack of corresponding policy innovations to change the examination-oriented nature of Chinese education (Numan,

2003; Tran & Baldauf, 2007; Li & Baldauf, 2011), Chinese international students are likely to be posed to daunting challenges in their initial adjustment into American higher education.

The Nature of the TOEFL Test

As one of the most widely adopted English-language proficiency test in the world, the TOEFL test is acknowledged and accepted in over 10,000 higher education institutes in 130 countries (ETS, 2019a). The TOEFL test, integrating the four language skills including reading, writing, listening and speaking, is said to be designed to represent the authentic linguistic demands in college-level academic settings. As the ETS official website declares, "[t]he language used in the TOEFL iBT test [internet-based test] closely reflects what is used in everyday academic settings…. Students who score well on the TOEFL iBT test are prepared for success" in academic and professional settings (ETS, 2019b).

Indeed, the TOEFL is a useful language test with high validity and reliability (Liu, Schedl, & Kong, 2009). However, it is in nature a decontextualized language proficiency test, focusing on the discrete features of language. Despite its many strengths, TOEFL falls short in measuring all the linguistic needs for academic success. In other words, achieving high scores on TOEFL does not guarantee successful linguistic functioning in academic settings, which requires both language proficiency and the ability to adapt to course requirements and meet the expectations of professors.

From a functional perspective based on the SFL theory (Halliday, 1984, 1985, 1994; Eggins, 2004), in order to achieve overall academic success, college students need to be equipped with not only those decontextualized language skills (as assessed in the TOEFL), but also the ability to apply language resources in situational contexts as well as to adapt to the instructional and learning styles within specific disciplinary areas. Since the TOEFL only taps

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into one out of the many dimensions in successful linguistic functioning in college, even if Chinese international students have achieved successful TOEFL scores, it may not be sufficient to predict their overall capability to meet the linguistic demands for college success.

Test Preparation for TOEFL

The test preparation culture in China, which is mainly "built upon recitation and regurgitation of the correct knowledge—from the text or the teacher—at the expense of problem solving, abstract thought and creativity" (Neuby, 2012, p. 684), has added another layer to Chinese international students' linguistic challenges in American higher education.

With the growing popularity of pursuing tertiary education overseas, China's private EFL test preparation companies have been flourishing in the past three decades. Among them, New Oriental Education & Technology Group Inc., founded in 1993, is considered the "most prestigious overseas English exam training school" in China (Zi, 2004). As the most dominant EFL test preparation school in China, New Oriental is listed on the New York Stock Exchange with a total stock market capitalization of over $6.6 billion (Stecklow & Harney, 2016). New Oriental has established international popularity in its test preparation programs, TOEFL preparation in particular. Described by the ETS as "the largest provider of private educational services in China" (ETS, 2012), it has been recognized as the only official provider of TOEFL online practice tests in China (Stecklow & Harney, 2016).

Despite its popularity and success, the test preparation provided by New Oriental has been found to be heavily results-focused; it seems that the pedagogical goal of this company is more to improve students' test scores than to enhance their actual English proficiency. In this process, rote memorization and tricks on getting the correct answers are said to be the primary focuses. From early 2000 till late 2016, New Oriental has been involved in multiple lawsuits and

scandals with the ETS due to copyright infringement and mishandling of test information. Since the TOEFL tests held in other countries sometimes precede those administered in China, New Oriental has been accused of gathering test information from abroad and leaking keys to students before they attend TOEFL exams in China (Stecklow & Harney, 2016).

Given the heavily results-focused test preparation provided by agencies such as New Oriental, many Chinese international students' TOEFL scores may be somewhat inflated. It is likely that these students who might be good at reciting and mastering the so-called "correct answers" in order to achieve high scores in standardized exams, are not equipped with proper linguistic capabilities to function in authentic English-speaking higher education settings.

Systemic Functional Linguistics in Tertiary Education Settings

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL; Halliday, 1984, 1985, 1994; Eggins, 2004) was developed based on social semiotic linguist Michael Halliday's foundational work on functional grammar. It is a theory of language exploring people's linguistic choices that are simultaneously shaping and shaped by the situational contexts. SFL provides an important theoretical framework in linguistic analysis, as it allows a three-way perspective of language, based on which

> meaning in texts of different types, as every use of language, whether spoken or written, can be analyzed for what it says about the world (the experiential meaning), for the social relationship it enacts (the interpersonal meaning), and for the way it weaves meanings into a coherent message (the textual meaning) (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010, p. 591).

As a theory of language, SFL analyzes language in contexts, and seeks to "explain how humans make meaning through language and other semiotic resources, and to understand the relationship between language and society" (Coffin & Donohue, 2012, p. 65). When applied in academic English teaching and researching contexts, SFL can be used to evaluate students' work to see whether it succeeds or fails in meeting the grade-level disciplinary expectations (Lancaster, 2014).

Recent research using SFL theory has focused on a variety of disciplines in tertiary education settings including Teacher Education (Macken-Horarik, Devereux, Trimingham-Jack, & Wilson, 2006; Woodward-Kron, 2004), History of Science (North, 2005), Economics (Lancaster, 2014), Chemical Engineering (Drury, Langrish, & O'Carroll, 2006), Social Sciences (Wignell, 2007), Film Studies (Donohue, 2012), Geography (Hewings, 2004), Email Writing (Yasuda, 2011), Applied Linguistics (Hood, 2010), and History (Ravelli, 2004). These studies have mainly draw upon genre and register analysis of SFL to tap into student writers' linguistic awareness and content knowledge to explore whether they have successfully met certain disciplinary standards (usually based on professors' evaluation) and whether their writing production has appropriately reflected the expectations of disciplinary linguistic features (such as those shown in course textbooks).

For instance, in their study applying genre-based pedagogy to train chemical engineering students in laboratory report writing, Drury, Langrish, and O'Carroll (2006) conducted pre- and post-test to analyze student writers' texts to see whether students have mastered "the structure of a report and the appropriate content for each stage" that successfully meet the disciplinary standard (p. 865). Similarly, in his research investigating patterns of stance and rhetorical qualities among student writers' argumentative economics papers, Lancaster (2014, p. 37) drew upon appraisal theory informed by SFL and found that in order to achieve high scores and meet course requirements, it is important for student to consistently demonstrate a "novice academic stance" through active learning.

Implications of these studies have shed important light on not only students' writing strategies across disciplines (North, 2006), content-area material development (Macken-Horarik

et al., 2006), instructional strategies (Drury, Langrish, & O'Carroll, 2006), and instructor

feedback (Lancaster, 2014), but also research methodological advancement (Lancaster, 2014).

The Distinctions between Chinese International Students and Chinese Americans

In her critical review of the literature on Chinese international students pursuing higher

education in the U.S., Zhang-Wu (2018) argued that international students are fundamentally

different from immigrants due to the following four reasons. Firstly, from the perspective of

political status, international students are granted short-term student visa to stay in the host

country, the length of which is determined by the duration of the academic programs they are

enrolled in. Being student visa holders, international students are not granted permission to work,

unlike the vast majority of the immigrants who are citizens and permanent residents.

Secondly, from the perspective of socioeconomic status (SES), international students are

generally wealthier than immigrant populations who are likely to be subjected to financial

burdens (Lenkeit, Caro, & Strand, 2015). Contrasting to the case with immigrant students, only a

very small proportion of the international students depend on student loans to finish college

education. In the case of undergraduate Chinese international students, for instance, almost 85%

have listed "personal/family" as their major source of funding (IIE, 2018); this alone has brought

in a profit of $39 billion into American higher education in the academic year from 2017 to 2018

(Association of International Educators, 2018).

Thirdly, internationals students differ from immigrants given their different motivations

for migration (Zhang-Wu, 2018). The vast majority of international students are found to travel

abroad mainly for educational purposes, and are likely to return to their home countries shortly

after the completion of overseas studies. To them, pursuing overseas studies is "a strategy for

contributing to the family's cultural, economic, and social capital, which may be directly

convertible into monetary gains" (Park, 2016, p. 238), so that they are provided with better career opportunities once they return to their own countries. Therefore, their motivation of studying overseas in order to improve SES and social capitals in their home countries is drastically different from most immigrants who tend to leave their homeland for a better life in the host country (Ball, 1993, 2003; Brown, 1990, 1995).

Lastly, from the perspective of race, many international students are unlikely to be familiar with the critical issue of racial inequality, a prevalent concern in U.S. society. In the case of Chinese international students, the largest international student ethnic group, due to the fact that China is sociohistorically racially homogeneous, mainly composed of Asians, they are minimally exposed to the deep-rooted racial divides in American society prior to their arrival in America (Zhang-Wu, 2018). In contrast, immigrants of Asian descent are racially minoritized in American society, and are more likely to be aware of the existence and influences of racial inequality.

In spite of the many distinctions between international students and immigrants, the two parties are not well distinguished in previous research. In fact, international students have often been treated as a subgroup and got lumped into the overall category of immigrants in many scholarly articles (e.g., Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, & Nakanishi, 2007; Kagawa, Hune, & Park, 2011; Lim, 2015; Park, Lin, Poon, & Chang, 2008).

For instance, *Beyond Myths: The Growth and Diversity of Asian American College Freshmen 1971-2005* (Chang et al., 2007) is a very well-known, well-cited, award-winning project. It is particularly famous for providing "the largest compilation and analysis of data on Asian American college students" (Wyer, October 10, 2007). While Chang and colleagues (2007) have made remarkable contribution to enhancing knowledge in higher education research

on Asian population, a close examination has revealed that Asian American immigrants and Asian international students were poorly distinguished in the study; they were mixed together to represent the so-called *Asian American college students* (Zhang-Wu, 2018). Despite their acknowledgement in the methodology section that "[a]lthough Asian international students are included in the Asian/Asian American sample, we use the term 'Asian American' in the report to describe the group" (Chang et al., 2007, p. 5), Chang and colleagues overlooked this aspect as one of their research limitations.

Given the many aforementioned differences between the two populations, mixing Asian international students and Asian immigrants to analyze for the experiences of the so-called *Asian American college students* can be problematic. As Zhang-Wu (2018, p. 1175) critiqued,

> Despite the humongous sample size of this quantitative study, blending these two drastically different populations under the same umbrella term of *Asian American college students* has certainly skewed the accuracy of its research findings, particularly concerning their reported percentages of 'low-SES Asian American freshmen' (international students tend to have much higher SES than immigrants) and 'Asian American freshmen intending to get a job to pay for college tuitions' (it is illegal for international students to work off-campus).

Considering the aforementioned factors, in this dissertation, the term *Chinese international students* is not treated as a subcategory of Chinese Americans, but rather used to describe those who were born and raised in China and came to the U.S. on student visa for overseas studies.

While pursuing overseas studies in U.S. society simultaneously immerses Chinese international students into the many issues in relation to racial diversity and hierarchy, given the focus of this dissertation on newly-arrived, first-semester undergraduate Chinese international students who had minimal previous knowledge or experiences about the racial divides in American society, the critical issue of race will not be among the central focuses of the study.

However, if race emerges as a theme or a topic of interest from research participants, careful analysis will be conducted regarding this aspect and corresponding findings will be reported.

Theoretical Framework

My dissertation is informed by two theories, namely the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1984, 1985, 1994; Eggins, 2004). Drawing upon these two theories, I present an integrated model to understand the transitional experiences, especially language experiences, of first-semester Chinese international students in American higher education.

Bioecological Model of Human Development

Based on the literature review, in order to examine the first-semester journeys of Chinese international students in American higher education, it is important to consider both their previous language and education backgrounds back in China, and their experiences navigating in American higher education. From this perspective, a theoretical framework that allows contextual exploration of focal participants' journey across time and space is necessary.

The Bioecological Model of Human Development proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) has lent itself to this dissertation. As a theoretical system to examine individuals' experiences over time, it addresses "the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793).

The Bioecological Model evolves from its original form of Ecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1983, 1989, 1993), which proposes that human development occurs when individuals are engaged in activities with increasing complexity. Such

processes can only be measured when contextualized, taking into consideration individuals'

interactions with time, society and life. In other words, the Ecological Model seeks to examine

human development in context. According to the model, there are four layers of environment that

influence an individual's development, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and

macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). The multi-layered environmental systems present a

dynamic, nested structure to analyze individuals' experiences. The interactions between an

individual and the nested environments are important, since the two parties are closely

interrelated and constantly exert influence on one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Building upon its precursor, the more recent Bioecological Model puts more emphasis on

the processes of individual development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As Bronfenbrenner

and Morris (2006) commented,

> The present model introduces major theoretical innovations from the 1983 chapter in both
> form and content. The present formulation makes no claim as a paradigm shift (if there be
> such a phenomenon); rather, it continues a marked shift in the center of gravity of the
> model, in which features of earlier versions are first called into question but then
> recombined, along with new elements, into a more complex and more dynamic structure
> (p. 794).

In the new model, individuals are placed at the center of the aforementioned multi-

layered system, triggering "bidirectional, synergistic interrelationships" (Bronfenbrenner &

Morris, 2006, p. 799). Characteristics of individuals contribute to not only "the *form*, *power*,

content, and *direction* of the proximal process" but also the "*developmental outcomes*—qualities

of the developing person that emerge at a later point in time" (emphasis in original,

Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798). In other words, rather than passively influenced and

molded by its surrounding environments, the agency of individuals is acknowledged. Individuals

are perceived as active agents who are exposed to the environments, yet also able to interact with

and change the environments. As Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) concluded, individuals are both the products and producers of their environments.

The Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) can be summarized as a person-process-context-time model. The person-process model emphasizes that development happens along with close interactions between individuals and their environments. Based on this model, in order to understand the person-process model of Chinese international students, a close examination of their interactions with faculty members, classmates, peers, and friends in both academic and social settings is necessary. Moreover, given the central status of the developing human in the entire model along with the bidirectional relationship between individuals and their environments, it is also important to examine the unique traits, characteristics, challenges, strategies, and actions of individual Chinese international students during the developmental processes.

The context model introduces four nested systems in which human development takes place. The microsystem involves the direct, immediate environment in which developing individuals are situated in. The mesosystem summarizes a second layer of environment which "comprises linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22). The exosystem features policies and indirect environments which could also impact the growth of developing individuals. Lastly, the macrosystem entails more general and broader environments such as social norms, race, and cultural expectations. In the case of Chinese international students studying in the US, the microsystem may include roommates, classmates, peers and friends; the mesosystem may include interactions which take place involving multiple contexts such as family, academic and social settings; the exosystem involves aspects such as immigration policies, institutional

policies, faculty and curriculum; and the macrosystem situates their identities as foreign, gendered minority (Asian) students in a predominantly White higher education setting in America.

Finally, the time model (also referred to as the chronosystem) proposes that the timing of events exert impacts on both the outcome and processes of human development. Such influences could take place not only at a macro-level, in which the timing of specific historical events plays a role in shaping social norms and culture, but also at a micro-level, in which the occurrence of important transitions and life events affect the processes and outcome of human development. Based on this model, Chinese international students' high school to college transition, Eastern to Western cultural transition as well as Chinese to English linguistic transition could influence the way they function linguistically and navigate in the new environment. Moreover, perceptions of immigrants and foreigners, race, and diversity in current American society may also affect social norms, views and expectations toward Chinese international students, which in turn exert influences on their development.

In conclusion, the person-process-context-time model featured in the bioecological theory is crucial in understanding the transitional journeys of Chinese international students, as it simultaneously draws attention to the development, processes, and outcomes of their experiences (Renn & Arnold, 2003). This multi-layered system sheds important light on this study in that it allows a close examination of Chinese international students' development from the most immediate context to more general sociocultural aspects.

In this dissertation, while the central focus will be on the micro, meso and exso systems, the macrosystem will also be touched upon to situate and facilitate understanding of Chinese international students' experiences in the mesosystem and exsosystem. Moreover, echoing the

Bioecological Model, the Chinese international students are perceived as active change agents who are both the products and producers of the environments, and are thus placed at the center of their entire developmental systems.

The Bioecological Model of Human Development has great potential in analyzing various dimensions of the journeys of newly-arrived Chinese international college students. Yet, given my research focus, I would like to adopt the theory specifically for the purpose of understanding their experiences in linguistic functioning. It is worth noting that in addition to linguistic transition which is the main focus of the dissertation, newly-arrived Chinese international students are also simultaneously going through the important developmental transition from secondary to tertiary education. Several influential higher education theories have been proposed targeting students' high school to college transition, drawing upon which many empirical studies on first-year college experiences have been conducted (e.g., Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008).

One of the most classic transitional theories is Tinto's (1975) retention and departure theory. According to Tinto (1975), the central influential factor determining a college student's dropout decision is his or her degree of integration, both socially and academically. Based on his theory, students who experience successful academic integration (i.e., good grades), social integration (i.e., friends and peers from the university), and also hold positive self-perceptions toward their academic and integration are significantly less likely to drop out of college. Additionally, Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Identity Development Theory are two other influential theories. According to Schlossberg (1981), successful college transition is influenced by whether or not such transition is voluntary

and on-time; four other factors including self, situation, support and strategy are also considered as influential factors in determining the success of college transition. Chickering and Reisser (1993) put forward seven vectors that contribute to the development of college student identity during the transition period; these vectors include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity.

While these classic transitional theories have made remarkable contributions to the understanding of college student experiences, they are criticized by some recent scholars for not paying enough attention to the critical issues such as race, SES and individual backgrounds (e.g., Kodama & Maramba, 2017; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2001; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992). For instance, Tierney (1992) challenged Tinto's (1975) theory by using the unique experiences of Native American students as a counterexample. Tierney (1992) argued that racially minoritized students may experience a "disruptive cultural experience not because college is a rite of passage, but because the institution is culturally distinct" (p. 608). Similarly, Kodama and colleagues (Kodama & Maramba, 2017; Kodama et al., 2001) critiqued Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory for its inadequate attention to race and individual differences by raising the distinct psychosocial development of Asian Americans.

While acknowledging the importance and necessity to explore students' high school to college transition as discussed in the aforementioned theories, for the purpose of this dissertation, I have placed my primary research focus on the exploration of Chinese international students' experiences during their linguistic transition. Although secondary to tertiary transition is not the main focus of the study, however, it is hoped that the findings of this dissertation could contribute to the expansion of existing theories on secondary to tertiary educational transition,

especially in exploring whether the unique status of Chinese international college students would add a layer to the aforementioned hypotheses proposed in previous theories.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Language acquisition, development, and usage has been major themes in this dissertation. In response to this focus, it is necessary to include a linguistic theory that allows examination of language usage in different contexts. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically the notion of language choice and demands in the context of situation (i.e. register) has lent itself to the study (Halliday, 1984, 1985, 1994; Eggins, 2004). According to SFL, language is a semiotic resource through which meanings are made in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). People make their language choices mainly based on the situational context, which defines the register. The concept of register entails three aspects: field, tenor and mode (Eggins, 2004). Field relates to the specific topics under discussion. Tenor relates to the relationship between language users and their audience. Mode relates to the form of language production, which could be oral, written, or multimodal.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I have drawn upon the three dimensions of register following the genre-based writing rubrics informed by SFL (Brisk, 2015). Brisk's (2015) framework of genre-based analysis provides a valuable guidance in analyzing Chinese international students' written work in partial fulfillment of course requirement, be it in college writing class or content-subject courses. According to Brisk (2015), students' writing samples could be analyzed from two major perspectives: (1) purpose and stages, and (2) language. While examining the purpose and stages could help tap into students' ability to fulfill the functional aspects required by specific genres (e.g., whether an argument writing fulfills the purpose of persuasion), evaluating students' features of language could provide rich information on detailed

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linguistic areas where students need additional support. Separately evaluating the functional and linguistic aspects, Brisk's (2015) SFL-informed framework is especially valuable in analyzing whether students' low scores in writing assignments are caused by their lack of understanding of the function-based, genre-specific expectations (e.g., to persuade, to recount), their improper language choices (e.g., verb tenses, use of person), or a combination of both.

Integrated Theoretical Model

The two aforementioned theories emphasize the importance of contexts in examining the linguistic experiences of Chinese international students during their first-semester in American higher education. Focusing on human development in context, the Bioecological Model situates the challenges of international students' linguistic, cultural, and college transitions in different layers of environment and developmental processes. Focusing on text in context, SFL is beneficial in gauging how they function linguistically in and outside of academic contexts during their cross-cultural college experiences. The two theories are interrelated and jointly inform the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Figure 2.1 below summarizes the integrated model.

With both language products and its producers being contextualized, SFL and the Bioecological Model tap into the overall linguistic experiences of Chinese international students during their translingual, transcultural and transnational overseas studies experiences. Thanks to the theoretical guidance of the Bioecological Model, layers of external factors influencing international students have been mapped out with individuals placed at the center of the developmental processes. Moreover, influences from time and historical events at the chronosystem are also taken into consideration (e.g., previous schooling experiences back in China).

The SFL theory is adopted and applied mainly in the mesosystem, since most of the participants' language experiences are likely to occur in relation to their academic and social settings. While the participants' language experiences at the mesosystem is the main focus of the dissertation, the other three systems are also crucial in understanding Chinese international students' linguistic production and language choices as observed in the mesosystems.

To be specific, the microsystem includes factors in the direct environment Chinese international students are interacting with. It is likely that when their close friends prefer to talk in Chinese more than English, the focal participants are also more likely to resort to Chinese. The exosystem involves contextual factors that are related to Chinese international students' indirect environments (e.g., institutional policies, curriculum). For instance, if the American higher education institution embraces an English-only policy, then the Chinese international students are forced to resort to English at school. Finally, the macrosystem represents factors that provide the general backdrop for all other systems (e.g., cultural expectations, race). It could also play a role in the Chinese international students' language choice. For instance, contrasting to the norms in the U.S., in Chinese argument writing, authors are not expected to present thesis statements at the very beginning of their essays. In other words, if thesis statements are absent in Chinese international students' argument writing in English, it is likely that their cultural background has influenced their writing style and choice of language.
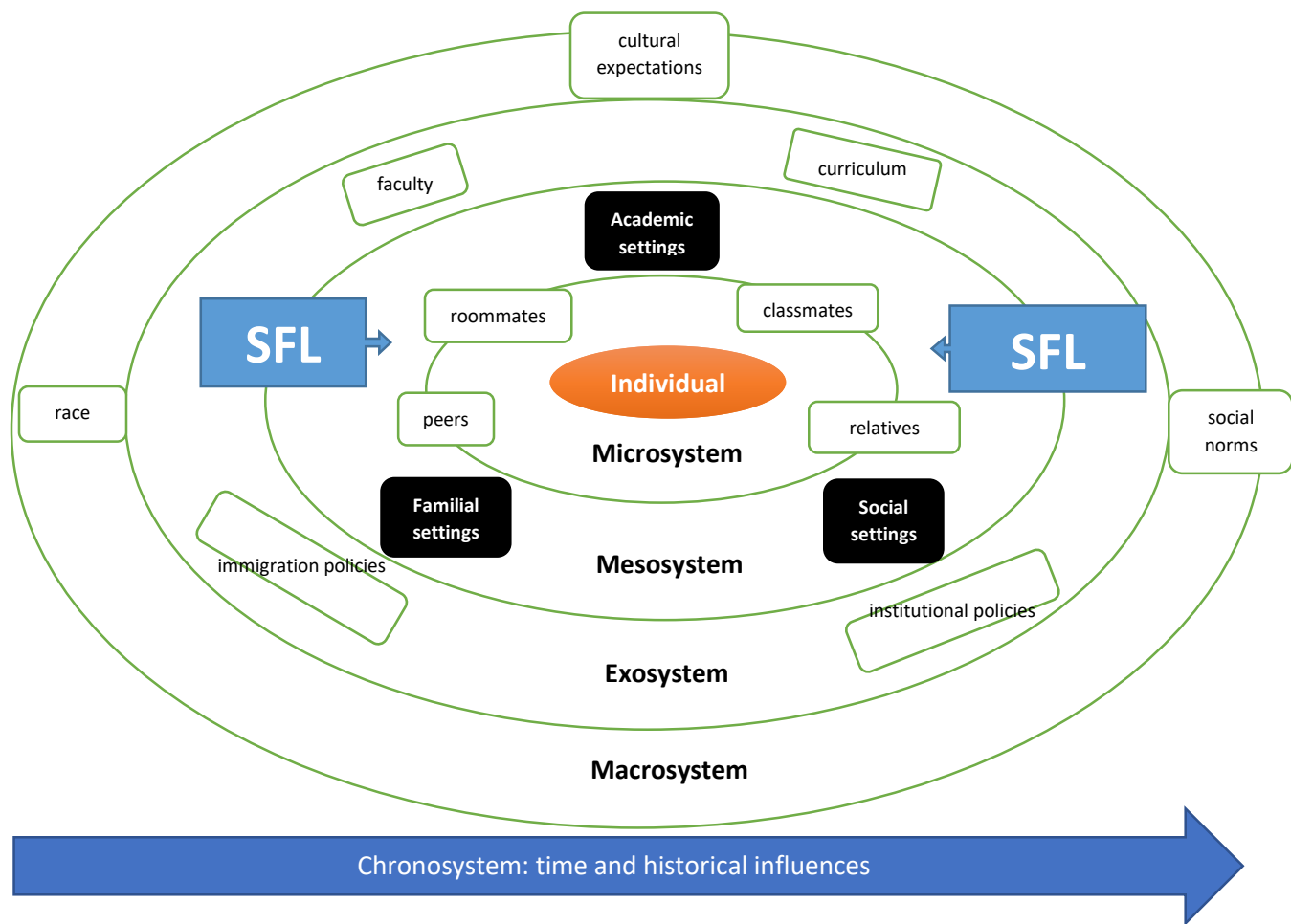
Figure 2.1. Theoretical Framework

Summary

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature covering the following topics: (1) English as a foreign language education in China, (2) academic English in American education system, (3) Chinese international students' linguistic challenges in American higher education, (4) Systemic Functional Linguistics in tertiary education settings, and (5) the distinctions between Chinese international students and Chinese Americans. Towards the end, I introduced two important theories (Bioecological Model of Human Development and SFL) that have informed this dissertation. Analyzing the interactions between the two theories, I further proposed an integrated theoretical model (see Figure 2.1).

In the next Chapter, I will introduce the methodological approach of the dissertation by presenting the study design, context, data sources, data collection methods, analytical approaches, as well as researcher positionality.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Focusing on the linguistic transition among 12 Chinese international college freshmen studying in an American higher education institution, this dissertation was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did the first-semester Chinese international college freshmen from different disciplines function linguistically in academic and social contexts at the beginning of the semester?

2. How did they function linguistically in academic and social contexts throughout the rest of the semester?

3. What has changed with regards to their language and academic experiences over the course of their first semester in college?

I conducted a one-semester-long qualitative study to closely follow the linguistic functioning of a group of Chinese international students from the orientation week (Week 0) prior to school started until the end of the semester (Week 15). This 16-week period was chosen, as it was part of the major developmental phases in Chinese international students' life, transitioning simultaneously from high school to college, from Chinese to English-speaking environments, and from Eastern to Western education systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). While the entire processes of linguistic, cultural, and educational acculturation were likely to last way longer than one academic semester, zooming into the initial stage of the participants'

linguistic functioning and academic performances could provide a snapshot of their navigating experiences during the important transition.

To explore the first-semester Chinese international college freshmen's linguistic functioning across academic and social contexts, I conducted applied thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) on a corpus of multi-modal data, including (1) semi-structured interviews (N=24); (2) writing samples (N=29, covering 4 genres); (3) talks-around-texts interviews (N=24); (4) digital data from online observations informed by digital ethnography through *WeChat*[5]; (5) bilingual language logs (N=24, covering a total of 576 hours); (6) informal conversations; and (7) research memos based on on-going analysis.

Research Setting

This study took place in a private university, Hillside[6], located in a suburb in Northeastern United States. Hillside University offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in various disciplines including but not limited to business, management, social work, arts and sciences, and education. Currently, it has over 9,000 undergraduates and 5,000 graduate students. Among them approximately 30% are students of color, and 7% are international students, representing 41 countries in the world.

Hillside has paid great attention to diversity. A Diversity and Inclusion Conference involving over two hundred faculty and staff is held annually to maintain "a diverse, welcoming, and inclusive community[7]." In addition to having a designated webpage on the university

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[5] *WeChat* is a multi-purpose social media application software created by Tencent, one of the leading technology companies in China. Details about this application software will be introduced in the section about digital ethnography.

[6] To protect research participants' privacy, all names in relation to the research site and participants in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

[7] Information extracted from the Hillside website.

website documenting news and events about diversity on campus, Hillside also houses multiple student organizations and cultural centers that promote cultural and ethnic diversity. From the academic years of 2009-2010 to 2016-2017, the enrollment of international students has doubled, with undergraduate international students increasing from 3% to 7% and graduate international students increasing from 11% to 21%. Among them, 65% are from Asia, with international students from China representing the largest ethnic group (N=790), followed by Korea (N=160). Based on the latest diversity news on the Hillside website, the number of Chinese international student enrollment continues to grow, with a 24% increase over last year.

As a prestigious university, Hillside holds very high threshold for their incoming international students' English proficiency. Regardless of their indicated majors of interest, all nonnative speaking international students are required to have a TOEFL score of at least 100 out of 120 to be considered for admission. In order to achieve 100 and above in the TOEFL, students need to have an average score of 25 and above out of 30 in each of the four discrete areas of examination including listening, speaking, reading and writing. Based on the score interpretation guideline provided on the ETS official website, scoring 22 or above in reading and speaking, 24 or above in writing, and 26 or above (totaling 94) in listening is considered demonstrating "high performance level" in English proficiency (ETS, 2019a). Students at this level are expected to demonstrate "excellent" and "solid" skills in listening and reading (ETS, 2019b), and will be able to conduct conversations on academic and social topics and perform writing based on not only reading and listening, but also knowledge and experience (ETS, 2019a). According to the description on the ETS website, having a threshold of 100 and above as admission requirement is therefore rather demanding. In other words, international students admitted by Hillside are with relatively high English proficiency as measured by the TOEFL.

Concerned about the many issues in relation to the TOEFL including test reliability and validity, along with the risk of test result fraudulence, Hillside University also requires all admitted nonnative English-speaking undergraduate international students to participate in an additional English writing placement test upon arrival regardless of their TOEFL performances. The purpose of this test is to identify international students who still need extra linguistic support. These students will be placed into a special section for international students, *ELL Writing*, taught by instructors with knowledge and credentials in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). In contrast, those international students who perform well in the placement test will be assigned into a mainstream first-year writing course, *Regular Writing*, along with their native English-speaking peers. Both writing courses carry the same credits, and are both among the required core courses for all college freshmen at Hillside.

Different from the TOEFL which taps into all the four skills of English proficiency, the Hillside placement test only focuses on reading and writing. The placement test is usually designed and later graded by one professor from the English Department at Hillside who has substantial knowledge on TESOL. This one-hour-long test consists of two parts: reading a pre-selected news article, and responding to prompts about the news article in writing. The reading article is usually about a recent event or topic that is relevant to college students. There is no absolute word limit required in the test, and students are said to be evaluated mainly based on the accuracy of their grammar and complexity of sentence structure. Each year, the total number of writings collected usually ranges from 150 to 200, depending on the enrollment size of nonnative English speaking international students at Hillside. On average, around two thirds of the international students who take the placement test will be assigned to *ELL Writing*, while the rest will enter *Regular Writing* along with their native English-speaking peers. Hillside usually offers

around eight *ELL Writing* classes, with approximately 15 students in each section. Given the large number of Chinese international students enrolled at Hillside, a very large proportion of the *ELL Writing* participants are Chinese.

Based on my informal conversations with school officials, faculty and staff, Hillside administrators and faculty seemed to view *ELL Writing* somewhat differently. Some believed that it was an "honor" for international students to attend the sheltered writing course, as it provides additional support and endows them with better opportunities to excel in content area courses. In contrast, others considered it as "unnecessary," "questionable," and "stressful" to students, as the Hillside placement test was scheduled right upon international students' arrival in America. The tight timing was said to be detrimental for some students' performance, as they might still be jetlagged after long international flights. Moreover, some staff who had frequent contact with international students mentioned that those international students who were assigned to the sheltered course tended to be "frustrated," "stressed," and "disappointed," as they were identified as incompetent in English regardless of their successful TOEFL results, and were separated from their native English speaking peers.

Pilot Study

The methodological approach of this dissertation was inspired by a pilot study that I conducted during the 2017-2018 academic year in the hope of improving research design and testing out the appropriateness and effectiveness of research questions (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). In the pilot study, I used convenience sampling to recruit three Chinese international students who were, at the time of the study, college freshmen. All three students (Yang, Xiao, and Gao) were male at the age of 18. They all completed high school education in

China before coming to the U.S. as international students. Yang, Xiao, and Gao took *ELL Writing* during their first semester in college back in Fall 2017.

Data collection for the pilot study occurred in Spring 2018, which consisted of three components. Firstly, I conducted a one-hour-long in-person semi-structured interview with each student. The interview was made up of five guiding questions, tapping into (1) their previous English learning experiences back in China; (2) reason for pursuing higher education in the U.S.; (3) their first-semester language experiences in academic and social settings; (4) overall experiences as an international student at Hillside; and (5) their perceptions on linguistic support provided by the university. Based on participants' preferences, all three interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese.

Secondly, I reached out to students through email after the interview and asked them to send me all the writings they have completed for their sheltered writing course along with instructors' rubrics and grades assigned. I yielded 11 pieces of writings from their *ELL Writing* course including students' initial outlines, multiple rounds of drafts, as well as the final versions. I selected two final pieces from each student, and conducted language analysis and text structure of student writing informed by SFL theory (Brisk, 2015). Lastly, based on analysis of texts, I initiated a 15-minute talks-around-texts interview with each participant over the phone, making clarifications on their specific language choices and their thought processes of producing the texts.

Something worth noting was that, originally, I had also planned to conduct observations in order to get additional information beyond the participants' self-reported data. However, based on the pilot study, site observations turned out to be inappropriate mainly for two reasons. Firstly, none of the participants was comfortable with this data collection method, claiming that

it was "too embarrassing" to be observed because their classmates might think of them as incompetent in English. One student further told me that he would feel nervous to be observed, which would eventually lead to his reluctance of oral participation in class. Secondly, even assuming the participants agreed to be observed, given the lecture-heavy, teacher-centered nature of many freshmen courses, it was very likely that not much information would be obtained. Therefore, I decided not to use observation as a data collection method.

Data collected were analyzed following applied thematic analysis method proposed by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012). Major findings from the pilot study were as follows:

1. Despite their successful TOEFL score to meet the university threshold, the three participants reported to be in lack of confidence in their English at the beginning of their freshmen year, especially with regards to English speaking and writing.

2. During their first semester college experiences, the English linguistic demands encountered in academic settings were said to be related to both receptive and productive language skills. However, all three students reported that they were more likely to practice English reading, listening, and writing than oral skills in academic settings.

3. Participants reported that oral English was used more often in social settings than academic settings, as English serves as the medium for them to perform many daily tasks in the U.S., such as negotiating for rents, calling customer service, ordering food and drinks, and hospital visits. In contrast, in academic contexts, even if they did not use much oral English, they still were able to receive successful scores if the courses (e.g., *Mathematics*) allotted less than 5% of the total grades to participation.

4. Participants tended to draw upon Mandarin to navigate in both academic and social settings. With regards to academic settings, given the large proportion of Chinese international students present, despite the "English-only policy" in *ELL Writing*, participants reported that they sometimes communicated in Mandarin during peer or small group work to make clarifications and exchange ideas "in a faster and easier way." In social settings, since none of the participants reported to have native English speakers as close friends or have stayed in any native-English-speaker-dominant student organizations for more than a few weeks, they tended to use Mandarin to socialize with peers and connect with family and friends back in China.

5. All three participants reported to be daily users of *WeChat*, a popular Chinese social media software. This software has been used mainly to stay connected with family and friends in China, and also to communicate with their Chinese peers in America. However, in addition to function as a culturally-relevant virtual social space, the *WeChat* software also allowed the participants to discuss course-related questions and concerns they had in academic life.

6. The three participants had different English learning experiences in China, depending on their parents' perceptions of overseas studies and English, resources available, and their personal preferences. However, one theme that emerged from all three participants was that English education provided by public schools in China was described as "unpractical" "unhelpful" and "boring," given the heavy focus on grammatical accuracy and the goal of learning English to pass standardized tests. The three participants claimed that both the English language used in TOEFL and skills required to function linguistically in an American college were drastically different

from what they had been prepared for through their English education in Chinese elementary and secondary public schools. They all reported to have taken some TOEFL preparation courses provided by private educational companies in China. Additionally, all of them have taken the TOEFL test for at least three times before they eventually reached the threshold for admission.

7. Analysis of students' texts using a genre-based rubric informed by SFL (Brisk, 2015) revealed that while the three participants had some general understanding of one of the most important academic genres, argument, they were still in need of additional academic support, especially in effectively presenting thesis statements. Additionally, general read-through analysis has also found frequent incidences of negative cross-linguistic influences between Mandarin Chinese and English (e.g., using *internet website* (*网络页面*) instead of *website*, *bank interest rate* (*银行利率*) instead of *interest rate*).

8. In the talk-around-text follow-up interviews, participants reported that they made many of the word choices based on direct Chinese translations, and all three participants reported that they often resorted to online Chinese-English dictionaries during writing at the beginning of the semester. Yet, at the end of the semester, they were more prone to use English-English dictionary to avoid strange wording in writing.

The findings of the pilot study have informed the design of the current dissertation in six ways. Firstly, in the pilot study, I had mainly looked at the participants' language experiences in academic settings. However, after interviewing the participants, I yielded interesting data about their language experiences beyond classroom contexts. Therefore, I found it necessary to also

examine the focal students' linguistic functioning in social contexts to present a comprehensive picture of their linguistic transition.

Secondly, while my original focus had been solely on participants' English language experiences, the findings of the pilot study indicated that it would be beneficial to examine international college freshmen's linguistic and academic transition through a bilingual lens, since their home language, Chinese, could function as an influential factor for their English language functioning and acculturation.

Thirdly, it would be necessary to collect writing samples from beyond the *ELL Writing* course. On the one hand, collecting writing samples from content-subject courses could yield more diverse writing samples, which might open up the opportunity to see their performances across genres. On the other hand, since *ELL Writing* was in nature a language course aiming to enhance the participants' English proficiency, examining writings from this course alone failed to represent the whole picture of how participants function to meet the writing linguistic demands in content-area subjects. Given that academic writing demands in college required not only language skills, but also a mastery of content knowledge, it would be beneficial to examine students' written work from the writing course and beyond.

Moreover, the findings provided some general information indicating that Chinese and English were used differently to fulfill various social and academic purposes. However, the exact proportion of usage of the languages and how they are used throughout the day was not clear. Therefore, it seemed necessary to integrate a language log (Brisk, Burgos, & Hamerla, 2004) so as to document the nuances of participants' language usage in a typical weekday and weekend day (for details see data sources).

Additionally, based on the pilot study, the participants were found to be frequent users of the popular Chinese social media application, *WeChat*, through which they communicated about their academic experiences and social interactions. Given its popularity and cultural relevance, it would be interesting to incorporate *WeChat* as a data collection tool to trace focal students' social and academic language experiences throughout the semester. As discussed earlier, since the traditional shadowing and observations were not favored by the participants, online observations and interactions through *WeChat* informed by digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016) provided an alternative approach to observe the participants' experiences in a non-intrusive way. Once the participants and I were friended on *WeChat*, I would be able to observe all their public postings; the participants did not need to meet with me or provide me with anything to facilitate the data collection process.

Lastly, due to convenience sampling methods, the three participants had the same gender and major; this resulted in their very similar courses taken during the first semester, due to the limitation of which different linguistic demands across various disciplinary areas could not be identified. Therefore, it would be necessary to open the participant recruitment to a larger population of Chinese international student so as to achieve a diverse pool representing some variabilities regarding their gender, major, and backgrounds. If the first round of recruitment did not lead to a diverse pool, it would be necessary to re-recruit till a more representative pool of participants were yielded.

Study Design

I adopted qualitative research methods drawing upon applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) as a means to examine the focal research questions. Applied thematic analysis is an exploratory research method which searches for emerging themes in the

process of describing and analyzing the phenomenon under study (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). It is an inductive approach which involves various analytic techniques (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). A theme is defined as "a *phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (emphasis in original, Saldana, 2009, p. 139), or an abstract construct which "link[s] not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). In the process of thematic analysis, themes are identified through "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258), so that fragments of ideas which may carry little meanings when examined alone can be sophisticatedly integrated (Leininger, 1985).

In this dissertation, I have integrated traditional data collection methods including semi-structured interviews, text analysis, talks around texts, bilingual language log (Brisk, Burgos, & Hamerla, 2004), and informal communication, along with digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016) through the *WeChat* software to explore the first-semester Chinese international college students' linguistic functioning in academic and social settings. Meanwhile, I also took research memos to document interesting findings during my encounters with the participants, preliminary thoughts and on-going analysis based on data collected in the aforementioned approaches.

Regarding my data collection through traditional qualitative methods, I firstly conducted one round of entry interview with each participant at the beginning of the semester to gather information on their language and education experiences prior to college entry. Around the middle of the semester, I collected at least two writing samples per student from their writing and content-subject course assignments. Following genre-based text analysis (Brisk, 2015), I conducted talks-around-texts follow-up interviews with each participant on their thought

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processes and decision-making during writing. At the end of the semester, I performed one exit interview with each participant in reflection of their first-semester experience.

Beyond those pre-planned, structured data sources, over the course of the semester, any clarification of data collected from the aforementioned sources or participant-initiated contact were also included as informal communication data. This reflected my research stance as a collaborator and co-creator of knowledge, rather than the single story-teller of my participants' experiences. Because knowledge production was not a one-way activity but instead a dynamic process in which ideas were generated "through our encounters with other people and things" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 16), I believed it necessary to also document any planned or unplanned, informal communication with the participants to help understand their experiences during the initial stage of their translingual, transcultural, and transnational journeys studying in an American higher education institution.

Along with those traditional qualitative data collection methods, throughout the semester, I also conducted online observations informed by digital ethnography in which I closely observed the participants' daily lives in a non-intrusive, digital way (Pink et al., 2016) through the culturally-relevant *WeChat* software. Data collected using this method were multi-modal in nature, which included texts, videos, audios, and visuals. Finally, throughout the entire semester, I documented any thoughts, ideas, observations, as well as my preliminary analysis by keeping an on-going research memo.

The richness of data sources in the study required a flexible yet comprehensive study design which allowed for analysis of data and themes "in all shapes and sizes" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). Applied thematic analysis was particularly suitable for this dissertation, which collected a corpus of multi-modal data from multiple participants in different disciplinary areas

across academic and social settings over time. The exploratory and inductive nature of thematic analysis echoed the focus of the dissertation, considering the sparse literature focusing exclusively on the transitional experiences and linguistic functioning of undergraduate-level Chinese international students in American higher education. Moreover, because the outcome of thematic analysis tended to be policy recommendations rather than theory building (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), choosing this method addressed the ultimate goal of this dissertation to explore how American higher education could better support the unique needs of its growing bilingual international student populations.

Sampling

Sampling was conducted in this thematic analysis study for theoretical rather than statistical reasons (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Yin, 2003). Different from quantitative sampling, the purpose of which is to increase generalizability, theoretical sampling approaches focal participants with a set of criteria so as to examine them systematically and in greater details to deepen understanding of the phenomena under study (Yin, 2003).

Sampling began after all relevant procedures had been approved by the Institutional Review Board. Recruitment flyers were sent out with the support from the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) at Hillside to all newly-arrived undergraduate Chinese students during the international student orientation in late August, 2018. One week after the orientation, the OISS sent out a follow-up email with the electronic version of the recruitment flyer to all Chinese international freshmen at Hillside University. Both the physical and the electronic versions of the recruitment flyer were bilingual in Mandarin Chinese and English, containing a brief description of the purpose of the study and my contact information. Interested students were encouraged to reach out to me either through email or via *WeChat*.

There were no material incentives for research participation. However, drawing upon my own identity as a veteran Chinese international student who is currently in pursuit of a terminal degree, I incentivized participants in the following two ways. Firstly, based on participants' needs, I offered to share my own experiences and takeaways as an international student from China. Secondly, after the completion of the study, I debriefed with each participant on research findings and implications, and provided personalized suggestions on how he or she could better navigate linguistically and academically as an international college student in their future studies.

The recruitment criteria of the study were: (1) non-immigrant undergraduate students from China; (2) those who were currently enrolled as first-semester Freshmen in Hillside University; and (3) native speakers of Mandarin Chinese from Mainland China. Interested students needed to meet all aforementioned criteria to be considered as research participants.

I decided on the aforementioned recruitment criteria due to the following reasons. Firstly, as detailed in Chapter 2, Chinese international students were fundamentally different from immigrants to the U.S. with Chinese descent, due to their different language, culture, education, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, only those F-1 visa holders (or student visa holders) were included in the dissertation. Secondly, since the focus of this dissertation has been to explore the participants' ability to function linguistically during the initial stage of their overseas college experiences, only first-semester college freshmen were included. Finally, only native-speakers of Mandarin Chinese from Mainland China were recruited because the two Special Administrative Regions of China, Hong Kong and Macau, have enjoyed high degree of autonomy in their executive, legislative, and educational systems. Since Chinese international students from those regions were likely to grow up in different language environments (e.g., Cantonese and English) and receiving distinct educational curricula compared with their

Mainland Chinese peers (e.g., Hong Kong's curricula were heavily influenced by the U.K. education system), I decided to exclude them from the study.

After disseminating the recruitment flyers, fifteen Chinese students contacted me to show interest in voluntary research participation. After reviewing the volunteers' candidacy based on the aforementioned inclusion criteria, twelve students were officially recruited as research participants of the dissertation.

Participants

Based on the recruitment criteria of (1) non-immigrant undergraduate students from China; (2) those who were currently enrolled as first-semester Freshmen in Hillside University; and (3) native speakers of Mandarin Chinese from Mainland China, I have recruited twelve volunteers as participants of the dissertation. The participants' background information has been summarized in Table 3.1, in which the twelve participants' pseudonyms, gender information, disciplinary areas of studies, disciplinary areas of courses chosen during their first semester in college, TOEFL results for college application, and types of high school attended are presented.

As shown in Table 3.1, the twelve participants, seven males and five females, majored in 8 disciplinary areas, covering Psychology, Economics, Marketing, English, Computer Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Mathematics. Given their various majors, the participants were enrolled in a variety of courses from different disciplinary areas during their first semester in college, including but not limited to Philosophy, History, Chemistry, Mathematics, Writing, Sociology, Theater Arts, Painting, and Economics.

It was worth noting that the actual courses that the participants were enrolled in were far more diverse than the information presented in the table. This was because to summarize the disciplinary areas of the courses taken, I categorized all the courses the participants reported to

be enrolled in based on their common content subjects. For instance, courses such as *Asia in the World* and *Women in Modern Asian Society* offered by the History Department were all noted as *History* in the table. By the same token, various courses offered by the Mathematics Department, such as *Calculus I*, *Calculus II*, and *Statistics* were denoted as *Math*. Similarly, all seminar-style courses focusing on college adjustment offered by individual departments to their first semester students (course names varied by departments; examples including but not limited to courses such as *Reflection and Action*, and *First-year Seminar*) were reported as *Seminar*.

As shown in Table 3.1, among the twelve participants, eleven have taken TOEFL prior to college entry, and their scores ranged from 103 to 117. According to my earlier discussion about the TOEFL score interpretation based on the official description of ETS, their overall successful TOEFL results have (theoretically-speaking) indicated their high ability to function linguistically in overseas studies. Hugo was the only student who did not take the TOEFL prior to college entry; due to his prolonged studies in an American high school, he was exempt from the TOEFL requirement based on Hillside's admission policy.

Table 3.1.

A Summary of the Participants' Background Information

Pseudonym (Gender)	Disciplinary Areas of Studies	Disciplinary Areas of First Semester Course	TOEFL Results for College Application	Types of High School Attended
Pat (Male)	Psychology	ELL Writing, Psychology, Math, History, Seminar	110 (S 24, L 29, R 29, W 28)	Traditional "regular high"
Larry (Male)	Psychology Chemistry	ELL Writing, Psychology, Chemistry, Math, History, Seminar	107 (S 20, L 30, R 30, W 27)	Traditional "regular high"
Bill (Male)	Psychology	ELL Writing, Psychology, Math, Philosophy, Seminar	103 (S 20, L 26, R 30, W 27)	International department within "regular high"
Hugo (Male)	Math	ELL Writing, Math, Philosophy, History	N/A	4 years of "American high"
Shawn (Male)	Computer science	ELL Writing, Math, Computer Science, History, Seminar, Philosophy	107 (S 22, L 30, R 28, W 27)	1 year of "regular high"; 3 years of "American high"
William (Male)	Marketing	ELL Writing, Economics, Computer Science, Seminar, Math	108 (S 26, L 29, R 30, W 23)	Traditional "regular high"
Matthew (Male)	Economics	ELL Writing, Math, Philosophy, Physics, Economics	103 (S 25, L 27, R 28, W 23)	Foreign language "regular high"
Sarah (Female)	Psychology	ELL Writing, Math Education, Seminar, Psychology, Computer Science, Philosophy	107 (S 26, L 23, R 30, W 28)	International department within "regular high"
Rebecca (Female)	Chemistry Biology	ELL Writing, Chemistry, Biology, Math, Music	117 (S 27, L 30, R 30, W 30)	1 year of "regular high"; 3 years of "American high"
Kristin (Female)	Economics	Literature, Math, History, Economics, Seminar	110 (S 23, L 29, R 29, W 29)	International department within "regular high"
Lily (Female)	Psychology	ELL Writing, Psychology, Philosophy, Math, Sociology, Seminar	106 (S 22, L 26, R 24, W 24)	International department within "regular high"
Eva (Female)	English	Regular Writing, Philosophy, Painting, Math, Theatre Arts, Seminar	115 (S 27, L 30, R 30, W 28)	Traditional "regular high"

Prior to college entry, nine of the participants attended high school in China while the other three (Hugo, Rebecca, and Shawn) had at least three years of experiences studying in American high schools. While all twelve participants categorized themselves following the dichotomy of students from the "普高" (regular high schools in China; also referred to as "regular high") and "美高" (U.S. high schools; also referred to as "American high"), some nuances could be observed regarding their previous high school experiences.

As presented in Table 3.1, the participants' high school experiences fell into five categories, namely (1) traditional "regular high" in China, (2) foreign language high schools in China, (3) international departments within traditional "regular high" in China, (4) one year of "regular high" in China and three years of "American high" in the U.S., and (5) four years of "American high."

The so-called traditional "regular high" refers to the most typical high school education in China. The primary purpose of "regular high" education is to prepare students for the Chinese College Entrance Examination. Therefore, students with traditional "regular high" backgrounds generally have no experiences with American high school curricula; nor do they have much exposure to native English-speaking teachers. In contrast, the foreign language high schools in China, while still having Chinese College Entrance Examination preparation as one of their focal goals, also put substantial emphasis on the learning of foreign languages. While students enrolled in foreign language high schools typically have no experience learning American high school curricula at school, they are very likely to be exposed to native English-speaking teachers as instructors of the *English as a Foreign Language* course.

The international department refers to a special division within traditional "regular high" where the goal of education is to prepare students for overseas studies (mostly in English-

speaking countries). Not every traditional "regular high" has such a department; it is more prevalent in schools with large populations of students from high socioeconomic backgrounds who have desire for pursuing tertiary education abroad. Since the instructional goal is primarily for overseas studies preparation, students enrolled in this type of high schools tend to have significantly less exposure to standard Chinese high school curricula in preparation for the College Entrance Examination; instead their high school education is likely to follow certain American high school curricula. Not only are the students exposed to TOEFL and Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) during their high school studies, but also they have the opportunities to take many Advanced Placement (AP) courses. While students from international departments may or may not have experiences taking courses with native English-speaking instructors, they are likely to be more prepared for overseas studies given their substantial knowledge on American high school curricula compared with their peers graduating from traditional "regular high" and foreign language high schools in China.

To capture the nuances of the various degrees of language and education acculturation prior to college entry featured in the aforementioned five different types of high school backgrounds, I further generated a continuum (Figure 3.1). At the very left of the continuum were Larry and Pat from the School of Education, Eva from the School of Arts and Sciences, and William from the School of Management. These four students reported to be from the so-called traditional "regular highs," which provided them with no contact of native English-speaking teachers or any American high school curriculum. Therefore, they were likely to be the least acculturated into overseas college studies in the U.S. at the very beginning of the semester, not only academically and linguistically, but also culturally.

Next to them on the continuum was Matthew from the School of Arts and Sciences, who attended a foreign language high school in China which exposed him to native-speaking English language teachers during conversation classes, yet no experience with any American high school curriculum or AP courses. Compared with his traditional "regular high" peers, Matthew was at a slightly more advantageous spot at the initial stage of his overseas studies; it was likely that his previous experiences taking language courses with native-English-speaking teachers made him more used to initiating authentic communication in English.

At a more linguistically and academic acculturated spot compared with Matthew were Bill, Sarah, and Lily from the School of Education, and Kristin from the School of Arts and Sciences. These students attended the international departments within Chinese high schools, which potentially exposed them with the opportunity to experience both native-speaking English language teachers, and American high school curricula. Finally, at the right side of the continuum were Rebecca, Shawn and Hugo from the School of Arts and Sciences, who had experienced at least three years of authentic English-speaking environment in American high schools and had taken AP courses prior to their studies at Hillside. These students were comparatively the most acculturated to the U.S. education system, linguistically, academically, and culturally.

| • Larry (M)
 • Pat (M)
 • Eva (F)
 • **William (M)**

 "Regular high" in China | • **Matthew (M)**

 Foreign language high school in China | • Bill (M)
 • **Sarah (F)**
 • Kristin (F)
 • Lily (F)

 International department within "regular high" in China | • **Rebecca (F)**
 • Shawn (M)

 1 year of "regular high" in China, and 3 years of American high | • **Hugo (M)**

 4 years of American high |
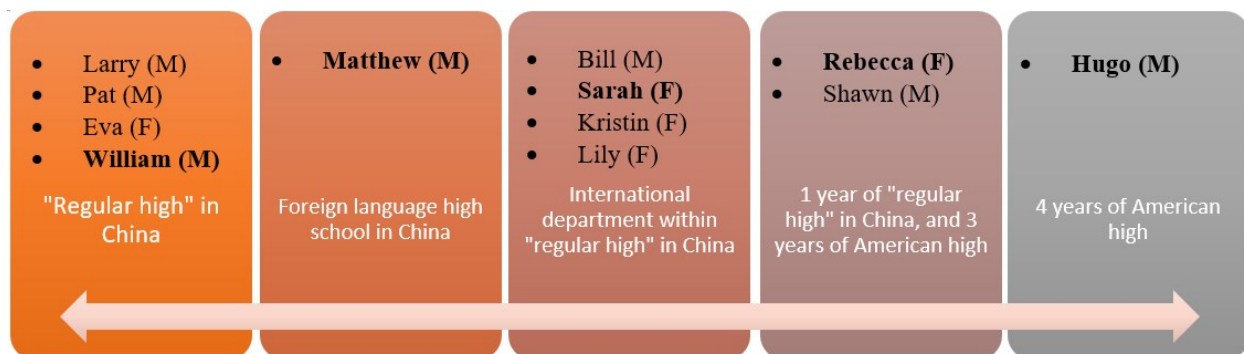
Figure 3.1. A Continuum in Summary of All Participants' Educational Experiences

While in Chapters 5 through 7, findings and discussions are presented about all twelve participants, I have decided to present detailed portraits of five focal Chinese international students' initial college experiences in order to explore how participants with different high school education backgrounds function academically and linguistically during their first semester in an American higher education institution. The selected focal participants, William, Matthew, Sarah, Rebecca, and Hugo, have been emphasized in bold in Figure 3.1.

My decision of zooming into these five cases was made according to purposeful sampling, a widely adopted case-selecting strategy in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). By intentionally identifying and selecting the most information-rich cases, purposeful sampling makes the most out of limited resources in order to illuminate the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). Based on analysis of data collected from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews, language logs, digital ethnography through *WeChat* observations, writing samples, talks around texts, research memos, and informal communication, I have identified a group of five students based on the rule of maximum variation in purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). These students were selected due to the abundant data available for each case from all the aforementioned data collection sources, as well as their demonstrated variety in gender, college major, and previous language and education experiences. It was hoped that through a portrait of the journeys of these five students, I could demonstrate the heterogeneity of experiences among Chinese international students during their first semester in college.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a period of four months from August to December during the Fall Semester of the 2018-2019 academic year. I have further divided the 4-month investigation into 16 weeks, starting from Week 0 which referred to the orientation week to

Week 15 right before the study days for the final examination. Table 3.2 below summarizes the

detailed timeline for data collection of each source.

Table 3.2.

Timeline for Data Collection

Data Collection	August W0-1	September W2-5	October W6-10	November W10-14	December W15
Participant consent	X				
Semi-structured interview Round #1	X (W1 only)	X (W2 only)			
Semi-structured interview Round #2				X (W 13 only)	
Students' writing (texts)		X (W 5 only)	X (W 6-7)		
Talks around the texts			X		
Bilingual language logs				X (W 12 only)	
Informal Communication	X	X	X	X	X
Online observations informed by digital ethnography	X	X	X	X	X
On-going data analysis	X	X	X	X	X

Prior to the official start of the data collection process (Weeks 0 & 1), I obtained consent

from potential participants to ensure confidentiality and protect their rights. Participants were

informed that at any stage of the data collection, they had the rights to skip questions or

withdraw from the study. They were also notified that if they decided to drop out from the study

at some point but afterwards expressed interests in rejoining the study, they would be permitted

to participate in the project again at a later stage.

As shown in the timeline (see Table 3.4), immediately after receiving consent from

potential participants, I started the first round of semi-structured student interviews (Weeks 1 &

2). Students' writing products (Weeks 5-7), talks around texts (Weeks 6-10), and bilingual

language logs (Week 12) were gathered during specific time points during the semester. Towards

the end of the semester, the second round of semi-structured student interviews were conducted (Week 13).

On-going analysis, informal communication, and digital ethnography was conducted throughout the four months to analyze, reevaluate, and reflect on data collected and shed light on ways to improve future data collection. I generated research memos to record ideas, thoughts, questions and tentative interpretations (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Throughout the data collection process, I conducted frequent member checks through informal conversations either in person or through *WeChat* with my participants in Mandarin Chinese. Member checking (also referred to as respondent validation) was beneficial in improving data quality as it helped to make sure that my observation, evaluation and tentative interpretation of participants' linguistic performances was true to their meaning (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Krefting, 1991). Conducting constant member checks also echoed my stance of valuing my participants as co-constructors of knowledge.

Data Sources

The exploratory and inductive nature of thematic analysis employed in this dissertation put emphasis on the collection of data from a variety of sources. Multiple sources of data could enhance the construct validity and potential generalizability, although generalizability has never been a goal for this exploratory qualitative study (Yin, 2003). Multi-modal data were collected (texts, visuals, audios, and videos) from twelve participants majoring in eight disciplines.

To be specific, data sources included a combination of (1) two semi-structured interviews with each of the twelve participants at the beginning and end of the semester (N=24); (2) writing samples from the participants' course assignments across disciplines (N=29, covering 4 genres); (3) talks-around-texts interviews with each participant to debrief about their writings (N=24); (4)

digital ethnography informed observations of the participants' usage of a popular Chinese social media application software *WeChat* throughout the semester; (5) two 24-hour language logs documenting each participant's bilingual usage in academic and social settings (N=24, covering a total of 576 hours of self-reported language usage); (6) informal communication with the participants; and (7) research memos based on on-going analysis.

The rich data sources have enabled a close exploration of Chinese international students' academic and linguistic experiences during their transitional period through multi-modal means. The various and diverse sources of evidence have not only paved way for later triangulation of the findings, but also conducted examinations of the same phenomenon from different perspectives (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). To explore the participants' first semester experiences, I simultaneously drew upon self-reported data from semi-structured interviews, bilingual language logs, informal communication, and talks around texts to capture focal students' perceptions of their linguistic functioning, and also integrated observational data from genre-based writing analysis and digital ethnography to gauge their actual linguistic performances. Table 3.3 below maps out data sources of the study and the corresponding research questions these data served to answer. In the sections below, I present details in relation to each data source.

Table 3.3.

Research Questions and Data Source Mapping

Research Questions	Data Source
1. How did the 12 Chinese international students from different disciplines function linguistically in academic and social settings at the beginning of their first semester in college?	- Digital ethnography observations - Semi-structured interviews - On-going research memo - Informal communication
2. How did they meet the oral and written linguistic demands in academic and social settings throughout the semester?	- Students' writings - Talks around texts - Digital ethnography observations

		• Semi-structured interviews
		• On-going research memo
		• Informal communication
3. What has changed regarding their linguistic functioning over the course of one semester?		• Digital ethnography observations
		• Semi-structured interviews
		• On-going research memo
		• Informal communication
		• Bilingual language logs

Online Observations Informed by Digital Ethnography

Multi-modal data collected through digital ethnography have contributed to the three key research questions. Digital ethnography is an innovative approach which utilizes digital platforms to explore participants' daily life experiences; it allows the collection of various modes and forms of artifacts which may include but not limited to text, voice memos, videos, and pictures (Pink et al., 2016). The rich sources of artifacts collected through digital ethnography could provide different angles in understanding the experiences of focal participants, and consequently contribute to data triangulation and analysis.

According to Pink and colleagues (2016), there are five guiding principles of digital ethnography, namely multiplicity, non-digital-centric-ness, openness, reflexivity, and unorthodox. By multiplicity, the authors have claimed that there should not be rigid rules and standards in designing and conducting digital ethnography research; each digital ethnography study is therefore "always unique to the research question and challenges to which it is responding" (Pink et al., 2016). By non-digital-centric-ness, the authors have argued that the digital media adopted in digital ethnography should not be placed as the center of the research; instead, participants' feelings and experiences in using these digital tools should also be given attention to (Pink et al., 2016). Openness acknowledges the researchers of digital ethnography as collaborative knowledge builders rather than the determiner of knowledge; by the same token,

instead of being passive objects of digital observations, participants of digital ethnography research are perceived as co-producers of knowledge (Pink et al., 2016). Building on the openness principle, reflexivity defines the ways in which digital ethnographers co-construct knowledge with participants as interactive and collaborative (Pink et al., 2016). Finally, the unorthodox principle encourages non-traditional, multi-modal ways of data collection, especially through the integration of data beyond texts (e.g., visuals, audios) (Pink et al., 2016).

I decided to incorporate online observations informed by digital ethnography as a supplement to traditional data collection methods because given the popularity of social media technology among young people, this data collection approach is said to be particularly appropriate to be adopted in studies that involve college students (Arnold & Casellas Connors, 2017). According to recent research findings from the Pew Research Center surveying young adults between 18 and 29 years old in the U.S., over 90% of the participants reported to have a smart phone (Pew, 2016). This has placed Chinese international college students in a favorable position to use social media to socialize and express feelings and experiences regarding their first-semester linguistic functioning through multi-modal means such as text, videos, pictures, and audios.

My intensive virtual digital ethnography observations were conducted through *WeChat*, a widely used, China-centric, multi-purpose social media application software. Launched in 2011, *WeChat* became the most popular social media platform for Chinese of all age groups with over 1083 million monthly active users (Statista, 2019). The *WeChat* software supports a variety of modes of online communication, which include but not limited to instant messaging through text, one-on-one or one-to-many voice messaging, video conferencing, photo and video sharing, blog posts, video games, bill pay, and location sharing. Additionally, it allows the establishment of

private chat groups, thanks to which any form of group posting or sharing are private and confidential.

I incorporated digital ethnography informed observations as a means to explore my participants' daily experiences throughout the Fall 2018 semester. *WeChat* was reported to be culturally-relevant and frequently-used according to my three participants of the pilot study. Similarly, all of my current research participants reported to be daily users of *WeChat*, through which they connected with families and friends both in the U.S. and back in China. After participant recruitment, I friended each of my participants via *WeChat*, which not only allowed private correspondence through individual audio, video, and text messages, but also granted permission for me to observe their public postings as well as the participants' interactions with their peers regarding the posts.

Over the course of one academic semester, I documented a total of 557 *WeChat* posts from the participants. These posts were multi-modal in nature and very often simultaneously contained bilingual texts, emoji, and visuals.

An example of the multi-modal data collected through digital ethnography was presented in Figure 3.2 below. In this example, the participant shared his experiences during a career fair event that he just attended. On the one hand, he was excited that he got many free gifts at the career fair (as shown in the picture). On the other hand, he was thrilled that although most organizations did not accept freshmen interns, one company was particularly interested in him and encouraged him to submit his resume as soon as possible. In this post, simultaneous usage of Chinese and English texts, emoji, and picture could be easily observed. Additionally, since the post was somewhat humorous, it received many likes from his Chinese peers[8].

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[8] To protect participants' privacy, any identifiable information has been blurred in blue.
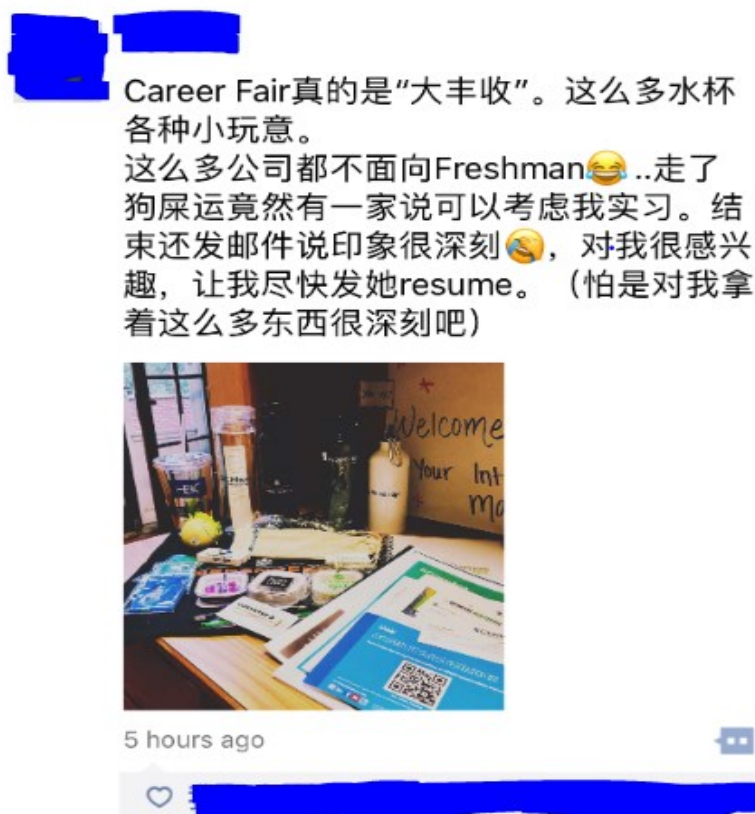
Figure 3.2. An Example of the *WeChat* Posts Collected

Semi-structured Interviews

Interview data also contributed to the exploration of the three key research questions. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant (N=24) at the beginning and also the end of one academic semester about their language and academic experiences. All the interviews were conducted in private in a quiet room at Hillside University. While I had originally planned to spend approximately 60 minutes on each interview, given the open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews, the duration of the interviews ranged between 40 and 95 minutes.

The interview protocols for the two rounds of interviews are presented in Appendix A. Questions in the anchor interview at the beginning of the semester mainly addressed the

following five aspects of Chinese international students' experiences, including (1) language and education experiences prior to college entry; (2) reasons for overseas studies; (3) linguistic functioning in academic and social settings after entering Hillside University; (4) experiences as nonnative speakers at Hillside; and (5) perceptions of the effectiveness of support received from the university. Comparatively speaking, the end-of-the-semester interviews were more open-ended in nature, in which I asked participants to share their general feelings about their first semester in college, and overall academic, language, and social experiences. Given the variability in each participant's experiences, I encouraged them to decide the main topics they would like to focus on and allowed them to share as much information as they would like to about their unique stories during this transcultural, transnational, and translingual journeys.

As a balanced bilingual in Mandarin and English, I made it very clear to all the participants prior to the interviews that they were free to choose whichever language they felt comfortable with during the interview, be it Mandarin Chinese, English, or a mixture of both. I further assured that I would not judge their English accent or grammatical errors, as the focus of the study was to learn about their experiences. By providing my participants with the agency to determine the medium of interviews, they were more likely to be at ease when sharing their stories. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission from the participants and later transcribed for further analysis.

Students' Writings

To address the second research question, the students' writing samples from coursework (also referred to as texts) along with any corresponding grades and feedback from professors (if applicable) were collected around midterm (Weeks 5 to 7). The students were instructed to send me at least two writings, one from their writing class and the other from any content area classes

(e.g., *History*, *Philosophy*, *Psychology*) so as to ensure that I could yield texts of various genres. For Kristin, who was not enrolled in any writing classes, I requested two essays from different content area classes. By Week 7, I received 29 pieces of essays, covering the following four genres: argument (N=12), recount (N=15), Explanation (N=1), and Report (N=1).

Something worth noting was that while I had originally asked for two writing samples from each student (expected total: 24 samples), the students shared with me a total of 37 writing samples which was more than 1.5 times of my original plan. Among the 37 essays, 29 fell into the predetermined data collection window (Weeks 5 to 7) and were eventually included in the analysis of this dissertation.

Talks Around Texts

Talks-around-texts interviews were also conducted to answer the second research question. The so-called "talks-around-texts" interviews refer to informal conversations with student writers about their writing products (Coffin & Donohue, 2012; Lillis & Scott, 2008). It integrates ethnographic elements into this exploratory thematic analysis study by generating conversations around and beyond texts (Lillis & Scott, 2008). It has been regarded as a supplementary tool in addition to written text analysis, as it could extend understandings from a 'texts in context' level to a deeper investigation of writers' perceptions of the contexts and their rationale for the texts produced (Coffin & Donohue, 2012).

I have conducted two 15-minute talk-around-text interviews with each student. The talks around texts happened after I had conducted text analysis based on the genre-based rubrics, during which I customized questions based on the results of text analysis. For instance, if a student received a low score in verb tense consistency, I would ask him or her to discuss the rationale for frequent shifting of tenses. Similarly, if a student did not have a thesis statement in

his or her argument writing, I would try to explore whether the missing component was due to the student's intentional language choice or unclear understanding of genre-specific requirements. In all talks around texts, I also asked to see whether the students had received any support during their essay writing (e.g., from the Hillside Writing Center, professors, or peers). If so, I encouraged the students to talk about their experiences in support seeking as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of the support received.

Bilingual Language Logs

Inspired by Brisk, Burgos, and Hamerla (2004), I integrated bilingual language logs to document the participants' usage of English and their heritage language (Mandarin Chinese) within a 24-hour period during a typical weekday and also a typical weekend day. Data from the bilingual language logs support investigation of the second research question. I collected one weekday language log and one weekend day language log from each participant (N=24), documenting their specific time, duration, and purpose of bilingual language usage.

An example of one participant's weekday language use was included in Table 3.4 below. As shown in the example, the bilingual language log provided detailed information not only on when, where, and for what purpose was English or Chinese used, but also documented the modes of language usage (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) as well as information about interlocutors (e.g., Chinese classmates, roommate). By integrating the self-reported bilingual language logs as a source of data collection, I was able to yield detailed information about the participants' linguistic functioning. As mentioned earlier, since neither site observation nor shadowing was found to be feasible for this study, the bilingual language logs provided valuable data on the participants' actual language usage in a non-intrusive way.

Table 3.4.

An Example of a Weekday Bilingual Language Log

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
7:50-8:30	Get up and shower	Dorm	n/a	n/a
8:30-9	Have breakfast with Chinese peers	cafe	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
9-9:50	*Physics*	HU	n/a	L/R/W
10-10:50	*Philosophy*	HU	S/L with Chinese classmates	S/L/R/W
11-12	Lunch with Chinese friends	cafe	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
12-1	Do *Philosophy* readings assigned in class today	dorm	S/L with roommate	R/W
1-1:50	*ELL writing*	HU	S/L with Chinese classmates	S/L/R/W
1:50-3	Do *Philosophy* readings assigned in class today	library	n/a	R/W
3-3:50	*Mathematics*	HU	n/a	L/R
4-5	Do *Philosophy* reading assigned in class today	library	n/a	R/W
5-6	Dinner with friends	HU	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
6-8:30	*Philosophy* class discussion session based on readings assigned in the morning	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
8:30	Go back to dorm to sleep	dorm	n/a	n/a

Informal Communication

Data from informal communication, either through face-to-face conversations or private

messaging via *WeChat*, were also included to explore the three key research questions. As

mentioned earlier, the stance I took in conducting this dissertation was a co-constructor of

knowledge; I therefore valued the agency and contributions from my participants. Informal

communication data mainly consisted of (1) any form of contact initiated by me to make

clarifications or get additional information from the participants (e.g., after reviewing the anchor interview data, I reached out to clarify with two participants about a few issues they mentioned during the interview), and (2) any participant-initiated communication for the purpose of sharing their experiences with me. The data collected from informal communication were usually multi-modal in nature, including not only bilingual texts, but also visuals and audios.

An example of participant-initiated informal communication was presented in Figure 3.3 below. In this example, one of my participants, William, initiated a conversation with me through *WeChat* personal messaging. He first sent over a picture showing a boy with an upset and tortured face to express his negative feelings. Following the visual, he continued with some bilingual texts complaining that as a student at the School of Management, he had to read the Wall Street Journal every week; however, since he could not understand the readings due to language barriers, William felt so frustrated that he described articles from the journal as "*有毒*" (poisonous).

Figure 3.3. An Example of Data Collected from Informal Communication

On-going Research Memos

Throughout the data collection process, I also took down notes and drafted memos to record observations, thoughts, tentative interpretations, and follow-up questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The research memos allowed me to pay attention to details, patterns, and themes in the data collected, and facilitated later data triangulation. Information from my on-going research memos was thus able to make contributions to my investigation of all three key research questions, especially the third one exploring changes that have occurred over time.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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The preliminary, on-going data analysis occurred throughout the process of data collection. I actively took down analytic memos in order to (1) document tentative interpretations, questions, thoughts, and ideas to inform future data collection; and (2) attempt to organize and synthesize data collected in preparation for later triangulation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Any audio-recorded data were transcribed for later analysis. Since data transcription was in itself an analytic process (Bird, 2005), I took notes and brainstormed ideas for later analysis while transcribing. Interviews conducted completely in Mandarin Chinese or those mainly adopting Mandarin with occasional code-switching between Chinese and English were transcribed and analyzed directly in its original language forms without translation. This decision was made considering my balanced linguistic capabilities in both languages. More importantly, analyzing participants' narratives in their original forms has the advantage of "preserv[ing] the nuance" and striving to interpret statements as true to their original meaning as possible (Blair, 2016, p. 112).

Constant member checks were conducted throughout data collection and analysis in the form of researcher-initiated informal communication to make sure that my transcriptions, translations and interpretations were true to participants' meaning (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Krefting, 1991). If participants pointed out any discrepancies, I would adjust my analysis accordingly to reduce researcher bias.

I adopted a combination of deductive and inductive data analyses. Utilizing a deductive approach, I conducted coding and analysis following the guidance of the theoretical framework. Conversely, in the inductive process, I explored patterns and themes that have emerged from multiple sources of data, and strived to come up with a new framework in understanding the linguistic and academic experiences of Chinese international students. In the following sections, I have presented detailed information on data analytic plans by source and discussed my researcher positionality.

Data Analysis by Source

    Analysis of all data sources except student writing.

To analyze data from semi-structured interviews, talks around texts, informal communication, digital ethnography, and research memos, I conducted analysis following the procedures of Applied Thematic Analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Thematic analysis puts emphasis on inductive analysis, in which codes and themes emerge and develop from data collected (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

Coding provides a "pivotal link" between data collected and interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 46). Following the procedurals proposed by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), I performed three stages of inductive coding including segmenting text, identifying themes, and content coding. Firstly, I adopted segmentation as a data reduction strategy, which

allowed me to separate useful information from redundant text and enhances the overall data quality (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The process of segmenting data, which was compared to using a compass to systematically locate the target spot (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), has paved way for my theme identification.

Immediately after segmenting data, I started to identify major themes. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) commented, "Themes come in all shapes and sizes. Some themes are broad and sweeping constructs that link many different kinds of expressions. Other themes are more focused and link very specific kinds of expressions" (p. 87). Given the flexibility of themes, I paid special attention to thematic cues including repetition, indigenous typologies (i.e., participants' unique ways of addressing constructs under examination), metaphors, transitions, comparison, linguistic connectors, and silence (i.e., participants' avoidance in addressing certain topics) (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Moreover, since theme identification was a complex process, I constantly read and re-read the texts to extract and refine themes (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The major themes that have emerged in this dissertation included "linguistic functioning in academic and social settings," "coping strategies initiated" "perceptions of the effectiveness of support received" and "stage of the semester."

Once emerging themes have been identified, content coding was conducted so that the proposed themes were analyzed and assigned codes which carried well-defined meanings (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Specifically, when analyzing artifacts collected through *WeChat* which transcended the traditional modes of data, I reflected on other sources of data including on-going research memos, informal communication, and interviews in order to interpret those artifacts in specific contexts. Additionally, to increase the reliability of the methodological approach and increase data quality, I conducted double-coding and frequent re-checks (Guest,

MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Following Guest and colleagues' (2012) suggestion to increase coding reliability, I coded all texts twice with a two-week interval in between. Finally, codes achieved (e.g., linguistic and cultural congruencies, linguistic and cultural incongruences, using Chinese as a bridging tool, support from professors, support-seeking from Chinese peers) were reviewed and compared across participants to identify any patterns for further discussions.

Thematic analysis was performed with the assistance of the qualitative coding software *ATLAS.ti* which allowed easy coding, comparison of codes, assigning codes and sub-codes, and generating research report. This software was particularly helpful in comparing thematic data, as it supported organization and summary of data from different sources.

Students' written work (texts).

I conducted text structure and language analysis of student writing informed by SFL theory. When analyzing texts, I customized my analysis to features of different genres and disciplines, since "[t]he internal organization of natural language can best be explained in the light of the social functions which language has evolved to serve" (Halliday, 1973, p. 34). The results from text analysis were reviewed along with grades assigned by their professors as well as talks-around-texts interviews to see whether there were discrepancies between professors' expectations and students' interpretation.

In order to analyze texts from an SFL perspective, I adapted the genre-based writing rubrics created by Brisk (2015). The corresponding rubrics for the four genres collected in this dissertation were presented in Appendix B. Although the rubrics were originally applied in the book to assess the writing performances of young children from kindergarten to 5th grade, they have been found to be reliable in evaluating text produced by older writers for the following two reasons. Firstly, Brisk (2015) drew upon SFL theory and created the rubrics based on genre

rather than the complexity of texts. Thus, this genre-based approach of assessing students'

writing should not be limited by the age of writers. Secondly, this rubric has been adopted in

previous research with beyond K-5 participants and is found to be reliable even assessing texts

produced by older students. For instance, in O'Connor's (2017) dissertation work, Brisk's (2015)

rubric has been used to analyze the writing performances of high school students, the age of

whom are extremely close to participants in the current study.

In her book *Engaging Students in Academic Literacies*, Brisk (2015) systematically

introduced genre-based writing instruction and provided detailed guidance on how to analyze

texts based on their genre-specific characteristics. Aspects emphasized in the rubrics echoed

many components of linguistic functioning under examination. To be specific, not only the

discrete language features, but also the topics of the writing (field), the relationship between the

language user and audience (tenor), and the role of language during interaction (mode) were

given attention to. Brisk's (2015) rubrics were well-suited to evaluate the writings collected in

this study, given the dual focuses on not only the language aspects but also students' capability

to utilize language in contexts to meet the needs of the specific genre.

Brisk's (2015) rubrics were designed to evaluate students' performances writing each of

the common academic genres, including reports, explanations, recounts, arguments and

narratives. According to the rubrics, students' writings are analyzed based on two aspects: (1)

purpose and stages, and (2) language. For instance, in analyzing the purpose and stages of the

argument writing, one of the most common genres that Chinese international students encounter,

the argument rubric addresses the following areas, including the purpose, verb conjugation

(proper tense), title (if required), thesis statement, reasons supported by evidence, reinforcement

of statement of position, and cohesive text (Brisk, 2015). In analyzing the language aspects of the

argument writing, the rubric focuses on modality, use of person, vocabulary use, language choice, and cohesion (Brisk, 2015). Similar to the rubric for argument, rubrics for other genres tap into both the purpose and language of the writing, which evaluate students' ability to function linguistically in producing written assignments to meet the course expectations.

The rubrics are customized based on each of the common genres students would encounter in academic settings, including (but not limited to) reports, explanations, recounts, arguments and narratives. Each rubric follows a scoring scale of one to four in evaluating students' performances. A rating of one means that the writer has minimal understandings of the genre, and would need substantial guidance and support in improving his or her writing. A score of two means that the writer has some but still insufficient understandings of particular aspects of the genre, and thus needs a certain degree of additional instruction and practice. A rating of three indicates that the writer has a general understanding of the target genre and is able to meet the genre-specific demands except for one or two incidences for revision. Lastly, a score of four shows that the writer has met the expectations required by the particular genre.

To minimize rater bias, after completing scoring of the writing samples collected, I randomly selected four writing samples representing the four genres collected and checked inter-rater reliability with a panel of three experts, two females and one male, who had extensive knowledge of the genre-based text analysis rubric informed by SFL (Brisk, 2015). The three experts, who were Mandarin-English, Korean-English, and Spanish-English bilinguals respectively, all received advanced training in Applied Linguistics and had at least one year of experience analyzing writing samples using Brisk's (2015) genre-based rubrics. Comparison between my scoring and the panel's grading has yielded an average agreement of approximately 93%. All the discrepancies lied in minor disagreement in assigning a score of two or three with

regards to the different levels of support required. In other words, there was no disagreement regarding discrete aspects with severe violation (a score of one) or successful performance (a score of four). After open discussion about the discrete items where minor disagreement lied, the panel and I have eventually reached an agreement of 100%.

Researcher Positionality

Born and raised in China, I came to study in an American higher education institution for graduate studies. The uneasy start of my language, identity and education journey as a newly-arrived Chinese international student has prompted me to pursue my doctoral studies with a focus in second language teaching and learning. Knowing that tens of thousands of Chinese international students traveling to the U.S. for tertiary education each year, I felt obliged to explore their experiences during the important linguistic, academic, and cultural transition in the hope to shed light on how American higher education could better serve their unique needs and facilitate their initial college adjustment.

In conducting this dissertation, I have taken an insider-outsider researcher position (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Being a Chinese international student, I was aware that the interviews with students might involve their personal experiences, emotions, and identity struggles, all of which could be hard to share. Therefore, I decided to take an insider position to make full use of my shared Chinese culture, language, values and experiences to build common grounds and establish a sense of bond and trust so as to open up conversations and make participants at ease.

As a researcher, I also adopted an outsider position to try my best in "put[ting] the objects of study *at a distance*" (Kessen, 1991, p.189, emphasis added in original) throughout every stage of the study so that I could minimize the chance of inserting my own feelings and perceptions which could inhibit their idea expressions and skew data analysis. As my own identity and

experiences were closely interconnected with the research questions I thrived to explore, I conducted constant member checking and shared my data analysis with participants for clarification in order to reduce any unnecessary subjectivity and increase the rigor of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Krefting, 1991). In the meantime, I also acknowledged that it was unavoidable to bring into the study some preconceptions, ideologies, and values based on my previous experiences. Therefore, I took a reflective stance and kept memoing how data collection and analysis might have been skewed or influenced due to my own subjectivity. This has been an on-going process; I kept these reflective memos as part of the database and revisited them throughout every stage of the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented an overview of the methodological approach of this dissertation by introducing detailed information regarding the study design, research setting, sampling, participants, data sources, data collection, and an overview of data analysis. Towards the end, a brief discussion of researcher positionality has been presented.

In the following three chapters, the findings of the study based on the multi-modal data collected from various sources will be presented. Chapter 4 zooms into a small group of selected participants and illustrates a portrait of the first-semester journeys among five focal participants, representing students from five different high school backgrounds. The purpose of Chapter 4 is to engage audience in the vivid stories of these five Chinese international freshmen and also to familiarize them with some major issues that have emerged during the participants' transitional experiences. Chapter 5 presents patterns and themes of the 12 participants' initial college experiences, and Chapter 6 reports the participants' language and academic journeys throughout the rest of the semester.

CHAPTER 4

A PORTRAIT OF FIVE STUDENTS' JOURNEYS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed portrait of five focal participants' first-semester journeys. Based on purposeful sampling with the criterion of identifying and selecting the most information-rich cases (Patton, 2002), I have chosen five focal participants, William, Matthew, Sarah, Rebecca, and Hugo, representing five different language and educational backgrounds (see Figure 4.1). These 5 cases were deliberately selected due to the rich information they contained, ranging from digital ethnography through *WeChat*, to informal communication, to semi-structured interviews, to language logs, to text analysis, and to talks around texts. Moreover, these students were also selected due to their different genders, majors and variability in disciplinary fields represented, including Marketing, Economics, Applied Psychology, Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics.

Table 4.1.

Focal Case Participant Information Overview

Pseudonym/ Gender/ Hometown	Major	Disciplinary Areas of Courses	High School Experiences/ TOEFL Experiences	Experiences Staying in the U.S. prior to College
William/ M/ Shanxi, Taiyuan	Marketing	• ELL Writing • Economics • Computer Science • Seminar • Math	Regular high school in China/ 108 after 5 trials (starting score: 56)	None
Matthew/ M/ Shanghai	Economics	• ELL Writing • Math • Philosophy • Physics	Foreign language high school in China/	None

		• Economics	103 after 3 trials (starting score: 99)	
Sarah/ F/ Nanjing, Jiangsu	Applied Psychology	• ELL Writing • Math Education • Seminar • Psychology • Computer Science • Philosophy	International department in a regular high school in China/ 107 after 5 trials (starting score: 90)	None
Rebecca/ F/ Beijing	Chemistry & Biology	• ELL Writing • Chemistry • Biology • Math • Music	K-9 in China; Elite, private, all-girl high school from 10th to 12th grade in the northeastern of the U.S./ 117 for college application	Spent 3 years in American high school
Hugo/ M/ Zhengzhou, Henan	Mathematics	• ELL Writing • Math • Philosophy • History	K-8 in China; Catholic high school from 9th to 12th grade in the northeastern of the U.S./ Never took TOEFL	Spent 4 years in American high school; In summer 2017, attended a one-month long summer school program in the U.S.

The five participants' familiarity to U.S. education and preparedness of overseas studies in the U.S. are illustrated in the continuum (see Figure 4.1; more details please see Chapter 3). At the very left end of the continuum, William attended the so-called traditional "regular high" school back in China, representing those international students who had the least exposure to U.S. education and the academic English-speaking environment. Following William was Matthew, who, while without any exposure to U.S. education, attended a foreign language high school in China which provided English conversation courses taught by native English-speaking teachers. In the middle of the continuum was Sarah, who had some exposure to U.S. education and the academic English-speaking environment; she received education from the international department of a Chinese high school which followed an American high school curriculum and

also offered Advanced Placement (AP) courses. William, Matthew, and Sarah were all among the nine "regular high" students recruited in this dissertation.

Toward the right side of the continuum were two "American high" students. Rebecca represented those international students who had significant exposure to U.S. education and the academic English-speaking environment, since she finished middle school education in China (U.S. equivalent of 9th grade) before pursuing the last three years of U.S. high school education. At the very right end of the continuum, Hugo represented those Chinese internationals students who were the most familiar with U.S. education and most prepared for an academic English environment; he experienced the entire four years of high school education in America.
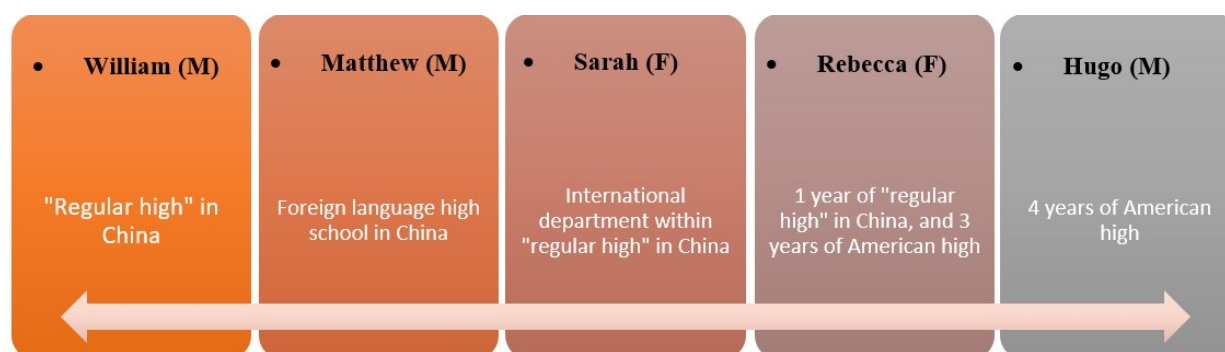
Figure 4.1. A Continuum of 5 Focal Participants' Language and Educational Experiences

The nature of Chapter 4 is story-telling, and the main purposes of this chapter are (1) to familiarize readers with the various journeys of different students with distinct language and education backgrounds, (2) to demonstrate to audience how the multi-modal data collected through a combination of digital ethnography and traditional data collection methods look like in this study, and (3) ideally to engage readers with the focal participants' vivid stories in the hope to prepare them for the patterns and themes to be presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Under the guidance of the theoretical framework, the five portraits will touch upon the focal students' first semester language and academic experiences across the micro, meso, exso, and macro systems.

Additionally, since the five stories are presented following a chronological order, the development of students' experiences across time has been captured in the chronosystem.

To prioritize the goal of story-telling and to provide readers with the best sense of their changing experiences over time, I have intentionally presented the portraits following their chronological order, instead of based on topics and themes. In this chapter, the portraits of the five focal students are presented following the progress of the semester to depict their very different transitional stories that deal with the reasons for their overseas studies, their TOEFL histories, language and education experiences prior to college, and major linguistic and academic experiences from the beginning to the end of their first semester in college. During this process, I have drawn upon a triangulation of data collected from various sources.

While I intended to incorporate as many data sources as possible in each portrait, priority has been given to data sources that best reflected each focal student's unique academic and language experiences. In other words, data presented in each portrait are not exhaustive, but rather intentionally chosen to serve the purpose of story-telling and to highlight the different characteristics of the five focal participants' distinct first-semester journeys. In order to bring out the most interesting stories, while interview data and language logs have been included throughout all portraits, I chose to frequently draw upon informal communication data and *WeChat* observations in some cases, while putting emphasis on text analysis of the students' writing samples from coursework in others.

A Portrait of the Focal Students' First-Semester Journeys in College

William: "My Friends Call Me the King of Office Hours!"

The first portrait is about William, who attended a traditional "regular high" back in China prior to his overseas studies in America. William's story will mainly touch upon the

following topics, including: (1) his previous language and education experiences; (2) his English language proficiency; (2) the language and academic challenges he encountered; (3) his corresponding coping strategies and support-seeking activities, especially office hour visits; and (4) his bilingual language use in academic and social settings. This story illustrates the first-semester journey of a student, who although had an extremely rough start at the beginning of the semester, managed to function linguistically and academically toward the end of the semester.

William was an outgoing, small-figured, 18-year-old Marketing major with short and curly hair. While he performed very well in the notoriously difficult College Entrance Exam in China and was admitted by a prestigious Chinese university, William's parents insisted that he pursue overseas studies in the U.S. to increase his competitiveness on the job market in the future. Knowing that a high TOEFL score was the prerequisite to enter an elite higher education institution in the U.S., William's parents paid thousands of dollars, sending him to TOEFL preparation classes provided by various private education companies. Within a year, William took TOEFL for 5 times. Through intense test preparation and repeated trials of the exam, his score almost doubled, increasing dramatically from 56 to 108.

Although receiving a 108 out of 120 on his TOEFL, which was considered a very high score by every means, William self-evaluated his English proficiency as *"糟透了"* (cannot be worse) during the first interview at the beginning of his college life (Interview, 8.30.18). He told me that his English proficiency was considered "*最多一般般*" (at most mediocre) back in high school, and the TOEFL score did not reflect his real English proficiency (Interview, 8.30.18). In a private text message that he sent to me via *WeChat*, William even joked that he must have taken "*假托福*" (a fake TOEFL), because despite his high TOEFL score, he experienced

difficulty functioning linguistically in both academic and social settings upon arrival (Informal Communication, 8.29.18).

Regarding his linguistic functioning in academic settings at the beginning of the semester, William told me via *WeChat* text message that he was sad to be a "struggler every day" (Informal Communication, 9.8.18). In one of his public *WeChat* posts (see Figure 4.2), William revealed the frustration of being the only international student in class—despite his difficulty in understanding course content, he did not know how to ask questions due to the language barrier (*WeChat* Observation, 9.4.18). His lack of oral English proficiency has also prevented him from class participation:

> 我刚开学特别伤心，我也想像他们那样侃侃而谈，我有特别多的东西想说，但是我
> 不知道该怎么用英语说，所以上课我不太说话。
> I was extremely sad at the beginning of the semester. I wanted to talk fast and fluently like them [his classmates]. I had so much that I would like to share, but I did not know how to express in English. Thus, I barely talked in class. (Interview, 8.30.18).

[Translation]
Caption under the crying panda emoji:
Don't worry about me. Let me cry for a month, and I will be fine.

William's post under the emoji:
Staying in a class where I am the only international student… Every day, I feel so confused and speechless… I want to ask questions, but I do not know how to pronounce… Today in class, I could not load my files, and was caught by the professor, who asked me to go to the office hour… [During office hour] she mentioned that she had been to China, and then she asked me all kinds of questions… Later, she said she could lend me a shoulder to cry on [smiling face emoji]… Finally, the professor let me out of her office…

Figure 4.2. Screenshot of Public *WeChat* Post by William on 9/4/2018

William reported to have experienced different degrees of language difficulty in all his courses, especially in *Freshman Seminar* and *Business Statistics* (Interview, 8.30.18). In a private *WeChat* message to me (see Figure 4.3), William described his experiences in these two classes as "一个上课跟聋子一样; 一个上课跟傻子一样" (in one class, I am like a deaf man; in another, I am like an idiot) (Informal Communication, 9.8.18). He explained that he felt like "a deaf man" in *Freshman Seminar* because his English listening proficiency was not good enough to understand what his professor and classmates were saying. William shared his frustration:

> 这个讨论课，讲述资本主义，社会主义，完全get 不了他们的点，他们都讲的飞快，我完全听不懂。
> This discussion seminar focused a lot on Capitalism and Socialism. I really could not get what they [the professor and classmates] were saying. They all talked so fast—as fast as flying. I could not understand a thing. (Interview, 8.30.18).

[Translation]
William: Yes!
William: I now realized what I was most afraid of
William: One is *Freshman Seminar*
William: The other is *Business Statistics*
William: These are the two courses
William: In one class, *I am like a deaf man*
William: In another, *I am like an idiot*

Figure 4.3. Screenshot of Informal Communication with William on 9/8/2018

Business Statistics focused mainly on using computer programming to conduct statistical analysis in the context of business, which required much less oral discussion compared with *Freshman Seminar*. However, William described himself as "an idiot" in this class, since he did not know how to express many basic programming symbols in English, such as dash, hyphen, and comma, making it extremely difficult to follow the lecture (Interview, 8.30.18). Even though

he prepared a programming symbol vocabulary list (see Figure 4.4), William still felt it challenging to follow the lecture at the beginning of the semester due to his unfamiliarity with these expressions in English (Interview, 8.30.18).
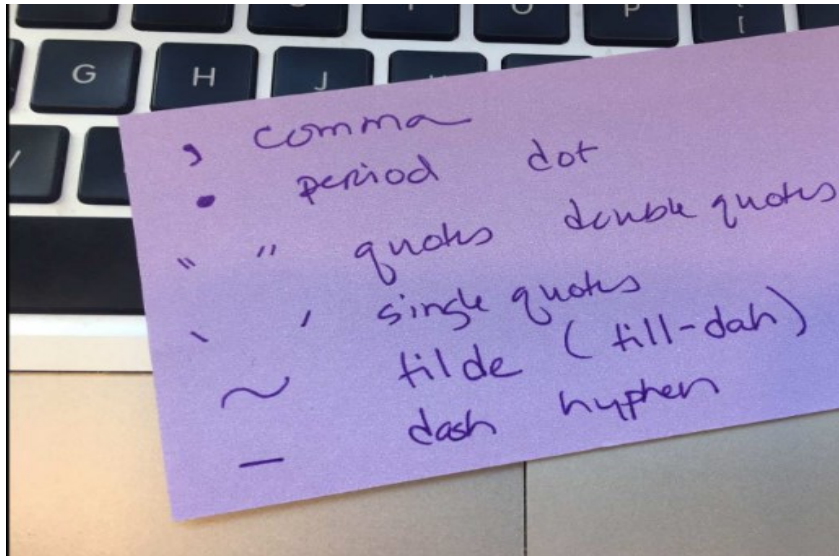
Figure 4.4. William's Programming Vocabulary List for *Business Statistics*

Right from the beginning of the semester, William's difficulty in linguistic functioning has extended beyond academic settings. During our first interview, an American classmate of his saw him and came over to say hi. When asked how his weekend went, William struggled to express himself. He looked very nervous and started to stutter. "I… I come to…ah how to say it… I…I go to downtown, and I… I takes the bus to the park… ah… um… I don't know how to say the park's name in English…" (Research Memo, 8.30.18). After his American classmate had left, William told me that he felt extremely embarrassed about that awkward conversation in which he failed to express himself. He said that he was so nervous to communicate with a *"外国人"* (foreigner) that his brain went completely blank when he had to squeeze out anything in English (Research Memo, 8.30.18).

His lack of confidence in English communication was further observed during the anchor interview, in which William chose to mainly use Mandarin Chinese (around 95%) with some occasional incidences of code-switching back and forth with English verbs (Research Memo, 8.30.18). For instance, he said "*get 不到*" (cannot get/understanding) for five times and "*hold 不住*" (cannot hold on/tackle) for four times throughout the interview; yet never produced any full sentences in English (Research Memo, 8.30.18).

During the anchor interview, William described his incapability to function linguistically in social settings. One example was about his unpleasant experience on the first day that he arrived at Hillside University. In order to buy basic essentials for his dormitory, William went to a nearby supermarket. However, when he wanted to ask the shop assistant for help, he had trouble expressing his idea in English. He described this experience as a "total disaster,"

> *我第一天来去超市差点就委屈哭了，因为我想买床单被罩那些的，想去问营业员那些东西在哪里，却不知道怎么用英语说。在中国学了英语这么多年，也背了这么多词汇，结果发现从来都没学过怎么说这些最基本的日常生活用品。我是外向型的，但还是不敢问，找了半天都找不到，真是委屈的眼泪都要下来了。。。*
> I almost cried the first day I went grocery shopping. I wanted to buy things such as sheets and blankets, and wanted to ask the shop assistant where they were located. However, I did not know how to say those in English. I learned English in China for so many years, and memorized so much vocabulary, but I have never learned how to express those basic daily essentials. I am an outgoing person, but I was not brave enough to ask for help. I looked for a long time and still could not find what I wanted. I felt so miserable that I was about to burst into tears… (Interview, 8.30.18).

According to William, his initial difficulty in linguistic functioning in both academic and social settings was largely due to his hometown, the City of Taiyuan in Shanxi Province, was much less developed compared with major cities in China such as Beijing and Shanghai. He believed that since studying abroad was very rare in his hometown, his high school put little attention to supporting his English learning in preparation for overseas studies:

相对那些发达地区，我们不能融入英语学习。他们那些大城市的，都是真正地融入式学习，为出国而学习英语。我们这些小地方都是为了考试而考试！我们整个学校就我一个人出国，连我们整个城市都很少有人出国。谁会管你出国准备呢？
Different from people from those more developed districts, we were not able to learn English through immersion. Those who came from big cities were really able to learn English through authentic and immersed ways. They learned English for the sake of going abroad. In contrast, people like me who were from smaller areas were purely learning English for the sake of passing exams! I was the only one who went for overseas studies in my high school; going abroad to study in a foreign college was very rare even in our city. Who would care about your overseas studies? (Interview, 8.30.18).

He further explained that "coming from a small place" has led to his English learning experiences back in China to be mainly examination-oriented due to the limited educational resources (Interview, 8.30.18).

我们学习英语是为了短时间拿个成绩而已。我们三年级才开始学英语。平时一个班都是五六十人，根本没机会练习口语。我们没外教，老师上课基本用中文，她自己口语超级差，各种美英混杂。。。每天早读课我们都是背单词，背句型，就这样中-英，中-英地死背。。。为了考托福，我就是每天狂背模板，刷题，有时候我都不知道为什么这么写这么说。反正都是背模板的，还真考了108！
All we did was nothing but to achieve high scores in exams using the shortest time possible. We did not start English learning till third grade. On average, my classes had around 50 to 60 students, leaving us absolutely no opportunity to practice English. We didn't have any [native-English-speaking] foreign teachers. Our teacher mainly used Chinese to teach English, [because] she herself spoke horrible English, with frequent mixture of British and American English… Every morning, our only task was to memorize vocabulary and sentence structures. We practiced rote-memorization all the time, firstly Chinese meaning, and then the corresponding English expressions… In order to get a high score in TOEFL, I spent every day memorizing sentence patterns and drowned myself in doing practice problems. Sometimes I had no idea why I should write this way or speak this way. But who cares. By memorizing patterns, I did get a 108 in TOEFL! (Interview, 8.30.18).

In order to concur the challenges posed by his lack of English proficiency, William has developed a series of coping strategies as the semester went by. At the very beginning of the semester, William mainly depended on Chinese as a bridge to facilitate his understanding and expression in English. The first strategy that William used was to depend heavily on English-Chinese dictionary. To be specific, whenever he came across any unfamiliar word in course readings, he would look it up in his Chinese-English electronic dictionary. Similarly, whenever he came across any vocabulary that he did not understand during conversations, he would ask the

interlocutors "can you spell it" and then tried to look up the Chinese translation in dictionary (Interview, 8.30.18). He explained, *"我知道用英英字典更好，但是我必须用中英字典，这样我可以在最短的时间里抓住意思"* (I know it is better to use English-English dictionary. However, I have to use English-Chinese dictionary so as to grasp the meaning in the shortest time possible) (Interview, 8.30.18).

Another initial strategy that he adopted was to seek support from other Chinese international students, especially those who attended high schools in America. William told me, *"他们在这里呆的久，英语好，我上课有不懂的就小声用中文问他们"* (They have been here [the U.S.] for very long, and are thus good at English. If I don't understand anything in class, I will whisper to them in Chinese for help) (Interview, 8.30.18).

However, as the semester progressed, William started to realize that he had to come up with new coping strategies and depend less on Chinese, since neither of the earlier strategies remained effective with the passage of time (Interview, 11.20.18). Firstly, his strategy of resorting to English-Chinese dictionary whenever he came across any new vocabulary became problematic, since looking up the dictionary too frequently was not only time-consuming, but also could interrupt his thoughts and prevent him from grasping the main idea of the conversations and readings (Interview, 11.20.18).

Moreover, William's heavy reliance on English-Chinese dictionary translation has also resulted in awkward wording during his essay writing. For instance, in one of his personal recount in submission to the *ELL Writing* course about his gap year experiences working in luxury hotels, William wrote: "Loyally wishes you to stay at the hotel period journey to be happy, welcome your once more presence we the hotel!" (William's Recount 1, 9.17.18). During our follow-up talks around texts, I asked what he meant to express and why he decided to write

in this way. William explained that he had planned to write "*忠心祝愿您住店愉快，欢迎您再次光临*" (I sincerely hope that you have had a pleasant experience staying in our hotel; hope to see you again in the future), yet did not know how to express it in English. Therefore, he resorted to his English-Chinese translation software, which generated the strangely-worded sentence mentioned above (Talks around Texts, 9.30.18).

In response to the negative influences caused by the over-usage of translation tools, William decided to gradually reduce the amount of English-Chinese dictionary use and try to push himself to "think in English" (Interview, 11.20.18). As he commented,

> *我现在基本上都不查中文字典了。过去我读书，都一定要把内容翻译出来，弄成中文才可以理解，现在我逼自己浸泡式读书，也不太会靠用中文才能思考了。现在有些专有名词，我都不知道对应的中文是什么，但这不理解会影响，我在英语里学了这个词，也就用英语一起思考，也能懂的文章大意。*
> Now I barely use any English-Chinese dictionary. In the past, whenever I read, I had to translate all information into Chinese before I could digest the meaning. Now I have been pushing myself to get immersed in the English reading environment. Thus I no longer depend solely on Chinese translation in reading comprehension. Nowadays, even though there may be some English jargons, the Chinese meaning of which I have no idea about, it will not affect my reading comprehension. Since I learn about the jargons in English, I directly think in English to understand the gist of readings. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Yet, William pointed out that Chinese translation software could still be an "important lifesaver" during emergencies (Interview, 11.20.18). For instance, in very rare situations when he did not have enough time to finish the reading assignments, William would copy and paste the entire journal article into English-Chinese translation software so that he could quickly skim through the Chinese version to get the main idea of the article (Interview, 11.20.18). He confessed that depending on the translation software was not ideal. However, this at least allowed him to quickly grasp the meaning of the readings, which prepared him to understand the following lectures better (Interview, 11.20.18).

As the semester progressed, his second strategy of seeking support from "American high" students also stopped working, as his peers started to get impatient and became reluctant to help him. One of his peer pointed out explicitly, *"你老问我烦不烦，别打扰我听课！"* (You're so annoying keeping on asking questions. Don't disturb me while I'm listening to the lecture!) (Interview, 11.20.18). To make matters worse, William's frequent support-seeking behaviors seemed to have made some of his "American high" peers look down upon him.

Around one month after the semester started, William contacted me through *WeChat* texts about an incident in which he was humiliated by one of his "American high" classmates. According to William, that "American high" student posted his essays into a *WeChat* group consisting of over 200 Chinese international students without his permission, and publicly made fun of him by pointing out how horrible his grammar was; that same student further humiliated him by laughing at his "incapable to write" (Informal Conversation, 9.26.18).

This was later confirmed by one of William's best friends, Larry, a Psychology major who also happened to be one of the participants in this study. On the same day, Larry reported the same incident to me. According to Larry, the "American high" student's behavior had angered many "regular high" students, who spoke up for William in the *WeChat* group chat and condemned the bully of his inappropriate behavior (Informal Conversation, 9.26.18). However, in spite of the support and understanding from his "regular high" peers, William was greatly traumatized by this experience (Informal Conversation, 9.26.18).

Consequently, William stopped asking questions to "American high" students; instead, he started to "depend on technology" by taking recordings of each lecture so as to play back at a slower speed after class to revisit course content (Interview, 11.20.18). However, it was not long before William realized that this new strategy was too time-consuming to rely on:

一个小时的课慢速回放至少要90分钟，我还得不停暂停做笔记或者重复听，这样完全是恶性循环啊，因为我没时间学其他的课，更没时间读书、做作业。
A one-hour lecture would turn into at least 90 minutes if I played the recording at a low speed. Moreover, I had to keep on pausing to take down notes or to listen again. This was indeed a vicious circle, because I would not have enough time to prepare for other classes, not to mention finishing readings and homework. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Around one month and a half into the semester, William decided to seek help from professors (Interview, 11.20.18). According to William, the first step he took was to write an email to each one of his professors, sincerely expressing his frustration due to language barrier and his willingness to work as hard as possible to do well in class. In his email, William emphasized that his lack of oral participation in class was not due to his lack of interest in class content; instead, it was because of his inability to understanding the lecture and express his ideas in English. In closing, William apologized for the "trouble caused by [his] low English proficiency" and revealed his desire to receive support from the professor by frequently visiting office hours and asking questions (Interview, 11.20.18).

His support-seeking strategy of opening up himself to the professor has gained positive results—most professors not only responded showing empathy and understanding, but also invited William to visit them during office hours to provide him with additional support (Interview, 11.20.18). The professors of the two courses that William reported to have struggled the most, even said that they would like to see him during office hours at least once per week (Interview, 11.20.18).

In one of William's *WeChat* public posts (see Figure 4.5), he shared a screenshot he took from one of his professor's email response (*WeChat* Observation, 9.30.18). In the email, the professor assured William that she was willing to provide as much support as she could. She comforted William that his lack of English proficiency and desire of support-seeking was never a "trouble" to her, and also invited William to come to meet her during office hours and beyond as

frequently as he needed to (*WeChat* Observation, 9.30.18). William's *WeChat* post revealed his

appreciation towards the professor's support and understanding. He described his emotion as *"都*

快流泪了" (so touched that his tears were about to come out) (*WeChat* Observation, 9.30.18).

[The passage in the white area was a screenshot that William has taken from one professor's email reply]

You are always welcome in my office hours (or at other times by appointment); it would never be a "trouble," like you mentioned. You could come every day if you wanted! I'm here to help you however I can. Please ask questions if you have them and ask me to repeat myself or rephrase what I said if you need me to. You will never bother me.

Let me know if there's anything I can do for you.

看到professor的邮件都快流泪了。

[Translation for William's post in the black area]
When I read the email with my professor's response, I was so touched that my tears were about to come out.

Figure 4.5. Screenshot of William's *WeChat* Post with Professor's Response 9/30/2018

As midterm examinations were approaching and the course content became more and

more dense, William started to note down all his professors' office hours and made an "office

hour schedule" in addition to his class schedule (Interview, 11.20.18). Every weekday, whenever

there were any intervals between classes, William would immediately open up the office hour

schedule that he made to visit professors who happened to be available. For example, as

described in one of William's language log documenting a typical weekday, he utilized the three

hours between classes (from 2 to 5pm) to "[v]isit all professors who have office hours during the

time frame" (William's Language Log, 11.13.18). As he visited office hours very frequently, William was given the nickname "the king of office hours" by his friends (Interview, 11.20.18).

William told me that he enjoyed being "the king of office hours," as he found support-seeking from professors was the "most effective" strategies in his first-semester college adjustment (Interview, 11.20.18). To him, the purpose of visiting professors during office hours went far beyond merely to ask questions; he treated communication with professors as an approach to practice his oral English and get advice from native speakers:

> 我所有老师的 *office hour* 每周都会去，而且我还把见老师当作锻炼口语的机会。我的老师都好好呀，常常告诉我这个怎么说，那个怎么说，我都学到了很多。比如我原来什么大写的 *capitalize* 都不会讲，但是老师教了我慢慢就知道了。
> I will always visit all professors' office hours every week. I treat visiting professors as an opportunity to practice oral English. My professors are super good. They often teach me how to say this, and how to express that. I have learned a lot from them. For example, in the past I did not know how to say 'capitalize,' but after my professor taught me [during office hours], I gradually know how to express that (Interview, 11.20.18).

William revealed that since almost all professors told him that the best way to improve English was through immersion, he tried his best to reduce his Chinese usage and maximize the opportunity to talk in English throughout the latter half of the semester (Interview, 11.20.18). As shown in his language log of a typical weekday (see Tables 4.2), William spent the vast majority of the day using English, and he even socialized with American friends by having dinner together (William's Language Log, 11.13.18). The only incidence of Chinese usage happened before and after his *ELL Writing* class (William's Language Log, 11.13.18). However, considering the fact that William's *ELL Writing* class was almost full of Chinese international students (Interview, 8.30.18), his brief Chinese usage seemed unavoidable.

Table 4.2.

William's Language Log: A Typical Weekday, Tuesday 11/13/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
8-9	Get up, eat breakfast, and get ready for class	dorm	n/a	S/L
9-9:50	*Business stats*	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
10-12	Preview readings for *Freshman Seminar* so that he can participate better	library	n/a	R/W
12-1	Lunch	cafe	n/a	S/L R when ordering
1-1:50	*ELL Writing*	HU	S/L	S/L/R/W
2-5	Visit all professors who have office hours during the time frame	Prof's offices	n/a	S/L/R/W
5-6:30	*Freshman Seminar*	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
6:30-7:30	Dinner with American friends	cafe	n/a	S/L R when ordering
7:30-1am	Homework	dorm	n/a	R/W
1am	sleep	dorm	n/a	n/a

As reflected in his language log of a typical weekend (see Table 4.3), William limited his pure Chinese usage to only half an hour during lunch, communicating with his "regular high" friends (William's Language Log, 11.17.18). As he explained,

> 我觉得和中国朋友社交和提高英文必定是有影响的，所以我就没有刻意认识每一个人。我只需要认识我周边的，和他们保持关系不错就好。因为我英语还要进步，所以不能认识更多的中国人，因为如果就算你尽力去抵抗，最后也会一起说中文。我现在就要努力克制这方面的，虽然和我多数的普高朋友我都说中文，但是我有一个美高的朋友和我关系很好，我就会故意透露他我有哪些东西不会表达，他就会教我，我还会说哪里总是说错，如果他发现了也会纠正我。和他我也学到了很多。
> I strongly believe that socializing with Chinese friends will pose threats to my improvement of English. Therefore, I did not intentionally try to know everybody [every Chinese international students]. I only need to know people close to me, and keep a good

relationship with them. I still need to improve my English, and because of this, I cannot know more Chinese people. Even if you try your best to resist the temptation, towards the end you will still talk in Chinese together. Currently, I am trying to work on this. Although I talk in Chinese with most of my "regular high" friends, I do have an "American high" good friend. I often intentionally tell him that I have difficulty expressing certain things, and he will teach me how to say them in English. I also let him know places where I often make mistakes, and if he catches my error in oral English, he will try to correct me. I have learned a lot from him. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Table 4.3.

William's Language Log: A Typical Weekend Day, Saturday 11/17/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
noon	Get up	dorm	n/a	n/a
12-12:30	Get ready to go out	dorm	S/L	S/L
12:30-1	Lunch with "regular high" peers	cafe	S/L	S/L only when ordering
1-6	Homework alone	library	n/a	R/W
6-7	Dinner with Hugo (an "American high" student in this study)	cafe	S/L (half of the conversation)	S/L (half of the conversation)
7-12	homework	dorm	n/a	R/W
12-12:30	Shower and sleep	dorm	n/a	n/a

With the finals approaching, William regarded office hour visits as opportunities to make connections with professors by sharing his personal experiences, which he believed would ultimately play a positive role on his final grades (Interview, 11.20.18). William shared with all his professors in detail about his examination-oriented English learning experiences back in Taiyuan. In particular, he emphasized how his previous English learning experiences, relying entirely on rote memorization, has posed great challenges to his college essay writing (Interview, 11.20.18).

Knowing William's previous experiences, his professors became more understanding and empathetic (Interview, 11.20.18). For example, noticing that William was very stressed around

the final examination, one professor not only comforted him, but also gave him extensions on

homework, and revealed the possibility to curve up his final grades:

> 老师跟我说，我是中国人，英语不是母语，所以可能会写起文章慢一些，所以会给我 extension！有的老师还会安慰我不要担心分数，我的 lab 做的非常好，所以他会 curve up 分数的。
>
> My professors told me that I am a Chinese, and English is not my first language. Because of this, it may take me longer to write papers. Therefore, they offered to give me extensions! One professor also comforted me that I should not worry about my grades. Since my lab work is doing very well, he will curve up my grades. (Interview, 11.20.18).

William concluded that the biggest asset throughout this semester was to be "the king of

office hours" (Interview, 11.20.18). William told me that he had made lots of progress in

linguistic functioning throughout the semester, and began to feel proud of his English (Interview,

11.20.18). Right before the final examinations, William messaged me via *WeChat* (see Figure

4.6) to report an incident where he was complimented for his English ability (Informal

Conversation, 12.2.18). According to William, the interlocutor had mistaken him for a Chinese

American (Informal Conversation, 12.2.18), which implied that his oral English proficiency has

improved tremendously over the course of the semester.
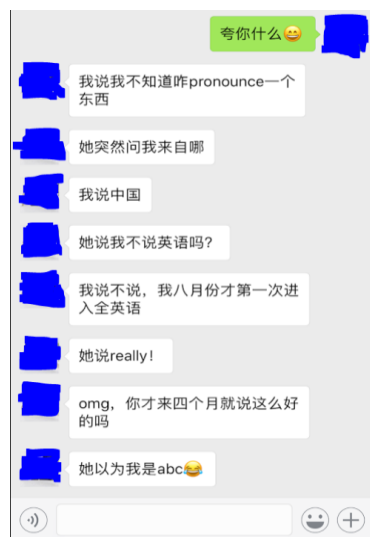
WeChat screenshot	[Translation]
夸你什么😄	*Qianqian*: What did she compliment you for? [smiling face emoji]
我说我不知道咋pronounce一个东西	*William:* I said I did not know how to pronounce something
她突然问我来自哪	*William:* She suddenly asked me where I was from
我说中国	*William:* I said China
她说我不说英语吗？	*William:* She asked don't you speak English [in China]?
我说不说，我八月份才第一次进入全英语	*William:* I said no, we don't. I entered the English-speaking environment first time in my life this August.
她说really!	*William:* She exclaimed: really!
omg, 你才来四个月就说这么好的吗	*William:* [She commented] oh my god, your English is so good since you are here for only 4 months.
她以为我是abc😂	*William:* She thought I was an American-born Chinese [laughing-to-tears emoji].

Figure 4.6. Screenshot of *WeChat* Text Messages from William, 12/2/2018

Matthew: "I Simply Don't Care Anymore…"

The second portrait is about Matthew, who attended a foreign language high school back in China prior to his overseas studies in America. Matthew's story will touch upon the following topics, including: (1) his previous language and education experiences; (2) the challenges he encountered in college-level courses and his corresponding coping strategies initiated; (3) his shifting preference in socialization; and (4) his bilingual language use in academic and social settings. This story illustrates the first-semester journey of a student, who, although had a comparatively more advantageous start compared with William at the beginning of the semester, eventually chose to give up his effort on linguistic and cultural acculturation toward the end of the semester.

Matthew was a tall, muscular, 18-year-old Economics major at the School of Arts and Sciences. He self-evaluated as *"自信"* (confident) and *"乐观"* (pessimistic), and described himself as an "ambitious guy with natural leadership" (Interview, 9.4.18). Matthew chose to pursue tertiary education in the U.S. not only due to his parents' desire to provide him with the best educational opportunities, but also because of his own ambition of staying in America and becoming an entrepreneur with global impact in the future. *"我来美国是因为我将来一定会去哈佛读 MBA"* (I came to the U.S., because I WILL get an MBA from Harvard in the future), he told me firmly and confidently soon after the start of our first interview (Research Memo, 9.4.18).

Wearing luxury-brand outfit from head to toes, Matthew told me that he came from a powerful, upper-class family in Shanghai, the most prosperous city in China (Research Memo, 9.4.18). According to Matthew, both of his parents are highly educated and successful—his mother is a lawyer, and his father is a politician who holds a critical position in the Chinese

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government. Matthew emphasized multiple times during the interview that he came from *"不是一般的有钱"* (an extraordinarily affluent) family, and his parents respected every decision he made. He believed that these had provided him with the privilege to always enjoy the best educational and material resources growing up (Interview, 9.4.18).

Even though Matthew attended his K-12 education in China, making him self-identified as one of the "regular high" students, his previous educational experiences were drastically different from William's. From elementary to secondary education, Matthew had the privilege to attend the best schools in Shanghai. He started learning English as a foreign language as early as when he was a first grader. Growing up, his English classes were always taught by a combination of native-English-speaking foreign instructors and local Chinese teachers (Interview, 9.4.18).

His high school was a prestigious foreign language high school. Most of his high school peers were said to be also from high socioeconomic backgrounds. Each year, around half of the graduates from his high school chose to pursue overseas studies in various countries such as the U.S., Canada, and the UK, and most of the rest would go to elite tertiary educational institutions in China. According to Matthew, this has led to his high school's emphasis on the creation of an "authentic English learning environment" (Interview, 9.4.18).

Not only were students taught English as a foreign language in small classes of around 15 people, but also they were encouraged to orally participate as much as possible during English lessons (Interview, 9.4.18). Moreover, different from the vast majority of secondary educational institutions in China, Matthew said that his high school focused less on examination-oriented education in preparation for the Chinese College Entrance Exam. Instead, the school valued what was called *"快乐式教育"* (happiness-oriented education) which aimed to cultivate students with "all-rounded abilities" (Interview, 9.4.18). For instance, while English education in most Chinese

high schools were defined by heavy homework load and pure emphasis on written tests, Matthew's high school was among the very few in China that required an oral component in English examinations. As he described,

> 我们平时英语作业其实不多，不过英语期末考试都要考口语。一般口语 30%，笔试 70%。
>
> We didn't have much English homework usually. However, we had to take oral English assessment at the end of each semester. The oral part would often take up 30% of the final score, with the rest 70% being written tests. (Interview, 9.4.18).

At the beginning of the semester, Matthew regarded his linguistic functioning in social settings as "very successful" (Interview, 9.4.18). Although his TOEFL score of 103 was just above Hillside University's baseline requirement of 100, Matthew reported that he *"日常交流都没什么问题"* (had no problems communicating in social settings) upon arrival at Hillside University (Interview, 9.4.18). Confident in his linguistic functioning in social settings, Matthew further revealed his ambition of socializing with American peers as well as dating an American girl in the near future (Interview, 9.4.18).

Based on my observation during the interview (a non-academic context), Matthew indeed seemed to be confident in his English, especially in oral English. He naturally practiced translanguaging (Garcia & Wei, 2014) and frequently switched back and forth effortlessly between English and Chinese for meaning-making (Research Memo, 9.4.18). When he was describing the courses that he was taking at Hillside, he frequently adopted English (approximately 35%); however, when he talked about his overall experiences as a Chinese international student, he mainly stayed with Chinese (Research Memo, 9.4.18). In spite of one mistake in putting the wrong stress when pronouncing the word "formative," Matthew's overall spoken English during the interview seemed accurate, fluent and clear (Research Memo, 9.4.18).

According to Matthew, two factors contributed to his high oral English proficiency in social settings: one was his previous English learning experiences back in China, especially having English conversation classes with foreign teachers; the other was the international community service he provided in Kenya, during which he had the opportunity to use oral English with foreigners in authentic ways (Interview, 9.4.18). Matthew told me during his junior year in high school, when he first heard of female genital mutilation without an anesthetic, a commonly practiced ritual in Kenya, he felt obliged to help those local teenage girls (Interview, 9.4.18). Therefore, he flew to Kenya to collaborate with local non-profit organizations and used the fund he raised in Shanghai to build shelters and provide education opportunities for local teenage girls. Later, he managed to persuade some Kenyan business owners to make annual donations to support the established facilities (Interview, 9.4.18). Throughout this multi-month process, Matthew had the opportunity to communicate, negotiate, and persuade in English, which made him *"习惯和外国人用英语交流"* (become accustomed to communicating with foreigners in English) in non-academic contexts (Interview, 9.4.18).

In contrast to his successful linguistic functioning in social settings at the beginning of the semester, Matthew reported to challenges in fulfilling the reading and oral linguistic demands in college-level content-subject courses, especially in *Philosophy* and *Mathematics* (Interview, 9.4.18).

Matthew explained that he chose *Philosophy* because it was *"有营养的课"* (a 'nutritious' course), which was beneficial in shaping his world view (Interview, 9.4.18). However, once the semester started, Matthew was intimidated by this course, especially due to the heavy workload and his incapability to read as fast as his American peers. He shared his frustration:

这个课真是我大一最难的课了。要读的超级多。比如昨天的课，课前要读 40 页，上午上完，下午有讨论课，结果讨论之前又要再读 40 页。。。他们美国人读的好快，我就不行，根本都不完。

This course is indeed the hardest class in my freshman year. There are so many reading assignments. Take yesterday for example, we were required to read 40 pages before class, and then we had the *Philosophy* class in the morning. In the afternoon, we had the discussion session for *Philosophy*, and in preparation for that, we were asked to read 40 more pages… My American classmates could read so fast, but I can't. There is no way I can finish that amount. (Interview, 9.4.18).

Matthew's struggle with *Philosophy* reading further appeared in his public *WeChat* posts, through which he repeatedly expressed the academic stress he felt due to this course. In the example presented in Figures 4.7, Matthew expressed his frustration by referring to philosophy as "an art of dying" (*WeChat* Observation, 9.10.18). In another example (see Figure 4.8), Matthew complained that his struggle with *Philosophy* readings was partially due to his lack of exposure to English language literature during secondary education back in China (*WeChat* Observation, 10.4.18).
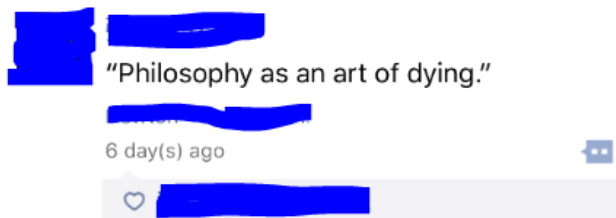
Figure 4.7. Example of Matthew's *WeChat* Posts Complaining about *Philosophy*, 9/10/18
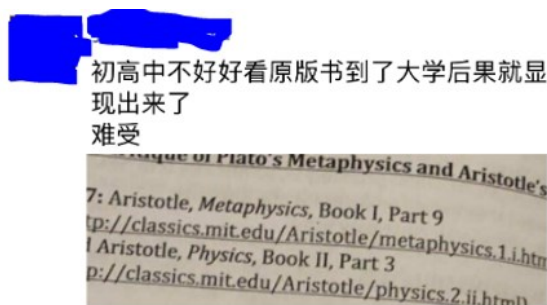
[Translation]
The consequence of not reading enough books written in the English language during middle and high schools became apparent after I entered college.
Feeling horrible.
[a screenshot showing readings from the syllabus]

Figure 4.8. Example of Matthew's *WeChat* Posts about *Philosophy*, 10/5/18

Furthermore, despite his high oral English proficiency in social settings, Matthew found it difficult to contribute to academic discussions in *Philosophy*. This, according to Matthew, was largely due to two factors. Firstly, his American peers talked very fast, and had the tendency of jumping in back and forth to build on each other's points during discussions, leaving him little chance to enter the conversation. Secondly, as an international student from a non-Western country, he did not have the essential background knowledge to contribute to class discussions:

> *作为一个中国人想和美国人讨论出比较有营养的点还是很难的，他们很多东西高中就学过了，而对我们中国学生来说，一切都得从头学。我们也学哲学啊，但是那都是什么马列主义毛泽东思想，他们的哲学看的都是什么亚里士多德，柏拉图，完全不一样。*
> It is really hard for me, as a Chinese, to have a fruitful discussion with Americans [in *Philosophy* class]. They [American students] have learned a lot about philosophy back in high school. However, for Chinese international students, we have to learn everything from scratch. We have also learned philosophy in the past. However, the philosophy we learned focused on aspects such as Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought. In contrast, they [American classmates] have been exposed to the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, which is completely different. (Interview, 9.4.18).

Similarly, Matthew also experienced challenges in his linguistic functioning in *Mathematics*, a disciplinary area that was traditionally (and erroneously) considered as language-free (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017). While Matthew was very confident that he could get an A in *Mathematics* thanks to the "super easy" course content, he was frustrated over his inability to express math concepts in English. He shared an "extremely embarrassing" incident:

> *有道题大家都不会，就我得出了正确答案，老师就让我上台讲讲我是怎么想的。这有什么好讲的？我们中国人都是上来就直接算，做对就行。我站在讲台上，感觉好尴尬，完全不知道怎么用英文解释。后来我只好默默转身在黑板上直接写下了做题步骤就下台了。。。*
> There was a question that nobody knew how to solve, except for me. I was the only one who got the answer correct. The professor asked me to go to the podium and tell everybody about my thought processes in solving this problem. What's the point of sharing the thought processes? We Chinese always just focus on doing calculation and get the answers correct. I stood in front of the whole class, feeling so embarrassed, as I had no idea how to express my math thinking in English. Finally, I had no choice but to

directly go to the blackboard and write down the procedures of calculation without saying anything. Then I went back to my seat… (Interview, 9.4.18).

Matthew said he was further discouraged during pair discussions. For instance, once the professor asked students to work in pairs and discuss "in y=kx+b, if x increases, whether y will increase" (Interview, 9.4.18). Although Matthew was eager to persuade his partner, an American girl who insisted that the answer should be "yes," he did not have the proper vocabulary to express himself. *"我想说你要看k的正负决定，是正就yes,是负就no,但我不知怎么说"* (I wanted to say you need to see whether k is positive: if positive, the answer should be yes; but when negative, the answer should be no. Yet, I don't know how to express myself) (Interview, 9.4.18).

Due to the language barriers, Matthew remained quiet in almost all pair and whole-class discussions since the beginning of the semester, which left his *Mathematics* professor with the false impression that he could not understand the course content (Interview, 9.4.18). "The math professor treated me like an idiot!" Matthew complained:

> *每过几秒钟他就要问我一下 "Do you understand?" 还会不停把头凑到我面前看我的笔记。搞得同学也把我当弱智，真受不了，这么简单的课程非要怀疑我的智商。不过他们把我当弱智，我也把他们当弱智。那些美国人都是自己不懂，还迷之自信，疯狂举手。。。*
> Every few seconds, he [the professor] would ask me "Do you understand?" Also, he kept on approaching me to look at my notes. Because of this, my classmates all see me as an idiot now. I can no longer tolerate this—people doubted my intelligence due to such an easy class. Although when they treated me like an idiot, I also thought of them as idiots. Those Americans were all unrealistically confident and eager to participate even though they understood nothing… (Interview, 9.4.18).

Faced with the aforementioned challenges, Matthew developed a series of coping strategies. At the beginning of the semester, Matthew sought help from his Chinese freshmen peers and the "academic sisters and brothers" (students from higher grades) who were also Chinese international students (Interview, 9.4.18). In order to tackle the heavy reading load in *Philosophy*, Matthew formed a reading group with another Chinese international student from

the same class. According to Matthew, there were two main strategies that they adopted in the reading group. In most cases, they would go through the readings independently, and later get together to share their understandings in Chinese. Matthew found this method rather effective, *"三个臭皮匠赛过诸葛亮。虽然我们都只理解的一小部分，合起来一聊就差不多都懂了"* (Two heads are better than one. Although we both could only understand a small part of the reading, when we shared notes, we managed to get the gist of the article) (Interview, 9.4.18). Occasionally, when the reading load was too heavy, they would divide the reading assignments into two parts. Each of them took responsibility of one section, and was in charge of thoroughly reading, taking down notes, summarizing the gist of the reading in Chinese before explaining to each other later. This approach, according to Matthew, allowed them to "save time" and "go deeper" into a portion of the readings (Interview, 9.4.18).

To tackle the difficulty in oral class participation in *Philosophy* due to his lack of background knowledge, Matthew connected with his "academic sisters and brothers" through *WeChat*. Thanks to the suggestions from his "academic sisters and brothers," Matthew learned to take the initiative in *Philosophy* discussions by "shift[ing] the context to China," a context in which he had sufficient background knowledge (Interview, 9.4.18). For instance, when the whole class were having a heated discussion about Plato's belief that everything in the world existed in intangible ways through their imitation of forms, Matthew raised up his hand and said "I believe there are many similarities between the beliefs of Plato and the famous Chinese philosopher, Confucius" (Interview, 9.4.18). According to Matthew, although his American peers were more eloquent, once he shifted the topic to the Chinese context, he earned himself the floor. "Everybody HAD to listen to me!" Matthew smiled, "They don't know Confucius, but I do! Then I can take my time [to express my ideas]." (Interview, 9.4.18).

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While seeking help from other Chinese students has to some extent benefited Matthew's

linguistic functioning in *Philosophy*, it did not seem to be helpful in facilitating his oral

participation in *Mathematics*. The "academic brothers and sisters" were sympathetic about his

situation, since they had had similar experiences when they were taking the same class

(Interview, 9.4.18). Yet, they told him to "ignore" the oral participation, because the professor

would still give him an A as long as he did well in homework and exams (Interview, 9.4.18).

Matthew tried to practice math reasoning in English with his two Chinese classmates.

However, they did not care, as they were confident to get an A even without participating in

discussions (Interview, 9.4.18). Matthew had to depend solely on himself to tackle his difficulty

in oral participation in *Mathematics*.

> *Matthew:* 这数学太弱智了，我同学上课都是在打游戏，完全不在乎参加讨论。比
> 起来，我还是最认真的。看来，说不出说得出，只能慢慢靠自己了。
> *Matthew:* The math class was totally idiot-proof. My [Chinese international student]
> classmates always play computer games in class. They totally ignore all the discussions.
> Comparatively speaking, I am the most diligent one. It seems that, I can only gradually
> depend on myself to figure out how to orally participate.
> *Qianqian:* 你准备怎么办？
> *Qianqian:* What's your plan then?
> *Matthew [sighed]:* 我也不知道，走一步看一步吧。
> *Matthew [sighed]:* I have no idea. Let's wait and see. (Interview, 9.4.18).

As the semester progressed, Matthew's coping strategies along with his attitudes toward

improving his linguistic functioning in academic settings underwent some changes. Firstly, the

reading partnership between Matthew and his classmate, despite its potential in reducing reading

load and facilitating comprehension, was forced to terminate due to their professor's suspicion

on their academic integrity.

Shortly after the midterm, Matthew contacted me through *WeChat* about a "super scary"

incident, in which the *Philosophy* professor suspected him for cheating (Informal

Communication, 11.12.18). According to Matthew, the professor interrogated him and his

reading group partner about cheating because not only had they achieved exactly the same score

in the exam, but also they had made exactly the same mistakes in the multiple choice section as

well as the three small essays at the end. Yet, Matthew and his peer insisted that they never

cheated. It turned out, since they always read together and shared all reading notes, their

understanding and misconceptions about the course content were exactly the same, resulting in

their similar responses in the midterm. Although the professor eventually understood the

situation and did not report them for violation of academic integrity, Matthew and his peer were

traumatized and decided to stop the reading group collaboration:

> *吓死我了，好在我们没坐在一起。要不然真是百口莫辩。听说被认为作弊就会中止*
> *F1 遣返回国。以后再也不能什么都一起读一起复习了，一切只能靠自己。*
> This really scared me to death. Good thing we did not sit together [during the midterm].
> Otherwise whatever we say, the professor will never believe us. I heard that if
> international students are reported for due to academic integrity, they are going to lose
> their F1 [international student visa status] and get deported. In the future, whatever the
> case, I will not read or review the course content together [with another student]. I have
> to rely all on myself (Informal Communication, 11.12.18).

As the reading group was no longer an option, Matthew came up with a new coping

strategy to tackle *Philosophy* reading—to resort to technology and online resources (Interview,

11.21.18). He discovered a paid software application named *Sparknotes*, through which he could

have access to summaries and critiques of countless academic literature. This software gave him

access to the main ideas of the readings by simply inputting the titles (Interview, 11.21.18). For

readings not reviewed by *Sparknotes*, Matthew often took advantage of online Chinese forums

and book reviews to get the gist without reading the entire articles. He agreed that this was "sort

of like cheating," and ideally he should have read the original *Philosophy* readings (Interview,

11.21.18). However, Matthew argued that he had little choice but to rely completely on those

"shortcuts" given the unmanageable reading load:

> *阅读的量很多，有时候一次就要200多页，周一上完课，周三上午就要求读完。但*
> *是怎么可能读完？我还有其他课要上，还有其他作业要做，怎么可能有空读完？我*

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只看了 Sparknotes 都抄了七八页 summary notes，我要是真是读的话，那我的笔记都可以写一本书了!

The reading load was indeed a lot. Sometimes, we were asked to read over 200 pages all at once. The reading was assigned after Monday's class, and we were required to finish by Wednesday morning. But how can this be possible? I had other classes to attend, and had homework from other courses to do. How can I possibly finish reading that much? Even by only reading *Sparknotes*, I still took down around 7 to 8 pages of summary notes. If I were to read those readings myself, my notes would have been as thick as a book! (Interview, 11.21.18).

Matthew's stress in tackling the heavy workload of *Philosophy* could also be observed in his language logs. According to Matthew's language log documenting a typical Wednesday (See Table 4.4), not only did he attend *Philosophy* lecture in the morning, but also he went to the corresponding discussion session at night. In addition to this, he also spent almost every minute of his spare time in between classes reading the materials assigned in the morning class in preparation for the discussion session at night (Matthew's Language Log, 11.14.18). Based on information of the language log, Matthew spent a total of 6.5 hours that day on *Philosophy* (Matthew's Language Log, 11.14.18).

Table 4.4.

Matthew's Language Log: A Typical Weekday, Wednesday 11/14/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
7:50-8:30	Get up and shower	Dorm	n/a	n/a
8:30-9	Have breakfast with Chinese peers	cafe	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
9-9:50	*Physics*	HU	n/a	L/R/W
10-10:50	*Philosophy*	HU	S/L with Chinese classmates	S/L/R/W
11-12	Lunch with Chinese friends	cafe	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
12-1	Do *Philosophy* readings assigned in class today	dorm	S/L with roommate	R/W
1-1:50	*ELL writing*	HU	S/L with Chinese classmates	S/L/R/W

1:50-3	Do *Philosophy* readings assigned in class today	library	n/a	R/W
3-3:50	*Mathematics*	HU	n/a	L/R
4-5	Do *Philosophy* reading assigned in class today	library	n/a	R/W
5-6	Dinner with friends	HU	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
6-8:30	*Philosophy* class discussion session based on readings assigned in the morning	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
8:30	Go back to dorm to sleep	dorm	n/a	n/a

Towards the latter half of the semester, Matthew gradually abandoned his strategy of entering *Philosophy* discussions by taking the initiative to make connections with the Chinese context. Matthew explained that in order to find the link between course topics and his background knowledge, he needed to digest the readings and identify points of connection before class (Interview, 11.21.18). However, given the heavy reading load in *Philosophy*, Matthew did not have enough time to do such preparation in advance (Interview, 11.21.18). Consequently, as the semester progressed, he talked less and less in class. When it approached the end of the semester, Matthew barely took part in any oral discussions in *Philosophy* (Interview, 11.21.18).

Shortly before the final exam weeks, when asked about his current feelings about *Philosophy*, Matthew seemed somewhat irritated and frustrated (Research Memo, 11.21.18). He first sighed. After a long pause, Matthew exclaimed: *"我就觉得**很**不公平！"* (I do feel it is **very** unfair!) (Interview, 11.21.18). He complained that the *Philosophy* professor never took the needs and background knowledge of Chinese international students into consideration, and his American-student-oriented course requirements have put international students at a severe disadvantage:

> 这课的哲学部分还好一点，神学真的很不公平。老师让我们看 *Confession*，一天就是 7 个 *book*，都不是 7 个 *chapter*！肯定是因为老师默认为国外的人都看过了，只要复习一下就行。那我没看过呀！我也不能真的就看呀！所以我只能在网上找资

料。。。老师让我们 paper 写关于圣经，但美国人都是从小读到大的，我感觉他们全都会，而且都会背了，但我们中国人都没读过，所以根本不知道该怎么写文章。完全不知道该怎么写，也不知道结构的流程怎么走，反正所有中国人都是 20 分只拿了 13 分，班上最高是 18 分，是个白人。

The philosophy part of this course was not too bad, but the theology section was truly very unfair. When the professor asked us to read *Confession*, he required us to read 7 books in 1 day! It was 7 books, not 7 chapters! The professor must have assumed that all foreigners [Matthew meant American students, who were foreigners to him] have already read those in the past and only needed to have a quick review. But I have never read these before! And I simply could not afford to spend that much time reading those! Thus, the only thing I could do was to search online for materials… The professor asked us to write a paper about the *Bible*. All American students must have been reading it throughout their life, and they should have already known all the content, and even learned to memorize them. Yet we Chinese have never read the *Bible* before, nor did we know how to write an essay about it. I had no idea how to write it, and what the expected structure was. Anyways, all Chinese only got 13 out of 20. The highest score in class was 18, and the author was a White student. (Interview, 11.21.18).

When asked whether he visited the *Philosophy* professor's office hours to talk about his concerns, Matthew shook his head and said: *"Office hour 真没必要，你除非自己听不懂，分数低，没信心才去找老师"* (There is really no need to go to office hours, unless you could not understand a word, get horrible scores, and have no confidence in yourself) (Interview, 11.21.18). He added that he did not want to try out office hours also because he heard from his Chinese classmates that seeking support from that professor was not helpful at all:

我不去 office hour，不光因为和他没什么话说。因为去了也没什么用，我有个朋友去了，因为 paper 分数很低，结果去了老师帮改了改，第二次文章分数还是很低。
I never go to office hour, not only because I have nothing to say to the professor. It is also because the office hour visit is not going to be helpful. I have a [Chinese international student] friend who went to the professor's office hours, because his paper had been given a very low grade. The professor helped him with his next paper, but it turned out that the grade was still really bad. (Interview, 11.21.18).

At the end of the semester, Matthew told me that he had no concerns in Mathematics anymore (Interview, 11.21.18). However, instead of introducing his successful coping strategies, as I had hoped to hear, Matthew announced that he *"根本不 care"* (no longer cared anymore) (Interview, 11.21.18). He explained that it was too time-consuming to learn about how to express himself in math conversations, since he had many other courses to worry about. More

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importantly, Matthew was not motivated because the professor only assigned 3% of the final

grade to oral participation, which was very unlikely to jeopardize his chance of getting an A:

> *因为课堂参与比例只有3%，主要就是作业和考试，这些我都没问题，最后肯定拿 A 是稳的。所以觉得没必要去 office hour 找老师问怎么说那些概念。我觉得如果课 堂参与比例更高，我会去 office hour。我不去很大程度上都是他课程设置的问题。*
> The class participation only takes up 3% of the grade. The more determining factors of final grades are mainly homework and quizzes, which I am good at. Therefore, I have absolutely no problem getting an A in the final. Due to this reason, there is no need for me to visit the professor's office hours to ask for help with regards to how to express those concepts [in English]. Had the class participation been assigned a higher weight in the course, I would have gone to his office hours. I chose not to go mainly due to his problem in course design. (Interview, 11.21.18).

Matthew told me since he was getting busier preparing for final examinations for other

classes such as *Philosophy* and *Physics*, he barely showed up at the *Mathematics* class anymore

during the latter half of the semester. As the class size was rather big, he believed the professor

would not notice his absence (Interview, 11.21.18).

Along with Matthew's attitudes toward his academic work, what has also changed over

time was his interest in making friends with Americans and dating an American girl. Contrasting

to what he had mentioned at the very beginning of the semester, Matthew said he was no longer

passionate about socializing with local peers, because they regarded Chinese international

students merely as "new perspective[s]" instead of potential friends (Interview, 11.21.18). He

explained,

> *他们可能会和你聊天，但他们从不把你当朋友，只是对你好奇，把你当成外国来的 new perspective。比如，他会问你，你作为中国人感觉 Trump 怎样？或者中国越来 越富了，你们是不是很有钱所以来这里学习？这些问题问了让我好尴尬，你说天天 聊这些，我怎么和你成朋友？*
> They [Americans] might want to chat with you, but they don't treat you as friends. They are merely curious about you, and regard you as a new perspective coming from a foreign country. For instance, they will ask you, 'as a Chinese, what do you think of Trump?' Or, 'China is getting richer and richer, are you guys here because you are super rich?' These questions made me very embarrassed. If you chat about these things every day, how can I become friends with you? (Interview, 11.21.18).

Furthermore, Matthew lost interest in dating an American girl because of what he described as unmanageable "cultural differences" (Interview, 11.21.18). He shared an unsuccessful experience communicating with a female American student:

> 我们聊天不到 5 分钟，她就突然问我 "Who do you think will be the winner in tonight's game? " 我当时就懵逼了。我连今晚有什么比赛都不知道，更不要说告诉她谁会赢了。太尴尬了。感觉他们美国女生都对体育特别感兴趣，什么 baseball, football 呀。我们中国人都不怎么关系这些体育项目的。文化差异太大，更不聊不到一起。Less than 5 minutes into our conversation, she [the American girl] suddenly asked me, "Who do you think will be the winner in tonight's game?" I was completely confused. I had no idea that there was a game that night, not to mention predicting the winner. It was too embarrassing. I feel American girls all have strong interest in sports, especially baseball and football. However, we Chinese do not care much about those kinds of sports. The cultural differences are too dramatic for us to communicate with each other (Interview, 11.21.18).

Matthew announced that he felt satisfied to socialize exclusively with other Chinese international students, and added that since his *"朋友圈"* (friend circle) at *Hillside* was not big enough, he also socialized with Chinese international students from two other universities nearby (Interview, 11.21.18). Based on *WeChat* observations, Matthew indeed usually spent his spare time together with other Chinese international students, enjoying food at Asian restaurants, playing computer games, watching sports games, showing off luxury brand clothes, and occasionally studying together (*WeChat* Observation, Fall 2018).

His friendship preference also echoed with the language usage patterns identified in Matthew's weekday and weekend language logs. According to Table 4.4 above, Matthew reported to have spent a substantial proportion of a typical Wednesday communicating with his Chinese peers using Chinese. It appeared that the only scenarios when he resorted to English were to order food from the cafeteria and to fulfill academic purposes during class and homework (Matthew's Language Log, 11.14.18). However, it seemed that whenever there were other Chinese international students present, Matthew had the tendency to use Chinese to chat

with peers even in academic settings (e.g., *Philosophy* and *ELL Writing* classes). When it came

to a typical weekend day (see Table 4.5), Matthew reported to have spent almost the entire day

using Chinese. The only exceptions occurred when he needed to order food and drinks, or to

fulfill shopping purposes (Matthew's Language Log, 11.17.18).

Table 4.4.

Matthew's Language Log: A Typical Weekend Day, Saturday 11/17/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
Noon -1	Get up, shower, and get ready to go out	dorm	n/a	n/a
1-3	Lunch with other Chinese international students	downtown	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
3-7	Go shopping with other Chinese international students	downtown	S/L	S/L/R only to shop
7-9	Dinner with other Chinese international students	downtown	S/L	S/L/R only to order food
9-2	Hangout with other Chinese international students to drink, chat, and play board games	downtown	S/L	S/L/R only to order drinks
2	Go back to dorm to sleep	dorm	n/a	n/a

When asked whether he felt concerned about his heavy Chinese usage, Matthew

responded, *"反正我以后也不打算留在美国，和中国人怎么开心怎么玩"* (I have no plan of

staying in the U.S. in the future anyways, I can hang out with Chinese students as much as I

want) (Interview, 11.21.18). When asked about his original plan of going to *Harvard* for

graduate studies and later working in the U.S. as an entrepreneur, Matthew simply said that he

was no longer interested in those anymore (Interview, 11.21.18).

Sarah: "I am really just one step away, yet stuck firm…"

The third portrait is about Sarah, who attended an International Department within a

traditional "regular high" back in China prior to her overseas studies in America. Sarah's story

will mainly touch upon the following topics, including: (1) her previous language and education experiences; (2) her coping strategies and support-seeking activities in response to the challenges encountered; (3) her perceptions of the effectiveness of support received; (4) concerns about culture as an influential factor in her academic studies, especially in writing; and (5) her bilingual language use in academic and social settings. This story illustrates the first-semester journey of a student, who although always having had high hopes for linguistic, cultural and social acculturation, was eventually trapped in an enclaved circle.

Sarah, a Psychology major from the School of Education, was a dark-skinned girl with small eyes. She described herself as a *"害羞"* (shy), *"安静"* (quiet), and *"被动"* (passive) person who almost never initiated any conversations with strangers (Interview, 9.6.18). According to Sarah, growing up, she had no particular interest in English; nor did she like Western culture. The only reason for her to pursue higher education in the U.S. was due to her parents' decision to have her experience a different culture, which could potentially increase her competitiveness in the future job market (Interview, 9.6.18).

Although Sarah completed her entire K-12 education in China, and also referred to herself as a "regular high" student, her educational experiences was different from both William and Matthew. Sarah came from Nanjing, a neighboring city of Shanghai and the capital of Jiangsu Province, a place known for its nationally recognized quality of education. In Jiangsu, *English as a Foreign Language* was one of the core subjects which all students were required to learn starting from their first grade in elementary school (Interview, 9.6.18). Sarah received her middle school education from a prestigious private school, known for its small-sized English classes taught by a mixture of both foreign and local teachers. Later, she was admitted by the International Department of one of the best public high schools in Jiangsu.

Different from the rest of her high school, which focused heavily on preparation for the College Entrance Examination, the International Department was specifically established to serve students who planned to pursue college education abroad. At the International Department, students were taught by local teachers in Chinese, yet following an American high school curriculum:

> *我们所有的课程都是为了出国而准备的，没有任何课程是针对高考复习。班里同学都是有出国打算的，大家从高一开始就一起准备托福。我们的英语课有外教，其他课程参照美国高中课程由中国人教。我在高中已经学过 AP Psych 和 AP Calculus。*
> All our curriculum was designed specifically in preparation for overseas higher education. Thus, none of the courses were designed to help us pass the College Entrance Exam. All my [previous] classmates had the plan for overseas college studies, and everybody started TOEFL preparation as early as the freshman year in high school. Our English class was taught by foreign teachers, and other courses were taught by Chinese teachers, yet designed to mirror the curriculum of American high schools. I have already passed AP in Psychology and Calculus (Interview, 9.6.18).

Over the course of two years, Sarah took the TOEFL five times, and eventually achieved a total score of 107. Despite her satisfying score on TOEFL, Sarah told me that she lacked confidence in her English proficiency (Interview, 9.6.18). Firstly, in spite of her high total score, she has received drastically unbalanced scores in the four subtests, with her listening section being significantly lower than all other parts across all her five attempts (Interview, 9.6.18). Secondly, although she scored rather high in the Speaking subtest, Sarah believed that her actual oral proficiency was not as high as what the score indicated. She explained that her seemingly high performance in the Speaking subtest was *"完全靠背模板"* (completely resulted from rote-memorization of answers to the prompts) (Interview, 9.6.18). Her lack of confidence in English could also be observed during the interview, in which Sarah primarily used Chinese (approximately 95%) except for occasional code-switching to English words and phrases (Research Memo, 9.6.18).

At the beginning of the semester, Sarah reported to have encountered difficulties in linguistic functioning in both social and academic settings, particularly with regards to English listening and speaking. In social settings, the first challenge that Sarah experienced occurred during the Freshman Orientation (Interview, 9.6.18). Sarah told me, since it was her first time communicating in an authentic English-speaking environment, she was not accustomed to how fast her American peers talked. In spite of her desire to socialize with the American students, she was not able to communicate with native speakers due to the language barrier:

> 我刚来这里在 orientation 见到了美国人，也很想了解对方，但是不太适应语言，也不知道有什么切入点可以和他们聊，好尴尬。感觉美国人都特别热情，都特别想和你聊，但是他们说的英语好快，都跟不上他们思路，也没法交流。虽然大家都很想聊天，但是大家说的话都听不太懂，就接不下去，只能很尴尬地看着大家。
> Shortly after I arrived [in the U.S.], I met American students at the Orientation. I was really interested in knowing more about them, but because I was not used to the English language, I did not know how to have a conversation with them. It was so embarrassing. I felt that the American students were all very welcoming and nice, and they seemed to be eager to know more about me. However, their spoken English was so fast that I could not catch up with what they wanted to express. Thus, we could not communicate. We all wanted to chat with each other, but since I could not understand what they said, I could not respond to their questions. The only thing I did was to stare at them, feeling very embarrassed. (Interview, 9.6.18).

While the university intended to support international students' cultural and language adjustments by assigning International Assistants (IAs) to facilitate conversations during the Orientation, Sarah was far from being satisfied. In her opinion, Hillside University "did a horrible job" in supporting newly-arrived nonnative English speaking international students (Interview, 9.6.18). According to Sarah, the IAs did not contribute much except for initiating some icebreakers and pushing everybody to talk. Due to her culture and personality, those forced, involuntary conversations turned out to be extremely awkward (Interview, 9.6.18). Reflecting on her struggles at the Orientation, Sarah shared some suggestions on how Hillside could better support international students:

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学校Orientation 那里做的太不好了，太突然了，从全中文的环境突然到全英文的环境。我刚来，就觉得：什么鬼啊？什么都讲这么快？我觉得如果有一个能在orientation 之前就可以和你聊聊天的人，哪怕是在网上也好，发发邮件，语音视频，这样可以有适应过程，还可以锻炼口语，一定会好很多。

Hillside did a terrible job at the Orientation, because it happened so abrupt to us, suddenly moving from a whole-Chinese context to an immersed English environment. When I first arrived, my entire feeling was: What the hell? How come everybody talks so fast? I think it would have been better if somebody [from Hillside] could contact us prior to our arrival in America. It could have been as easy as initiating a conversation online via email correspondence, or through a voice or video chat. In this way, we surely would feel better because we could have some extra time to adjust [to the English-speaking environment], and also to practice our oral English. (Interview, 9.6.18).

To cope with her difficulty in English communication in social contexts, Sarah decided to temporarily avoid chatting with native English speakers, and socialize only with her Chinese peers until she felt ready to "take that step" (Interview, 9.6.18). Although interested in making friends with her American peers and knowing more about them, Sarah decided to temporarily avoid communication with her American peers to give herself sometime to adjust to the English-speaking environment and boost up her confidence in English (Interview, 9.6.18). She also added, at this stage she did feel more comfortable socializing with Chinese international students: *"觉得自己还是和中国人在一起比较舒服，而且那些美国人和我们聊也不知道该说什么，大家都很尴尬"* (I feel more relaxed chatting with Chinese. I really don't know how to communicate with Americans, and this could make all of us embarrassed) (Interview, 9.6.18).

During the first interview, Sarah told me that she was interested in a volunteering opportunity in which students could have the opportunity to tutor children from socially, culturally, and linguistically marginalized backgrounds. According to her, working as a volunteer to teach children from diverse backgrounds was not only meaningful to society, but also beneficial to her academic studies at the School of Education. Yet she was hesitant because of the challenges she encountered in linguistically functioning in social settings. She said, *"真想去又不敢去"* (I really want to take the opportunity, but am not brave enough to go) (Interview,

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9.6.18). Toward the end of the interview, Sarah announced that she was not yet linguistically ready for that opportunity, and therefore would like to re-consider it next year or the year after (Interview, 9.6.18).

With regards to her linguistic functioning in academic settings at the very beginning of the semester, Sarah experienced similar challenges, particularly in English speaking and listening. While she had already taken AP courses in *Psychology* and *Calculus* back in high school, putting her at a more advantageous position in college-level content-subject learning compared with most other "regular high" students, Sarah reported to be "stressed" and "anxious" due to her language barriers (Interview, 9.6.18). According to Sarah, it was difficult for her to understand all except for one course taught by a Chinese professor who just immigrated to the U.S. a few years ago. She complained that the majority of her professors, who were native speakers of English, talked so fast that it was too stressful to keep up. To make things worse, her American classmates tended to talk "even faster," making it almost impossible for her to participate in whole-class discussions (Interview, 9.6.18). As she described,

> *老师讲的已经很快了，结果同学讲话更快，一下子就过去了。他们讨论起来都是一个接一个不停地说，我拼命想理解他们说了什么。好半天才把上一个人的观点勉强了解了，下一个人已经快说完了。我有时也有想说的，但是又不太敢举手，就是怕因为我没听清其他同学已经说过类似观点了，怕闹笑话。。。*
> The professors already talked too fast, but my [American] classmates talked even faster. They could finish expressing their opinion in seconds. When they [American classmates] discussed, they always talked one after the other without any stop. I had to listen hard to death in order to understand what they say. Sometimes it took me so long to digest one classmate's opinion. However, by the time I have vaguely understood the first person's idea, the second person was almost done with her speech. Sometimes, I also wanted to talk. However, I was not brave enough to raise up my hand. Because of my poor English proficiency, I could not be certain whether others have already mentioned the point that I was planning to make. I was afraid to be laughed at… (Interview, 9.8.18).

To cope with such a situation, Sarah had originally thought of visiting her professors during office hours to confess about her language barrier and to seek support. However, she felt very hesitant because she was uncertain whether or not she was the only student who was

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struggling with English. *"或许只有我一个人有这个问题? 我们班有其他国际生, 别人好像也还好"* (Maybe it's my own problem? There are other international students in class, and they seemed to be fine) (Interview, 9.6.18). Sarah expressed her concern: if she ended up being the only international student who could not understand the lectures, her professors would have bad impressions of her (Interview, 9.6.18). In the end, Sarah pushed herself to go to her professors' office hours. Yet, rather than directly seeking support to tackle her difficulty in linguistic functioning, she asked for permission to audio record each lecture using her phone (Interview, 9.6.18). Sarah hoped that through her hard work listening to the recordings again and again after class, she could get used to the English-speaking academic environment and eventually catch up with her peers (Interview, 9.6.18).

As the semester went on, Sarah reported to feel "anxious," "stressed," and "depressed" (Informal Communication, 9.30.18). One Sunday, around one month after the beginning of the semester, I received multiple *WeChat* voice messages from Sarah, in which she shared her frustration and anxiety caused by her unsuccessful linguistic functioning in academic settings. In her *WeChat* audio messages, Sarah's voice was a little shaky; she sounded sad, hesitant, and frustrated, as she was sobbing quietly, sighed from time to time, and occasionally had long pauses in between speeches (Research Memo, 9.30.18). Sarah told me, sometimes she felt extremely embarrassed because when she finally had the courage to speak up in class, she often got stuck, as she did not know how to say a certain word in English:

> *有时我没法表达, 课堂一片安静, 教授就这样看着我, 我觉得好尴尬, 同学们也都看着我, 我觉得真的好尴尬, 很想找个地方躲起来, 一头钻进地洞里, 就是有种羞愧的感觉。。。*
> Sometimes, when I was not able to express myself in English, the whole class fell into silence. The professor did nothing but to fix his eyes on me, and this made me feel extremely embarrassed. All my classmates were also staring at me, which made me really super embarrassed. I really wanted to find a place to hide. I hoped I could just dig a hole

into the floor and hide myself in it. This was how ashamed I felt… (Informal Communication, 9.30.18).

In a latter voice message, Sarah told me that peer pressure had further added to her frustration and anxiety. She felt all other Chinese international students must have been comfortable with linguistic functioning in academic settings, and she perceived herself as the worst among her peers (Informal Communication, 9.30.18). When asked why, Sarah shared her observations during the *ELL Writing* class:

> 在我写作课上，虽然大家都是中国人，我不知怎么的，就是觉得他们的口语都比我好很多。我感觉他们表达起来都比我好，有时我觉得教授问的问题只有我没法表达。。。
> My *ELL Writing* class is full of Chinese international students. I don't know why, but I keep on feeling that every single one of them speak much better English than me. I feel they are all able to express themselves better than me. Sometimes I feel I was the only one who could not express my idea [in English] to answer the professor's questions… (Informal Communication, 9.30.18).

In response to this, I shared my previous experiences as once a newly-arrived Chinese international student to comfort her that those feelings might simply be due to her stress. I emphasized that it was not rare to encounter challenges in linguistic functioning upon arrival in an English-speaking higher education environment (Informal Communication, 9.30.18). Additionally, I encouraged her to communicate with other Chinese international students to see if they also had any language difficulties, suggesting that others may have the same problems (Informal Communication, 9.30.18). Nevertheless, Sarah did not seem to like this idea. She argued that confessing her language struggle to other Chinese students could show her weakness; since she was already under lots of peer pressure, the last thing she wanted was to make her peers look down upon her (Informal Communication, 9.30.18). Finally, Sarah decided to share her feelings with her mother to seek some emotional support.

Later that day, I received a few more audio messages from Sarah, in which she sounded much more relieved (Research Memo, 9.30.18). She told me that the phone call with her mother

had helped her tremendously. Thanks to her mother, she gradually realized that what she had

been experiencing was normal, and it would usually take a long time to be able to achieve

significant progress in one's oral English (Informal Communication, 9.30.18). She concluded,

> 我不会太纠结这些，就慢慢让它过去，我告诉自己毕竟口语提高是一个过程，我需要慢慢来，不能期待一下子口语就像母语一样和别人没有交流障碍，我就准备一点点适应，提高。
>
> I won't be too worried about these [feelings and experiences] anymore. I plan to let them go with the passage of the time. I comfort myself that since improving oral English is going to be a long process, I need to take it slow. It is not realistic to hope that I will not encounter any communication breakdown and my oral English can immediately become as good as my mother tongue. I plan to take it slow to make adaptations in order to improve [my English proficiency]. (Informal Communication, 9.30.18).

As the semester went by, Sarah felt more and more accustomed to oral communication in

academic settings (Interview, 11.20.18). While she was no longer worried about her oral

functioning in English, Sarah said that she was faced with a new linguistic challenge—to fulfill

the writing requirements across different courses (Interview, 11.20.18).

Sarah shared two of her major concerns with regards to academic English writing. Firstly,

she pointed out that professors in different disciplines were likely to have drastically different

expectations on writing styles, which made her highly confused. She did not know how to write

to satisfy all her professors, because *"差不多的文章，有的老师给分高，有的老师给分低"*

(for articles written in similar ways, some professors gave me high scores, but others graded me

down) (Interview, 11.20.18).

Sarah believed that this was largely due to her professors' different perceptions on

international students' grammatical mistakes in writing: while to some, grammar in writing was

not as important as the content, others treated grammar of equal importance as compared to

content (Interview, 11.20.18). In support of her point, she shared her experiences with two

professors from different disciplines, one in *Philosophy* and the other in *Education*:

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我很喜欢哲学老师，因为他不会对语言点扣分，主要看内容。有时候他会给我留个言，说我的内容很好，但是有语法错，建议可以去找 tutor，不过这不影响我拿高分。Education 那个课就不一样了，我第一篇文章只拿了 90，老师评语说我的内容写的非常好，但是就是语法错了太多，于是老师就扣了分。

I really like my *Philosophy* professor, because he never deducted any point due to my language problems. He mainly focused on content. Occasionally, he mentioned in his comments that the content of my writing was good, but I had some grammatical errors. He also provided me the suggestion to find a [writing] tutor. However, this did not jeopardize my chance of receiving high scores in his class. In contrast, it's a different story in *Education Seminar*. I only received 90 [out of 100] in my first essay. The professor commented that my content was really good, but I made too many grammatical mistakes, because of which he had to deduct some points. (Interview, 11.20.18).

From Sarah's perspective, all content subject professors should evaluate international students' writing based on content, rather than the quality of language. This was due to the fact that international students, as nonnative speakers of English, were likely to have imperfections with their language expressions (Interview, 11.20.18). As she explained,

我就觉得不太公平，老师明明知道我是国际生了！不能明白为什么我内容写的好，因为语法问题还要扣分。美国人他们就只看内容给分，而国际生他们同时还会在语言上扣分，这意味着我们国际生比他们有更多的地方可以被扣分！哎，超级 unfair…

I feel this was unfair. Those professors have already known that I am an international student! I cannot understand why they had to deduct points on my grammar even though I did well in terms of the content of writing. They always evaluate American students only based on their content. However, when it comes to international students, they look at both language and content. That means we, as international students, have more potential areas to have our points deducted! Ah, this is super unfair… (Interview, 11.20.18).

She said it would be "totally reasonable" if the *ELL Writing* professor deducted points due to grammatical errors, because that course was in nature "a language class" (Interview, 11.20.18). However, she believed since language was by no means the focus in content-subject instruction, it was **unfair** for those professors to deduct points on grammatical problems, unless the language issues were so severe that they could not comprehend the meaning (Interview, 11.20.18), which was not the case with Sarah. Based on text analysis of Sarah's writing samples, I observed that there were indeed some imperfections with her language expressions.

Nevertheless, those language issues did not appear to have compromised her content meaning expression. For instance, in her writing samples, two arguments and one recount, I was able to follow her main ideas, although I have also identified occasional incidences of redundant article use (e.g., "academic performance in **the** college"), inappropriate modality (e.g., overuse of low modality expressions such as "might," "could," and "be likely to" in persuasive argument), and errors in third-person singular (e.g., "he **like** to teach me") among other minor language problems.

Another challenge that Sarah encountered in the latter half of the semester was with regards to the remarkably different writing styles between Chinese and American culture, especially in argument writing (Interview, 11.20.18). According to Sarah, writing a thesis statement was the hardest area for her, simply because *"中国人不这么写"* (Chinese do not write this way) (Talks around Texts, 11.2.18). She explained that in Chinese argument writing, it was important to show depth. She supported her view by raising the example of Lu Xun, one of the most famous writers in Chinese history, who was known for his vagueness and depth in argument writing. A commonly valued strategy that Lu Xun often used was said to be *"铺垫"* (to lay a foundation) by presenting adequate background information and evidence without directly presenting the thesis. Sarah introduced that in order to understand the writer's argument, readers needed to "do some detective work" by putting together the bits and pieces of evidence in order to finally understand the key argument (Talks around Texts, 11.2.18). Based on the norm of argument writing in Chinese, presenting a thesis statement right at the beginning to express the main ideas of the article was therefore regarded as highly undesirable, as it could not *"发人深思"* (generate deep reflections among readers) (Talks around Texts, 11.2.18).

Her culturally-informed decision of not presenting a clear thesis statement was confirmed based text analysis using the genre-based rubric. Her two argument samples earned scores of 1 and 2 respectively for "thesis statement," indicating that she either failed to present any thesis statement, or provided a very vague one that did not clearly demonstrate her points. For instance, in one of her argument samples written in fulfillment of her *Psychology* professor's requirement of "creat[ing] a persuasive argument about the importance of a topic," Sarah failed to present a clear thesis statement demonstrating her perceived urgency to address child maltreatment. In her opening paragraph, instead of explicitly clarifying what the topic of interest was and why it was important, Sarah simply presented an overview of some background information with regards to child maltreatment. As she wrote,

> With the rapid development of economics and society, more people promoted child welfare system which played an important role to ensure children grow up in a good environment. However, Child Maltreatment report by the Administration on Children, Youth and Families noted 683,000 victims of child maltreatment or 9.2 victims per 1,000 children (Collins, L.M., 2017). People might not realize child maltreatment had become a terrible epidemic within the society. (Sarah's Writing Sample, 10.24.18).

To cope with the two aforementioned challenges in academic writing which arose at the latter half of the semester, Sarah decided to seek support from her professors and also tutors from the Hillside Writing Center (Interview, 11.20.18). Her rationale for resorting to both professors and tutors was that they could help her writing in different ways: *"老师可以帮我的文章大框架，tutor 可以帮我改语法"* (professors are helpful in building the structure of my papers, and tutors can edit my papers for grammatical errors) (Interview, 11.20.18).

According to Sarah, her support-seeking strategy has earned positive results. By visiting office hours before the writing assignment due date, Sarah was able to have a better understanding of the detailed expectations of professors, which were sometimes "beyond the rubric" (Interview, 11.20.18). For example, in *ELL Writing*, even though the assignment rubric

of a fictional narrative did not specify whether the authors were required to put emphasis on the main character's thoughts and emotions, the professor told Sarah during the office hour visit that she "personally like[d] those fictional narratives with heavy emphasis on thoughts and emotions" (Interview, 11.20.18). Based on this hint, Sarah revised her paper and added many vivid descriptions of how the main character felt. Shortly before the due date, she sent the paper to a tutor who helped to proofread and check for grammatical errors. Consequently, she received an A in this paper (Interview, 11.20.18).

At the end of the semester, Sarah announced that she finally felt adapted to freshman college life, yet only in academic settings (Interview, 11.20.18). She argued she barely experienced any "typical social life" in a U.S. higher education institution (Interview, 11.20.18). Sarah was truly regretful about her earlier decision to avoid socializing with American peers as much as possible so as to take her time in adjustment. She described her first-semester social life as monotonous, spending the same time at the same place with the same person:

> 我觉得现在过的还是高中的生活，过的太单调了，每天就游离于宿舍，图书馆，食堂。一天24小时，可能有18小时我都和我的室友在一起，其他的那几个小时睡觉，虽然是在同一个屋里，呼吸同一个空气，但好歹眼睛是闭上的。
> I feel there is no difference between my current and high school life. It was too boring and simple. I spend every day moving between the dormitory, library, and cafeteria. Within the 24 hours of a day, I spent approximately 18 hours with my roommate [who is another Chinese international student]. For the rest hours [when we are sleeping], even though we are still in the same room, and breathe the same air, at least our eyes are closed [and won't see each other]. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Her limited social life could also be observed in her language logs, documenting a typical weekday and a typical weekend. As shown in Tables 4.6 and 4.7, Sarah spent almost every minute of the day with her roommate. Because her roommate also happened to be a Psychology major, their classes were exactly the same (Interview, 11.20.18). Sarah told me, originally she had chosen to live with a Chinese roommate from exactly the same program because she thought in this way she would never be lonely. Yet, after spending an entire semester "和室友捆绑在一

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起" (sticking together with her roommate), she started to feel regretful about her initial decision (Interview, 11.20.18). Sarah said, her relationship with her roommate had far transcended the "traditional roommate" relationship; although she sincerely liked her roommate as a good friend, the lack of privacy and personal space has left her feeling miserable and suffocated (Interview, 11.20.18). She sighed, *"有时，真希望我室友是美国人"* (Sometimes I wished that I could have had an American roommate) (Interview, 11.20.18).

Table 4.6.

Sarah's Language Log: Example of A Typical Weekday, Monday 11/12/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
8-8:20	Get up, and get ready for school	dorm	L/S	n/a
8:20-9	Breakfast with roommate	cafe	L/S	L/S/R only when ordering food
9-9:50	*Philosophy* with roommate	HU	L/S	L/S/R/W
10-12	Homework with roommate	library	L/S	R/W
12-12:50	*Mathematics Education* with roommate	HU	L/S	L/S/R/W
1-1:30	Lunch with roommate	cafe	L/S	L/S/R only when ordering food
1:30-4:30	Homework with roommate	HU	L/S	R/W
4:30-5:45	*Computer Science* with roommate	HU	L/S	L/S/R/W
5:45-6:30	Dinner with roommate	cafe	L/S	L/S/R only when ordering food
5:45-11	Homework with roommate	dorm	R/W with *WeChat* L/S with roommate	R/W
11-11:30	Shower and sleep	dorm	L/S	n/a

Table 4.7.

Sarah's Language Log: Example of A Typical Weekend, Saturday 11/17/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing

9-11:30	Get up and watch TV with roommate	dorm	S/L	n/a
11:30-12:30	Lunch with roommate	cafe	S/L	S/L/R only when ordering food
1-9	Shopping & dinner with roommate	downtown	S/L	S/L/R only when shopping/ordering food
9:30-11	Return to dorm, shower, and sleep	dorm	S/L	n/a

Sarah revealed her strong interest in making friends with and learning more about her American peers, and claimed that at this stage she was finally psychologically and linguistically ready to socialize with American classmates (Interview, 11.20.18).

> *现在我口语也更适应了，于是我就鼓起勇气和美国人说话。就比如我们做 presentation 的小组，有个白人女生，我之前觉得她长的很严肃，很不友好，结果 真正聊了才发现，她其实是个很爱幽默的人。而且那些美国人都是又会学又会玩， 我真的好想了解他们到底是怎么做到的。*
> Now I finally feel more accustomed to the English-speaking environment. Thus, I have had the courage to initiate conversations with my American peers. For example, in my presentation group, there was a white girl. In the past, I had always thought of her as somebody unfriendly, because she had a very serious-looking face. However, after I chatted with her, I found that she was actually very humorous. Another reason [for my interest in making friends with Americans] is that those American students are all able to study hard and play hard. I really want to learn about how they manage to do that. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Sarah believed that she was eventually "only one step away" from realizing her dream of making friends with Americans, yet "it was too late" (Interview, 11.20.18). She explained that the most critical period for establishing a friendship should be at the very beginning of the semester, when people had not formed much bonding with each other. At the end of the semester, even though she was finally psychologically and linguistically ready to approach her American peers, she was disappointed to find that this was no longer possible:

> *感觉美国人都自己有自己的圈子，他们上课也都坐在一起。美国同学，都是课上说 说，下了课就各走各了，没有办法有更多联系。*
> I feel American students have already had their own friend circles. They always sit together in class. My relationship with American peers is limited to our communication during class time. Once class is over, we will walk to different directions, and have no additional contacts with each other. (Interview, 11.20.18).

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When I comforted her by suggesting that she could still change for an American

roommate next year, Sarah shook her head and said "that's not an option anymore" (Interview,

11.20.18). While she really hoped to have an American roommate, Sarah told me her roommate,

who was also her best friend, would absolutely hate her for "being a betrayer" (Interview,

11.20.18). Toward the end of the interview, Sarah concluded that she was eager to make a

change, and was also psychologically and linguistically ready to take a step; yet she was "stuck

firm" due to her lack of courage to leave her current life and friendship behind. As she remarked,

"I am really just one step away, yet stuck firm…" (Interview, 11.20.18).

Rebecca: "My English is Good!"

The fourth portrait is about Rebecca, who attended one year of traditional "regular high"

back in China and three years of "American high" prior to college entry. Rebecca's story will

mainly touch upon the following topics, including: (1) her previous language and education

experiences; (2) her English language proficiency; (3) perceptions of her "regular high" peers;

and (4) her bilingual language use in academic and social settings. This story illustrates the first-

semester journey of a culturally, linguistically, and academically acculturated student who had

no difficulty functioning in American higher education given her previous language and

educational experiences.

Rebecca was an energetic Biology and Chemistry double major with a pair of thick-

framed glasses and long, straight hair. "Hi, nice to meet you. I am Rebecca!" She grinned,

greeting me in nearly accent-free English right before the start of our first interview at the

beginning of the semester (Research Memo, 9.6.18). It was not uncommon for participants in this

study to translanguage between English and Chinese occasionally, yet Rebecca was the only one

who started with English and remained using English during most of the conversation

(approximately 90%) (Research Memo, 9.6.18). When asked why she chose to stay with English for the vast majority of the conversation, Rebecca laughed: "Cuz I know you speak good English, and so do I. Isn't this just more natural?" (Research Memo, 9.6.18).

Rebecca completed her K-9 education[9] in Beijing, China, and later received her 10th to 12th grade high school education in an elite, private, all girl school in Pennsylvania. She told me that she had been "determined to study in an American high school" ever since when she was an elementary school student (Interview, 9.6.18). When she was in 9th grade, Rebecca insisted on applying for American high schools in spite of her parents' strong disagreement claiming the she was too young. She explained that she chose to pursue education far away from home because of her poor relationship with her parents. According to Rebecca, although born in an upper-class family with highly-educated parents, she was seldom happy growing up; since her parents were both workaholics, she spent the majority of the childhood with her grandparents: *"我父母每天都是工作，几乎很少管我，那我就想与其不开心，不如出国，离开他们。。。"* (My parents were busy working every day, and barely had time to attend to me. I was unhappy. Then I came up with the idea of going abroad so that I could stay away from them…) (Interview, 9.6.18).

Rebecca started learning English when she was a first grader. Growing up, she had always been one of the top students in English (Interview, 9.6.18). However, Rebecca said that the good grades she achieved in class back in China did not indicate that she was well prepared for meeting the overseas language requirements as measured by TOEFL. *"你要想出国读高中，就一定要在外面学托福"* (If you want to pursue high school studies abroad, you must learn

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[9] In Chinese public schools, there are 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of middle school and 3 years of high school. Therefore, K-9 education indicates from kindergarten to middle school education.

TOEFL outside); and by "outside," Rebecca meant taking classes from private tutors and educational companies (Interview, 9.6.18).

She described English education in Chinese public schools as "super teacher-centered," since students were given little chance to practice their oral language (Interview, 9.6.18). She believed that English as a foreign language education in China, despite its claimed focus on communicative language teaching, was "nothing like actual English, not even close" (Interview, 9.6.18). In preparation for American high school application, Rebecca had spent one entire summer taking intensive one-on-one classes with a private TOEFL tutor. At the age of 14, she took TOEFL three times, and increased her score gradually from 60 to 103. This later earned her the opportunity to study in an elite, all-girl high school in Pennsylvania.

Rebecca witnessed the biggest progress in her English proficiency during high school. Upon arriving at her American high school, despite her successful TOEFL score of 103, she was overwhelmed by the "fast-paced conversations," "crazily hard readings," and "mission-impossible" writings (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca revealed that since her high school was "predominantly white with almost no international students or students of color," the teachers were not prepared to support nonnative speakers of English, and thus barely offered any additional accommodation (Interview, 11.20.18).

> 我的美高老师对我毫无怜悯心，我在美高充分认识到了作为一个国际生，你在用第二语言写作，人家对你毫无怜悯心。*You don't know how to write in English? Then we don't care!* 人家打分都是对着一个 *rubric*，你有达不到要求的，那天经地义，没有办法。你要想分数高，就要自己寻求帮助！
> My American high school teachers were not sympathetic to me at all. As an "American high" international student, I fully understood that people would not feel sorry to you when you had to write in your second language. You don't know how to write in English? Then we don't care! They always referred to the rubrics to grade your paper. If you did not meet the requirements, then there was no other option except to have your points deducted. If you want a high grade, then you must seek help on your own! (Interview, 11.20.18).

Rebecca said, thanks to her experiences in high school, she understood the importance of depending on her own and taking the initiative in support-seeking. During her three years in an American high school, she constantly pushed herself out of the comfort zone to ask questions to her American peers (Interview, 9.6.18). This has not only benefited her English functioning, but also helped to establish friendships with her American peers:

> When I first arrived in high school, my English sucked. So I just asked questions about everything and anything, and people would explain to you, and then you would get used to it. If you don't understand a joke, then ask your friend. That's how you get a friend! If you don't know the meaning of a question, then ask your friends to explain to you! I have many American friends who know that I am not good enough. I have many good friends who I am still in touch with. They explained so much stuff to me… That's how you live. That's how it works out. (Interview, 9.6.18).

Rebecca self-evaluated her high school journey as "pretty successful," and she contributed her achievement to her strong belief in support-seeking: "Don't wait for others to come to help you, cuz they probably never will. If you're not sure, just ASK!" (Interview, 9.6.18).

By the time of the first interview, Rebecca had been studying in the U.S. for over 3 years. Based on the admission policy of Hillside, despite her status as an international student, the TOEFL requirement could be waived due to her prolonged educational experiences in America. Nevertheless, Rebecca decided to take the TOEFL "simply to impress the universities" with her high English proficiency. Her attempt has yielded a near-perfect score of 117 (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca said confidently, "My real English [proficiency] is way better than this [what the TOEFL indicated]!" She went on explaining that she believed that the 3 points deducted in the Speaking subtest was most likely because she "got a super bad cold that day" (Interview, 9.6.18).

Throughout her first semester of college life, Rebecca experienced no difficulty in linguistic functioning in both academic and social settings. She believed that this was because she had already "accomplished all those [linguistic] transitions and adaptions back in high school" (Interview, 11.20.18). In social settings, thanks to her near-native English pronunciation,

Rebecca had no difficulty communicating with native speakers, and was able to make friends

with her American peers right from the very beginning of the semester. She shared an incident,

in which she was mistaken as a Chinese American, to demonstrate her strong capability to

function linguistically in social settings in college:

> After I talked, people were like, instead of saying 'How come your English is so good,'
> they said 'How come your Chinese is so good?" I said 'dude, I've learned to talk in
> Chinese for 14 years!' So they were like 'so you are an international student?' I said
> 'yeah'… *所以我在这里已经语言没问题了* (Therefore, I have no language problems
> anymore in the U.S.). I don't need more transition… (Interview, 11.20.18).

Based on my *WeChat* observations, Rebecca indeed revealed no sign of struggle in terms

of her English performance in college. She often used English skillfully as a medium to convey

humor in relation to her experiences in content-subject learning (Research Memo, 12.9.18). For

instance, as shown in Figure 4.9, Rebecca expressed the confusion and struggle during her

"overwhelmingly difficult *Chemistry* course" (Interview, 11.20.18), through her demonstration

of a humorous conversation between a student and her chemistry instructor (*WeChat*

Observation, 10.13.18). In this conversation, she drew upon the different meanings of the word

"mass" in *Chemistry* and *Theology* to show that she, as a student, was completely lost in her

Chemistry professor's explanation of certain concepts (Interview, 11.20.18). In another example,

to express peer pressure experienced in her *Biology* class (Interview, 11.20.18), Rebecca posted a

joke on *WeChat*: "Sometimes I think we are about the same, cuz I weigh 8oz and they weigh half

a pound. But as I look closer, wait… I am 8oz of TRASH, and they are half a pound of

GOLD…" (*WeChat* Observation, 10.7.18).

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Chemistry Teacher: Did you know that protons have mass?

Me: I dint even know they were catholics

Teacher:

13 hours ago

[Translation for Post]
Rebecca: Hahahahahhahahahhahahahahahahahaha ha [crazy laughing]

[Content in Picture]
Chemistry Teacher: Did you know that protons have mass?

Me: I dint even know they were catholics.

Teacher:
[picture showing that somebody looked so furious that he was about to physically assault the other person]

Figure 4.9. Example of Rebecca's *WeChat* Posts about *Chemistry*, 10/13/18

In academic settings, Rebecca found her overall English performances as "如鱼得水"

(literacy translation: like putting fish into the water; meaning: easy and successful) (Interview,

9.6.18). Rebecca reported that she could fully engage in academic conversations, be it in class, or

in office hour visits (Interview, 9.6.18). Moreover, since she did not take reading-intensive

courses such as *Philosophy* and *History*, the only reading assignments came from the *ELL*

Writing class, which was considered "extremely easy" (Interview, 9.6.18).

Due to her high performance in the anchor writing assessment at the beginning of the

semester, Rebecca was originally assigned to the *Regular Writing* class. Nevertheless, before the

semester officially started, she specifically requested to be put into the sheltered *ELL Writing*

section instead (Interview, 9.6.18). According to Rebecca, her decision to join the ELL Writing

was not due to her lack of confidence in academic writing, but rather because of her desire to

receive systematic training on writing designed specifically for English language learners:

> 我觉得听说读写里最难的就是写，特别是第二语言。你如果不写出来，你是不会意识到 *there are so many mistakes.* 你如果不写出来，你是不会知道这么多 *mistake* 你都在一直在不停地不停地犯，所以我觉得写作还是非常有必要加强的，因为你只有常写才能发现你的不足，和你容易犯的错误。*ELL* 班里肯定会更注意语法语言细节什么的，更有利让我发现自己的潜在不足。
>
> I feel the hardest aspect among listening, speaking, reading and writing should be writing, especially writing in a second language. Without writing, you won't realize there are so many mistakes [in your language expression]. Without writing, you won't realize you are constantly making those mistakes. Thus, I believe it is very necessary to strengthen my writing skills. Only by writing more often can you discover your weakness and frequent errors. The ELL Writing class will certainly put more emphasis on grammar and other details of the language, which is more beneficial for me to realize my hidden weaknesses. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Rebecca told me that she always *"严格按照一个美高学生来要求自己"* (strictly

followed the standards as an "American high" student) and had "zero tolerance for grammar

mistakes and Chinglish expressions" (Interview, 9.6.18). By analyzing Rebecca's writings in in

Music and *ELL Writing*, I found that her texts consistently yielded 4s (highest score possible) for

all detailed aspects according to the genre-based rubric (Brisk, 2015). This indicated that

Rebecca did not need any additional instructional support in accomplishing her academic writing

assignments.

While there were few observable changes in her academic and social linguistic

functioning over the course of one semester due to Rebecca's already high English proficiency

since high school, I did notice some gradual changes in her attitudes toward "regular high"

Chinese international students.

At the beginning of the semester, Rebecca revealed a rather unfavorable attitude toward

"regular high" students, and described them as "lazy," "childish," and "impolite" (Interview,

9.6.18). She argued that those "regular high" failed to push themselves out of the comfort zone

and take advantage of the resources available (Interview, 9.6.18). In support of her view, Rebecca shared two examples. The first one occurred in the *Mathematics* class. According to her, one of the "regular high" student did not know how to solve a certain homework problem; however, instead of going to the professor's office hours for help, that student reached out to Rebecca and asked whether he could copy her answer (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca immediately rejected him and asked him to go to the professor for help. Nevertheless, instead of seeking support from his professor, that student copied the answer from another Chinese classmate (Interview, 9.6.18).

The second example that she raised was in relation to "regular high" students' lack of participation in student organizations. Rebecca told me that Hillside had various student organizations, some social and others academic, which were very good places to meet American friends, practice English, know more about the Western culture, and learn new skills (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca was part of multiple student organizations and enjoyed the experiences socializing with American peers. One of the organizations that she participated in was a competitiveness-based leadership program, in which 50 Hillside freshmen were selected every year. Rebecca said she "felt so ashamed" to be the only Chinese there, given the fact that Chinese international students represented the largest international student group on campus (Interview, 9.6.18).

Rebecca felt sorry for her Chinese peers: "This is such a wonderful opportunity to boost up your resume, why not give it a try?" (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca introduced that based on her observation, few "regular high" Chinese international students participated in any student organizations. "The most they do is probably the Chinese Student Association," which according to Rebecca was mostly made up of "regular high" Chinese international students and thus did not

function as a good opportunity to extend their friend circle and enhance their English proficiency (Interview, 9.6.18).

In response to Rebecca's examples, I suggested an alternative explanation, that perhaps the "regular high" Chinese international students' unwillingness to approach professors during office hours and their reluctance to participate in student organizations could be due to concerns about their lack of English proficiency (Interview, 9.6.18). Nevertheless, Rebecca did not agree with the idea. She argued that those "regular high" Chinese international students "simply didn't try hard enough" (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca explained,

> When you're studying abroad, nobody is going to come and babysit you. If you're not sure, just ASK! You don't cheat or avoid. Ask your professor for help, ask your classmates for help, ask the tutoring center for help! You should take advantage of resources, and give everything a try. What do you have to lose? Again, if you're not sure, just ASK! (Interview, 9.6.18).

She further commented that she disliked "regular high" students particularly because they were "very, very, very impolite" (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca recalled her experiences in the *ELL Writing* class, in which the vast majority were "regular high" students, with the only three exceptions being Rebecca and two other students from Korea and Nepal respectively. Although the *ELL Writing* professor had made it clear that only English was allowed in class, the "regular high" students always *"抱团"* (stuck together like a rice ball) and chatted exclusively in Chinese before and after class (Interview, 9.6.18). Rebecca found their exclusive Chinese usage impolite as it had marginalized the two non-Chinese speakers in class:

> I think that's very, very, very impolite. Situation really varies, if you are having a personal conversation [with another Chinese], then using Chinese is fine. If you are with other people [who are non-Chinese speakers], then ANYTIME you should use English, because otherwise you will exclude other people… Before class everyone is chatting in Chinese and I am the only one chatting in English, because they [the two non-Chinese speakers] might want to chat too! I don't know… They [the two non-Chinese speakers] must feel so bad…We are all talking in Chinese, and they are SO alone. We are all Chinese; this is just SO unfair… (Interview, 9.6.18).

Rebecca revealed that her resistance of using Chinese before and after the *ELL Writing* class has led to the "regular high" students' dissatisfaction; she was disliked by the rest of the class (Interview, 9.6.18). Nevertheless, Rebecca said she was not bothered:

> Other students think I am weird. I know! But I am ok with that, because I think you are weird too. Different perspectives I guess… In the U.S., I assume English should be the most comfortable language for everyone, because you passed TOEFL! So I use English as a language to approach people… (Interview, 9.6.18).

Rebecca reported that due to the tension between her "regular high" peers, she decided to socialize only with American students right from the beginning of the semester. She said she never followed other Chinese international students to *"抱团"* (stick together like a rice ball), and nor did she intentionally participate in any group activities hosted especially for Chinese international students. Rebecca was invited into the Chinese Freshman WeChat Group. However, she muted the group chat notifications because she was not interested in establishing any friendship with "regular high" students (Interview, 9.6.18). Toward the end of our first interview, Rebecca told me that she felt happy with socializing with her American peers. When asked whether she would like to know more Chinese international students in the future, Rebecca answered without hesitation: "Nope! I need what I need, and I don't need to know who they are!" (Interview, 9.6.18).

Information reported in Rebecca's language logs documenting a typical weekday and weekend echoed her lack of interest in socializing with other Chinese international students. Based on her language logs (see Tables 4.8 & 4.9), Rebecca exclusively used English while hanging out with her American peers to have meals, attend classes, and participate in student organizations together. The only incidence that she practiced Chinese listening was in *ELL Writing*. However, Rebecca made it clear that "I listened [to Chinese] cuz I could not change my

environment; but the fact that I listened does not mean that I said a thing in Chinese" (Interview, 11.20.18).

Table 4.8.

Rebecca's Language Log: A Typical Weekday, Tuesday 11/13/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
7-8	Get up and have breakfast	Dorm	n/a	n/a
8-9	Calculus discussion group	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
9-10:15	Chemistry	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
10:30-11:45	Biology	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
11:45-12:45	Lunch with American friends	Café	n/a	S/L/R
12:45-1:30	Homework	Library	n/a	R/W
1:30-2:45	ELL Writing	HU	L	S/L/R/W
3-4:15	Music	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
4:30-5:30	Student organization meeting	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
5:30-6:00	Dinner with American friends	Café	n/a	S/L/R
6-8	Student organization meeting	HU	n/a	S/L/R/W
8-9	Shower and sleep	dorm	n/a	n/a

Table 4.9.

Rebecca's Language Log: A Typical Weekend Day, Sunday 11/18/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
9:30-10	Get up and have breakfast	Dorm	n/a	L/S/R
10-12:30	Homework	Dorm	n/a	R/W
12:30-1:30	Lunch with American friends	Café	n/a	S/L
1:30-4:30	Hangout with friends	downtown	n/a	S/L
4:30-6:30	Student organization meeting	HU	n/a	L/S/R/W
6:30-7:30	Dinner with American friends	Café	n/a	L/S/R
7:30-11	Homework	Dorm	n/a	R/W

However, in contrast to her self-reported bilingual usage documented in the language logs, my observation of Rebecca's *WeChat* usage revealed that, at least solely from the

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frequency of communication via this particular social media application, she has demonstrated increasing contacts with other Chinese students, especially those "regular high" ones, over the course of the first semester (Research Memo, 12.10.18).

At the beginning of the semester, Rebecca did not update *WeChat* posts very often, and her posts during that period were largely about non-academic topics such as computer games and manga, which mostly generated conversations between her and her good friends from middle school back in China (Research Memo, 12.10.18). Nevertheless, as the semester went on, Rebecca's *WeChat* posts touched more and more upon academic-related topics in relation to her college experiences at *Hillside*, which generated frequent interactions between her and her "regular high" peers.

Figures 4.10 and 4.11 illustrated screenshots of two examples demonstrating Rebecca's interactions with other Chinese international students which happened around the midterm examinations. In Figure 4.10, Rebecca revealed her stress about the coming *Chemistry* midterm exam. Her post was liked by a few "regular high" students, and some left comments comforting her and wishing her luck (*WeChat* Observation, 10.22.18). In the post illustrated in Figure 4.11, Rebecca expressed her stress about the midterm preparation, and asked for help from her Chinese peers to stop her from procrastinating. This post was again liked by a group of her "regular high" peers (*WeChat* Observation, 10.24.18).

明天别考试，求你了，再给我一天时间刷题吧。

I'm fine
Fine就fine在fine他妈个逼

23 hours ago

谁来拯救我的化学，谁来拯救我的生物，我的大神都在哪儿，你们举个手我现在就去找你们
Good luck!!!

[Translation]
Post content: Tomorrow, please do not give me the midterm exam. Please, give me one more day to do my practice problems.
[Picture: depressed panda; caption: I'm fine, followed by curses in Chinese showing that in reality I am not fine at all]

[Post liked by a group of Chinese international students]
Rebecca: Who can rescue my Chemistry? Who can rescue my biology? Where are my lifesavers? Please raise up your hands, and I will find you now
Another Chinese student: Good luck!!! [lucky leaf emoji]

Figure 4.10. Example of Rebecca's *WeChat* Posts: Chemistry Midterm, 10/22/18

13:42   48%
‹ Discover   Moments

完了完了完了完了完了完了我拖延症又双叒叕犯了QAQ！！！！！

你爹落泪

17 hours ago

急需谁抽我一嘴巴子（不

[Translation]

Post content: I am done, I am done, I am done, I am done. My procrastination starts again [crying face emoji]!!!

[Picture: Crying duck; caption: I am crying]

[Post liked by a group of Chinese international students]
Rebecca: I urgently need somebody to slap my face

Figure 4.11. Example of Rebecca's *WeChat* Posts: Stress from the Midterm Exams, 10/25/18

It was likely that due to her increased interactions with "regular high" students over *WeChat*, at the end of the semester, Rebecca's attitudes toward her "regular high" peers seemed somewhat different from before. Instead of purely blaming "regular high" students for their impoliteness of *"抱团"* (sticking together like a rice ball) and exclusive usage of Chinese (Interview, 9.6.18), Rebecca started to show understanding of the rationale behind this behavior

(Interview, 11.20.18). She pointed out that their "sticky rice" behavior was *"可以被理解的"*

(understandable) because:

> *如果我和你的相似度比我跟其他人的相似度更多，那我就更喜欢和你做朋友。所以你把我放到一群陌生人里，我会去找你。*
> If you and I have more similarities compared with those between me and other people, then I will be more inclined to make friends with you. Therefore, if you throw me into a group of strangers, my first instinct is to find you. (Interview, 11.20.18).

While Rebecca found the rationale understandable, she pointed out that the "sticky rice"

behavior" was still not ideal, as it limited Chinese international students' opportunities to

socialize with American people. As she summarized, *"你既然就愿意交高昂学费来美国了，那*

你和其他人做朋友也未尝不可" (Now that you are willing to pay so much money to come for

overseas studies in the U.S., it is not a bad idea to make friends with other [non-Chinese] people)

(Interview, 11.20.18). Rebecca added that the perceived "similarities" should be extended

beyond merely the color of the skin or the country of origin; based on her own experiences,

despite of the differences in their appearances, she was able to make friends with many

American students due to their similar interests and personalities (Interview, 11.20.18).

Furthermore, instead of referring to "regular high" Chinese students' lack of oral

participation and office hour visits as "lazy" and "childish" (Interview, 9.6.18), toward the end of

the semester, Rebecca started to understand that those behaviors may be related to the impacts

from their previous educational experiences in China:

> *我知道他们并不是不会，而是不想说。。。我觉得这可能是中国教育体系里培养出的习惯，因为我在中国也不说话呀，你想象谁没事在高中的课堂说话？我觉得，他们，他们就是看惯了老师自 high 了。而且也没有 office hour 这种概念。这个其实我很理解的。*
> I know they ["regular high" students] barely speak up in class, not because they do not understand the content, but rather because they have chosen to stay silent… I feel this is probably a habit cultivated in the Chinese education system, because I myself never spoke up in class back in China. Can you imagine any student speaking up in a [Chinese] high school classroom? I feel, they, they must have been so used to watching their teachers' passionate solos. Also, there is no such thing as 'office hours' in China. I can

fully understand this [their lack of oral participation and reluctance of approaching teachers for help]. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Reflecting on her own experiences of learning to adapt to oral participation in American high school classrooms, Rebecca said "I don't want to blame them anymore" (Interview, 11.20.18). Although it might be a long process, she hoped that the "regular high" students could eventually understand the expectations from American professors and function better in academic contexts (Interview, 11.20.18).

In a later private *WeChat* text message correspondence occurred at the very end of the semester (see Figure 4.12), Rebecca revealed her empathy towards "regular high" Chinese international students. She commented that being an international student in an American university was actually hard for everybody, she herself included (Personal Communication, 12.10.18). She then quoted *Lu Xun*, one of the most famous writers in Chinese history, to express that sometimes she could not fully understand all the challenges facing the "regular high" students, simply because they had different experiences (Personal Communication, 12.10.18).
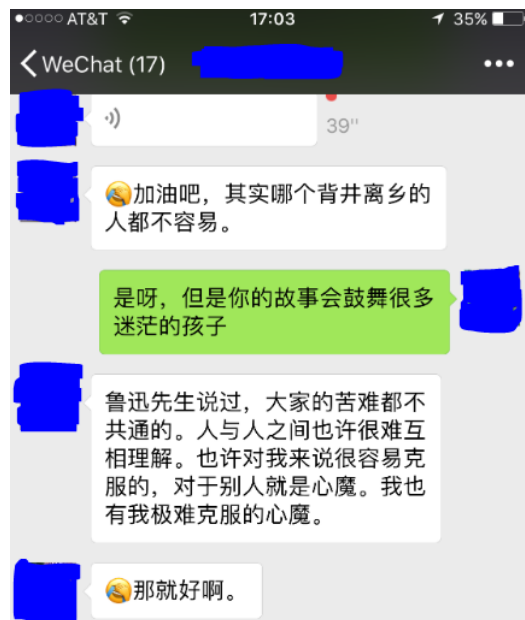
[Translation]
Rebecca: [face-palm emoji] We should fight on. Honestly speaking, it is difficult [to pursue higher education in a different country] for everybody who is so far away from home.
Qianqian: I agree. Your story will inspire many students who are currently confused [about how to take the initiative in support-seeking and make the best use of school resources].
Rebecca: Lu Xun once said: "Because people have different pains, it is very hard to fully understand each other's difficult situations. Something that seems to be easy to handle to me, could be impossible to cope with for others. I, too, have my own trouble that I could hardly concur."
Rebecca: [face-palm emoji] I hope so.

Figure 4.12. Screenshot of Private Conversation with Rebecca, 12.10.18

Hugo: "I am a Type II 'American high' student!"

The fifth portrait is about Hugo, who attended four years of "American high" prior to college entry. Hugo's story will touch upon the following topics, including: (1) his language and education experiences; (2) his English language proficiency; (3) his concerns about losing Chinese language and culture; (4) his preference for socialization; and (5) his bilingual language use in academic and social settings. This story illustrates a journey of a culturally, linguistically, and academically acculturated student who started to have concerns about losing his cultural and language roots and therefore preferred to socialize mainly with his "regular high" peers.

Hugo was a Mathematics major at the School of Arts and Sciences. Wearing thick glasses and interested in solving math problems, he joked that he was a "typical, nerdy math guy" (Research Memo, 8.27.18). Hugo came from Zhengzhou, Henan Province, in Central China. He spent his elementary to middle school education in his hometown before coming to the U.S. for high school education (Interview, 8.27.18). Growing up, he had never had the idea of studying abroad as an international student, and nor was he good at English back in China. Although he started learning English when he was a first grader, he barely passed any English exams in elementary school (Interview, 8.27.18). Hugo described his elementary and middle school English education as very teacher-centered and examination-oriented, with oral participation never considered as part of the requirements. Hugo had never experienced any English classes taught by a native English speaker; all his lessons were taught by local Chinese teachers who spoke English with accents (Interview, 8.27.18).

One day when he was an 8th grader, Hugo accidentally sat in a lecture about pursuing high school education in the U.S., and became interested. With the support from his parents, four years ago, Hugo went to a Catholic high school in the U.S. (Interview, 8.27.18). Hugo explained

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that his decision of attending a Catholic high school was to avoid the TOEFL test, which was not among the admission requirements for many religious high schools (Interview, 8.27.18).

Entering an authentic English-speaking environment from a traditional, teacher-centered English learning background, it took Hugo around 7 months to be able to understand his high school teachers' lectures, and an additional year to finally fully adapted to the American high school teaching and learning (Interview, 8.27.18). According to Hugo, upon arrival, he had difficulty understanding all classes, especially the *English Language Arts* and *Theology* class, in which he *"完全听不懂"* (was not able to understand even a single word) (Interview, 8.27.18). Hugo told me, his linguistic transition and adaptation to the English-speaking environment took very long because he was an introvert, and it was difficult for him to reach out to teachers and classmates for help (Interview, 8.27.18). Moreover, as his high school was "White dominant" with few Chinese international students, Hugo was not able to rely on support from his Chinese peers (Interview, 8.27.18).

In order to cope with the challenges posed by his lack of English proficiency, Hugo came up with two strategies. The first was to use Chinese as a bridging resource (Interview, 8.27.18). As Hugo explained, in order to understand the course instruction, he frequently resorted to the English-Chinese dictionary, and in order to comprehend the readings, he used to search for the Chinese versions of the corresponding materials online. The second coping strategy was to figure out his teachers' *"套路"* (patterns and tricks) (Interview, 8.27.18). According to Hugo, he found out that his high school teachers had the tendency to draw upon certain reference books and websites in preparation for their instruction. By previewing those reference materials, Hugo could have early access to the course content, activities, and even homework, which allowed him extra time to digest the knowledge points in advance (Interview, 8.27.18). Thanks to these two

strategies, Hugo was able to catch up with content-learning and also gradually make progress in English adaptation (Interview, 8.27.18).

Hugo referred to himself as a "lucky guy" who, as an international student, has never in his life attended any TOEFL preparation course or the actual exam (Interview, 8.27.18). This was because by the time he applied for Hillside, he had already studied in the U.S. for over 4 years, under which circumstances the TOEFL requirement could be waived based on the admission policy.

Despite his prolonged educational experiences in the U.S., at the very beginning of the semester, Hugo self-evaluated his English proficiency as *"除了听和读外，问题不小"* (having obvious problems in all aspects except for listening and reading) (Interview, 8.27.18). Nevertheless, when asked to explain the detailed problems in speaking and writing that he perceived to have experienced, Hugo clarified that in reality, he had no real language difficulties, be it functioning in academic or social contexts; by saying "apparent problems in speaking and writing," he meant that he could not speak or write as well as his native-speaking peers (Interview, 8.27.18). In spite of this, he believed that his English proficiency should still be much superior than those "regular high" students:

> *我的英语其实在社交，在课堂听说读写都能应付。可是我是理科生，众所周知理科生英语都不太好。当然，但是要和普高的人比起来，那我的英语肯定好很多。但是你要和人家美国当地人比，肯定还是有很大差距的，不光说话有 accent, 写起来也没人家自然。*
> In reality, my English is good enough to function with no difficulty in social or academic settings, be it in listening, speaking, reading or writing. However, I am a science major, and as known to all, science majors [from China] are stereotyped to be weak in English. Of course, if you compare me with those "regular high" peers, my English proficiency is surely far better. Yet, if you compare me with those American students, then the gap in our English proficiency remains very large. Not only do I have an accent while speaking, but also I cannot write as well as them. (Interview, 8.30.18).

With regards to Hugo's linguistic functioning in social settings, both his self-evaluation and my observation indicated no sign of language barriers throughout the semester. To be specific, in terms of speaking and listening, not only did Hugo claim that he had no problem staying in touch with several native English-speaking friends from high school, but also he seemed to be confident with his oral English during the anchor interview, in which he translanguaged effortlessly between English (approximately 50%) and Chinese (Research Memo, 8.30.18). Though with some slight accent, Hugo's oral English production appeared clear, fluent, and easy-to-understand (Research Memo, 8.30.18).

Hugo also reported to have been chatting with his American roommate every night without experiencing any communication breakdown (Interview, 8.30.18). My observation of his *WeChat* posts confirmed that Hugo socialized with his American roommate without any language hurdle. An example was presented in Figure 4.13, illustrating one of Hugo's public *WeChat* posts documenting a fun time teaching his American roommate how to sing a Chinese song. Based on the video, Hugo was able to communicate freely with his roommate (*WeChat* Observation, 8.27.18).

[Translation]
Hugo's post content: I taught XXX [my roommate] how to sing 'Prisoned Bird' [smiling face emoji] In the future, I will ask him to sing to me every night before sleep.

[Video documenting how Hugo taught his roommate to sing]

Figure 4.13. Screenshot of Hugo's Public Posting: Socializing with Roommate, 8.27.18

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Similarly, Hugo experienced no difficulty reading in social contexts (Interview, 8.30.18). His *WeChat* posts revealed that not only could he comprehend the non-academic readings, but also he sometimes made comments on the wordings of certain advertisements and posters (Research Memo, 12.11.18). For instance, as shown in Figure 4.14, Hugo caught a small detail in which the content of "STEM" on Hillside's career service website was described as "Science, Technology, **Environment**, Math" rather than the traditionally recognized "Science, Technology, **Engineering**, Math" (*WeChat* Observation, 9.14.18). Hugo highlighted the word "environment" in pink, and commented with humor that Hillside successfully hid its weakness of not having an engineering program (*WeChat* Observation, 9.14.18).

Hmmm...很好地规避了 没有 Engineering School的事实🤔😏

11 hours ago

[Translation]
Hugo's post content: Hmmm… *Hillside* did a very good job hiding the fact that it does not have an Engineering School [thinking emoji] [wicked smile emoji]

[screenshot of an email notice about the career fair at Hillside, which says 'Employers want to meet you! The STEM (Science, Technology, Environment, Math) Career & Internship Fair is a customized event featuring organizations with full-time and internship opportunities in diverse STEM…'] Hugo used pink to highlight the word "Environment" in The STEM (Science, Technology, Environment, Math)

Figure 4.14. Screenshot of Hugo's Public Posting: Reading in Social Contexts, 9.14.18

With regards to Hugo's linguistic functioning in academic settings, he reported he was able to "understand all the lectures" and "speak up when necessary" (Interview, 8.30.18). Yet,

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Hugo revealed that while he was able to, he did not quite enjoy talking in English as he believed

that he still had an accent, and was incapable of "talk[ing] just like an American" (Interview,

8.30.18). In terms of academic reading, Hugo reported that as he was a Mathematics major, he

did not have many readings this semester except for those assigned in the *Philosophy* class. Hugo

found the *Philosophy* readings "a piece of cake," since he had already learned about very similar

content back in high school (Interview, 8.30.18).

Hugo's *WeChat* posts confirmed his struggle-free experiences reading in academic

settings, in which he demonstrated the ability to comprehend the course readings by both

commenting on them, and establishing connections between the readings and his own life

(Research Memo, 12.11.18). As shown in the example presented in Figure 4.15, Hugo made an

explicit association between a certain content of the *Philosophy* reading and his recent breakup

with his girlfriend. Hugo annotated a quote of Aristotle, describing that young people had the

tendency to fall in and out of love very quickly. In his comment to the reading, Hugo agrred with

Aristotle by comparing love to a gasp of wind, which comes and leaves swiftly and quietly

(*WeChat* Observation, 9.28.18).
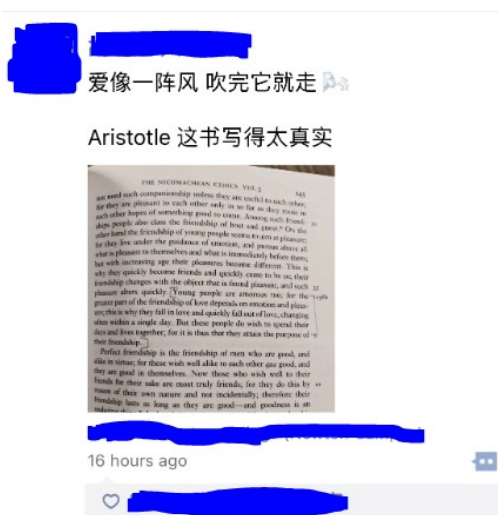
[Translation]
Hugo's post content: Love is like wind, which will disappear right after it blows [wind-blowing emoji]
The content in Aristotle's book is much too realistic

[Picture of one page from the Philosophy reading]
Hugo annotated only the following content:
"Young people are amorous too; for the greater part of the friendship of love depends on emotion and pleasure; this is why they fall in love and quickly fall out of love, changing often within a single day. But these people do with to spend their days and lives together; for it is thus that they attain the purpose of friendship."

Figure 4.15. Screenshot of Hugo's Public Posting: Reading in Academic Contexts, 9.28.18

The only area of concern that Hugo mentioned at the beginning of the semester was in relation to academic writing (Interview, 8.30.18). Although he reported to have no difficulty fulfilling the writing requirements in academic settings, Hugo believed that he needed better training in academic writing than what his high school had prepared him for, and would benefit from the systematic instruction designed specifically for nonnative English speakers:

> 在美高的时候，写作都教的比较马虎，也不知道到底应该怎么写。说到底，那些什么 ELA 之类的课，都是针对美国人设计的。我觉得自己虽然能完成写作要求，但是肯定需要一些系统训练才能提高一些细节问题。
> When I was in high school in the U.S., I did not receive high-quality writing instruction, and was often confused about how to write. Toward the end, those [high school] courses such as the *English Language Arts* were all designed solely for Americans. I knew that I could fulfill the writing requirements of the courses, but it was certain that I needed some systematic training [specifically for nonnative speakers] to improve some detailed problems in my writing. (Interview, 11.19.18).

Hugo was so determined to join the *ELL Writing* section that he gave up the opportunity to participate in the anchor assessment prior to the course assignment. *"我直接和英语系说，我不要参加考试，就把我分到 ELL 班上"* (I contacted the English Department, and said there was no need for me to participate in the assessment; please assign me to the *ELL Writing* section) (Interview, 8.30.18). Hugo explained that his strong preference to join the *ELL Writing* section was twofold. Firstly, he believed that such a writing course specifically designed for second language learners would benefit his academic English writing proficiency in the long run. Secondly, since he self-evaluated his academic writing proficiency to be *"比普高的强，比美国人弱"* (stronger than those "regular high" students, and weaker than Americans), Hugo believed that attending the ELL section mainly consisting of "regular high" Chinese international students would increase his chance of receiving an A in *Writing* (Interview, 8.30.18).

Throughout the semester, Hugo took advantage of *ELL Writing*, and made lots of progress in academic writing (Interview, 11.19.18). Describing the *ELL Writing* course as "the

best course" in his freshman year, Hugo claimed that through this course, he not only learned how to effectively structure his writings in response to the genre-specific requirements, but also was able to identify some systematic grammatical mistakes that he had never noticed in his writings before (Interview, 11.19.18). To take full advantage of this course, Hugo had frequently visited the professor's office hours to enhance his ability to structure his writings in response to the genre requirements. Additionally, he also requested to have his professor arrange a graduate student from the English Department to be his writing tutor, who proofread his articles and provided him with feedback on how to eliminate certain grammatical mistakes (Interview, 11.19.18). Hugo found support from his professors and tutors very helpful (Interview, 11.19.18).

Different from all my other research participants who mainly focused on sharing their concerns and progress in relation to their English functioning in academic and social settings, Hugo was the only one who claimed to be very concerned about losing his Chinese ability ever since the very beginning of the semester (Interview, 11.19.20).

Based on his language logs, Hugo spent a decent portion of his day communicating with peers in Chinese, be it on a typical weekday or at weekend. During a typical weekday when he had class (see Table 4.10), Hugo reported to practice Chinese listening and speaking almost throughout the day, except for when he was at his dorm, where he chatted with his American roommate (Hugo's Language Log, 11.14.18). This was because he usually socialized with other Chinese international students (Interview, 11.19.18). A similar pattern was observed in his weekend language use (Table 4.11; Hugo's Language Log, 11.17.18).

Table 4.10.

Hugo's Language Log: A Typical Weekday, Thursday 11/15/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
8-9	Get up and get ready for class	Dorm	n/a	S/L
9-12	*Mathematics*	HU	S/L	L/R/W
12-12:50	Lunch with friends	HU cafe	S/L	S/L/R only when ordering
1-1:50	*ELL Writing*	HU	S/L	S/L/R/W
2-5	Student Organization: volunteer middle school math tutor	A local neighborhood	S/L	S/L/R/W
5-7	Go back to school, and have dinner	Train/ Cafe	S/L	S/L/R only when ordering
7-11	Homework	library	S/L	R/W
11-11:30	Go back to dorm and get ready to sleep	Dorm	n/a	S/L

Table 4.11.

Hugo's Language Log: Example of A Typical Weekend, Saturday 11/17/2018

Time	Activity	Place	Heritage language speaking/listening/reading/writing	English speaking/listening/reading/writing
Last night till 3am	Go drinking with peers	downtown	S/L	S/L only when ordering
3-10	Sleep	dorm	n/a	n/a
10-11	Get up, shower, and eat breakfast	dorm	n/a	n/a
11-12	Inquire about insurance at HU Health Center	HU health center	n/a	S/L/R/W
12-7	Hang out with old friends	downtown	S/L	S/L/R only when shopping/ordering
7-9:30	Watch a movie with friends	downtown	S/L	L
9:30-10	Take the train home with friends	train	S/L	L/R
10-midnight	Chat with roommate till asleep	dorm	n/a	S/L

Despite his frequent usage of the Chinese language, Hugo was concerned that it was more and more difficult to express himself in Chinese, his mother tongue:

> 感觉自己的中文在不断退步，自己虽然每天都在用中文，不知为什么中文就不断退步。我本来觉得中文说了十几年，怎么也不会退步，但是没想到才来美国四五年，就感觉中文已经说不好了，特别是课堂里面学到的很多新的概念，都是在美国高中和大学学到的，我都没法用中文表达。比如什么 cultural identity 之类的，都不知道该怎么翻译。这些在国内都没听过，我感觉会现在中文表达起来会有很多障碍。
> I feel my Chinese is constantly getting weaker and weaker. Although I use Chinese every day, I don't know why my Chinese keeps on becoming worse. I originally thought that since I have talked in Chinese for over a decade, there would be no way that I lose my Chinese. However, to my great surprise, I have only been in the U.S. for around 4 to 5 years, and have already felt difficulty using Chinese. This is particularly true when it comes to explaining in Chinese about the many new concepts that I have learned from my American high school and college. I cannot express those ideas in Chinese. I have no idea how to translate things like 'cultural identity.' These are concepts that I have never heard before back in China, and I feel lots of trouble trying to express them in Chinese (Interview, 11.19.18).

I comforted Hugo, telling him that what he had experienced was not unusual given the fact that language existed in contexts; some of the context-specific concepts in English, including his example of "cultural identity," were simply not present in Chinese (Interview, 11.19.18). Furthermore, I shared my own experiences as a doctoral student who was about to receive a terminal degree yet still could not clearly explain what my research focuses are in Chinese to my family and friends back in China (Interview, 11.19.18).

Hugo thanked me but went on expressing his concerns about losing his mother tongue. He claimed that, in comparison with his "regular high" peers, his Chinese was much worse. Hugo shared an example that when it snowed for the first time in the fall semester this year, one of his "regular high" peers was able to immediately improvise a short Chinese poem describing the beautiful snow. Yet, despite his effort, the most he could produce was nothing more than "今天下雪了，雪很漂亮" (Today it's snowy, and the snow looks very pretty) (Interview, 11.19.18). Hugo commented that sacrificing his cultural root and mother tongue for education in

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the U.S. was too much for him, and he felt regretful studying overseas as early as high school (Interview, 11.19.18). He added that had he been given a second chance, he would have completed high school in China to strengthen his mother tongue further (Interview, 11.19.18).

According to Hugo, there were two types of "American high" Chinese international students: the first type represented those who became fully acculturated, mainly socialized with American peers, self-perceived as "half an ABC" (half an American-born Chinse), and were likely to look down upon those newly-arrived "regular high" students; the second type referred to those who lost interest in learning about American culture and making friends with American people, and only wanted to stay with other Chinese international students, especially those who attended high school back in China. Hugo announced, "I am a Type II 'American high' student!" (Interview, 11.19.18). He described his lack of interest in America and its people:

> 我对美国完全丧失了新鲜感，完全没有了解美国人的欲望。除了我的室友，大学里遇到的其他美国人对我来说都是路人。
> I have completely lost interest in the U.S. as well as its people. Except for my roommate, I regard all other Americans that I met in college merely as random passersby in life. (Interview, 11.19.18).

Hugo added that he chose to hang out mainly with "regular high" students, because *"新鲜感退去，留下的就只剩孤独和 homesickness"* (when his feeling of curiosity [in Americans and American culture] faded away, what was left was only loneliness and homesickness) (Interview, 11.19.18). He said that he felt *"心里很温暖"* (warmth from his heart) when staying with peers who could not only share the same culture, but also communicate with him in his mother tongue (Interview, 11.19.18).

Hugo's *WeChat* posts also revealed his homesickness and deep connection with China (Research Memo, 12.11.18). For instance, during the Mid-Autumn Festival, a traditional Chinese holiday that was not widely known or celebrated in the U.S., Hugo extended his best wishes to

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his family and friends in China through a *WeChat* post, and also mentioned that it was "his happiest day of the month" (see Figure 4.16; *WeChat* Observation, 9.24.18). In another example as shown in Figure 4.17, Hugo explicitly expressed his deep love for China and his homesickness missing his family and friends. He posted an image symbolizing Beijing, the capital of China, and wrote *"无需想起，因为从未忘记"* (there is no need to remember, because I have never forgotten) (*WeChat* Observation, 10.1.18).

[Translation]
Hugo's post content: Happy Mid-Autumn Festival, my hometown family and friends [moon-face emoji] [cat emoji]

[Video posted: A Chinese music video named 'when love is approaching' by artist Ruoying Liu]
Hugo commented: It's my happiest day in September [laughing emoji]

Figure 4.16. Screenshot of Hugo's Public Posting: Mid-Autumn Festival, 9.24.18

[Translation]
Hugo's post content: There is no need to remember, because I have never forgotten. Happy National Day.
It's my 5th year away from home, miss you all

[picture posted: image of the signature building in Tian'an Men Square, Beijing, China]

Figure 4.17. Screenshot of Hugo's Public Posting: National Day in China, 10.1.18

At the end of the semester, Hugo told me that he was overall happy with his first semester in college, especially because of the friendships he had established with other Chinese international students, those "regular high" ones in particular (Interview, 11.19.18). Conforming

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to what has been documented in his language logs (see Tables 4.10 & 4.11), Hugo reported to have often spent his days attending classes, having meals, doing homework, discussing math problems via *WeChat*, and participating in student organizations together with his "regular high" peers, which allowed him to immerse in a Chinese-speaking environment and enjoy the companionship from his friends (Interview, 11.19.18). Toward the end of our second interview, Hugo said his future goal was to pursue graduate education in the U.S. before returning to China. He told me, "In this process, however long it is, I hope to continue our friendship [with 'regular high' students], and help them with their [language and culture] adjustment, as much as I can… They always reminded me of myself in high school…" (Interview, 11.19.18).

Summary

Chapter 4 presented a portrait of the very different journeys of five focal students during their first semester in college. At the very beginning of the semester, the three "regular high" students, William, Matthew, and Sarah, all experienced various degrees of difficulty with regards to their linguistic functioning in academic and social settings. Over the course of one semester, William successfully coped with the challenges through his active support-seeking behavior, Matthew gave up completely, and Sarah was trapped in a dilemma.

The two "American high" students, while without the challenges posed by the English language, went down two drastically different paths of college experiences. Using English throughout her day, Rebecca became fully acculturated into the American culture and society, and socialized primarily (if not exclusively) with her American peers. In contrast, despite his capability of socializing with American peers, Hugo chose to mainly hang out with other Chinese international students, especially those "regular high" students.

The findings have touched upon all aspects of the layered systems as proposed in the theoretical framework. However, it seemed that influences from the micro, meso, exso, macro, and chrono systems did not demonstrate a determining impact on the students; internal factors of the individuals also played a role in jointly shaping the focal Chinese international students' first semester experiences. To be specific, similar to their different degrees of exposure to U.S. education and preparedness for an English speaking environment prior to tertiary education (see Figure 4.1), the five focal students demonstrated variability with regards to their ability to function linguistically in academic and social settings at the end of their first semester in college. Nevertheless, a close examination of the five students first-semester experiences across time has revealed that their linguistic and academic transition was by no means linearly predicted by their previous language and educational experiences. Individual students' agency and support-seeking activities also played an important role in mediating the results of their language proficiency and usage at the end of the semester.

For instance, while William started college being the least prepared for U.S. education and language, with his determination to improve his English proficiency and his support-seeking actions through office hour visits, he made substantial progress and was able to function successfully in both academic and social settings at the end of the semester. In contrast, although Matthew started college at a more advantageous position than William with regards to previous language and educational backgrounds, the relatively lack of motivation and agency has led to his decision of avoidance and giving up. By the same token, despite their similarly high English proficiency and familiarity with U.S. education, Rebecca and Hugo experienced different outcomes in their first-semester language experiences. Rebecca demonstrated a "us vs. them" attitude towards those "regular high" students, and chose to primarily socialize with American

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peers using English. Conversely, due to his concern of losing his mother tongue and culture, Hugo preferred to spend more time with the "regular high" students.

Throughout the five cases, there appeared to be three stages of these international college freshmen's adjustments, namely the beginning of the semester (Weeks 0 to 4), around midterm (Weeks 5 to 9), and toward the end of the semester (Weeks 10 to 15).

At the first stage ranging from the orientation week (Week 0) to the end of the first month (Week 4), the students have, for the first time, experienced success and difficulty in terms of social and academic linguistic functioning at the college level and came up with their corresponding initial coping strategies. For those "regular high" students in particular, this phase also featured their realization of a gap between their imagined overseas studies and the reality.

At the second stage ranging from slightly before to immediately after the midterm examinations (Weeks 5 to 9), the students were faced with more and more academic stress caused by the increasingly heavier workload, and tended to make adjustments to their initial coping strategies and socialization preferences formed at the beginning of the semester.

At the last stage, from the latter half till the end of the semester (Weeks 10 to 15), the Chinese international students gradually started to get familiar with American tertiary education experiences. Meanwhile, they continued to make adjustments to facilitate their linguistic functioning in academic and social settings later in college.

Chapter 4 has zoomed into a small group of students with distinct educational and language backgrounds, and provided a snapshot of their first-semester experiences across the aforementioned stages. In Chapters 5 and 6, I strive to paint a bigger picture by reporting the findings across the twelve cases organized by the patterns and themes observed above throughout the three phases of the semester. While Chapter 5 introduces their language and

academic experiences within the first month of the semester, Chapter 6 reports patterns and

changes throughout the rest of the semester.

CHAPTER 5

INITIAL EXPERIENCES IN COLLEGE

Introduction

As discussed at the end of Chapter 4, three developmental phases of the semester could be identified, including the beginning of the semester (Weeks 0^{10} to 4), around midterm exams (Weeks 5-9), and toward the end of the semester (Weeks 10-15). Organizing the participants' first-semester experiences based on the three aforementioned stages can capture the Chinese international students' experiences from a developmental perspective, and facilitate tracking of the changes over time. At the beginning of the semester, the participants had, for the first time, experienced college-level linguistic demands. For the "regular high" students in particular, this period featured their realization of a gap between their imagined overseas studies and the reality; to address the challenges, they came up with their initial coping strategies. With the midterm exams approaching, the participants were faced with heightened linguistic demands and increasing academic stress. During this stage, the Chinese international students demonstrated enhanced ability to function linguistically and were likely to make adaptations to their initial coping strategies. Finally, toward the end of the semester, while the participants continued to make adjustments, they were more familiar with the linguistic demands in college.

The goal of Chapter 5 is to (1) report the initial experiences of the twelve participants by synthesizing patterns and themes identified at the beginning of the semester, and (2) set a foundation for tracking changes throughout the rest of the semester (to be presented in Chapter

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[10] As explained in Chapter 4, Week 0 stands for the orientation week, which was one week prior to the official start date of the semester.

6). Chapter 5 will be organized based on the three overarching themes emerged across all cases, including Chinese international students' (1) linguistic functioning upon arrival, (2) coping strategies initiated, and (3) perceived effectiveness of support received from others. At the end of the chapter, a brief summary of their initial experiences in college will be presented. The findings presented in Chapter 5 mainly focus on the micro, meso and exso systems, with the macrosystem providing the sociocultural backdrop and the chronosystem capturing the developing stages in the semester.

To facilitate readers' understanding of the twelve Chinese international students' experiences, I decided to briefly reiterate the educational and language backgrounds of the participants. The twelve participants, seven males and five females, came from eight disciplinary areas. Detailed information on their hometown, major, courses selected, and TOEFL are summarized in Table 5.1 below.

While the participants described themselves based on the dichotomy of "American high" and "regular high" students, their previous experiences could be viewed as a continuum (see Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3). At the very left of the continuum were Larry, Pat, Eva and William from traditional "regular highs", which provided them with no contact of native English-speaking teachers or any American high school curriculum. Next on the continuum was Matthew, who attended a foreign language high school which exposed him to native-speaking English language teachers, yet did not provide access to American high school curriculum or AP courses. In the middle of the continuum were Bill, Sarah, Lily and Kristin, who attended the international departments within "regular highs." While these students may or may not have access to native-English-speaking language teachers, they were taught following American high

school curricula. At the right side of the continuum were Rebecca, Shawn and Hugo; the three students had experienced at least three years studying in American high schools prior to college.

Table 5.1.

Academic and Demographic Information of Participants

Pseudonym Hometown	Major	First Semester Course Disciplinary Areas[11]	TOEFL Background
Pat/ Zhejiang	Psychology	ELL Writing, Psychology, Mathematics, History, Freshmen Seminar	• Highest score: 110 (S 24, L 29, R 29, W 28) • Times tried: 3; Score range: 94-110
Larry/ Zhejiang	Psychology & Chemistry	ELL Writing, Psychology, Chemistry, Mathematic, History, Freshmen Seminar	• Highest score: 107 (S 20, L 30, R 30, W 27) • Times tried: 4; Score range: 90-107
Bill/ Jiangsu	Psychology	ELL Writing, Psychology, Mathematics, Philosophy, Freshmen Seminar	• Highest score: 103 (S 20, L 26, R 30, W 27) • Times tried: 2; Score range: 96-103
Hugo/ Henan	Mathematics	ELL Writing, Mathematics, Philosophy, History	• N/A (no TOEFL experiences; details see Chapter 4)
Shawn/ Henan	Computer science	ELL Writing, Mathematics, Computer Science, History, Freshmen Seminar Philosophy	• Highest score: 107 (S 22, L 30, R 28, W 27) • Times tried: 2; Score range: 74-107
William/ Taiyuan	Marketing	ELL Writing, Economics, Computer Science, Freshmen Seminar, Mathematics	• Highest score: 108 (S 26, L 29, R 30, W 23) • Times tried: 5; Score range: 56-108
Matthew/ Shanghai	Economics	ELL Writing, Mathematics, Philosophy, Physics, Economics	• Highest score: 103 (S 25, L 27, R 28, W 23) • Times tried: 3; Score range: 99-103
Sarah/ Jiangsu	Psychology	ELL Writing, Mathematics Education, Freshmen Seminar, Psychology, Computer Science, Philosophy	• Highest score: 107 (S 26, L 23, R 30, W 28) • Times tried: 5; Score range: 90-107
Rebecca/ Beijing	Chemistry & Biology	ELL Writing, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Music	• Highest score: 117 (S 27, L 30, R 30, W 30) • Times tried: 4; Score range: 60-117
Kristin/ Beijing	Economics	Literature, Mathematics, History, Economics, Freshmen Seminar	• Highest score: 110 (S 23, L 29, R 29, W 29) • Times tried: 4; Score range: 90-110
Lily/ Shanghai	Psychology	ELL Writing, Psychology, Philosophy, Mathematics, Sociology, Freshmen Seminar	• Highest score: 106 (S 22, L 26, R 24, W 24) • Times tried: 3; Score range: 86-106
Eva/ Anhui	English	Regular Writing, Philosophy, Painting, Mathematics, Theatre Arts, Freshmen Seminar	• Highest score: 115 (S 27, L 30, R 30, W 28) • Times tried: 2; Score range: 99-115

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[11] More details about how different courses were coded into disciplinary areas, please refer to Chapter 3.

The Initial College Experiences: Weeks 0-4

To gauge the 12 Chinese international students' experiences from the orientation week till the end of the first month after semester started (Weeks 0-4), I triangulated data from (1) the first round of semi-structured interviews, (2) informal communication, (3) WeChat observations, and (4) research memos. Findings were presented following the three themes of (1) linguistic functioning upon arrival, (2) coping strategies initiated, and (3) perceived effectiveness of support received from others.

Theme 1: Linguistic Functioning Upon Arrival

The twelve students had very different journeys with regards to their language and academic experiences at the beginning of the semester. While the "American high" students encountered little trouble functioning linguistically in college, the "regular high" students experienced various degrees of challenges in their linguistic functioning. In this section, I will introduce the participants' linguistic functioning upon arrival following four sub-themes: (1) mismatches between their imagined English proficiencies indicated by the TOEFL and the reality, (2) negative academic experiences due to cultural and language incongruences, (3) positive course experiences due to cultural and language congruencies, and (4) contact with native speakers of English.

      Mismatches: imagined proficiencies indicated by the TOEFL vs. the reality.

The participants reported that they had originally regarded the TOEFL as an accurate indication for their English performances in college. However, after their initial experiences in college, they identified various gaps between their imagined college linguistic functioning based on the TOEFL results and the reality (Research Memo, 9.30.18).

To be specific, despite their overall successful scores as measured by the TOEFL and high hopes of a smooth linguistic transition upon college entry, all nine "regular high" students reported to have encountered different degrees of difficulties functioning linguistically in academic and social settings, which were described as "shocking" "frustrating" and "unexpected" (Interviews, 8.30.18.9.4.18, 9.6.18). Among them, seven students (Bill, Lily, William, Kristin, Larry, Sarah and Matthew) reported to have encountered challenges functioning linguistically in academic settings, while six (Bill, Pat, William, Larry, Eva, and Sarah) complained about language barriers in social settings. It turned out that there were many incongruences between their TOEFL performances and their actual abilities in meeting the linguistic demands at the initial stage of their college life.

As introduced in Chapter 3, the TOEFL, a high-stakes, gate-keeping English language proficiency assessment, has been required by almost all U.S. higher education institutions. At Hillside University, the bottom-line requirement for the TOEFL was 100 out of 120, a score that could demonstrate high English proficiency based on the descriptors at the ETS official website. In order to achieve 100 or above in TOEFL, students need to have an average score of at least 25 out of 30 in each of the four discrete areas of examination including listening, speaking, reading and writing. Based on the score interpretation guidelines provided on the ETS official website, scoring 22 or above in reading and speaking, 24 or above in writing, and 26 or above in listening (totaling 94) is considered achieving "high performance levels" in English proficiency (ETS, 2019a). Students at this level are expected to be able to demonstrate "excellent" and "solid" skills in listening and reading (ETS, 2019b), and will be able to conduct conversations on academic and social topics and write effectively not only in response to reading and listening, but also based on knowledge and experiences (ETS, 2019a).

All participants except for Hugo had taken the TOEFL test. Their most recent TOEFL scores ranged from 103 to 117 (details see Table 5.1), with an average total of a little under 109 out of 120, and subtest average at right above 27 out of 30. Such an average performance has clearly exceeded the threshold for the so-called high-level English proficiency, which consists of a total of 94 out of 120, and a subtest average of just below 24 out of 30 (ETS, 2019a, 2019b).

It was noteworthy, however, that despite their overall high TOEFL performances, the participants all had between two and five attempts before achieving successful results (details see Table 5.1). Additionally, all the eleven TOEFL takers in this study had taken at least one semester of intensive test preparation courses offered by private, for-profit educational organizations or companies, including the New Oriental[12]. Those preparation courses were said to have heavy emphasis on rote memorization of language patterns and answers to previous exam questions, as well as tricks to score correct answers (more details see Chapter 2).

Thanks to the assistance of those test preparation courses and the repeated trials of the standardized assessment, my participants witnessed significant improvement on their TOEFL scores, increasing from an initial average score of slightly under 85 to their final average total at over 108. In one extreme case (William), the participant's score almost doubled from 56 to 108 after 5 repeated trials within a short period of the time. An achiever of 108 in the TOEFL, William concluded that the whole meaning of existence of the TOEFL was "nothing but to 教会 我们如何应试" (nothing but to teach us how to do well in standardized assessment) (Interview, 8.30.18). Considering that language acquisition and improvement is usually a relatively long process, the true indication for English language proficiency behind such sharp score increases as measured by the TOEFL remains under question.

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[12] More details about this company please see Chapter 2.

According to the participants, they arrived in the U.S., believing that their successful TOEFL performances could indicate an easy linguistic transition in college. Nevertheless, many participants, especially those who finished K-12 education in China, reported to have encountered various degrees of difficulty functioning linguistically in authentic English-speaking academic and social settings, leading to significant mismatches between the reality and their expected capability of meeting the linguistic demands upon college entry.

Their most common concern was in relation to the TOEFL's strong tendency of misrepresenting and underestimating the authentic linguistic demands in college, especially in English reading and speaking. Despite their successful TOEFL performance and high hopes for a smooth linguistic start upon entering the U.S. higher education system, almost all "regular high" participants found their initial linguistic functioning at college "struggling" and "unsuccessful." Eight students (Pat, Larry, Bill, William, Eva, Sarah, Matthew and Shawn) explicitly referred to the assessment as "*不靠谱*" (unreliable), "*没用*" (unhelpful), "*假*" (inauthentic), and "misleading" (Informal Communication, 8.29.18; Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). Having yielded a TOEFL score of 107, Sarah commented, "*连我这种托福高分的人都这么吃力，很难想象那些划着100线过来的人怎么才能熬过。。。*" (Even people like me who yielded a high score in the TOEFL were so struggling, it was really hard to imagine how those people right at the admission threshold of 100 could survive…) (Interview, 9.6.18).

For instance, with a perfect score in the TOEFL reading subtest, Bill had been very confident about his reading ability and had expected a smooth linguistic transition into U.S. college especially with regards to academic reading (Interview, 8.30.18). However, around two weeks into the semester, he was shocked to realize that reading turned out to be the most challenging aspect during his initial college adjustment (Informal Communication, 9.11.18).

Firstly, Bill was struggling with the unmanageable length, as the reading assignments were at least four to five times the length of the articles in the TOEFL reading subtests (Informal Communication, 9.11.18). Secondly, he pointed out that the TOEFL reading subtest measured students' reading comprehension solely in the format of multiple choice questions; even if students were uncertain about the meanings, it was still possible to get the correct answer by guessing or simply depending on luck. In contrast, in authentic college studies, students were required to have a thorough understanding of the readings and extract the key points of the articles so as to make connections to other course readings and concepts, participate in oral discussions, and generate academic writings (Informal Communication, 9.11.18).

Additionally, Bill argued that the TOEFL reading subset failed to tap into a very important skill in college reading—the ability to annotate. Given the computer-based nature of the TOEFL, students were not given the opportunity to annotate while reading. Moreover, due to the short length of the readings in the exam, annotation was not an essential element in order to yield the correct answer (Informal Communication, 9.11.18). In contrast, the academic readings in real college life were much longer and denser, and it was extremely difficult to comprehend the articles and fulfill the course requirement without proper annotation skills:

> 我除了划线之外都不知道怎么做笔记。这些文章很多都特别长，而且一篇文章说了很多人的观点，每个人观点还不同，读的时候我勉强知道谁大概在说什么，可是到后面 discussion 的时候就完全搞不清楚谁提了什么观点。但是老师，特别是我们哲学老师，偏偏喜欢在课上让我们用一个词还概括某个人的观点。。。真是很难。
> Other than underlining, I have no idea about how to annotate. The course readings are usually a lot and also super long. To make things worse, each reading contains the opinions of many people. Since everybody holds a different opinion, initially I was only able to vaguely understand the gist of each individual's ideas. However, as I approached the discussion section of the paper, I usually had no idea about who raised what opinion. Unfortunately, my professors, especially the *Philosophy* professor, very often asked us to use one word to summarize one particular person's opinion mentioned in the readings… This is very hard for me. (Informal Communication, 9.11.18).

Similarly, the TOEFL speaking subtest, another area that multiple participants complained about, presented inaccurate indications of their speaking performances and resulted in their unexpected oral linguistic difficulties upon arriving in America. For instance, William and Sarah both received a score of 26 in their TOEFL speaking subtest, which according to the ETS official website indicated their high oral English proficiency and strong likelihood to have a smooth oral performance adjustment upon college entry. However, as detailed in Chapter 4, both students were shocked to experience significant struggles with their English speaking in various academic and social settings. Based on their experiences, it turned out that the lack of turn taking between interlocutors due to the talking-to-the-computer style TOEFL speaking subtest had failed to prepare them for the highly interactive nature of oral communication in authentic English speaking environment. Moreover, despite their high test performances, since the TOEFL speaking subtest did not require any personal contact with native speakers of English, both students were nervous and anxious during their initial conversations with their native-English-speaking professors and peers; due to these negative emotions, their actual oral linguistic functioning was likely to be further compromised.

Negative course experiences due to linguistic and cultural incongruences.

Based on their previous language and education backgrounds, the participants have formed various expectations on their course experiences at Hillside University. While the three "American high" students all described their college courses as a natural extension from their high school experiences, the nine "regular high" students reported different degrees of difficulties caused by the mismatches between the reality and their imagined college course experiences based on their previous experiences in China. It turned out that when they experienced linguistic and cultural incongruences, the Chinese international students were likely

to have negative experiences during their coursework. There were two major sources of challenge that had caused such incongruences, namely (1) the difficulties in learning content-area courses through a second language, and (2) the different cultural expectations on courses in certain disciplinary areas.

__Difficulties in learning content-area courses through a second language__. The three "American high" students all had at least three years of experiences learning content subjects through English, thanks to which they reported to have experienced little challenge learning through a second language at the college level. On the contrary, none of the "regular high" students had much experience learning content knowledge through a second language; such a linguistic incongruence between high school and college education has posed challenge on their content-subject learning.

Be it in the traditional "regular high" schools, foreign language high schools, or the international department within "regular highs," English language education and content subject learning was often treated as separate entities, which consequently led to the "regular high" students' lack of familiarity in English-medium content instruction and learning. To be specific, the traditional "regular high" students Larry, Pat, Eva, and William described that not only were all their classes taught by local Chinese teachers, but also the focus of their entire high school education was to prepare students for the college entrance examination (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18). In this process, English was treated solely as a course subject, rather than a medium of content instruction. In the case of Matthew who attended a foreign language high school in China, while native English-speaking teachers were present, they were only responsible for teaching the conversation classes within the English subject. All content subjects were still taught by Chinese teachers in preparation for the college entrance examination (Interview,

9.4.18). Lastly, according to Bill, Sarah, Kristin, and Lily who graduated from the international departments within "regular high" schools, although they had exposure to American high school curricula, all content-subject courses were mostly taught by teachers in Chinese (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

Although they used to be considered "*好学生*" (good students) and "*榜样*" (role models) throughout their secondary education, their lack of familiarity with English-medium content instruction and learning has resulted in the participants' perceived linguistic incongruences; this consequently led to their negative experiences in college (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

For example, Kristin, an international department graduate, told me that *Literature*, taught in Chinese, used to be her favorite subject back in high school. As once a top student in *Literature*, she had always enjoyed reading and critiquing modern and classic literature (Interview, 9.4.18). Kristin had done an excellent job while learning *Literature* following an American high school curriculum back in China; therefore, initially she was very confident and had been looking forward to her college-level *Literature* courses (Interview, 9.4.18). However, after attending the first class, Kristin became discouraged and stressed:

> *如果不是因为英文，我本来真是很喜欢文学的。但是，由于这里隔了一层英语，感觉很有挑战。那些诗词里的词汇很抽象，我就是查了还是不懂，更别说理解整个的意思。而且美国人高中学过很多修辞，我只在高中勉强听过词汇，很难应用。。。我上课很少主动发言，因为语言上有压力。*
> If it were not for English [as a medium of learning], I used to really love *Literature* a lot. However, with English as a barrier, I felt very challenged. The vocabulary in the poems was really abstract. Even if I looked up the words in the dictionary, I still could not understand the meaning, not to mention to gauge the gist of the entire poem. Moreover, different from my American classmates who have already learned many of the rhetorical approaches, I only came across some of the vocabulary in relation to rhetoric back in high school. Thus, it was very hard for me to apply those rhetorical concepts… I barely spoke up in class, because I was very stressed by English. (Interview, 9.4.18).

The situation of learning content subjects through a second language was further complicated when the students were simultaneously challenged by heavy workload and

unfamiliar course content; the Chinese international students were likely to experience various degrees of difficulty based on their previous language and education backgrounds. For example, to fulfill one of the core requirements, the majority of my participants chose to take a *Philosophy* course during their first semester in college. The students either selected *Philosophy I* which introduced the fundamental philosophical knowledge and frameworks, or *Philosophy II,* a course touching upon key perspectives in both *Philosophy* and *Theology*. Both classes were reported to have an average size of 20 to 25 people. Regardless of the exact version of the *Philosophy* classes taken, a common complaint about this disciplinary area by my participants at the beginning of the semester was its heavy reading load (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). The average reading load after each lecture was approximately 60 pages, ranging from 30 to 200 pages (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

Depending on the participants' various previous language and educational backgrounds, the Chinese international students reported contrasting experiences in *Philosophy*. While Hugo and Shawn, the two "American high" students who took *Philosophy*, agreed that there were lots of reading assignments from this disciplinary subject, they mentioned that since they have learned similar contents via English back in high school, the course readings were "more or less like a review" and could be tackled by "quickly go[ing] through the articles" since they were familiar with both the language and the contents (Interviews, 8.30.18).

The students who attended international departments within Chinese high schools (Bill, Sarah, Kristin, and Lily) also complained about the heavy reading load in *Philosophy*. Yet, they pointed out that thanks to their exposure to the American high school curricula, they had experiences learning corresponding contents in Chinese and were able to have some general background knowledge about the main ideas of many of the reading assignments. While English

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reading was still reported to be a major source of challenge in *Philosophy*, the international department graduates were able to have a general idea of certain articles prior to reading, such as some famous arguments by Plato and Aristotle (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

In contrast, for the traditional "regular high" students as well as the foreign language high school graduate Matthew, *Philosophy* readings were reported to be extremely difficult. As introduced in detail in the case of Matthew in Chapter 4, those students were simultaneously faced with the challenges from language barriers posed by content-specific jargons in English, unfamiliar content, and the heavy reading loads. This has led to their description of this course as a "*死亡考验*" (death challenge) (Interview, 8.30.18). In fact, I was told that this course had a reputation for being extremely difficult among traditional "regular high" students, because of which William was not brave enough to take it during the freshman year (Interview, 8.30.18). Less than one week into the semester, two other participants (Pat and Larry) who were originally enrolled in *Philosophy* decided to drop the course so as not to jeopardize their GPAs. As Pat explained: "*第一学期先保命要紧，还是等适应了再选哲学吧*" (In the first semester, the priority is to survive. I'd better wait till later to choose *Philosophy*) (Interview 8.30.18). Toward the end, among the students who had no experiences with U.S. high school curricula, only one traditional "regular high" student (Eva) and one foreign language high school graduate (Matthew) stayed in *Philosophy* classes.

Differences in course expectations between the U.S. and China. Another factor which was reported by almost half of my participants (Lily, Eva, Larry, Matthew, and William) to have contributed to the discrepancies between their imagined college life and the reality, was the different course expectations between the U.S. and China. It seemed that when the participants perceived the courses as culturally incongruent, they were likely to have negative experiences.

Take *Music* for instance, in K-12 education in China, most of the music classes were practice-oriented and students were often expected to sing, dance, or practice a certain musical instrument. Music education in China was said to be passive and receptive (Brand, 2004; Law & Ho, 2009). The linguistic demands in traditional Chinese music education were relatively low, as students were rarely provided with the opportunity to critically examine the music and conduct appreciation and critiques in oral or written forms. In contrast, based on the latest National Music Education Standards in the U.S., in addition to those practice-oriented components required in Chinese music education, American students were also expected to "identify," "describe," "demonstrate," "interpret," and "evaluate" musical ideas, which involved considerably higher linguistic demands (National Association for Music Education, 2014).

Unaware of the different expectations and linguistic demands in the same disciplinary areas across the two cultures, Lily was determined to select *Music* prior to the beginning of the semester, believing that "这种水课就是让学生唱唱歌跳跳舞，既可以放松，还可以平衡其他课的读写压力" (such a super easy course that asks students to sing and dance will be relaxing and could balance the academic English reading and writing loads from my other courses) (Interview, 9.6.18). Nevertheless, Lily was greatly intimidated by the *Music* course upon attending the first class, which led to her decision to drop the class immediately:

> 吓死我了，老师一上来就让我们分析一首古典音乐，那些美国人都侃侃而谈，我超级懵逼。更夸张的是，他开学第三周就要交一篇1500字的论文！1500呀，比写作课还长！我选音乐是因为我喜欢跳舞唱歌，才不是来折磨自己写作文的呢！果断一下课就drop掉了。。。
>
> This has really scared me to death. Shortly after class started, the professor asked us to analyze some classical music. Those American students were all able to participate in the heated discussions, yet I was so confused. To make things worse, the professor asked us to submit a 1,500-word essay by the third week! It is 1500 words, longer than what's required from the ELL Writing course! I selected *Music* because I love singing and dancing. I am not here to torture myself by writing super long essays. Without any hesitation, I dropped that course right after the first class… (Interview, 9.6.18).

Similarly, the negative course experiences due to the Chinese international students' perceived cultural incongruences can also be observed in *Mathematics*. As shown in Table 5.1, all the twelve students, regardless of their various majors, chose to take some forms of mathematics classes during their first semester in college (e.g., *Calculus I*, *Calculus II*, *Business Statistics*, and *Finance Probability*) as a means to "刷分" (boost up their GPAs), "轻松拿 A" (get an easy A), and "缓解其他课的压力" (balance off the stress from other courses) (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). According to the participants, there were two rationales behind their common interest in taking *Mathematics* during the first semester. Firstly, compared with the U.S., mathematics education in China was widely known to be more intense and advanced, putting those Chinese international students at a more advantageous position. Secondly, mathematics was often (erroneously) considered as a language-free discipline (Brisk & Zhang-Wu, 2017). Based on their previous math learning experiences in China, my participants had believed that as long as they were able to get the answers right, they were able to succeed in math classes (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

In spite of the Chinese international students' high hopes of having an easy time in various mathematics courses, they were shocked to realize that the professors' expectations in math classes went beyond simply yielding the correct answers (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). As described in the struggles of Matthew (see Chapter 4), in those math classes which were rather large in size (between 80 and 150 people per class), the ability to orally explain, discuss, and persuade based on some given math concepts and problems was also part of the course expectation. Having no experience expressing their thought processes and persuasively explaining math concepts in English, the newly-arrived Chinese international students were faced with significant challenges in their initial college adjustment.

Positive course experiences due to cultural and linguistic congruencies.

Contrasting to their various negative experiences caused by the challenge from learning through a second language and cultural-specific course expectations, the students in this study reported to have had some positive experiences in several culturally and linguistically congruent courses, especially in *History* and *ELL Writing*.

History. Around half of the students (Pat, Larry, Hugo, Shawn, and Kristin) chose to take a course in the History Department to fulfill one of the undergraduate core requirements at Hillside. Yet, different from the courses provided by the Philosophy Department, in which students had no choice but to learn Western-centered knowledge, the History Department offered a larger selection of classes. Thanks to this, the students were able to choose courses that were relevant to their own culture and interests, which resulted in their positive experiences.

Kristin was enrolled in *Women in Modern Asian Society*, a 10-people discussion seminar, while the other four students chose to take *Asia in the World*, a lecture-style class consisting around 200 students. According to my participants, their rationales to choose culturally relevant history courses were three-fold. Firstly, the five participants mentioned that they had expected rather heavy reading and writing load in *History* given the nature of this disciplinary area; therefore, by selecting a course they had sufficient background knowledge in, it would be easier for them to tackle the reading and writing assignments. Secondly, Pat, Shawn, and Kristin revealed that they had always had passion in Asian history, and were very interested in experiencing how Asian history was taught and viewed in Western education (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18). Lastly, the five participants mentioned that one of the biggest motivations for them to select courses on Asian history was because the professors for those courses were Chinese. While they were fully aware that having Chinese professors would not change the

English-speaking nature of the courses, they claimed that this could at least provide them some emotional support. As Larry further explained, "*选课时一看到中国老师的名字就感觉亲切！*" (During the course selection, I felt happy and relaxed the moment I saw Chinese professors' names!) (Interview, 8.30.18).

Despite its heavy reading load (approximately 50-60 pages per class) right from the beginning of the semester which was quite similar to that in *Philosophy*, the five students all reported to positive experiences in *History*. According to them, this was largely due to two factors. Firstly, because the two Chinese professors were recent immigrants to the U.S., they had some Chinese accents while talking in English. This was perceived by my participants as linguistically congruent, as they reported to find it easier to understand the contents of the lecture, as compared with their experiences in other courses primarily taught by native-speakers of English (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18). Larry even described *History* as the only class that he could understand every word during the lecture, as the professor "talked just like [his] high school English teacher" (Interview, 8.30.18).

Another factor that has contributed to the participants' positive attitudes was the confidence and expertise they felt in the culturally-congruent, Asian-centered courses, in which their bilingual and bicultural identities were highly valued and appreciated. All five students have mentioned that unlike their experiences in other courses, they felt "superior," "smarter," and "more like an expert," because thanks to their sufficient cultural knowledge on Asian history, they were at a much more advantageous position compared with their American classmates (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18). Pat described his experience in *History* as "exciting," because "*终于有门课可以让我们秒杀所有美国人了*" (finally there is a course in which we can beat all the American classmates easily) (Interview, 8.30.18).

Meanwhile the participants also revealed confidence in their bilingual ability, which was reinforced by one of their Chinese professors. According to my participants, the instructor of *Asia in the World* frequently drew upon her own bilingual knowledge in class; her usage of Mandarin during instruction was believed to have empowered the Chinese students in her class. For example, Shawn recalled that at the beginning of the first lecture, the Chinese professor announced to all 200 students in class that she preferred to be called "*赵老师*" (pronounced as "Zhao Laoshi," meaning Teacher Zhao[13] in Chinese) instead of "Professor or Doctor Zhao" (Interview, 8.30.18). Then, she modeled the Chinese pronunciation of "*赵老师*" and requested all students in her class, the majority of which being White, native-speakers of English, to practice after her. Shawn perceived this as an empowering moment for all Chinese international students in class, because Mandarin which was considered so easy and effortless to them seemed to be a huge challenge to their American classmates:

> *她说 'In the future, please call me Zhao Laoshi. Now, repeat after me: Zhao-Lao-Shi...'*
> *太搞笑了，你不知道那些美国人念她名字有多挣扎！哈哈哈，笑死我了。我们在场*
> *的中国人好多都笑出声了。。。I really LOVE this... You know, it's great to put them*
> *[the American peers] in our shoes...*
> She said 'In the future, please call me Zhao Laoshi. Now, repeat after me: Zhao-Lao-Shi...' This was so funny. You can't imagine how those Americans struggled to pronounce her name! Hahaha, this really amused me to death. At that moment, many of the Chinese student burst into laughter in class... I really LOVE this... You know, it's great to put them [the American peers] in our shoes... (Interview, 8.30.18).

Favorable attitudes toward the bilingual space created by this particular instructor could also be observed in the students' public WeChat posts. According to the participants, thanks to their bilingual skills, they felt empowered to be able to freely express their feelings in their home language and intentionally exclude non-Chinese speakers from the conversation when desired.

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[13] In Chinese culture, "*老师*" (pronounced as "Laoshi," meaning teacher) is a very respectful way to address educators. Even at the university level, many Chinese prefer to use "*老师*" over professor/doctor, which are perceived to be more bound with western culture.

For instance, in one of the lectures, the Chinese professor, Zhao Laoshi, used an online, live poll software to get her students' perception about *History*. She specifically asked students to "[u]se one to three words to describe history, studies of history, and history courses" (WeChat Observation, 8.29.18). While the majority of the students expressed their opinions in English, several students used Chinese along with some other languages and dialects (WeChat Observation, 8.29.18). Among the Chinese comments, there were two extremely informal phrases towards the upper part of the picture (see circled area in Figure 5.1), both describing the students' unfavorable attitudes toward *History*. While the phrase toward the left expressed a half-joking curse on the instructor to vent a certain student's hatred of *History*, the expression on the right was a funny slang saying history classes were so annoying and brain-draining that they "made people's heads grow bigger" (WeChat Observation, 8.30.18).
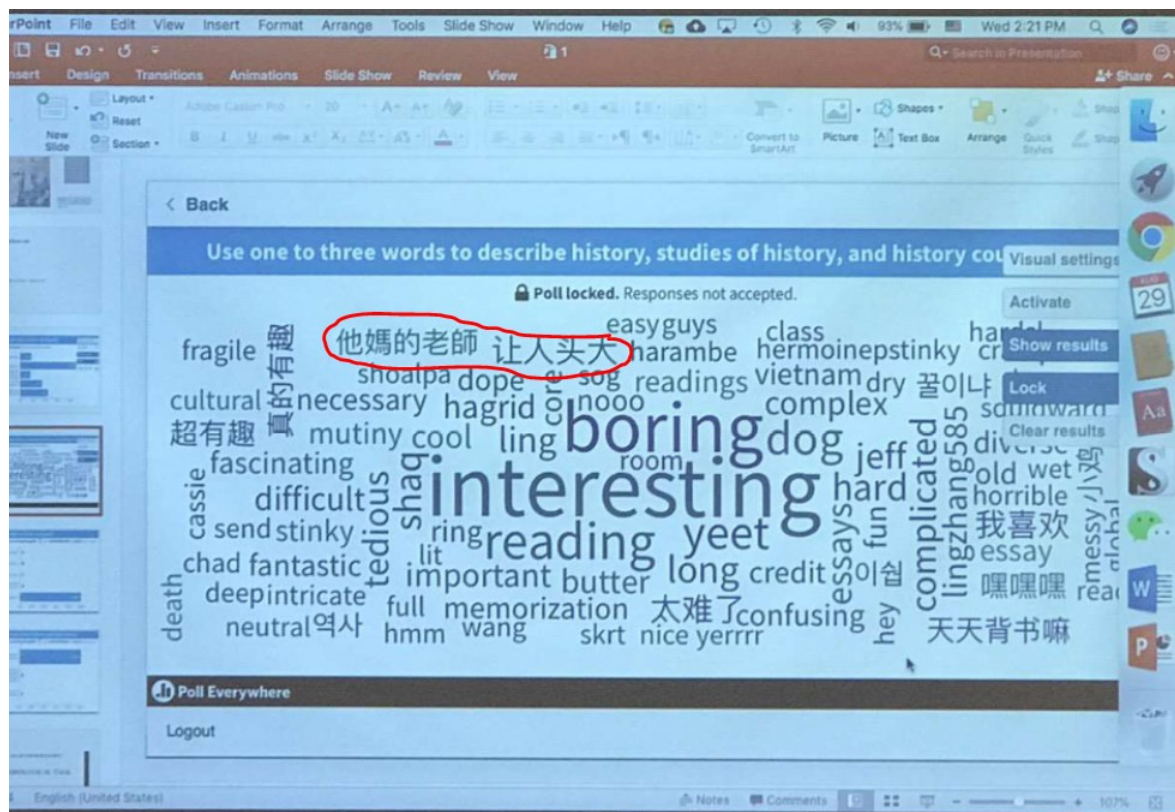
Figure 5.1. Enlarged Image from Pat's WeChat Post on 8/29/2018

Given the informality and the slang nature of the two funny (and slightly impolite) expressions, only Chinese international students were able to get the humor in those expressions, who immediately burst into laughter upon the appearance of the two expressions on the screen (Informal Conversation, 9.7.18). My participants took pride in their ability to exclude English speakers from the humor and just keep the amusement among themselves. On the same day, both Pat and Bill posted pictures of this particular slide on WeChat to share their amusing experiences in Zhao Laoshi's class (see Figures 5.2 & 5.3). Under Pat's post saying that he was "laughing to death" (Figure 5.2), Larry further commented by sharing his story: when asked by non-Chinese students to explain the meaning of the expressions, Larry, instead of providing a translation, intentionally chose to draw upon his bilingual advantage to exclude non-Chinese speaking interlocutors from the jokes so as to maintain his perceived privilege and pride as a bilingual in Chinese and English (Informal Conversation, 9.7.18; WeChat Observation, 8.29.18).
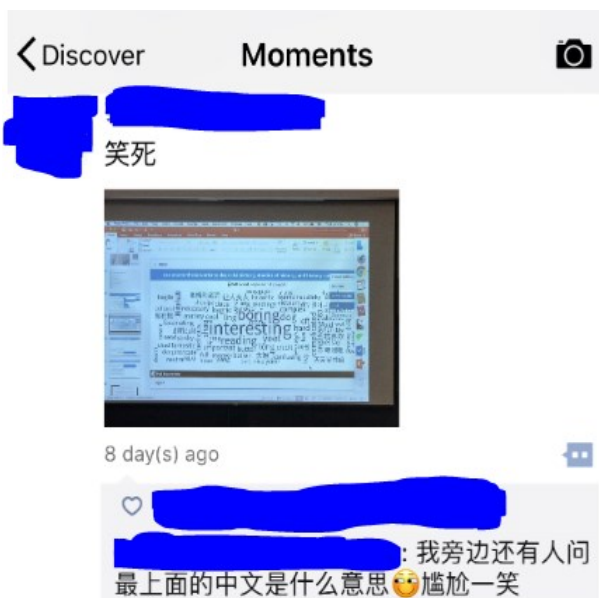
[Translation]
Laughing to death

[The picture showed one of the slides in Zhao Laoshi's history class. In this picture, students' responses to a live poll asking them to "describe history, studies of history and history courses" were documented.]
[The post was liked by a few other students]

[Translation]
Larry commented: People sitting nearby asked me the meaning of the Chinese toward the top [emoji showing wicked smiling face] I simply responded with an awkward smile

Figure 5.2. Screenshot from Pat's Public WeChat Post, 8/29/2018

哈哈哈哈哈哈 ▮老师的lecture

8 day(s) ago

[Translation]
Bill's post content:
Hahahahaha, the lecture by Zhao Laoshi

[The picture showed one of the slides in Zhao Laoshi's history class. In this picture, students' responses to a live poll asking them to "describe history, studies of history and history courses" were documented.]

[The post was liked by a few other students]

Figure 5.3. Screenshot from Bill's Public WeChat Post, 8/29/2018

It was also noteworthy that the welcoming attitude to diversity and the courage to challenge the so-called mainstream linguistic norm as demonstrated by Zhao Laoshi has potentially exerted influences on all bilingual students. It was likely that the frequent bilingual practices adopted by her has made the entire class a safe, multilingual and multicultural space, in which the home languages, dialects, and symbols of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were welcomed. As shown in Figure 5.1., in addition to English, learners responded to the online poll using a variety of linguistic expressions, such as Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Korean, Swahili and even onomatopoeia words for emotion expression (e.g., hmm, yerrr, nooo, yeet) (WeChat Observation, 8.29.18).

ELL Writing. Another course that the vast majority of my participants have reported to have positive experiences in was *ELL Writing*. According to my participants, their favorable attitudes toward this course was mainly due to its language and cultural congruencies, in which English was not treated as a medium of content-subject learning, but instead a focal area of

study. Additionally, students were allowed to choose their own topics of writing, as long as they could write in the target genres.

Among the participants in this study, ten were enrolled in *ELL Writing*, one in *Literature* (Kristin), and another in *Regular Writing* (Eva). It was worth noting that due to their high English proficiency, originally, five students, Kristin, Eva, and the three "American high" students, were granted permission to join *Regular Writing*. However, toward the end, Eva, was the only one who chose to join *Regular Writing*, because it would be "shameful" and "awkward" for her, as an English major, to receive additional language support in *ELL Writing* (Interview, 9.4.18). In contrast, the other four students, Kristin, Hugo, Rebecca and Shawn, all requested to be placed in *ELL Writing*. While Rebecca and Shawn had left notes on the anchor writing assessment in expression of their desire to join *ELL Writing*, Hugo even refused to show up at the anchor writing assessment and explicitly requested the English Department to directly place him in the sheltered session. Consequently, the three "American high" students were re-assigned into *ELL Writing*. Yet Kristin was told that all *ELL Writing* classes were full, and she could either join *Regular Writing*, or take *Literature* in the fall before taking *ELL Writing* next spring. Determined to join *ELL Writing*, Kristin decided to take *Literature* in the first semester instead.

The four participants mentioned two reasons for their preference in *ELL Writing*. Firstly, due to their high English proficiency, they would have a higher chance to excel in the sheltered writing class, thus resulting in higher final grades (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). Additionally, Rebecca, Hugo, and Shawn claimed that they preferred "a course specifically designed for second language learners" so as to improve their academic English writing systematically, an aspect that was considered to have been given inadequate attention to during their U.S. high school education experiences (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

The students who ended up in *ELL Writing* generally showed positive attitudes toward their experiences in this course, especially due to its cultural and linguistic congruencies. Since the majority of the class shared similar language and educational backgrounds, they found it more relaxed to participate orally in class. As Lily concluded, "大家都是中国人，而且基本都认识，说起话来也不会紧张" (Since we are all Chinese and people pretty much know each other well, I don't feel nervous while speaking up in class) (Interview, 9.6.18).

Moreover, as English was treated as a subject rather than a medium and the goal of the course was to support their linguistic functioning in later college studies, they were more motivated to learn (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18). Multiple participants also told me that they felt more comfortable in *ELL Writing* compared with other courses, because their professors were all well-trained language educators, who were more understanding and less judgmental about their occasional language errors. Finally, as they were allowed to bring in their personal experiences and choose their own topics in writing projects, the participants were more comfortable with essay-writing in this course (Interviews, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

Contact with native speakers of English.

This section reports the focal Chinese international students' experiences communicating with native speakers of English in both academic and social settings at the beginning of the semester. The two major types of native speakers that they reported to have contact with were (1) professors, and (2) American peers, such as classmates and roommates.

Contact with professors. Office hour visits stood out to be a primary means of communicating with professors at a personal level. While initiating communication with professors during their office hours has been a common expectation throughout the U.S. higher education, it was extremely unfamiliar and novel to the Chinese international students given the

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cultural differences. In Chinese education, there was no such concept as office hours, and students were not expected to approach their instructors and initiate any connections beyond the classroom settings.

According to my participants, the importance of office hour visits was repeatedly emphasized at the Freshmen Orientation right before the semester started; yet the exact definition and purpose of office hour consultations never clearly explained. Therefore, in spite of being aware of its significance, most participants expressed confusion about the purpose and expectations of office hour visits during the anchor interviews (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). Many guessed that it should be an opportunity exclusively provided for students to "ask long and hard questions," which could not be solved by consulting with professors right before or after class (Interview 9.6.18). One student (Matthew) mentioned that it was only necessary for struggling students and "those who screwed up" (Interview, 9.4.18), and another student (Larry) thought that it might be an opportunity for students to impress the professors by introducing themselves, "*送送小礼*" (sending small gifts) and "*说说好话*" (complementing/saying nice words) (Interview, 8.30.18).

Based on their inaccurate or incomplete assumptions, the majority of my participants, especially those "regular high" students, had very limited experiences with office hour visits, except for those occasional mandatory sessions (i.e., in *ELL Writing* course, and also during meeting with faculty advisors). They explained that this was because they *"真想去又不敢去"* (really wanted to take the opportunity, but were not brave enough to do so), "*没什么大问题问*" (had no big questions to ask), "*和教授没什么好说的*" (had nothing special to talk with the professor), felt "awkward to talk one-on-one with the professor," were "not good at English" or "did not screw up" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

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At the time of the interviews (Weeks 1 to 2), only Lily, Sarah, and the three "American high students" had visited professors during their office hours. Lily and Hugo reported that they went to meet their *ELL Writing* professors during their office hours to discuss their first essays, a mandatory requirement in that course (Interview, 9.6.18). As mentioned in Chapter 4, Sarah attended office hours at the second week of the semester in order to ask for permission to record the lectures; her visit was very short which took approximately ten minutes (Interview 9.6.18).

It appeared that the only students who took the initiative to approach professors and took full advantage of the office hour visits right at the very beginning of the semester were the "American high" students, Rebecca and Shawn, who both claimed to have spent between 30 minutes and an hour during each meeting (Interviews, 8.30.18; 9.6.18). Thanks to Shawn's previous experiences reading books about college adjustment and Rebecca's experiences asking for advice from "academic sisters and brothers," the two students had already had a clear understanding of the expectations, purpose, and significance of the office hour visits prior to the Orientation, during which the importance was reemphasized. Therefore, both students had already visited at least one professor by the time of the interviews. Rebecca reflected on her first meeting with the *Biology* professor,

> It was actually super easy… pretty fun, to be honest. I just said hi, introduced myself, asked one question, and chatted with the professor on some random stuff… like my previous experiences in high school, and her visits to China. Anyways, time passed real quick. Before we realize, 40 minutes have gone by… (Interview, 9.6.18).

Among the seven students who reported to have not yet visited their professors during the first two weeks of the semester, five mentioned that they planned to do so in the future, while two others (Matthew and Eva) said they did not find it necessary and were unlikely to approach their professors via office hour visits. Matthew was not interested in the idea, because based on his assumption, office hour visits were only necessary for those students who were in trouble;

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since he perceived himself as generally "doing pretty good" at the beginning of the semester, he did not have much motivation to visit the professors (Interview, 9.4.18; details see Chapter 4). On the other hand, Eva argued that office hours were unnecessary because she could solve the questions that she needed to ask by catching the professors right after the lectures. Moreover, she was not enthusiastic about the one-on-one nature of the office hours, as she described herself as a quiet introvert who found it awkward to communicate with unfamiliar people:

> 我有在课下问老师问题呀。。。既然一下课就可以解决，没什么必要去 office hour。我到现在其实都搞不清这两个的区别。But anyway, 反正我也比较内向，去了办公室和老师大眼瞪小眼也很尴尬。。。
> I actually had experiences asking questions to my professors right after the lectures ended… If I could solve my problems immediately after class, I don't think it necessary to go to the office hours. In fact, until now, I still did not quite know the differences between the two. But anyways, I am an introvert. Even if I do go to the office hours, it will be very embarrassing and awkward, as the professor and I will just stare at each other with very little to say… (Interview, 9.4.18).

By the end of the third week, the situation remained unchanged. The five students who claimed to have plans for office hours continued telling me that they wanted to meet their professors in private soon, though none had put their thoughts into action (Informal Communication, 9.14.18). The only change happened with Rebecca and Shawn, who reported to have a few more office hour visits in the meantime (Informal Communication, 9.14.18). Rebecca claimed that she went to see both her *Chemistry* and *Biology* professors to ask questions about the homework, while Shawn said he reached out to consult with an *East Asian Studies* professor that he had never met before about the potentials of changing his major from *Computer Science* to *Asian studies*. The time spent during each professor visit was reported to be approximately between 20 and 50 minutes (Informal Communication, 9.14.18).

By the end of the fourth week, the general status concerning my participants' office hour visits remained similar, except for two slight changes. Firstly, one more student, Kristin, reported to have met some professors during their office hours (Informal Communication, 9.21.18). She

revealed that as both her *Literature* and *History* classes were rather small, the professors put lots of emphasis on oral discussions. According to Kristin, she found it difficult to jump into the discussions since her American peers tended to talk very fast; worrying that her lack of oral participation in the two courses might jeopardize her GPA, she went to meet with both professors during their office hours (Informal Communication, 9.21.18). Each meeting lasted for around half an hour. Kristin believed her meetings with the professors were very helpful, as the professors were now aware of her language barriers as an international student and showed empathy to her struggles (Informal Communication, 9.21.18).

Secondly, Rebecca, who continued visiting her *Biology* professor during the fourth week, told me that thanks to her frequent office hour visits, she had established a close relationship with her professor (Informal Communication, 9.21.18). Rebecca recalled, "We joked a lot [during the meeting]… This week, since I met her around lunch time, she even offered to treat me lunch. We had a great time chatting over lunch." (Informal Communication, 9.21.18). Rebecca commented that she "felt bad" for those Chinese international students who did not take advantage of the office hours: "These are great opportunities. Why not just show up and introduce yourself?" (Informal Communication, 9.21.18).

Contact with American peers. In general, the participants reported to have opportunities communicating with American peers in three scenarios at the beginning of the semester, namely in class, at the dormitory, and during events such as the International Student Orientation and student organizations. Evident discrepancies could be observed between the "regular high" and "American high" students with regards to their experiences communicating with American peers.

Firstly, the two groups of students held different opinions concerning their contact with American peers. The three "American high" students perceived their communication with native-

speaking peers as "something natural," "relaxing" and "just a regular part of college" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18). This was likely due to their years of previous experiences socializing with American peers during high school. In contrast, most of their "regular high" peers regarded communication with native English-speaking peers as a new and adventurous experience, in which they had to intentionally push themselves to "*离开自己的 comfort zone*" (leave their comfort zones) (Interview, 8.30.18). The majority of the "regular high" students felt "uncomfortable," "nervous," and "shy" communicating with American peers because they were not confident with their oral English proficiency (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

Moreover, different from the three "American high" students, who reported to view connections with American peers as an essential and unavoidable part of their college life, the "regular high" students perceived socialization with Americans as something optional. As Bill said, "*我自己和中国人玩的很好，为什么要强迫自己和美国人聊天呢？*" (I have established close relationships with other Chinese students, why do I have to force myself to chat with Americans?) (Interview, 8.30.18). Similarly, Larry commented,

> *反正我怎么开心怎么来呀。要是我觉得更喜欢和中国同学在一起，其实没有必要接触美国人。我觉得我们不需要进入美国人的圈子，因为没必要为了迎合别人而改变你自己！*
> Anyways, happiness is the most important thing. If I find it more comfortable to stay with other Chinese peers, there's really no need to have contact with any American classmates. I don't think we have to join their friend circles, because there is no need to change yourself in order to make others happy! (Interview, 8.30.18).

Secondly, there were some differences in relation to the nature of contact between the "regular high" and "American high" students. The three "American high" students reported to have established close friendships with their American peers (e.g., classmates, roommates, groupmates from events) at the beginning of the semester, and their nature of contact with American peers was mostly voluntary. In addition to two American friends at Hillside, the three

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students also revealed that they had experiences making friends with American peers back in high school, whom they remained in touch with even in college (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18).

On the contrary, to the vast majority of the "regular high" students, the nature of contact with native English-speaking peers was rather involuntary and artificial, primarily generated by mandatory course projects assigned by the professors or unavoidable greetings which were "simply due to the need to be polite" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18). While many of the "regular high" students revealed interest in establishing friendships with American peers, they found it extremely hard to do so. The "regular high" students believed that the American peers should be blamed for such a "superficial relationship" between Chinese and Americans, as "they, not us, were the ones who always stay[ed] together" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18).

Pat referred to the idiom "*物以类聚，人以群分*" (birds of a feather flock together), arguing that he was not surprised by the segregation between Chinese and American students, since the American students always hang out together, be it inside or outside of class (Interview, 8.30.18). His point was also supported by six other students who expressed similar views during the interviews (Research Memo, 9.10.18). Bill further illustrated this view by sharing his own experiences in the *Psychology* class,

> *我们不是美国人的第一选择目标，除非他们真是落单了，没办法了，才会和你聊天。就比如说我们心理科，所有的美国人都是一来就跟自己人坐在一起，讨论什么的 都在一起，从来不理中国人。你看，要是有谁没座位了，迟到了，实在没办法了，才会和你坐，假装热情聊天什么的。但是一到下节课他们有选择可以和自己人坐了，肯定不理你。到最后，我们心理课讨论一般都是一堆美国人在一起，然后剩下的中国人组个队，还有韩国人印度人什么的都也只能和自己国家的人在一起。*
> We are not the first choice for Americans. Unless they are lonely, and have no other people to turn to, they won't chat with you. Take my *Psychology* class for instance, all the Americans always sat with their own kind and discussed with other Americans. They never cared about chatting with Chinese. You will see that only when American students could not find a seat, was late for class, or had no other choice but to sit with you, would they pretend to be nice and chat with you. However, when it came to the following class when they did have the option to sit with other Americans, they definitely would not talk to you. Towards the end, our *Psychology* class discussions were always segregated, with

Americans stuck with their own kind. The marginalized Chinese students had to form a discussion group on their own. And this was the same case for Koreans and Indians, who had no choice but to stay with peers from their own countries. (Interview, 8.30.18).

Last but not least, compared with their "American high" peers, the "regular students" reported to have more language and cultural barriers during their communication with American peers. With regards to language barriers, for the newly-arrived Chinese international students, the most common language barrier was reported to be the fast talking speed of the American classmates, especially during in-class discussions. All nine "regular high" students mentioned that they had encountered at least one incidence when they got lost and was unable to orally participate during the discussions, because the American classmates "not only talk[ed] fast, but also jump[ed] into each other's speech" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). This echoed what was described in the portraits presented in Chapter 4, in which all the three focal "regular high" participants, William, Matthew, and Sarah described the fast-paced speech of American students as one of the major sources of linguistic challenge during their initial stage in college.

Another common language barrier was said to be the unfamiliar vocabulary and expressions, which were likely due to the "regular high" students' lack of exposure to non-academic English. With no long-term overseas experiences, their previous contact with English was primarily limited within the examination-oriented education context in China. This tended to lead to their unfamiliarity with more casual forms of English such as slangs and idioms. Expressions such as "knock on wood," "play it by ear," "get cold feet," and "mumbo jumbo" which were often used by native speakers in informal conversations were considered difficult and confusing for the newly-arrived students (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18).

Compared with their "American high" counterparts, the "regular high" students reported to have experienced more incidences in which culture functioned as a source of linguistic challenge. To be specific, almost all of the "regular high" students mentioned that they

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frequently had difficulty understanding their American peers' humor, even though they were able to understand the meaning of each discrete word (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18). For instance, reflecting on his own experiences, William told me that he really had no idea how to catch the "笑点" (literal translation: laughing point, meaning the funny aspect) of some American students' jokes in class (Interview, 8.30.18). Despite his effort to secretly look up every unknown word of the joke in the dictionary, William was still confused about why the whole class, including the professor, had burst into laughter (Interview, 8.30.18). Similarly, Bill recalled his experience at the International Student Orientation:

> 为了活跃气氛，我们的 IA 说他来给我们讲个笑话。我不记得他具体说了什么，反正就是。。。他说完了就一个人狂笑，可是我们几个中国人面面相觑，都没觉得有什么好笑，弄得大家反而更尴尬了。其实他说的时候，我感觉是听懂每个词的，意思也差不多 get 到，就是不知道为什么他们美国人觉得那么好笑。
> In order to break the ice, our International Assistant (IA) said he could tell us a joke. I don't remember what he said exactly, but anyways… the moment after he finished, he started laughing like crazy, all by himself. But we Chinese were so confused and found nothing funny. As his icebreaker joke was not picked up by any of us, we all felt that it [the initial meeting with IA] was more awkward and uncomfortable. To be honest, I thought that I had understood every word and somewhat got the meaning of his joke, but I just did not know why the Americans found it so funny. (Interview, 8.30.18).

Another commonly encountered barrier was the lack of familiarity with culture-specific topics (Research Memo, 9.21.18). For instance, Eva complained that she was frequently isolated from conversations by her American roommates: "They kept on laughing and chatting about 'keeping up with the credentials' or something… What credentials? Why they have to keep up? I totally have no idea what they were talking about…" (Interview, 9.4.18). In this example, because of her lack of exposure to American media, the newly-arrived international student Eva was not able to understand the culture-specific topic *Keeping Up with the **Kardashians*** (which she misheard as "credentials"), which was the name for a popular American reality television series. Due to this cultural barrier, Eva was excluded from conversations with her roommates.

Similarly, Pat was unaware of a culture-specific practice that Westerners often adopted to communicate with people they were not very familiar with—to use some non-controversial topics such as the weather as a conversation starter for small talks. Because of this, he misinterpreted that Americans always liked to chat about topics which were "*没营养的*" (literal translation: nutrition-free, meaning superficial and meaningless), which resulted in his lack of interest in making friends with his American peers (Interview, 8.30.18).

Pat shared his observations of a few American peers in his *History* class. According to him, for two weeks in a row, each time the three American girls saw each other before class, they would always spend around 10 minutes chatting about some "meaningless topics" such as the weather (Interview, 8.30.18). Pat considered their behavior "a total waste of time," and concluded that those Americans girls always repeated those unimportant topics each time they met, because "they must be afraid to let others know that they were lonely" (Interview, 8.30.18). He explained,

> *她们每次都说这些没营养的东西，其实肯定是因为她们内心孤独，找不到别人说话，又怕被别人笑话。所以只能没话找话说，还常常笑出声，假装自己很开心。她们可以花上十分钟聊一下完全没意义的话题。我每次上课都听一个女生抱怨：啊，昨天好热！然后其他两个女生也随声附和。然后我就听她们接着说：我的宿舍好热啊，你的宿舍热吗？然后又能聊很久。。。在我们中国人看来，这简直难以理解—你和不熟的人有事就说，没事就闭嘴，谁会聊什么天气呢？So what? 聊了可以让天气变凉快吗？*
>
> Each time they always talked about those 'nutrition-free' stuff. This must be because they were very lonely at heart, and could not find friends to chat with. Since they were afraid to be laughed at being loners, they had to find stuff to chat about even though in reality they had nothing to say. They even pretended to be very happy by laughing out loud. They could spend 10 minutes talking about completely meaningless topics. Every time in class, I would hear one girl saying 'ah, it was so hot yesterday!' The other two girls would always agree with her. Then I heard that they would go on complaining about something like 'It was really hot in my dorm. How about yours?' Following this trend, they could continue their conversations for very long… From we Chinese's point of view, this was completely unbelievable—you talk to people you are not familiar with only when you have important things to say; otherwise, you remain in silence. Who will talk about weather? So what? By talking about it, the weather will get cooler? (Interview, 8.30.18).

Theme 2: Coping Strategies Initiated

To cope with the various challenges encountered during the initial stage of their freshman year, the Chinese international students reported to have come up with two major coping strategies: (1) using Chinese as a bridge; and (2) seeking support from others.

Using Chinese as a bridge.

During their first month in a U.S. university, the practice of using Chinese as a bridge to cope with the language difficulties in English was found to be exclusively adopted by the "regular high" students (Research Memo, 9.21.18). In fact, all nine "regular high" students claimed that they had frequently depended on this strategy in support of linguistic functioning in academic and social settings. This echoed the portraits presented in Chapter 4, in which the newly-arrived Chinese international students William, Matthew, and Sarah all resorted to Chinese to cope with their language and academic challenges.

The most common method in using Chinese as a bridge was the usage of English-Chinese dictionaries. This included both portable electronic dictionaries, and popular online translation applications such as *ICIBA*, *Youdao Dictionary*, and *Google Translate*. Multiple participants mentioned that they were aware of the benefits of English-English dictionary, which could not only help Chinese students to "think in English," but also provide them with the opportunities to "learn many other things about the words," such as the corresponding synonyms, acronyms, and antonyms (Interviews, 8.30.18). In spite of this, the "regular high" students still preferred to use English-Chinese dictionary due to its advantage of being efficient and straightforward, which allowed them to grasp the meaning of the vocabulary quickly (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). As William explained,

很多时候，特别是听老师讲课的时候，我必须在最快的时间里了解它的意思，因为如果我花太久在查单词上，老师的知识点我就听不到，这样恶性循环。英英解释要看半天，还是英中来的快！

Many times, especially when I'm listening to the professor's lecture, I need to get the meaning of the vocabulary in the shortest time possible. Because if I spend too long with the dictionary, then I will miss the points of the lecture, which could lead to a vicious spiral. It takes too long to read the English explanation of the words, so I prefer English-Chinese dictionaries! (Interview, 8.30.18).

Although English-Chinese dictionaries were adopted across all the newly-arrived Chinese international students, participants reported to use them at different stages especially during reading. The majority of the "regular high" students mentioned that they tended to resort to Chinese dictionaries the moment they encountered any unfamiliar words which were key to comprehend the article, so as not to "get stuck" during reading (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). In contrast, Pat and Larry preferred to finish reading the entire articles before looking up the meaning of the key words, so that their flow of thought would not be interrupted and they could have a holistic understanding of the reading before going into details (Interviews, 8.30.18). Larry further added that looking up the vocabulary after reading the entire article could also improve English learners' reading proficiency, since they were forced to extract relevant information from the article to predict the meaning of the unfamiliar words (Interview, 8.30.18).

Another commonly adopted approach depending on Chinese as a bridge was to resort to online resources in Chinese. Similar to the strategy of bilingual dictionary use, it was widely adopted across all "regular high" participants. The students used Chinese online resources mainly for three purposes. Firstly, to manage the heavy reading load of *Philosophy* and *History*, several Chinese students said they often looked for the Chinese version of the corresponding literature to grasp the main idea before reading the English version. Occasionally, when they were tight on time, the students would also skip reading the English version entirely. Secondly, to facilitate their understanding of certain unfamiliar concepts during the lecture, around half of

the "regular high" students reported to have quickly browsed through some background information online in relation to the knowledge points in Chinese. Lastly, one student mentioned that he once looked for literature published in local Chinese journals so as to avoid in-text citations required in academic English writing (Interview, 8.30.18). He introduced his trick:

> 如果你先找中文论文，再用自己的话把相关知识点翻译成英文，再写进你的 *essay* 里，你就不用管烦人的 *in-text citation* 了。因为美国教授的放抄袭软件无论如何不可能发现你其实引用了中国论文的句子，因为在你 *essay* 里的出现的只有你的翻译。
>
> You don't have to worry about the annoying formats of in-text citation if you first find literature in Chinese, then translate relevant key information into English using your own words, and finally integrate it into your essay. There is no way for American professors' anti-plagiarism software to figure out that you actually cited something from literature published in Chinese, because the only thing that shows up in your essay is going to be your own translation. (Interview, 8.30.18).

Something worth noting was that the three "American high" students, while denying any usage of Chinese as a bridge in college, all confessed that they used to resort to this strategy when they first started high school in the U.S., be it using English-Chinese dictionaries or browsing for information in Chinese (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18). Nevertheless, they reported to have abandoned this strategy later in high school because it was found to be "not as helpful" and "time-consuming" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18).

Seeking Support from Others.

In addition to using Chinese as a bridge, another coping strategy was to seek support from others, which was adopted by all twelve participants. The two most frequently mentioned parties which the students sought support from were professors and other Chinese peers. With regards to seeking support from professors, as mentioned earlier, around half of the participants had sought support from their professors via office hour visits by the end of the fourth week (Research Memo, 9.21.18).

The other source of support that my participants turned to was their Chinese peers, including their "academic sisters and brothers" (senior Chinese international students) and other Chinese international freshmen. All twelve students mentioned that they had consulted with their "academic sisters and brothers" to get advice on all dimensions of their overseas studies experiences; the support that they reported to have sought from those senior students include but not limited to consulting on academic issues (e.g., course selection, oral participation in class, difficult homework problems), extracurricular activities (e.g., information on student organizations, internships, volunteer opportunities, and career fairs) and social life (e.g., problems with roommates, dating, and information on social events) (Research Memo, 9.21.18). All those support-seeking activities from the "academic sisters and brothers" were conducted via WeChat, mostly through the formats of WeChat group chats and personal audio messages (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18).

Similarly, the participants also sought help from other Chinese international freshmen. Two patterns could be observed in their support-seeking. Firstly, compared with those newly-arrived international students, the "American high" were significantly less likely to ask for help concerning their linguistic barriers (Research Memo, 9.14.18). This was likely because the three "American high" students had comparatively fewer language difficulties both in academic and social contexts thanks to their years of high school experiences in the U.S., and therefore needed less linguistic and academic support.

Secondly, the "regular high" students did not prefer to ask for help from their "American high" peers; the vast majority of the "regular high" students reported that they frequently sought support from other newly-arrived Chinese international students who had finished K-12 education in China through in-person communication, WeChat public posts, personal messages,

and group chats (Research Memo, 9.21.18). In fact, William was the only one who often turned

to "American high" peers for academic and linguistic support, asking them questions using

Chinese in class (Interview, 8.30.18). Details about his support-seeking from "American high"

students were presented in Chapter 4.

The main reason for the "regular high" students' overall reluctance in approaching their

"American high" peers for support was due to the tensions between the two groups of students.

During the anchor interviews, all the "regular high" students, including William, mentioned that

they did not like those "American high" peers because they were "unfriendly," "arrogant," "too

proud in their English" and often looked down upon those who had no previous experiences

studying in the U.S. (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). According to the "regular high"

students, this was most likely related to those "American high" students' perceived superiority

because of their comparatively higher English proficiency and the more acculturated status. Pat

told me, "They feel super about themselves, and often pretend to be ABCs (American Born

Chinese, or Chinese Americans)!" (Interview, 8.30.18). Larry even concluded based on his

personal observation that there must be a "*鄙视链*" (discrimination chain) among college

freshmen, with the White Americans being the friendliest and most respectful to "regular high"

students, followed by Asian Americans, and "American high" students being the most hostile

(Interview, 8.30.18).

Instead of seeking support from "American high" students, the "regular high" participants

formed a community to support each other. According to my "regular high" participants, not

only did they provide each other with academic support (e.g., tackling readings together,

checking answers, forming study groups, sharing time management strategies, and

recommending learning application software), but also they helped each other in their social life (e.g., emotional support, supporting each other's daily life) (Research Memo, 9.14.18).

This echoed finding from my WeChat observations. For instance, Figure 5.4 illustrated an example of "regular high" peers' mutual academic support. In the public post, Eva asked for help about a math problem, which she could not understand (WeChat Observation, 9.18.18). Shortly after she posted a picture of the question and put down one word "why" followed by four question marks, another "regular high" student posted detailed explanations and also answered her follow-up question (WeChat Observation, 9.18.18). In contrast, Figure 5.5 demonstrated an example of the "regular high" students' support seeking regarding social life. In the public post, William asked about the distance between his location and another city where his good friend lived. Similarly, this problem was solved by his peers quickly (WeChat Observation, 9.22.18).
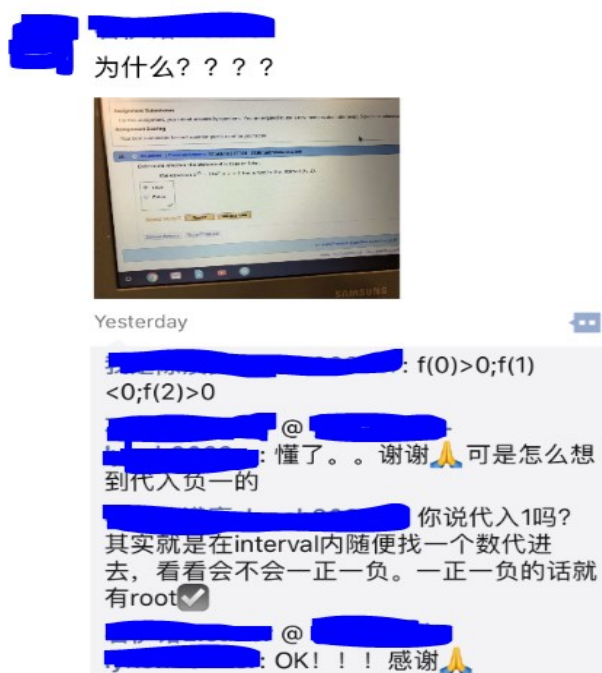
[Translation]
Eva's post: Why????
[A picture showing that her answer to a math problem was wrong]

Anonymous Peer: f(0)>0; f(1)<0; f(2) >0
Eva @ Anonymous Peer: I got it…
Thanks [grateful emoji] But how did you think of using -1 as an example
Anonymous Peer: Are you talking about using 1 as an example? In fact, I randomly picked numbers within the interval to see whether both positive and negative results would show up. Once we see one positive and the other negative, then it will have root [emoji showing correct answer]
Eva @ Anonymous Peer: OK!!! Thank you [grateful emoji]

Figure 5.4. Example for Support Seeking among Peers, Eva's Public WeChat Post, 9/18/18
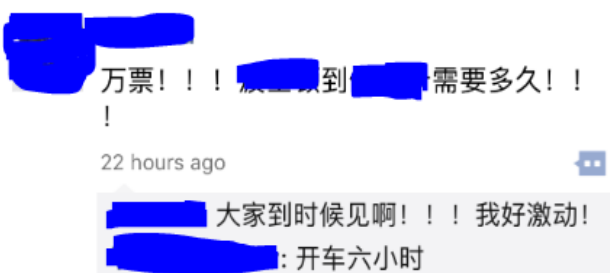
	[Translation]
万票！！！候补到需要多久！！！	*William's post:* My WeChat friends!!! How long does it take to travel from Anonymous City A to City B!!!
22 hours ago	
大家到时候见啊！！！我好激动！	*William*: See you all soon!! I am so exacted!
：开车六小时	*Anonymous Peer:* it takes 6 hours by car

Figure 5.5. Example for Support Seeking among Peers, William's Public WeChat Post, 9/22/18

Theme 3: Perceived Effectiveness of Support Received from Others

At the beginning of the semester, the Chinese international students reported to have received lots of support from many sources, some helpful yet others not. The support they received covered many dimensions of their academic and social life, especially with relation to their linguistic functioning and academic adjustment. In this section, I discuss the three most frequently mentioned sources of support and their perceived effectiveness by my participants, including (1) professors, (2) Chinese peers, and (3) the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS).

Support from professors.

Half of the students experienced office hour consultations, either voluntarily or involuntarily; in general, those who met professors in office hours demonstrated positive attitudes toward their support. (Research Memo, 9.14.18). Lily and Hugo who attended their *ELL Writing* professors' mandatory debrief meetings both claimed that it was "a valuable experience" and the professors were "encouraging" "extremely helpful" and "nice" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18). For instance, Lily explained that since she only got a C+ for her first essay assignment, she was very shocked, frustrated, and disappointed as this was said to be "the lowest grade she had ever received" (Interview, 9.6.18). However, thanks to the office hour visits with her *ELL Writing* professor, she became "more positive" and "more relaxed" (Interview, 9.6.18).

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According to Lily, the professor first comforted her by saying that everybody was given a rather low score because the nature of the first essay was "entirely diagnostic" in the hope of drawing the international students' attention to their areas of improvement in academic writing (Interview, 9.6.18). The professor then went through the essay with Lily together, during which he provided customized suggestions on her revision and also recommended her to take advantage of the Writing Center in order to improve her grammar. Finally, noticing that Lily was still quite frustrated due to the low grade, the professor assured her that all the students would be given the opportunity to revise their work so as to improve their scores (Interview, 9.6.18).

While enrolled in a different *ELL Writing* class taught by a different instructor, Hugo reported similar positive experiences during the mandatory office hour meeting with his writing professor. Both students mentioned that they were grateful to their professors' guidance, and planned to seek support from the Hillside Writing Center in the near future (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.6.18).

Similarly, the students who took the initiative in office hour visits also claimed that the support from their professors was helpful. For instance, Kristin said that she felt empowered and more confident thanks to her *Literature* professor's support. Around one month into the semester, Kristin went to meet her *Literature* professor because she felt "压力山大" (literal translation: stress as big as a mountain, meaning extremely stressed) being the only non-white, non-native speaking, and non-American student in class (Research Memo, 9.21.18). She revealed to her professor that she felt powerless, since she was not able to talk as well as, and as much as her native English-speaking peers in class (Research Memo, 9.21.18). Not only did the professor show empathy by sharing her personal struggles decades ago as an exchange student in Europe, but also she encouraged Kristin to speak up confidently whenever she had an idea because her

American classmates were "surely interested in interpreting the literature from a unique, Oriental perspective" (Research Memo, 9.21.18). The support from the professor was perceived as very helpful, as Kristin reported that she spoke up more often in class and was less nervous when she expressed her opinions (Research Memo, 9.21.18).

Support from Chinese peers.

The participants also held generally positive attitudes toward support from their Chinese peers, especially their "academic sisters and brothers" and other Chinese international freshmen.

Support from senior students. As introduced earlier, all 12 students had experiences seeking support from senior Chinese students with regards to various academic and social issues. Two kinds of support received from the "academic sisters and brothers" were considered extremely beneficial, namely their advice on course selection and oral participation in class.

With regards to course selection, the vast majority of the participants reported to have taken advice from their "academic sisters and brothers." They regarded the suggestions from senior students as the "golden rule," claiming that they were more precious than advice from their faculty advisors and information on previous course evaluations, because those "academic sisters and brothers" were once in their shoes and were thus able to evaluate the courses objectively from the viewpoints of Chinese international students (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). For instance, based on suggestions from his faculty advisor, Bill said that he was originally enrolled in Zhao Laoshi's *History* class. Nevertheless, he decided to drop the class immediately after hearing rumors from some of his "academic sisters and brothers," saying that "Chinese international students could never get an A" in that class, because the Chinese professor was always extra strict with Chinese students to show the university that she was not biased by their common ethnicity (Interview, 8.30.18).

The only exception was Hugo, who was skeptical about the course selection advice from those senior students, and mentioned that he preferred to select courses based on his own interest as well as his faculty advisor's recommendation (Interview, 8.30.18). Hugo argued that since course selection was "very personal and subjective," students should make their own decisions; moreover, they should only get advice from "reliable resources," which he specifically meant faculty members (Interview, 8.30.18). According to Hugo, his strong opinion regarding course selection resulted from his personal experiences back in high school. At that time, he used to depend heavily on senior Chinese students' advice on course selection, who often recommended courses that were easy to get high grades in and warned him against classes taught by demanding teachers (Interview, 8.30.18). However, it turned out that the recommendations from those "academic sisters and brothers" back in high school were not always accurate:

> *有的时候，学长学姐公认的很糟糕的老师其实没有想象中那么坏，相反，有的时候反而还很好。有的时候那些学长学姐的建议很不全面，他们有时自己不努力，没拿到 A，就全面否定一个老师，这是很不可取的。*
> Sometimes, the instructors who were said to be horrible by those academic sisters and brothers were not that bad at all. In fact, they were actually pretty good. The suggestions from those senior students could be incomplete. It's likely that they talk bad about an instructor, simply because they themselves did not work hard enough and thus failed to get an A. It's very wrong to do so. (Interview, 8.30.18).

While Hugo agreed that senior students could be helpful in many other aspects, he perceived their support on course selection "unnecessary" and "sometimes misleading" (Interview, 8.30.18). Hugo supported his opinion by comparing his class schedule with those of his peers' who selected courses based on senior students' advice:

> *你看我的课表，我都是按照自己的兴趣，承受能力，还有教授的意见安排的。我每天都很平均，一天不安排超过三门课，中午还尽量安排午休时间，这样不会特别累，作业也比较平均，有利于我每节课的学习效率。我的很多同学都只听学长学姐的建议，那是很不科学的。为了抢传说中的水课，避开所谓的难课，结果他们有不少人一三五有四五节课，甚至六节课，而二四几乎没课。这样就导致他们一三五太累，上课没法集中，而且作业一下子这么多也很难高质量完成。*

If you take a look at my course schedule, you will see that I selected courses based on my own interest, ability, and also the suggestions from my faculty advisor. Every day, the number of courses that I have is very similar. I have no more than 3 classes per day, and also tried to avoid classes around noontime to give myself a break. In this way, I won't be too tired and the homework load will be rather manageable, which is helpful in boosting my learning efficiency in each class. In contrast, many of my peers decided to only listen to their "academic sisters and brothers," which was a very bad idea. In order to jump into those so-called easy-A class and avoid difficult courses, many of them have 4-5 classes, sometimes even 6, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, yet almost no classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This has resulted in them being overly fatigue on the three days when they had too many courses. Consequently, they could not concentrate in class, and nor could they do their homework very carefully (Interview, 8.30.18).

Unlike the slightly mixed feelings toward their advice on course selection, the Chinese international students all described the senior students' support on oral participation to be extremely helpful (Research Memo, 9.14.18). The two most frequently mentioned oral participation suggestions from the senior students that were found to be effective were (1) to be patient, and (2) to make connections to China.

The first advice on being patient was said to be given by the "academic sisters and brothers" specifically to address a challenge encountered by many Chinese international students to speak up during group discussions—the fast talking speed of their American peers. As illustrated earlier in the section about Chinese international students' contact with native speakers, it was very difficult for them to speak up during group discussions, in which their native-speaking peers tended to talk very fast and often jump into each other's speech. This was reported to have caused anxiety and stress among many of my participants (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

Based on the "to be patient" strategy, the Chinese students were advised to stay silent, keep smiling, and maintain direct eye contact with their American peers as they expressed their opinions. It was believed that, in this way, even though the Chinese students did not have the proper turn-taking strategy to have the floor during the discussion, eventually some American peers would be interested in knowing their opinions by handing the floor to them (Research

Memo, 9.14.18). This strategy was found helpful by my participants, especially those who

perceived themselves as introvert and shy. Pat shared his experiences applying this strategy,

> 有时你越是想说，他们就越不让你说。你感觉插不上话，自然很郁闷，就更说不出了。但是，你要是有耐心，一直微笑地看着他们静静等，总有美国人会找你。要不然他们可能觉得冷落你半天不好意思，要不然就是他们好奇你对他们的观点有什么想法。就有一个美国人和我说 *'You were smiling when I was talking. What do you think?'*
> Sometimes the more you want to talk, the more they [American peers] won't let you. If you cannot jump into the conversation, you surely will feel depressed and stressed, and will find it harder to express your opinions. But if you are patient enough, keeping on staring at them while smiling, eventually some Americans will find you. Maybe this is because they feel bad for ignoring you for quite a while, or maybe because they are curious about your thoughts on their opinions. Once there was an American student who gave me the floor by saying 'You were smiling when I was talking. What do you think?' (Interview, 8.30.18).

The second advice on oral participation was to make connections to China. This strategy

was reported to be often used by those students who were enrolled in *Philosophy*. It was likely

that since this course was heavily Western-centered, the Chinese students would benefit if they

could change the power relationship by introducing some Chinese ideologies, which only they

had expertise in. For example, during class discussions about Plato and Aristotle's opinions, the

students were suggested to make a connection with the thoughts of some famous Chinese

philosophers such as Confucius. In this way, the Chinese students could take advantage of their

content expertise to participate in the oral discussion without being worried about their American

peers' interruptions or comments. Details about this strategy and its application was introduced

in the portrait of Matthew in Chapter 4.

Support from other Chinese international freshmen. In addition to those "academic

sisters and brothers" who were senior students, the Chinese international freshmen received

support from each other, academically, socially, and emotionally (Research Memo, 9.21.18). As

illustrated in the examples presented in Figures 5.5 and 5.6, the mutual support among Chinese

freshmen appeared to be beneficial both academically and socially. Moreover, the emotional

support among Chinese international freshmen at Hillside was highly valued by my participants, describing it as "一笔财富" (a treasure) and "温暖" (warm) (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18).

Two students, Matthew and William, even explicitly pointed out that they chose Hillside over other elite universities mainly because of its reputation of having a small and supportive Chinese international student community (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18). Matthew told me, since the total number of Chinese international freshmen was relatively smaller compared with many other universities, the students were likely to know each other well and stick together when difficulties arise (Interview, 8.30.18). His view was supported by several other participants, who mentioned that thanks to the support from their Chinese peers, they were able to conquer the negative emotions due to language barriers, homesickness, loneliness and marginalization from the mainstream student group at Hillside (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18).

William shared his own experience as an example. Due to the stress of not being able to function linguistically in academic and social settings at the beginning of the semester (details see Chapter 4), he felt depressed, homesick, and had no appetite for any of the food served at Hillside Café (Informal Communication, 9.20.18). To vent his negative feelings, William posted on WeChat (see Figure 5.7), describing how miserable he felt and how much he craved for Chinese food (WeChat Observation, 9.15.18). Soon afterwards his post was liked by some Chinese peers (see Figure 5.6), and many more contacted him via personal message to offer him comfort (Informal Communication, 9.20.18). One Chinese student even replied under his post, offering to make tomato fried egg for William, one of the traditional Chinese dishes that he claimed to be craving for (WeChat Observation, 9.15.18). Roughly a week later, William told me that he felt so empowered and amazed by the emotional support from his peers that he was no

longer feeling depressed. He further added that he was "very, very blessed" to be at Hillside (Informal Communication, 9.20.18).

[Translation]
William's post:
Today is another very sleepy, sad day. [emoji smiling face] I have not had any appetite for food for a while. There's nothing that I want to eat. I miss hot pot, crawfish, Chinese barbecue, bubble tea, spicy clay pot, dumplings, tomato fried eggs, and various other Chinese food.

[a picture showing his hand holding a subway ticket]

[The post was liked by many other students]

William: What Freshman 15? It's not real. It's just a lie. I feel I am losing more weight. I feel truly, truly sad.
Anonymous Peer: I can cook tomato fried egg for you

Figure 5.6. Example of Emotional Support, William's Public WeChat Post, 9/15/18

Support from the OISS.

Another source of support that all participants have mentioned was the OISS, which organized the International Student Orientation and assigned upperclassmen as International Assistants (IAs) to support newly-arrived international students' college adjustment at Hillside University. However, contrasting to their overall positive attitudes toward the support from their professors and peers, the vast majority of my participants reported to be disappointed by the assistance received from the OISS. Six students concluded that the inadequate support from the OISS revealed Hillside's true motivations to recruit international students, which they believed to be "to make money," "to increase diversity," and "to boost up its ranking" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

Nearly half of the participants showed strong dissatisfaction toward the International

Student Orientation, believing it was "too intense," "too abrupt," "boring," and "very

intimidating" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). As illustrated in Sarah's case in Chapter 4, the

students reported to feel stressed and linguistically unprepared for the intense English immersion

during the International Student Orientation. To address this problem, Sarah suggested that the

university should touch base with international students via email or video conferencing prior to

their arrival, so as to provide them with a gradual transition into the authentic English-speaking

environment (Interview, 9.6.18).

As for their experiences with IAs, Lily said that she enjoyed the support from her IA, a

Chinese "academic sister" who happened to share the same major with her (Interview, 9.6.18).

According to her, the IA not only provided her with suggestions on course selection during the

Orientation week, but also brought all the Chinese students in the group to Chinatown for dim

sum shortly after the semester started. Lily told me that she perceived herself as "a super lucky

girl" compared with her peers, who were assigned IAs with no common academic, cultural,

linguistic, or ethnic backgrounds (Interview, 9.6.18). She explained:

> *都是中国人，感觉就比较亲切，说什么都可以用中文，而且大家有什么问题直接*
> *都可以微信。不像是和美国 IA，说什么都要发英文邮件很麻烦，而且又不熟，有*
> *什么事又觉得不好意思打扰他们。。。*
> Since my IA and I are both Chinese, we feel more connected, and can feel free to use
> Chinese whenever needed. If I have any questions, I can directly contact her via WeChat.
> However, if you have an American IA, then all communication has to be done via email
> in English, which is a lot of hassle. Moreover, you just don't feel close enough to them
> and thus feel shy to bother them with questions… (Interview, 9.6.18).

In contrast, the other students explicitly stated that they did not feel any support from

their IAs and described the existence of IA as "*走过场*" or "*形式化*" (both meaning nothing but

a format) (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). Yet, my participants did not seem to be very

disappointed or surprised by this; they told me that the lack of support from their IAs was

"highly predictable" and "not surprising at all," since right from the beginning, they had already expected that the IAs themselves were busy college students who had no time to care about others (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

One student (Shawn) further claimed that the IA leading his group was extremely rude, biased, and unprofessional, as he alienated and marginalized Chinese international students by chatting exclusively with the Spanish-speaking students in the group (Interview, 8.30.18). According to Shawn, all the Chinese students in his group were left unattended throughout their first meeting, because his IA, a white American student, was excitingly translanguaging back and forth between Spanish and English to chat with the several Latino international students in the group (Interview, 8.30.18). Shawn still sounded furious when he reflected on this incident, "It's Okay if you like Spanish and want to have more practice. But it's not Okay if you humiliate us by simply ignoring us!" (Interview, 8.30.18).

Summary

This chapter outlines the 12 participants' language and academic experiences at the beginning of the semester. The findings were presented based on three overarching themes: (1) linguistic functioning upon arrival, (2) coping strategies initiated, and (3) perceived support received from others. Across all the three themes, some differences and tensions can be observed among the students with various language and education backgrounds, especially between the "American high" and "regular high" students. Regardless of their common status as Chinese international students, the two groups appeared to be rather divided academically, socially, and linguistically.

Generally speaking, the "American high" students reported to have an overall smooth start with regards to their linguistic functioning at the initial stage in college, and were able to

seek support from their professors when necessary. Moreover, they had little struggle approaching or establishing friendships with their American peers. In contrast, the "regular high" students were found to have a comparatively much more difficult time going through the academic, cultural, and language transition at the beginning of their freshmen life in an American higher education institution.

While the nine "regular high" students' journeys differed based on their previous education and language background back in China, some general patterns could be observed. Linguistically speaking, despite their high hopes for an easy linguistic transition based on their successful experiences in the TOEFL, the "regular high" students were going through some unexpected struggles in meeting the various linguistic demands in an English-speaking college environment. It turned out that the TOEFL, which they had believed to be an accurate indicator of their English proficiency, was not able to reflect a complete picture of the linguistic demands required to excel in American higher education, resulting in their unexpected linguistic difficulties at the initial stage of their overseas studies.

Academically speaking, due to the perceived cultural and linguistic incongruences, the "regular high" students were faced with substantial challenges caused by the mismatches between their imagined college life based on their previous experiences in China and the reality. The lack of experiences in learning content subjects through a second language as well as the different course expectations and linguistic demands across the Western and Eastern cultures have jointly posed challenges on their initial academic adjustment. On the contrary, when cultural and language congruencies were present, the students were likely to have positive experiences in college-level courses. Finally, socially speaking, the "regular high" students still

appeared to be more comfortable staying with and seeking support exclusively from other Chinese-speaking peers due to linguistic and cultural factors.

In Chapter 6, I will report the journeys of the twelve Chinese international students throughout the rest of their first semester in college. The findings will be organized into two time points, around midterm (Weeks 5-9) and the latter part of the semester (Weeks 10-15). The results will be presented following the same themes as appeared in Chapter 5, namely (1) linguistic functioning in academic and social settings, (2) coping strategies initiated, and (3) perceived effectiveness of support received from others, to show the focal students' gradual transition linguistically, academically, and socially throughout their first semester in an American college.

CHAPTER 6

JOURNEYS THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE FIRST SEMESTER

Introduction

In Chapter 5, I reported the 12 participants' initial college experiences, especially their linguistic transitions in academic and social settings. In this chapter, I will introduce the focal students' language and academic journeys throughout the rest of their first semester in college. Guided by the chronosystem of the theoretical framework, the findings have been organized based on two time points, namely the middle section of the semester (Weeks 5-9), and toward the end of the semester (Weeks 10-15) in order to present the Chinese international students' college adjustment over time. Within each timeframe, I report the changes that have happened in relation to their linguistic, academic and cultural adjustment within the micro, meso, exso systems with the macrosystem as a backdrop following the three themes presented in the previous chapter, including (1) linguistic functioning in academic and social settings, (2) coping strategies initiated, and (3) perceived effectiveness of support received from others. Toward the end, a brief summary will be presented synthesizing findings about the first semester journeys of the Chinese international students with different backgrounds.

Linguistic Functioning in Academic and Social Settings

As presented in Chapter 5, the linguistic functioning of the Chinese international students in academic and social settings at the beginning of the semester could be observed in two major domains, namely (1) their academic experiences, especially course experiences, and (2) their contact with native speakers of English, such as their professors and American peers. Based on

findings documenting their experiences at the initial stage of their college studies (Weeks 0-4), a clear divide could be identified between the "American high" and "regular high" students.

While the three "American high" students Rebecca, Hugo, and Shawn all reported to have little difficulty functioning in college-level courses, their "regular high" peers were struggling due to the mismatches between their predicted English proficiency as measured by the TOEFL and the reality. Additionally, the existence or lack of cultural and linguistic congruencies played an important role in their linguistic and academic functioning in college-level courses. When cultural and linguistic congruencies were present (e.g., in *History* and *ELL Writing* courses), the Chinese international students were likely to report positive experiences. In contrast, when the courses were perceived culturally or linguistically incongruent, the participants had a tendency to report negative experiences (e.g., in *Mathematics* and *Philosophy* courses).

Moreover, the three "American high" students were able to initiate office hour visits and establish friendships with their native English-speaking peers, during which there were no reported language difficulties. On the contrary, very few of the "regular high" students took advantage of the office hour visits, and nor did they socialize with their American peers beyond the classroom settings. None of the "regular high" students had a very clear understanding of the purpose and expectations of the office hour visits, despite their general awareness that it was important to meet professors during their office hours. With regards to their contact with native English-speaking peers, cultural and linguistic barriers were the major hurdles preventing the "regular high" students from establishing friendships with their American peers. Given the contrasting language and cultural differences, the "regular high" students decided to mainly socialize in a closed circle, establishing friendships almost exclusively with their own kind.

As the semester progressed, some changes could be observed with regards to the participants' linguistic functioning in academic and social settings. In Figure 6.1 below, I have summarized their changes in linguistic functioning over time. As mentioned earlier, I divided the semester into three phases including the initial stage (Weeks 0-4), around midterm examinations (Weeks 5-9), and toward the end of the semester (Weeks 10-15). Following each time frame, I have summarized the major themes regarding the participants' linguistic functioning in academic and social settings. Any changes observed as compared with the earlier time point was underlined and marked in bold. In Figure 6.1, the "American high" participants were noted as "AH" students, while the "regular high" participants were noted as "RH" students. In the sub-sections below, I will present in detail how my participants' linguistic functioning evolved throughout their first semester in an American university.

Week 0-4
- AH students reported no linguistic difficulty; they had frequent contact with native English speakers (Professors, U.S. peers)
- RH students experienced mismatches between their expectations and the reality; they had little contact with native speakers
- Cultural & linguistic congruencies affected participants' academic experiences, especially for RH students.

Week 5-9
- AH students reported no difficulty; they had frequent contact with native English speakers (Professors, U.S. peers, **tutors**)
- Cultural & linguistic congruencies affected participants' academic experiences, especially for RH students.
- **Higher linguistic demands on academic English writing across disciplines for all participants.**
- RH students demonstrated **more frequent contact with native speakers,** while language difficulty persisted

Week 10-15
- AH students reported no difficulty; they had frequent contact with native English speakers (Professors, U.S. peers, tutors, **TAs**)
- Cultural & linguistic congruencies affected participants' academic experiences, especially for RH students.
- **Language-related concerns on content-subject final examinations, especially for RH students.**
- RH demonstrated **increased contact with native speakers,** while **reported reduced language difficulty**

Figure 6.1. Changes in the Participants' Linguistic Functioning over Time

Middle Section of the Semester: Weeks 5-9

Similar to the beginning of the semester, the "American high" students continued to report significantly fewer language barriers in academic and social settings compared with their "regular high" peers. Moreover, cultural and linguistic congruencies remained as crucial factors influencing the Chinese international students' experiences in college-level courses.

However, some changes could also be identified around the middle section of the semester (see Figure 6.1). Firstly, the "regular high" students demonstrated more frequent contact with native English speakers during this time point; in addition to professors and American peers, tutors were also reported to be one of the main sources of contact among the Chinese international students. Secondly, comparing with the earlier time point, this particular stage of the semester featured increasing linguistic demands on academic English writing across disciplinary subjects.

In the following sections, I will present the language and academic experiences of the participants from Weeks 5 to 9 based on (1) things that have remained the same, as well as (2) changes observed which was particular to this time point.

Things that have remained the same.

Differences in linguistic functioning among the two groups of students. Generally speaking, compared with the situation at the initial stage of the semester, the divide between "regular high" and "American high" students remained to be a major theme. While the "American high" students were able to perform successful and smooth linguistic functioning in both academic and social settings, many of the "regular high" students continued to encounter various language barriers across English listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

To be specific, over half of the "regular high" students mentioned that they had encountered challenges in English oral communication (i.e., listening and speaking) throughout

social and academic settings during this time point. The lack of oral fluency was particularly

concerning among the newly-arrived Chinese international students. For instance, Larry, Pat,

Sarah and William claimed that they sometimes had to have long pauses in the middle of their

speech in order to figure out the correct vocabulary or grammatical structure to express their

ideas (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). This, according to William, was likely because they were

unable to "think in English" (Interview, 11.20.18). Since all their ideas were first formed in

Chinese, they had to go through translation processes before their oral production in English.

Similarly, the "regular high" students continued to report difficulties in English writing

and reading. As for writing, the biggest concern among my participants was the drastically

different cultural expectations and linguistic features in academic writing between the U.S. and

China. The two most challenging aspects were found to be constructing thesis statements in

argument writing, and adopting consistent verb tenses in recounts. More details in relation to the

participants' writing performances will be presented later as part of the findings based on genre-

based text analysis informed by SFL (Brisk, 2015).

With regards to reading, many participants found the dense vocabulary and complex

sentence structures in their content-subject reading assignments particularly challenging. For

instance, in her WeChat post, Eva marked a very long sentence from her philosophy reading and

complained that the "reading assignment this week [wa]s dEEp" (see Figure 6.2, WeChat

Observation, 10.1.18). She intentionally spelled "deep" as "dEEp" to show her desperation and

frustration (Informal Communication, 10.2.18). The sentence that Eva marked was:

> The difference between the sage and the ordinary person is that the former can feel
> unconditional love for those who suffer and do everything in his power to attenuate their
> pain without allowing his lucid vision of existence to be shaken. (WeChat Observation,
> 10.1.18).
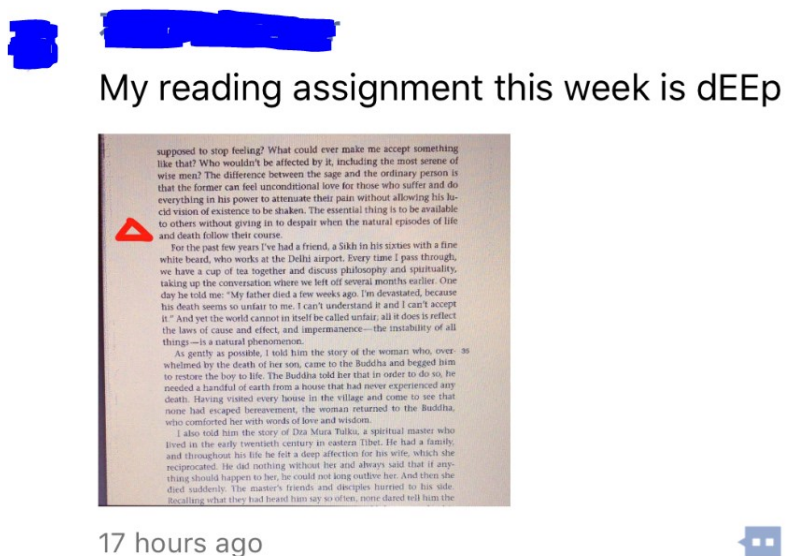
Figure 6.2. An Example of Difficult Language in Philosophy Readings, 10/1/18

This sentence was indeed very dense and difficult to digest, especially for those newly-arrived Chinese international students. The first challenge came from its length, consisting of 41 words. This itself could potentially intimidate the readers before they even got into the details of the sentence. Additionally, it was easy to identify that in this paragraph-long sentence, the only punctuation mark was the period used at the end of the sentence, making it challenging for readers to digest the meaning in chunks. Thirdly, the usage of passive voice (e.g., to be shaken) added an additional layer to the comprehension of the sentence. Additionally, the vocabulary in this sentence were found to be very tense, featuring nominalization of verbs (e.g., existence), words with multiple meanings (e.g., sage, vision), and formal, academic expressions (e.g., attenuate, lucid).

Last but not least, this one sentence was made up of multiple layers of modifiers and subordinate clauses. For instance, in "the former can feel unconditional love for those who suffer and do everything in his power," a small chunk extracted from this long sentence, the word "love" was modified by the premodifier "unconditional" and followed by the postmodifier "for

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those who suffer and do everything in his power". Furthermore, within the aforementioned postmodifier was a subordinate clause "who suffer and do everything in his power" functioning as a sub-postmodifier to modify "those." Such a complex sentence structure posed challenges on international students' comprehension; without the ability to distinguish the layers of modifiers from the stem of the sentence, it seemed almost impossible to grasp the main idea of the reading.

The correlation between cultural/linguistic congruencies and course experiences. At the middle stage of the semester, the existence or lack of cultural and linguistic congruencies continued to be correlated with the students' positive or negative course experiences. In courses which were perceived as in lack of cultural and linguistic congruencies, such as *Philosophy* and *Mathematics*, the Chinese international students continued to report negative experiences.

Philosophy, which was considered as overly Western-centered and in lack of cultural connection to the Chinese international students, continued to be reported as one of the most challenging courses by my participants. The two "American high" students, Hugo and Shawn, claimed that the majority of the stress they experienced at this stage in *Philosophy* was more because of its heavy workload than any language problems per se (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.21.18). In contrast, the "regular high" students enrolled in the course all reported various degrees of language difficulties on top of the unmanageable reading load.

The most common complaint regarding the linguistic challenges in *Philosophy* was the dense vocabulary and complex sentence structure, both were said to be major hurdles impeding the international students' reading comprehension. The aforementioned example from Eva's WeChat post (see Figure 6.2) clearly illustrated the high linguistic demands in reading. Furthermore, the Western-centered content has added another layer to the students' reading comprehension. As concluded by Bill, "*一句话总结哲学课，就是无论怎么读都感觉自己没*

法理解那么深刻!" (If you ask me to use one sentence to summarize the philosophy class, then it must be: however hard you read, you'll never fully understand the article!) (Interview, 11.19.18).

Similarly, *Mathematics*, a disciplinary area that all my participants had taken courses in, continued to be described as challenging, especially with regards to its heavy demands in oral discussion, an aspect that was hardly emphasized in math education in China. Matthew's struggles in math discussions as portrayed in Chapter 4 were typical among the "regular high" students, as oral discussion was said to be a mandatory requirement across the various courses in *Mathematics* taken by my participants. While the Chinese students were very confident in solving the math problems and getting the right answers, they found it challenging to orally explain their thought processes due to the unfamiliarity of discipline-specific jargons (e.g., exponential function, quadrant, reciprocal).

Yet a slight change that could be observed was that, contrasting to the participants' efforts to improve their oral discussion at the beginning of the semester, they appeared to be less motivated to participate orally in math classes due to two reasons. Firstly, as the semester progressed and with the increasing academic stress from midterms of many other courses, they did not have much time to improve their math discussion skills. Secondly, across various math courses, participation was said to be only between 0 and 3 percent of the total grade; the Chinese students were thus not motivated to spend effort in improving their performances in math discussions. As Pat pointed out, he would rather focus his time on midterm preparation for other courses, because with or without the 3 points in participation, he was definitely able to get an A in *Mathematics* (Interview, 11.19.18). Due to this reason, during the middle section of the semester, the vast majority of the "regular high" students reported to have either stayed quiet or skipped the math discussions completely. At the end of Week 9, the only student who still put

effort in improving her oral participation in *Mathematics* was Eva, who claimed that she would occasionally seek support from her native English-speaking discussion partners assigned by the professor to learn how to express certain math concepts in English (Interview, 11.20.18).

On the contrary, in courses which were perceived as culturally and linguistically congruent, the participants continued to report positive experiences. For example, although the heavy reading loads in the two culturally congruent Asian history courses, *Asia in the World* and *Women in Modern Asian Society* were comparable to that in *Philosophy*, the Chinese international students continued to report their positive experiences. While the heavy workload has indicated high linguistic demands in reading, it appeared that the challenges posed by academic English reading were somewhat lessened given students' sufficient contextual background knowledge. For example, as illustrated in Pat's Chinese poem posted on WeChat (see Figure 6.3), because of his passion in *History*, even tackling 50 pages of readings in one night was not considered a burden (WeChat Observation, 10.10.18).

确认过眼神
爱学这一门
一晚五十页
问题并不大

20 hours ago

[Translation]
Pat's post:
I have firmly believed that
Since I love this subject,
Reading 50 pages of readings in one night
Is going to be a piece of cake

[liked by other Chinese peers]
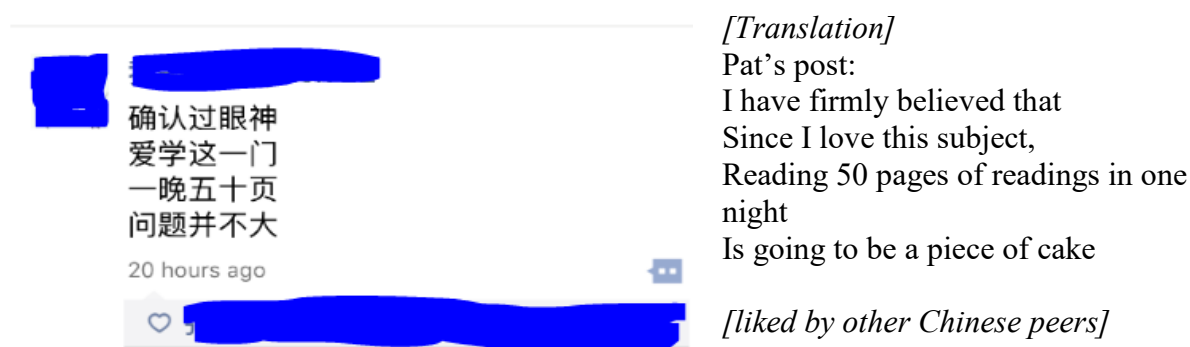
Figure 6.3. An Example of Pat's Comment on History Readings, 10/10/18

Similarly, the Chinese international students continued to report positive experiences in *ELL Writing*, a culturally and linguistically congruent course given the students' freedom to select their own topics, and its focus on supporting second language learners' academic English growth. Although enrolled in different sessions taught by various instructors, the ten students

taking *ELL Writing* uniformly reported that they enjoyed the targeted language support for international students. In particular, they continued to show favorable attitudes toward the mandatory one-on-one meetings with their professors, during which they were able to receive customized suggestions on their drafts to facilitate future revisions. For instance, Sarah told me that she had the tendency to write long, run-on sentences in English essays, making it hard for her readers to follow. According to Sarah, the most common comment that she had received for her writings in content-subject courses was "What do you mean here?" (Interview, 11.20.18). Thanks to the mandatory one-on-one meetings, Sarah was able to get concrete advice from her professor to change this habit:

> 老师告诉我，如果我有很多观点都想表达，就先把长句子写下来。然后，再根据里面的具体内容，把他修改成小句子。他们美国人喜欢一个小点一个小点地表达。这样每次我写起来都会注意，把大观点分成小点阐述。
>
> My professor told me that if I had many points to express, I could first write down a long, run-on sentence to get my ideas out. Then, I should revise the sentence by breaking it into smaller sentences based on the detailed points of view I wanted to express. Americans always like to organize their thoughts based on smaller points. In this way, whenever I write, I will always pay attention to break my big ideas into smaller points. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Changes observed around midterm examinations.

The increased contact with professors/tutors. The participants, especially the "regular high" students, had more contact with their professors. By Week 5 all students claimed that they had attended at least one office hour meeting. The nature of the visits included both the mandatory one-on-one sessions required in certain courses, and the voluntary meetings initiated by the students (Research Memo, 9.28.18). By Week 9, all my participants except for Matthew, who insisted that office hour visits were exclusively for those who were in severe trouble, had initiated at least one voluntary meeting with the professors (Research Memo, 10.28.18). The most frequent visitor to office hours was William, who reported to meet with all his professors at

least once per week (Interview, 11.20.18; details see Chapter 4). Following him, were the three

"American high" students, Rebecca, Shawn, and Hugo, who also reported to have frequently

visited their professors during office hours (Research Memo, 10.28.18).

In addition to office hour consultations, the ten students enrolled in *ELL Writing* were

introduced by their professors to a popular new source of contact—tutors. Not only were they

recommended to seek support from the Hillside Writing Center, but also they were told that they

could request for one-on-one tutoring sessions with native English-speaking graduate English

majors. Except for Matthew who claimed that he had no interest in and did not see any need to

have a tutor (Interview, 11.21.18), the other nine students, including the three "American high"

graduates, all signed up for the tutoring services from the English Department. William, Pat and

Larry mentioned that being introduced to multiple additional language resources ensured that

whenever they had extra need for linguistic support, they could have someone to turn to:

> 要是约不上 *Writing Center*，我就发邮件找我的 *tutor*。或者有时候我的 *tutor* 没空
> 我就去找 *Writing Center*, 反正总能找到人帮我。
> If there was no appointment available at the Writing Center, I would email my tutor. If
> sometimes my tutor was busy, then I went to the Writing Center for help.
> Anyways I can always find a helping hand. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Contrasting to the successful linguistic functioning of the three "American high"

students, the majority of the "regular high" students reported to have encountered language

difficulties and conversation breakdowns during the meetings with their professors and tutors.

The biggest source of challenge came from unfamiliar jargons and content-specific vocabulary

(Interviews, 11.20.18). The "regular high" students tended to address vocabulary-induced

conversation breakdowns differently. For example, William was likely to immediately inform

the professor of his incapability in comprehending certain expressions in the conversation and

asked for clarification (Interview, 11.20.18). Conversely, Sarah said that she tended to nod and

smile in order to pretend that she was able to follow her professors and tutors (Interview, 11.20.18). She explained that it was embarrassing not being able to comprehend certain expressions, and was concerned that asking for clarification would leave the professors and tutors with a bad impression of her (Interview, 11.20.18).

Something noteworthy was that, regardless of their language and education backgrounds, my participants uniformly reported concerns with regards to conversations with the two history professors who were bilingual in Mandarin Chinese and English (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). The Chinese international students were uncertain which language to use during their personal communication with the professors beyond the classroom setting. In *Asia in the World*, the professor's frequent code switching between Chinese and English, was interpreted by the four students in her class (Pat, Larry, Hugo, and Shawn) as a welcoming sign for Chinese usage during their private conversations (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18, 11.21.18). Yet, reflecting on the "English-only" language policy emphasized in their *ELL Writing* course, the students were uncertain whether the usage of Chinese would offend the history professor.

While the "English-only" policy was in fact specifically referring to their language usage during the *ELL Writing* course, the participants seemed to have misinterpreted it as the language policy in American higher education. As Pat explained, since his *ELL Writing* professor repeatedly mentioned that the usage of home language in class was "unprofessional" and "inappropriate," English was perceived as the only language that was "legitimate" in American universities (Interview, 11.19.18). Eventually, despite their shared heritage language and struggles to fully express themselves in English, all the participants enrolled in *Asia in the World* decided to "play safe" and used English exclusively throughout their office hour visits and

informal communications with the Chinese professor after class (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18, 11.21.18).

Kristin had a slightly different experience in her contact with the professor of *Women in Modern Asian Society* (Interview, 11.20.18). Unlike the instructor of *Asia in the World*, Kristin's history professor never used any Chinese in class, making her believe that English should be the only acceptable language of communication during their private conversations (Interview, 11.20.18). However, Kristin recalled that when she ran into the professor in the restroom and greeted her in English, the professor answered in Chinese and later initiated a small talk with her using their shared heritage language (Interview, 11.20.18). After this instance, Kristin changed her mind and thought perhaps the professor preferred Chinese in her communication with Chinese students; therefore, during the office hour meeting, she took the initiative and greeted the professor in Chinese (Interview, 11.20.18). The professor greeted her back in Chinese, but then shifted back to English and said "you can start now" (Interview, 11.20.18). Kristin complained that she was extremely confused by the "different signals" from the professor, and concluded that the best strategy should be to stay quiet and let the professor talk first:

> *我和你说英文，你就和我说中文。我和你说中文，你又和我说英文。。。完全搞不懂她到底要什么。其实老师自己的英文也没有那么流利，于是在她 office 里，我们两个中国人就硬是用憋足的英文和对方讲话。Anyways, lesson learned. 下回我就等她先说话。她说中文我就说中文，她说英文我就回答英文，省得不礼貌。*
> When I talked to you in English, you responded in Chinese. Yet when I talked to you in Chinese, you replied in English… I am completely lost and have no idea what she wants. In fact, that professor's English was not all that fluent. It was kind of awkward, when the two of us stayed in her office and used bad English to communicate with each other. Anyways, lesson learned. Next time, I will wait for her to start the conversation. If she speaks Chinese, I will use Chinese. If she chooses English, I will stay with English. In this way, she will not be offended by my language use. (Interview, 11.20.18).

The "regular high" students' increased contact with American peers. While the "American high" students remained to have frequent contact with their American peers across

contexts during the current time point, more "regular high" students reported to have socialized with their English-speaking peers. While around half of them remained similarly passive in their contact with American peers as compared to the beginning of the semester, Sarah, Pat, William, and Eva revealed their desires to enhance their communication with their American peers (Research Memo, 10.28.18). Sarah mentioned that she had always been interested in knowing more about her American peers; however, she did not take concrete actions to facilitate any beyond-class contact, complaining that there was no such opportunity since the Americans have already formed their own friend circles right from the beginning of the semester (Interview, 11.20.18). In contrast, William and Pat, who had originally showed little interest in connecting with their American peers earlier in the semester, expressed strong desires to socialize with native speakers so as to improve their oral English proficiency as the semester progressed.

William followed his professor's advice to increase his contact with American peers in order to reduce his temptation to use Chinese and to immerse himself in an English-speaking environment (Interview, 11.20.18; see also Chapter 4). Pat, who emphasized that he remained uninterested in becoming close friends with his American peers due to the many cultural differences, expressed interest in having more language practices in order to improve his fluency in English speaking (Interview, 11.20.18). According to Pat, he felt regretful about his decision to live off campus with another Chinese international student and to only participate in student organizations exclusively targeting Chinese international students (i.e., Chinese Student Association), which had substantially limited his opportunity to meet American students in social settings (Interview, 11.19.18). Since it was already too late to join any American-student dominant student organizations around midterm, Pat created his own opportunity to practice English by playing basketball at least twice per week, during which he chatted with some native-

speaking peers (Interview, 11.19.18). For the days when he did not have time to play basketball, Pat would try to enhance his English input by watching some American television shows online. According to Pat, his favorite was celebrity chef Gordon Ramsey's cooking shows, through which he picked up lots of idioms and food-related vocabulary (Interview, 11.19.18).

The "regular high" student who demonstrated the biggest change in connecting with native English-speaking peers was Eva. Slightly over one month into the semester, she made her decision to socialize primarily (if not exclusively) with racially minoritized American students (Interview, 11.20.18). Nevertheless, different from Sarah who was interested in knowing more about her American peers, and Pat and William who were motivated to improve their oral English, Eva's motivation to socialize with those American students of color was due to her disadvantaged financial status and previous unpleasant experiences in her contact with European Americans (Interview, 11.20.18).

According to Eva, who came from a middle-class family in a small city in China, her family was faced with substantial financial burdens in order to support her overseas studies at Hillside University. This was very different from the situations of most other Chinese students, who came from affluent families and held high socioeconomic status back in China. Eva told me, however hard she tried, she found it difficult to establish any close relationships with other Chinese international students. She constantly felt inferior as she was "too poor to be friends with them" (Interview, 11.20.18). Moreover, Eva also reported that she felt alienated by her two Caucasian American roommates, who frequently excluded her from conversations (Interview, 11.20.18). She believed that her chance of making friends with European Americans was slim, because "*那些白人就是觉得你和他们不一样，所以也不跟本不屑花功夫和你们玩*" (those Whites always see you as different, so they are too proud to socialize with you) (Interview,

11.20.18). Instead, Eva realized that she had much in common with those racially minoritized American students and felt more comfortable socializing with them; she believed that this was because they were all "marginalized populations" (Interview, 11.20.18). Eva explained,

> *我有各种各样的朋友，但是好像都是边缘群体。像什么黑人，美国穆斯林，然后还有亚裔。我感觉我们本身就是被边缘化的人，所以大家自动都会和相近的人玩。*
> I have many friends, but it seems that they are all marginalized populations, such as African Americans, Muslim Americans, and Asian Americans. I feel that we are all marginalized, minoritized people, so we are naturally interested in hanging out with people who are similar to us. (Interview, 11.20.18)

Eva told me that she had benefited from her friendship with those racially minoritized American students in two ways. Firstly, she reported to have witnessed lots of progress in her oral English proficiency thanks to this experience. By Week 9, she was able to express herself more easily and quickly in English (Informal Conversation, 10.24.18). Her frequent contact with native speakers also reduced her language anxiety, which in turn benefited her oral participation in class (Informal Conversation, 10.24.18). Secondly, Eva claimed that through her friendship, she was able to learn many cultural and historical facts about the U.S., which was very fascinating to her. She used to perceive the U.S. society as "a friendly melting pot" based on what she had learned in textbooks in China; however, after chatting with her friends, she started to be more aware of the racial disparity and implicit biases in American society (Interview, 11.20.18).

The increasing linguistic demands on writing across disciplines. While the students did not have much writing assignments during the first month of the semester, the middle section of the semester featured increasing linguistic demands in academic English writing across disciplinary subjects. By Week 5, all the participants had been assigned at least one writing assignment from their content-subject professors (Research Memo, 10.5.18).

To understand the focal students' academic writing performances, I collected their writing samples shortly before the midterm. The students were instructed to send me at least two writings, one from their writing class while the other from any content area courses (e.g., *History*, *Philosophy*, *Psychology*). For Kristin, who was not enrolled in any writing classes, I requested two essays from different content area classes. By Week 7, I received 29 pieces of essays, covering the following four genres: argument (N=12), recount (N=15), explanation (N=1), and report (N=1). After analyzing them based on the genre-based rubric informed by SFL (Brisk, 2015), I scored each of the writings and summarized the results by genre in the four tables below (see Tables 6.1-6.4).

Three general patterns were observed based on text analysis across genres. Firstly, the Chinese international students had a tendency to perform better in essays assigned in their writing course, compared with those required by content-subject courses. This was likely because the students were allowed to leverage their personal experiences and determine the content for their essays in the writing course. On the contrary with content-subject essay assignments, they had little agency in topic selection. Echoing many other students' perceived reason for their better performances in the writing course, Larry explained:

> *我很喜欢写作课的写作，因为你只要跟着老师的文体走，想写什么都可以。像我回忆我爷爷的故事，就有很多真情实感，所以写起来很顺。而其他课的 research paper 都规定我们要些什么内容了，你必须就一些课堂概念讨论。我之前也不是很了解这些专业课概念，也没有很多背景知识，所以很难写好。*
>
> I have really enjoyed writing for the *ELL Writing* course. As long as you follow the genre expected by the professor, you can write about anything you like. For example, in one paper, I wrote about my grandpa's story, during which my real emotions were integrated. Therefore, it was very easy to write that essay. However, in content-subject essays, we are required to discuss about specific topics. You have to construct your essays based on some content-specific concepts. Due to my lack of understanding in those content-specific concepts, I have limited prior knowledge to draw upon. Therefore, I find it very hard to write essays for content courses. (Interview, 11.21.18).

Secondly, regardless of their English writing abilities, the students' mastery of the content knowledge played an important role in their academic writing performances in disciplinary-area course. Thirdly, the two areas where the Chinese international students experienced the most challenges were constructing thesis statements and adopting consistent verb tenses, both of which were influenced by the drastically different cultural expectations between the U.S. and China.

Table 6.1 presents the grading for the twelve argumentative essays collected. If a student submitted more than one essay of the same genre, I noted them in the table as "participant name 1" and "participant name 2" respectively. The sequence of the results followed a descending order based on the total score received. A score of 4 meant that the student had met the expectation, while a score of 3 illustrated that the student had a general understanding of the expectation, yet made very occasional mistakes. Scores of 1 and 2, as marked in red and orange respectively in the table, both indicated that the students needed different degrees of extra instructional support. For details regarding the rubric please see Chapter 3.

As illustrated in Table 6.1, the two students who had performed the worst on argument writing were found to be Sarah and Lily, the four writings of whom had consistently received the lowest total scores. The highest score in this genre was assigned to the second essay of Kristin's (noted as Kristin 2), with a perfect score of 68. In this argument sample in partial fulfillment of her *Literature* class assignment, Kristin has demonstrated her ability to successfully meet the genre-specific expectations at both the structural (i.e., purpose and stages) and linguistic (i.e., language) levels. Findings from the follow-up talks around texts with Kristin further confirmed my grading, as she reported to have received an A in that essay and her professor praised her writing for being "clear" "persuasive" and "well written" (Talks around Text, 10.26.18).

Similarly, her other piece (Kristin 1) along with the essays from Matthew (Matthew 2) and Shawn, were found to be the among the highest rated writings; across all requirements on language and structure, the essays showed evidence of meeting the genre-specific expectations and were consistently assigned scores of 3 and above.

By looking at students' performance across cases, there was no identifiable pattern demonstrating the influence of the students' language and educational backgrounds on their performances in argument writing. Yet, the participants naturally fell into three categories, namely those who did generally well in meeting all the genre-specific requirements (Kristin 1, 2; Matthew 2; Shawn), those who failed to meet the genre-specific requirements in no more than 2 aspects (Matthew 1, Pat, Eva, Bill, Sarah 2, Lily 1), and those who failed to meet the requirements and require substantial support in multiple aspects (Lily 2, Sarah 1). While the authors in the first two groups reported during the talks around texts interviews that they had a good mastery of the specific content-subject knowledge they were trying to argue for, Lily and Sarah both mentioned that their multiple violations of the genre expectations were largely due to their misconceptions of the course content.

For instance, Sarah told me that she had mistaken the concept of child maltreatment for a phenomenon that was particular to low-income families (Talks around Texts, 11.2.18). Thus, in her argument about the importance to conduct research on child maltreatment in Applied Psychology, Sarah interchangeably referred to child maltreatment as "child maltreatment among low-income families," which not only caused confusion throughout the argument, but also led to severe violations of multiple genre-specific requirements. Sarah started the article by providing lots of research-based evidence on how harmful child maltreatment was in general:

> The consequences of child maltreatment had been repeatedly shown to extend into and beyond childhood to affect educational and employment outcomes, mental and physical health, relationship quality, and antisocial and criminal behaviors (Phaedra, C.S., &

Valerie, E.J., & Xiangming, F., PhD, and James, M.A., 2008). It demonstrated those children were at an increased risk to have failures in the future. To be more specific, they trapped into a vicious circle which made them be unable to get educational attainment and socioeconomic status to improve their lives… (Sarah 1, 10.24.18).

However, soon afterwards, she suddenly shifted her topic by addressing how urgent it was for parents from low socioeconomic families to realize the detrimental consequences of child maltreatment. As she continued, "For those poor families, parents should pay attention to such bad consequences. If they did not want to destroy their children's future developments, they needed to consider carefully before they abused their children…" (Sarah 1, 10.24.18). This transition appeared very abrupt and confusing, as while the earlier evidence tapped into the general population, the later warning was suddenly targeted specifically to "those poor families." Later in the text, Sarah kept on jumping back and forth between child maltreatment among the general population and the poor families, which consequently led to severe violations in multiple areas such as cohesiveness, thesis, and generalized participants, thus resulting in a low score.

Also from a cross-case perspective, the top three discrete areas that have earned the most "1s" (indicating the need for substantial support) were found to be with regards to the lack of thesis statement, failure in reinforcement of statement of position, as well as no clear demonstration of the purpose of the genre. For instance, in her argument about Socrates's wisdom, Lily opened her essay by providing some background information about the topic without clearly presenting her thesis statement. She wrote:

Plato's apology comprehensively record the trial process of Socrates, the main content is about how Socrates defend himself and what he said after he knew he was sentenced to death. Reading this text, not only the audience can have a basic understanding about what a philosophic speech is like, but also what kind of wisdom Socrates process and how deeply it influence him. (Lily 2, 10.1.18)

During the talks around texts interview, Lily shared with me the feedback from her *Philosophy* professor, who highlighted the introduction paragraph and commented:

This thesis could use some development. You say that the text shows us what kind of wisdom Socrates has, but your thesis should tell us what you'll be arguing that wisdom is. Your thesis should answer the question, not pose it, and then you use the body of the paper to defend your understanding of the text. (Talks around Texts, 10.20.18).

Lily's vague opening was not surprising, given that English writings were more likely to be straightforward, while Chinese writings valued the so-called depth and vagueness, and tended to present ample background information without directly stating the thesis. During the talks around texts, multiple participants reported difficulties in argument writing in English, because of the different expectations across cultures. Referencing vagueness and indirectness in the works of Lu Xun, one of the most famous Chinese writers, Sarah concluded that since argument writing was taught very differently in Chinese and American education, it was extremely challenging for newly-arrived Chinese international students to function successfully in argument writing in an American university (Interview, 11.20.18; also see Chapter 4).

Table 6.1.

Comparative Grading of Students' Argument Writing Samples

	Student Samples											
	Kristin 2	Matthew 2	Kristin 1	Shawn	Matthew 1	Eva	Pat	Bill	Sarah 2	Lily 1	Lily 2	Sarah 1
Argument- Purpose & Stages												
Purpose	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	1	4	3
Verb Tense	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	1	2
Title	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Thesis Statement or Claim	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	4	3	1	4	1
Reasons supported by evidence	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Reinforcement of statement of	4	4	4	3	1	4	1	1	1	4	4	1
Cohesive Text	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	1	2
Argument- Language												
Generalized participants	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	2
Language choices	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
Use of technical vocab	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Types of sentences--statements	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Use of person	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	2	3	4	4	4
Modality	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	1
Evaluative Vocab	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Grading	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Text Connectives	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	3
Cohesive paragraphs	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	4
Total Points	68	67	66	65	62	62	61	61	61	60	58	50

Table 6.2 presents the students' grading in recount writing. Among the 15 pieces collected, the three samples from the "American high" students were assigned near-perfect scores. While the "American high" students performed better than their "regular high" peers in recount writing, there were no identifiable patterns among the writing performances of the three types of "regular high" students (i.e., students who attended traditional "regular highs," foreign language high schools, and international departments within "regular highs").

Across the recount samples, the most evident problem was in verb tense consistency, an area where approximately half of the essays showed problems. This was again likely due to the influences from Chinese, as it was commonly known as a tense-free language. For instance, in his personal recount documenting his experiences going hiking with his grandmother back in China, Pat frequently jumped back and forth between past and present tenses. He wrote:

> Ultimately in distance those waves became ambiguous and concealed by fog and clouds. This magnificent view ends with a milestone. There is a small discarded temple with a nice rock looked like a piece of tofu. Grandmother told me it was called "tofu rock". It tells that the trip is nearly half way done. After reaching "tofu rock", the stairs become much less steep and extend into forest again. It feels like the top of the mountain is a table and the stairs even go down since the Temple is in a lovely valley. The interesting stuff on the path was much more than things mentioned above. In mountains I really sensed the nature of each season. (Pat 2, 9.30.18).

This nine-sentence paragraph started with past tense (became, concealed) in the first sentence, but abruptly shifted to present tense in the second sentence (ends) and a mixture of tenses in the third sentence (is, looked). Yet, the fourth sentence went back to past tense (told, was), while the following three sentences were again presented in present tense (tells, become, feels, is, go, is). Finally, the paragraph ended with past tense throughout the last two sentences (was, sensed).

During the talks around texts interview (10.27.18), Pat explained the rationale for his frequent tense inconsistencies by taking the third sentence of the paragraph as an example, in

which he wrote "There is a small discarded temple with a nice rock looked like a piece of tofu" (Pat 2, 9.30.18). According to Pat, he chose to start with present tense because "the discarded temple is always there no matter what" (Talks around Texts, 10.27.18). Since comparing the rock to a piece of tofu was his thought "right at that moment," he decided to go back to past tense in the latter half of the sentence (Talks around Texts, 10.27.18). Pat concluded that verb tense was extremely difficult for him, given the lack of a similar concept in Chinese (Talks around Texts, 10.27.18).

Table 6.2.

Comparative Grading of Students' Recount Writing Samples

	Matthew	Rebecca 1	Rebecca 2	Pat 1	Shawn	Eva	Sarah	Lily	Larry 1	Larry 2	Bill 1	Pat 2	William 1	Bill 2	William 2
Recount--Analysis of Student Work: Purpose & Stages															
Purpose	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Verb Tense	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	1	3	4	2	2	2	1	2
Title	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	N/A	3
Orientation	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Sequence of Events	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4
Conclusion	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1
Coherent Text	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	2	2
Paragraph Formation	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3
Recount--Analysis of Student Work: Language															
Verb Groups	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Noun Groups--adjectivals	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
Packs of Noun Groups	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Adverbials	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	2
Use of Clause Complexes	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	2
Use of Dialogue	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	4	1	4	1	4
Audience	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
Voice	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Text Connectives	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Reference Ties	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
Total Points	72	72	72	71	70	70	70	68	68	68	68	66	64	60	57

Only one explanation and one report writing samples were collected from Hugo and Eva respectively. As presented in Table 6.3, Hugo did exceptionally well across all discrete areas except for an absence of identifying statement and the improper voice adopted. Comparatively speaking, Eva had shown more areas that required instructional support, including general statement, cohesive text and cohesive paragraph (see Table 6.4).

It was worth noting that, Eva's use of adjectivals was exceptional based on the rubric and earned her a perfect score of 4. Nevertheless, her language choices seemed to be overly formal and included many complex expressions that were not typically used by newly-arrived Chinese international students. For instance, in her report, Eva wrote:

> The soft lighting shining down from the arched ceiling, gray wallpaper, and simple, unadorned framing all work together to create a calm, subdued backdrop against which the brightly-colored piece can shine… Upon close study, one can marvel at how the painting resembles an intricate mosaic: each square of color is a distinct shade of its own… The tiny, distinct, rectangular shaped brushstrokes give the painting an overall blinking, shimmering effect, and combined with the dancing, shifting form of the cloud, create a certain rhythm and vigor… (Eva's Report, 10.1.18).

During the follow-up talks around texts, Eva confessed that in order to fulfill this assignment, she had "borrowed some language" from a few published online resources; she reported to have received a B- from her professor, who commented that he was hoping to hear more of her "own voice" (Talks around Texts, 10.24.18).

Table 6.3.

Grading of Hugo's Explanation Writing Samples

Explanation--Analaysis of Student Work: Purpose & Stages	
Purpose	4
Verb Tense	4
Title	4
Identifying Statement	1
Explanation Sequence	4
Conclusion	4
Coherent Text	4
Explanation--Analaysis of Student Work: Language	
Verb Groups	4
Generalized Participants	3
Adjectivals	4
Adverbials	4
Use of Clause Complexes	4
Audience	4
Voice	2
Text Connectives	4
Reference Ties	4
Total Points	**58**

Table 6.4.

Grading of Eva's Report Writing Samples

Report--Analaysis of Student Work: Purpose & Stages	
Purpose	4
Verb Tense	4
Title	4
General Statement	2
Information	4
Conclusion	4
Cohesive Text	2
Audience	4
Voice	3
Report--Analaysis of Student Work: Language	
Participants	4
Noun Groups Lexical Ties	4
Adjectivals	4
Use of Clause Complexes	4
Cohesive Paragraph	2
Total Points	**49**

Towards the End of the Semester: Weeks 10-15

Similar to the earlier time point, toward the end of the semester, cultural and linguistic congruencies continued to influence the Chinese international students' academic experiences. Moreover, the "American high" students continued to show higher tendency to use English in social settings compared with their "regular high" peers. Yet some changes have occurred during this particular time point, as summarized in Figure 6.1 at the beginning of the chapter. Firstly, with the semester approaching its end, the "regular high" participants reported many language-related concerns with regard to their coming content-subject final examinations. Secondly, the "regular high" students began to show a tendency of linguistic acculturation in both academic and social contexts. Moreover, in addition to professors, tutors, and American peers, the Chinese international students also reported contact with their teaching assistants (TAs).

In the following sections, I will present the language and academic experiences of the participants from Weeks 10 to 15 based on (1) things that have remained the same, as well as (2) changes observed which were specific to this time point.

Things that have remained the same.

Cultural and linguistic congruencies predicted the students' academic well-being. Consistent with earlier in the semester, the students continued to report positive experiences in courses where cultural and linguistic congruencies were present. They remained to show overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward *ELL Writing*, the course which was perceived as the most linguistically and culturally congruent due to its unique focus on supporting nonnative speakers of English (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18, 11.21.18).

Similarly, the students who were enrolled in the two culturally relevant history classes continued to show positive attitudes toward the subject. Although the reading load remained heavy, the participants reported to have enjoyed the learning processes thanks to their existing

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cultural knowledge. For example, in Pat's public WeChat posts, he often expressed his favorable

attitudes toward *History*. Shortly after the midterm, Pat stated that in spite of the fact that he was

assigned a 50-page reading assignment in *History*, he was not concerned about it at all (see

Figure 6.4; WeChat Observation, 11.4.18). This was very likely because the culturally relevant

content of the readings has mediated the high linguistic demands posed by the history

assignments. A week later, in another post, Pat reiterated the benefit of cultural congruencies in

content-subject learning (see Figure 6.5). While acknowledging that the course consistently

required a heavy reading load, Pat expressed his passion in *History* by comparing it to his first

love in life (WeChat Observation, 11.11.18).

我究竟经历了些什么
一看 reading 五十页
内心却没有一丝波澜

9 hours ago
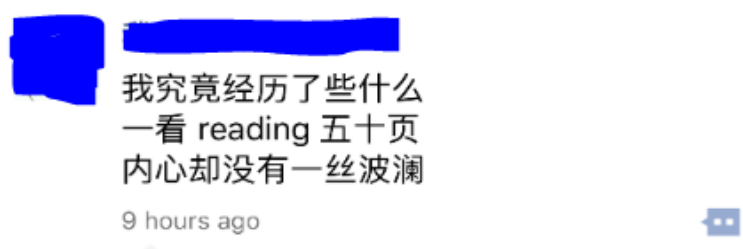
[Translation]
Pat's post content:
What has happened? I
was not worried at all
when I realized that I
got 50 pages of reading
to do.

Figure 6.4. Example I: Pat's Positive Experiences in History, 11/04/18

历史虐我千百遍
我爱历史如初恋

3 hours ago
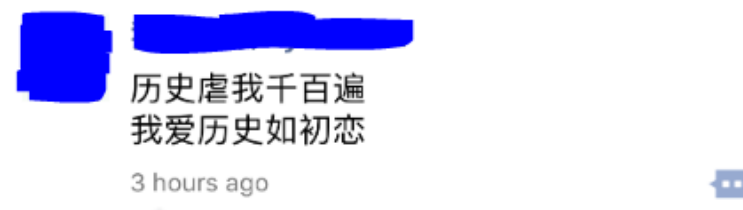
[Translation]
Pat's post content:
Even though *History*
has crazy amount of
workload again and
again, my deep love
towards *History* has
never changed; I love it
the way I felt for my
first love in life.

Figure 6.5. Example II: Pat's Positive Experiences in History, 11/11/18

The "American high" students continued to use more English in social contexts. Based

on information collected from bilingual language logs documenting the participants' language

use in a typical weekday and weekend day (Brisk et al., 2004; detailed examples see Chapter 4),

the "American high" students showed stronger tendency to use more English than Chinese, compared with their "regular high" peers. With regards to their weekday and weekend language use in social contexts (see Figures 6.6 & 6.7), the majority of the "American high" students reported exclusive English usage during social contexts, which echoed their preference of establishing friendships with American students as mentioned in the interviews (Research Memo, 12.10.18). Hugo stood out as an outlier, as he reported to spend at least 50% of the time using Chinese. Yet, this was not surprising, since Hugo had explicitly expressed his concern of losing Chinese and his preference to stay with newly-arrived Chinese peers, describing him as an atypical or "Type II American high student" (Interview, 11.19.18).

In contrast, the vast majority of the "regular high" students reported to use more Chinese than English in social contexts on typical weekdays and weekend days (see Figure 6.6 & 6.7). Regardless of the days in the week, the "regular high" students from the international departments (Sarah, Bill, Lily) and Matthew who graduated from a foreign language school, showed greater preference to use Chinese in social contexts compared with their traditional "regular high" peers such as Eva, William, Pat and Larry. This finding was interesting, considering that both international department and foreign language school graduates, compared with those traditional "regular high" students, had more exposures to communication with native English speakers and experiences with American high school curricula back in China.

Eva and William stood out as the two exceptions among the "regular high" students, who reported to have resorted to English almost exclusively in social contexts. However, this was not surprising, because Eva mentioned that she barely hung out with any Chinese international peers and preferred to socialize with American students of color. Similarly, William had explicitly mentioned his desire to purposefully limit contact with Chinese peers so as to improve his oral

English proficiency. It was worth noting that during a typical weekend day, while still resorting

to English more than Chinese overall, William's percentage of English use was significantly less

compared with that of a typical weekday. This echoed what he mentioned during the interview,

that despite his desire to practice English, William would still occasionally socialize with his

Chinese peers to maintain their friendships (Interview, 11.20.18; details see Chapter 4).
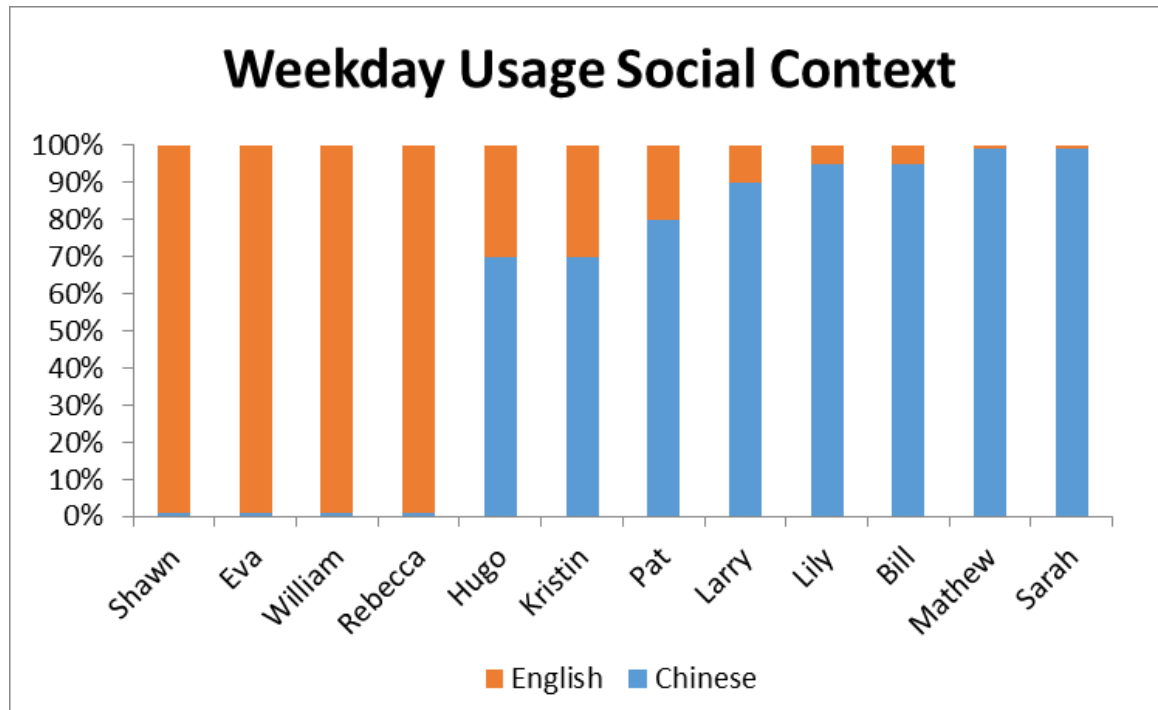
Figure 6.6. Participants' Language Use in Social Context (Typical Weekday)
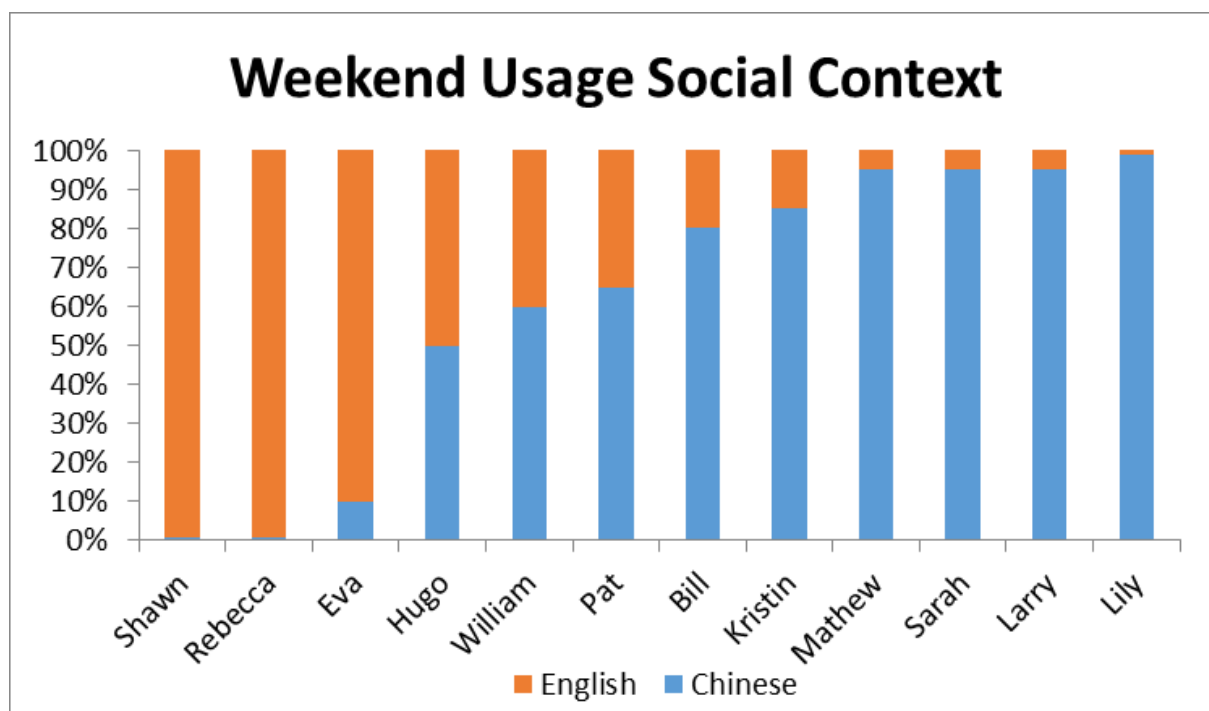
Figure 6.7. Participants' Language Use in Social Context (Typical Weekend)

Changes observed towards the end of the semester.

Concerns about the final examinations. Something that was specific to this time point was that, toward the end of the semester, almost all "regular high" students mentioned that they had linguistic concerns in the coming final examinations. Seven participants reported to be worried, because they were told that the format of the content-subject final exams would include short-answers questions, in which they were expected to write down the names of the many concepts and theories they had learned in class.

According to the Chinese international students, although they were able to understand the content of the concepts and theories, it was extremely difficult for them to accurately spell out every word, especially those long, discipline-specific jargons (e.g., Psychoanalytic Theory, Hereditarianism, Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis in *Psychology*; Neoclassical Synthesis,

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Keynesian Economics, Laissez Faire Capitalism in *Economics*; Posthumanism, Epistemological Theories, Neo-Aristotelianism, Anthropocentrism in *Philosophy*).

To make matters worse, based on their previous experiences either from the midterm examination or from the practice problems, their professors seemed to be very strict with spelling; the answers would be considered right only if every discrete word of the theories and concepts was spelled accurately. The Chinese international students expressed concerns about their final grades due to the challenge from spelling. They argued that the short answers format was heavily biased and linguistically unfriendly, which was likely to put nonnative English speakers at a disadvantage (Interview, 11.20.18). Reflecting on her experiences in the *Psychology* midterm exam, Sarah complained:

> 我期中只比平均分高了 2 分，主要不是不理解，是有些简答题那些专业词汇我拼不对，明明知道意思，要是让我用中文回答我都会，但是可能有的词拼的不对，所以就扣了很多分。。。
>
> My midterm grade was only 2 points higher than the class average. This was not because I did not understand the concepts. It was because in some of those short-answers questions, I was unable to spell out those discipline-specific jargons correctly, even though I was very clear with the meanings. If I were allowed to answer in Chinese, I could have gotten all answers correct. However, due to the language barrier from spelling, I lost many points… (Interview, 11.20.18).

Similarly, William pointed out that the short-answers format has increased the difficulty of the test for international students, simultaneously assessing their content knowledge and English proficiency (Interview, 11.20.18). William suggested it would be more fair if the same questions could be asked using multiple choice format, because in this way both native and nonnative speakers of English would be tested mainly for their content knowledge (Interview, 11.20.18).

It was worth noting that the reported language difficulties in relation to the spelling of discipline-specific vocabulary were not particular to the students enrolled in social sciences or

liberal arts courses with relatively high linguistic demands (e.g., *Philosophy*, *Psychology*, *Economics*). Even in disciplinary subjects such as *Chemistry* and *Physics*, which were traditionally considered much lower in terms of linguistic demands, the Chinese international students still reported to have experienced pressure from the spelling of discipline-specific vocabulary. It seemed that it was the absence of linguistic congruencies rather than the heavy linguistic demand itself that had posed challenges to their linguistic functioning in class.

For instance, in one of the practice problems for the *Physics* final exam, Matthew reported to have encountered a question asking him to explain "Why the moon is not pulled into the earth?" (Interview, 11.21.18). In this example, it was almost impossible for the students to answer the question without using some potentially linguistically-challenging expressions such as "the gravitational force," "velocity," and "perpendicular." Matthew regarded this as an easy question and claimed he was able to answer the question without any effort if he were allowed to use Chinese; yet, because of his incapability to answer the question fully and accurately in written English, Matthew revealed a lack of confidence in the upcoming *Physics* final exam (Interview, 11.21.18).

Linguistic acculturation among the "regular high" students in academic contexts. While the three "American high" students continued to report their linguistically barrier-free experiences as first semester college freshmen, it appeared that with the passage of time, the divide between the linguistic functioning of the two groups of Chinese international students has narrowed, especially in academic contexts. Toward the end of the semester, not only did the "regular high" students reported more frequent office hour visits and contact with tutors, but also they claimed to be more accustomed to the English-speaking environment and was able to function better in various academic settings.

By the end of Week 15, there were no longer obvious differences regarding the overall frequencies of contact with professors and tutors between "regular high" and "American high" students. Two exceptions remained to be William, who reported to have the most office hour visits, and Matthew, the only student who never took the initiative to have any meetings with his professors or tutors (Research Memo, 12.1.18). In addition to professors and tutors, at this particular time point, another source of contact which became popular was TA. Yet, unlike their contact with professors and tutors which was exclusively via face-to-face meetings, the Chinese international students reported that they were more often in contact with their TAs via text messages or online group chats (Interview, 11.20.18). This very informal means of communication was likely triggered by their similar age and equal status as students.

Another change in relation to their linguistic functioning in academic settings was that, different from their repeated conversation breakdowns and concerns over the lack of oral fluency earlier in the semester, the "regular high" students claimed that they were less nervous and more confident with their English toward the end of the semester. This was likely due to their growing oral English proficiency over time as well as increased acculturation into the U.S. education system. As Lily described,

> 现在和教授还有 *tutor* 交流起来都比以前自然多了，也不像原来那么紧张了，可能是习惯了吧。虽然偶尔还会卡壳什么的，但是基本都不影响交流。
> Now my communication with professors and tutors feels more natural. I no longer feel as nervous as before. Maybe this is because I am more used to it. Although occasionally I still got stuck during the meeting, in most cases, it did not impede my communication. (Interview, 11.19.18).

The aforementioned patterns with regards to the narrowing gap between the two groups of Chinese international students' linguistic functioning in academic settings also echoed findings from the weekday and weekend day bilingual language logs (Brisk et al., 2004). Generally speaking, based on the weekday and weekend language logs documenting the

participants' bilingual usage in academic contexts (see Figures 6.8 & 6.9), there were no longer any identifiable divide between the "American high" and "regular high" Chinese international students. This could imply that the "regular high" students became more linguistically acculturated, thus leading to a narrowing gap regarding their English usage as compared with their "American high" peers.

To be specific, Figure 6.8 presents the focal students' English and Chinese usage during a typical weekday in academic contexts (e.g., during the lectures, while doing homework, participating in group projects). All the participants showed strong tendency to use more English than Chinese in academic settings during typical weekdays, and there were no clearly identifiable patterns demonstrating students' language use in academic settings influenced by their previous language and educational backgrounds. While the "two American high" students Shawn and Rebecca reported to almost exclusively use English, Hugo was found to be one of the heaviest users of Chinese in academic contexts. Moreover, while the international department "regular high" graduates Sarah and Lily showed a tendency of using the most Chinese, the traditional "regular high" students Eva and William reported to hardly use any Chinese in academic contexts.

The narrowing gap between the "regular high" and "American high" students could also be observed in their weekend language use in academic contexts. Figure 6.9 presents the focal students' proportions of English and Chinese usage in academic contexts during a typical weekend day (e.g., studying at the library, doing homework at their dorms, participating in group projects). Because half of the participants (Matthew, Hugo, Lily, Sarah, Pat and Bill) mentioned that they did not usually study during the weekend, their corresponding language use in academic contexts at weekend was thus not applicable and left blank in the graph. The other six

students, regardless of their previous language and schooling backgrounds, all reported to use

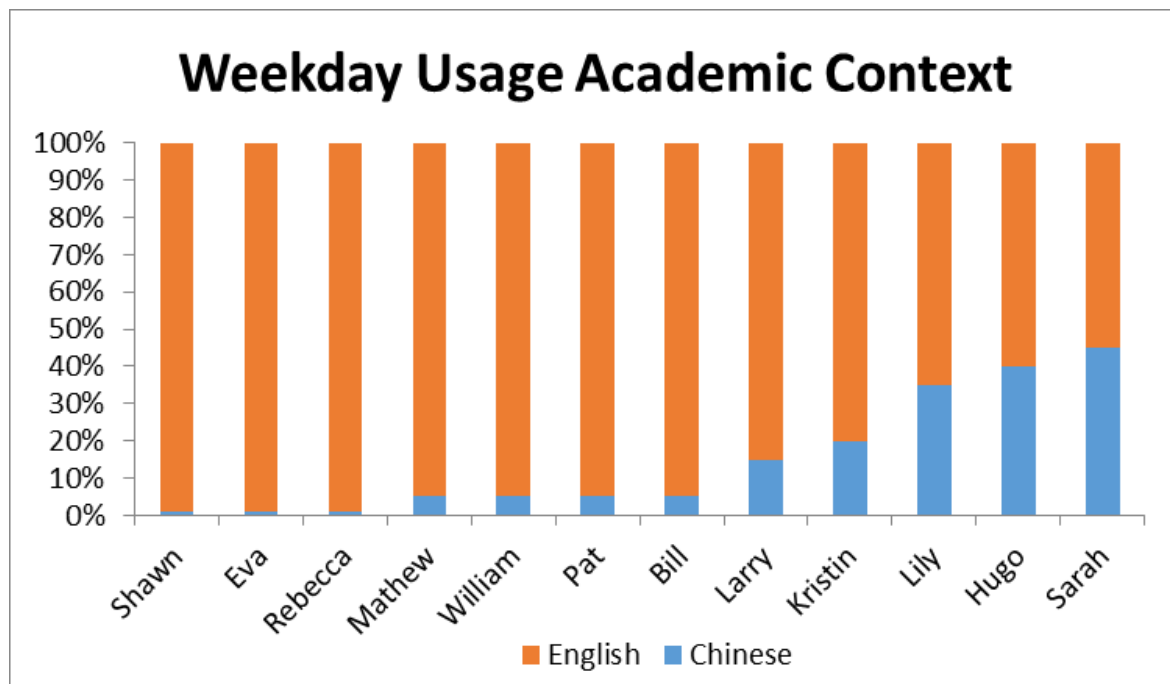significantly more English (greater than 95%) than Chinese in academic contexts at weekend.

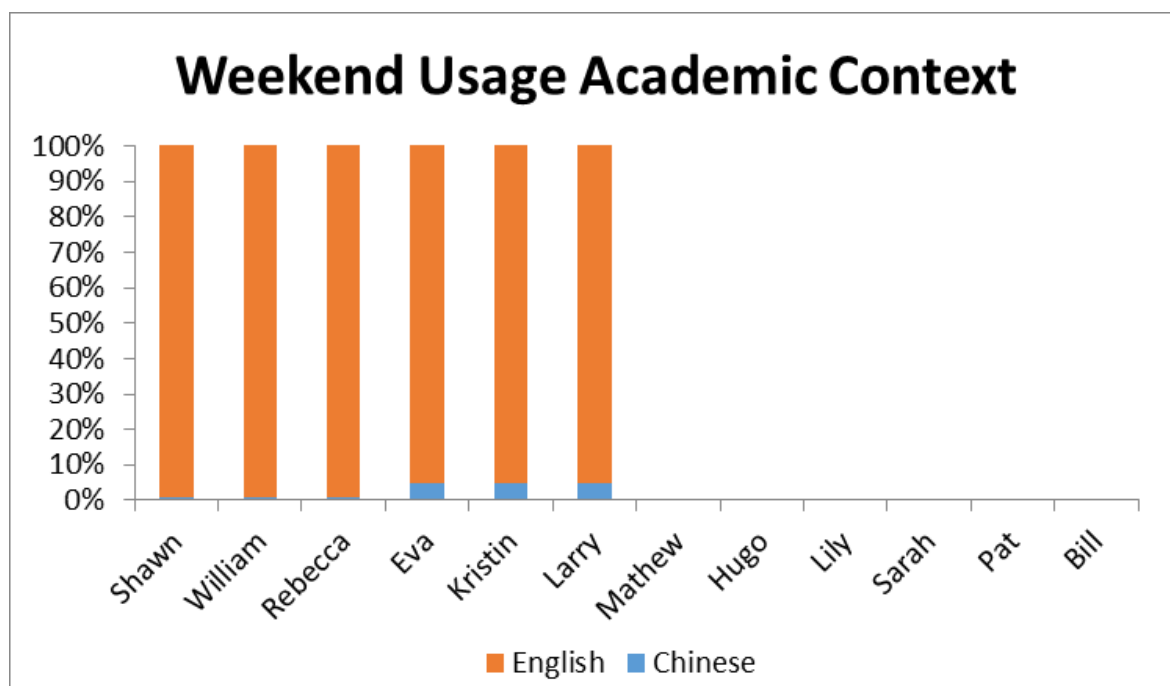*Figure 6.8.* Participants' Language Use in Academic Context (Typical Weekday)

Figure 6.9. Participants' Language Use in Academic Context (Typical Weekend)

It was worth noting, however, that the aforementioned overall tendency of students'

dominant English use in academic contexts was also likely to be influenced by the environment,

because English use, be it receptive or productive, was unavoidable when they were listening to

the lecturers, participating orally in class, and doing reading and writing assignments. For

example, Matthew mentioned during the interview that he was "forced" to use primarily English

in academic contexts because there were not many Chinese students sharing the same class

schedule with him (Interview, 11.21.18). By the same token, with the presence of a few Chinese

peers who happened to share the same class schedules and tended to sit nearby in class and later

study together as a group (as reported in the case of Sarah, Hugo, and Lily), the students were

more likely to have the opportunities to communicate in Chinese. For instance, in the case of

Sarah as presented in Chapter 4, despite her desire to have more contact with native English

speakers and use more English, due to the constant company of her roommate, she had no choice

but to stay with the Chinese language. Therefore, the students' language usage in academic

contexts during typical weekdays may not fully illustrate patterns of their language use by

choice.

Linguistic acculturation among the "regular high" students in social contexts.

Compared with earlier in the semester, the "regular high" students demonstrated

improvement in their ability to function linguistically in social settings. While occasional

conversation breakdowns during their contact with native English-speaking peers remained to be

particular to those "regular high" students, the number of participants who reported to have

encountered such language difficulties has decreased significantly from five to three (Research

Memo, 12.5.18).

For the students who showed changes in their patterns of contact with American students during the middle section of the semester, Eva remained to enjoy her friendship with her racially minoritized American peers, and Sarah, Pat and William continued to express their interest in having conversations with their American peers. While Sarah stayed passive and did not approach her American classmates, Pat and William continued to initiate conversations with their native-English-speaking peers so as to enhance their oral English proficiency.

With the finals approaching, Pat was unable to play basketball as often as before, due to the increasing academic stress from coursework. However, he developed a new strategy to increase the chance of English practices by forcing himself to initiate small talks with native speakers before, during, and after class (Interview, 11.19.20). According to Pat, he knew that the Americans had little interest in chatting with him; however, since his American peers were all very polite, if he were to take the initiative to approach them, they had no choice but to have a conversation with him (Interview, 11.19.20). Pat mentioned that it felt a bit awkward to have those "*强行交流*" (forced conversations); yet since his goal was not to make friends but only to improve his oral English proficiency, he found it helpful and stated that he would continue with this trick in his future studies at Hillside (Interview, 11.19.20).

William continued to take the initiative in approaching his American peers. Not only did he learn to use Twitter[14] in order to "have some common topics" with his American peers, but also he signed up to be a volunteer at the Hillside Office of Sustainability, in which he had many opportunities to meet native-English-speaking students (Interview, 11.19.20). William successfully pushed himself out of his comfort zone, and became the second "regular high" student after Eva to establish close friendships with a few American peers. For instance, in one

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[14] A common social media application in America.

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of his WeChat public posts (see Figure 6.10), William shared a happy moment in which he enjoyed hanging out with two American peers, who he referred to as "best friends" (WeChat Observation, 12.3.18). Toward the end of the semester, he reported to be much more confident in his oral English proficiency and shared with me an incidence in which he was mistaken as a Chinese American due to his fluent English (details see Chapter 4).

Figure 6.10. An Example of William's Friendship with American Peers, 12/3/18

Coping Strategies Initiated

As introduced in Chapter 5, at the initial stage of the semester, the Chinese international students mainly coped with academic and linguistic challenges in three ways. Firstly, Mandarin was a bridging tool used exclusively by all "regular high" participants. Secondly, seeking support from their professors through office hour consultations was a frequently adopted strategy by the three "American high" students, but not the "regular high" students. Thirdly, the participants, especially those "regular high" ones, demonstrated a strong tendency to seek

support from their Chinese peers. Some tensions existed between the two groups of students; most "regular high" students were reluctant to seek support from their "American high" peers, who were "unfriendly," "arrogant," "too proud in their English" and often looked down upon those who had no previous experiences studying in the U.S. (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18).

As the semester progressed, some changes could be observed with regards to the participants' coping strategies. In Figure 6.11 below, I have summarized those changes across the initial stage (Weeks 0-4), around midterm (Weeks 5-9), and toward the end of the semester (Weeks 10-15). Following each time frame, I have summarized the major themes regarding the participants' support seeking. Any changes observed as compared to the earlier time point was underlined and marked in bold. In the sub-sections below, I will present in detail how my participants' coping strategies evolve throughout their first semester in an American university.

Week 0-4
- Chinese was used as a bridging tool by all RH students, but not AH students
- AH students all sought help from professors through office hour visits, yet few RH students did so
- Participants all sought help from their Chinese peers, though tensions existed between RH and AH students (only 1 RH student sought help from AH student)

Week 5-9
- Chinese was used as a bridging tool by **most but not all** RH students; no AH students used it.
- **11 out of 12 students sought help from professors and tutors (RH reported progress on email writing thanks to their process of support seeking from professors)**
- Participants all sought help from their Chinese peers, though tensions existed between RH and AH students (**more RH students sought help from AH student**)

Week 10-15
- **Chinese was no longer popular as a bridging tool among RH students.**
- 11 out of 12 students sought help from professors, tutors, and **TAs; students became more strategic in support seeking from various sources**
- Participants all sought help from their Chinese peers; **tensions reduced** between RH and AH students (**more RH students sought help from AH peers**)

Figure 6.11. Changes in Coping Strategies over Time

Middle Section of the Semester: Weeks 5-9

Similar to the earlier time point, approaching midterm, the strategy of using Chinese as a bridging tool remained popular exclusively among the "regular high" students. Moreover, the participants continued to seek support from their Chinese peers, especially their "academic sisters and brothers" as well as freshmen peers. Lastly, the tensions still persisted between the "American high" and "regular high" students.

However, some changes could also be observed. Firstly, despite the popularity of adopting Chinese as a bridging tool, more and more of the "regular high" students were aware of its potential drawbacks and were more critical about their usage of Chinese as an academic scaffold. Secondly, different from their reluctance of support-seeking from their professors at the beginning of the semester, around midterm not only did almost all "regular high" students start to seek support from their professors and tutors, but also they reported that the process of appointment-making itself (i.e., email writing in English) was beneficial. Thirdly, despite the persisting tensions between the two groups of Chinese international students, more "regular high" students reported to seek support from their "American high" peers.

In the following sections, I will present the coping strategies of the participants from Weeks 5 to 9 based on (1) things that have remained the same, as well as (2) changes observed which was particular to this time point.

Things that have remained the same.

Chinese as a popular bridging tool. Similar to the beginning of the semester, Chinese continued to be a popular bridging tool adopted exclusively by the "regular high" students. Firstly, Chinese-English bilingual dictionaries were still reported to be an essential tool in facilitating their academic studies during the middle section of the semester (Research Memo, 10.28.18). The majority of the "regular high" students claimed that they had used English-

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Chinese dictionaries in assistance of their linguistic functioning in all four domains of English, among which reading and writing were said to be the two areas where they most frequently resorted to bilingual dictionaries, given the rising linguistic demands in the two language domains due to the coming midterm examinations (Research Memo, 10.28.18).

Secondly, the "regular high" students continued to adopt Chinese online resources to get background information and facilitate their reading comprehension. The disciplinary area where the students relied on Chinese online resources the most was *Philosophy*. As mentioned earlier, *Philosophy* was regarded as one of the most challenging courses by my participants across various majors, not only because of its heavy work load, but also due to its high linguistic demands especially in reading. On the one hand, the language used in the readings were found to be dense, complex, abstract, and formal, which was particularly challenging for the newly-arrived international students. On the other hand, since the content of the readings were heavily Western-centered, the "regular high" students were unable to draw upon their background knowledge, putting them at a disadvantaged position.

This was considered "extremely unfair" by multiple participants, as their previous philosophical knowledge in relation to the Oriental schools of thoughts (e.g., Confucianism, Daoism) were devalued and considered "illegitimate" (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.21.18). To cope with these aforementioned challenges, the "regular high" participants frequently resorted to online Chinese materials to establish their background knowledge and also to facilitate their understanding in subject contents. For instance, as illustrated in Figure 6.12, Eva utilized the Chinese Wikipedia as a resource to facilitate her understanding of *The Republic* by Plato (WeChat Observation, 10.15.18).

柏拉图太厉害了吧

13 hours ago

：理想国第八章——在读维基百科总结 😊
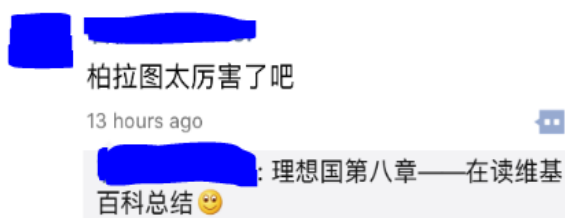
[Translation]
Eva's post content: Plato is too cool to believe

Eva's additional comment: I am currently reading the summary of Chapter 8 in *The Republic* on Wikipedia [smiling face emoji]

Figure 6.12. An Example of the Usage of Online Chinese Materials, 10/15/18

Support seeking from Chinese peers and tensions among Chinese students. During the middle section of the semester, the participants continued to seek support from their Chinese peers. Many "regular high" students continued to show preference to exclusively seek support from their peers without any U.S. high school experiences, as the tensions between "American high" and "regular high" students remained observable.

On the one hand, the "regular high" students continued to complain about their "American high" peers because they were said to have often showed off their English proficiency and looked down upon the newly-arrived international students. For instance, Bill complained that one of the "American high" students living on the same floor with him always "show[ed] off" by talking to him and other "regular high" students exclusively in English (Interview, 11.19.18). Bill commented, "*都是中国人，你装什么逼假装 ABC？也不看看你其实也有口音！*" (We are all Chinese; why do you show off by pretending to be a Chinese American? You should know that you actually have an accent too!) (Interview, 11.19.18). In another case, William reported to have been laughed at by an "American high" student in public, who made fun of his poor writing skills; this incident later caused further conflicts among the two groups of students, as they quarreled over the WeChat group chats. Details about this incident could be seen in the portrait of William's story in Chapter 4.

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On the other hand, the "American high" students, Rebecca and Shawn, both explicitly

stated that they did not like the "regular high" students, especially their "sticky rice" behavior,

because of which they tended to only socialize with their own kind without stepping out of their

comfort zone to communicate with their American peers (Informal Conversation, 9.30.18).

Rebecca criticized them for giving up opportunities to fully experience America culture and

education (Interviews, 9.6.18; Informal Conversation, 9.30.18). Shawn commented that the

"regular high" students' lack of contact with their American peers made their overseas studies

"meaningless" (Informal Conversation, 9.30.18). He explained,

> 很多中国留学生都陷在自己的圈子里，不和美国学生玩。如果你父母花这么多钱送你来美国，你却完全没法体验美国的学习生活，那就完全失去来这里留学的意义了。来这里不就是为了接触美国社会，提高英语的吗？
>
> Many Chinese international students were stuck in their own friend circles, and did not play with American students. If your parents have spent so much money to send you here in the U.S., yet you never even tried to experience American culture and education, then it is completely meaningless for you to come for overseas studies. Aren't you here in order to know more about American society and improve your English? (Informal Conversation, 9.30.18).

Changes observed around midterm.

Attitudes toward using Chinese as a bridging tool. While Chinese continued to be used

as a popular bridging tool by the "regular high" students, the participants started to realize some

potential drawbacks and became more selective in adopting this strategy. While most "regular

high" students continued to adopt this strategy, some abandoned Chinese translation completely.

According to some participants, the usage of Chinese-English dictionary in reading was

said to be ineffective and time-consuming. For instance, Sarah, who had "zero tolerance" for

unknown vocabulary in English readings, claimed whenever she encountered a new word, she

could not resist the temptation to figure out its meaning by looking it up in the bilingual

dictionary (Interview, 11.20.18). Nevertheless, since there were various discipline-specific

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jargons in each academic reading, it usually took her several hours to read while looking up each unfamiliar word (Interview, 11.20.18). This added to her stress, since she had to stay up very often in order to finish her assignments. To make matters worse, the frequent bilingual dictionary usage also impeded her overall reading comprehension, as Sarah was forced to frequently "jump back and forth" between the two languages during her reading (Interview, 11.20.18). Reflecting on her experience, Sarah said that she decided to be more selective in the words she chose to look up, so as not to jeopardize the holistic comprehension of the article (Interview, 11.20.18).

Additionally, the reliance of bilingual dictionaries in writing was also likely to result in awkward wordings. For instance, in her personal recount, bilingual-dictionary-user Eva wrote "Painting at Eastside **induced a more layered pleasure**…" in order to express that she was very happy painting at Eastside (Eva's Recount 1, 9.30.18). In another example, in order to express that the students were challenged to step out of their comfort zone, Lily drew upon translations provided by her bilingual dictionary and wrote "…those students may not become friends immediately, but at least **they lower their invisible fence** and accept each other as a potential acquaintance." (Lily's Recount, 9.28.18). Those strange wordings were likely to confuse the professors and consequently resulted in low grades (Research Memo, 11.28.18).

Last but not least, many participants raised concerns about their heavy dependence on Chinese online materials. While resorting to the summaries and translations facilitated their understanding of course readings, multiple students cautioned that this strategy could exert a negative influence in the long run. Due to its convenience, many "regular high" students reported to have skipped the English version of the readings and solely depended on the Chinese resources; this occurred more frequently when they were facing academic stress. However, without reading the English version, the students were not exposed to some of the content-

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specific vocabulary and expressions, which were crucial in oral participation in class. Consequently, although they had a general understanding of the content knowledge, the students reported to have difficulty functioning linguistically in class (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.21.18).

Support seeking from professors and tutors. Three changes could be identified with regards to the Chinese international students' support seeking from non-peers. Firstly, compared with the beginning of the semester, more students reported to have sought help from their professors, either through office hour visits or by asking questions right before or after class around middle of the semester.

At this point in the semester, the main purposes of their office hour visits were reported to be to (1) seek linguistic support, (2) ask for help in course content, (3) ask for advice on how to prepare for the midterm exams, (4) debrief on exams or quizzes, (5) practice oral English, and (6) impress the professor. To be specific, the "American high" students mainly sought support from their professors to fulfill the second, third and fourth purposes mentioned above. As for the "regular high" students, while the vast majority of them reported that they visited the professors to fulfill the first four purposes, William was the only one who also utilized as the office hour visits as an opportunity to practice English and impress his professors (Interview, 11.20.18). For instance, William told me that since one of his professors had mentioned during the lecture that he was interested in knowing more about Socialism in China, he found many materials online, translated them into English, and brought them to the professor so as to impress him (Interview, 11.20.18). By doing so, William hoped for a higher participation grade at the end of the semester (Interview, 11.20.18).

It was worth noting that multiple participants mentioned that the support seeking process from the professors itself was beneficial, especially in improving their ability in email writing.

As email correspondence was not as popular a communication tool in China, many "regular

high" students did not have much experience in email writing (Research Memo, 10.28.18). For

instance, in the past, Larry always addressed people as "Mr." or "Ms.," but through the process

of making office hour appointments, he realized that a more preferable way to address his

professors was by "Dr." or "Prof." (Interview, 11.20.18). Similarly, originally, whenever Pat

wanted to express his urgency, he always wrote "please reply ASAP" (Interview, 11.19.18).

However, after communication with emails more frequently, he gradually realized that it was

politer to word the same idea as "I am looking forward to hearing from you in your earliest

convenience" (Interview, 11.19.18). An example of the "regular high" students' support-seeking

email to their professors was presented in Figure 6.13 below.

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: ▓▓▓▓ <▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓>
Date: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓
Subject: About Some Of My Worries
To: <▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓>

Dear ▓▓▓▓▓,

I hope this email finds you well.

I'm ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓, a Chinese international student, and this is my first time studying in the US.

There are many students from China at ▓▓▓, but we are from different cities in China, which means
we have different backgrounds. As a result, our ability to understand a language is different. I was
born and raised in Taiyuan, which is a less developed city in China, and I went to a traditional
Chinese high school. Since I did not grow up in an environment where English is frequently used,
I might need more time to get used to the new environment.

Sometimes I might have trouble understanding (Sometimes I can't follow the speed of speech.
And I can't catch some of the vocabularies used.) the class and I might trouble you a lot during
office hours in the future. But I will try my best to improve my English proficiency and adjust to
the class as soon as possible. It's getting better every day!

Thank you. Have a good weekend!

Best wishes,
▓▓▓▓

Figure 6.13. An Example of the Students' Support-seeking Email to Their Professors

The second change was that in addition to professors, the Chinese international students also sought support from tutors. As introduced earlier, there were two types of tutors that they said to have sought support from, one was those from the Hillside Writing Center, and the other was graduate students from the English Department as introduced by the *ELL Writing* professors. Except for Matthew, all other students reported to have taken advantage of the tutoring services.

Something worth noting was that since the English Department tutors were introduced during the *ELL Writing* classes, only the students who were enrolled in that course could have access to the resource. The two students who were not enrolled in that class (Eva in *Regular Writing* and Kristin in *Literature*), both showed interest in tutorship and wished that they could also be given the same opportunity. The English major Eva told me that she would be interested in knowing graduate students from the same department through the tutoring service (Interview, 11.20.18). In contrast, Kristin said that she longed for a tutor from the English Department because when the midterm examinations were approaching, it became very competitive to get an appointment at the Writing Center (Interview, 11.20.18).

The third change around midterm was that despite the persisting tensions between the two groups of students, more "regular high" students asked their "American high" peers for help. For example, Lily mentioned that due to the high demands for writing support around midterm, it was sometimes difficult to make appointments with tutors; when those situations happened, she would send her essays to an "American high" classmate who helped to proofread her writings (Interview, 11.19.18). Similarly, Larry argued that the "American high" students could be a helpful resource due to their familiarity with some discipline-specific expectations in American education. He shared his experiences in *Chemistry* class:

> 在中国化学课我们一般做实验，把结果简单记录一下就好。在美国这里，老师叫我们详细观察，要把实验报告写的越详细越好。我都不知道格式怎么写，也不知道如

何详细描述。每次班里美国同学都在做实验时拼命打字记录，我都不知到怎么写。好在有个美高女生和我一个班，她每次实验报告都几乎满分，因为她在美高都练过。我就跟她学，在她的帮助下，我的报告也都有平均分以上了。

In China, when we did experiment in chemistry class, usually we only needed to briefly document the results. However, in the U.S., the professor required us to observe carefully and provide as much details as possible for the lab reports. I did not know what the format of writing should be; nor did I have any idea about how to describe in detail. Every time, the American students were typing like crazy to take notes on the details of the experiment, but I did not have any idea how to write a report. Luckily, there was an "American high" girl in my class. She received near-perfect scores for all her lab reports, because she had experiences with writing reports in high school. So I asked for help from her. Under her guidance, I was able to achieve above-average scores on my reports. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Toward the End of the Semester: Weeks 10-15

With the semester approaching its end, different degrees of changes could be observed in almost all aspects of the Chinese international students' support-seeking behaviors, as compared to the earlier time points.

Changes in using Chinese as a bridging tool.

Approximately three months into the semester, the Chinese students reported that they rarely utilized Chinese as a bridge. The students seldom referred to Chinese online resources and were more inclined to read the original course readings due to the influences of the short answers questions, which not only required the students to be familiar with the contents of the course readings, but also tested their mastery of the discipline-specific vocabulary and expressions.

Similarly, the participants rarely resorted to English-Chinese dictionaries or translation software due to its time-consuming nature as well as the potential to create awkward expressions in writing. Multiple participants mentioned that the usage of English-Chinese translation tools was strongly discouraged based on the advice from their writing professors and tutors. Pat referred to the usage of bilingual dictionary as his "last resort," saying that in most cases he would resort to the English-English dictionary so as to train himself to read and think in English

(Interview, 11.19.18). He explained that the only situation in which he tended to use the bilingual dictionary was when he did not know how to express a certain word in English and was unable to paraphrase it (Interview, 11.19.18). However, aware of the potential possibility of awkward wording, Pat said that he would usually double check the English translations provided by the Chinese dictionary by looking them up in an English-English dictionary (Interview, 11.19.18).

Changes in support seeking from others.

Toward the end of the semester, with the increasing academic stress, some minor changes could be observed with regards to the Chinese students' support seeking behaviors. With regard to support seeking from non-peers, the participants mentioned that in addition to their professors and tutors, they also occasionally sought support from their Teaching Assistants (TAs); this was likely because with the upcoming final exams, office hour visits alone may be insufficient to address all their questions (Interviews, 11.20.18, 11.21.18).

Except for Matthew, the only student who never took the initiative in seeking help from his professors, tutors, or TAs, all other participants continued to adopt support seeking as a coping strategy, although they appeared more strategic in taking advantage of various resources. For instance, Sarah, Lily, and William specifically pointed out that they would utilize the tutoring service to improve their grammatical accuracy, because those detailed language problems were regarded "too stupid to ask for help" from the professors (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). Instead, they were likely to allocate their time with the professor specifically to tackle questions with regards to course content, believing that compared with the tutors, the professors had a better knowledge about the subjects (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18).

In terms of the participants' support seeking from their Chinese peers, a minor change was that more "regular high" participants began to seek support from their "American high"

peers. For instance, William mentioned that he revealed to one of his "American high" friends (Hugo) that he had a strong tendency to make some grammatical mistakes during his conversations in English; to be specific, he very frequently mixed up the gender pronouns "he" and "she," and had a poor mastery of the usage of past tense in English speaking (Interview, 11.20.18). In response to his request, Hugo helped to correct William whenever he noticed any of those mistakes during their conversations (Interview, 11.20.18). Similarly, whenever they were unable to make an appointment with tutors, Sarah and Lily would send their essays to their "American high" peers to proofread for grammatical errors (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18).

It seemed that the tensions between the two groups were not as severe as before. While the "American high" students explicitly expressed their empathy for the language difficulties encountered by their "regular high" peers, multiple "regular high" students mentioned during the end-of-semester interviews that their "American high" peers were "not as horrible as they thought" (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18, 11.21.18).

Perceived Effectiveness of Support Received from Others

As mentioned in Chapter 5, at the beginning of the semester, while the Chinese international students reported to have generally enjoyed the support received from their professors and Chinese peers, the vast majority of them were dissatisfied with the assistance from the OISS, especially with regards to the support from their IAs. With the passage of time, some changes have occurred with regards to their perceptions of the effectiveness of the support from their professors, as well as the resources of support available (see Figure 6.14). Yet, the participants' overall negative attitudes toward the support provided by the OISS remained consistent throughout the semester.
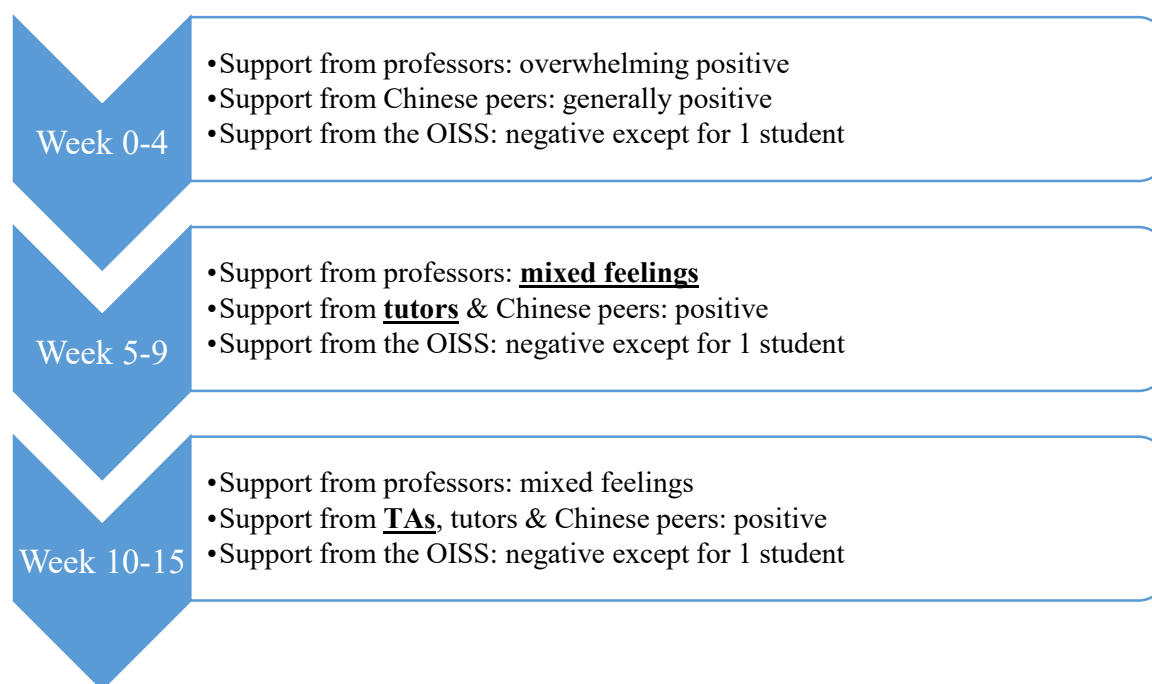
Figure 6.14. Changes in Support Received over Time

Middle Section of the Semester: Weeks 5-9

Compared with the beginning of the semester, while the vast majority of the participants remained to hold positive views about help from their Chinese peers and negative attitudes toward support received from the OISS, two changes have occurred during the middle of the semester. Firstly, different from their overwhelmingly favorable attitudes at the beginning of the semester, multiple participants reported to have experienced mixed feelings toward the assistance from their professors. Secondly, in addition to their professors, Chinese peers, and the OISS, the Chinese international students also received help from their tutors, which was reported to be a helpful source of guidance. In the following sections, I will present the language and academic experiences of the participants from Weeks 5 to 9 based on (1) things that have remained the same, as well as (2) changes observed which was particular to this period.

Things that have remained the same.

Positive attitudes toward support from Chinese peers. Similar to the situation at the

beginning of the semester, my participants continued to describe the support received from their

Chinese peers as helpful, be it from other Chinese freshmen or their "academic sisters and

brothers." The support received from their freshmen peers was reported to be beneficial both

academically and emotionally. With regards to academic support, the "American high" students

have served as an important linguistic and academic resource for their "regular high" peers. As

for emotional support, the friendships among the Chinese international students were said to

have reduced their feelings of depression, loneliness and homesickness. For instance, Sarah

posted on her WeChat (see Figure 6.15) that thanks to her friends, she did not feel lonely to

spend her birthday thousands of miles away from her parents (WeChat Observation, 10.2.18).

[Translation]
Sarah's post: I don't feel lonely at all on my first birthday away from parents [exciting face emoji]

[Picture on the left: Sarah and her friends cheered over bubble tea; Picture on the right: the shadows of Sarah and her friends]

Figure 6.15. An Example of Emotional Support from Chinese Peers

Also similar to the beginning of the semester, the "academic sisters and brothers"

continued to be an extremely helpful resource, as they (1) provided suggestions on course

selection for the upcoming Spring semester, (2) helped explain homework problems, (3) offered

tips on oral participation in class, and (4) served as a resource for content-subject learning. For

instance, in his private WeChat message, William shared a screenshot of an email that he

received from one of his "academic sisters" (see Figure 6.16; Informal Communication,

10.24.18). In that email, the "academic sister" wrote to William in their common first language,

and expressed her willingness to support him in one particular class (Informal Communication, 10.24.18). It was also worth noting that this email simultaneously served as an evidence for the crucial role played by WeChat in communication among Chinese international students. While the "academic sister" reached out to William via email, she indicated at the end that if he would like to receive support from her, he should reach to her via WeChat (Figure 6.16).

[Translation]

Hello my "academic younger brother",

I used to be a student in professor XXX's XXX section. The professor wanted me to reach out to you and help you adjust to your academic life at Hillside. My name is XXX, and I am currently a senior. If you have any questions with regard to the XXX class or anything else, please contact me via WeChat at: XXXXXX.

Figure 6.16. An Example of Academic Support from Senior Students

The overall negative attitudes toward support from the OISS. The vast majority of the Chinese international students continued to describe the OISS as a not-very-beneficial resource. According to the participants, they had often received emails from the OISS or their IAs about certain social events around the middle of the semester. However, while they appreciated the OISS's effort to provide them with opportunities to socialize with other students, especially native English speakers, they reported to have little interest in attending those events mainly due to two reasons.

Firstly, multiple students complained that the events organized by the OISS were "boring," "funky" and culturally-irrelevant, which were not properly catered to the international student populations (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). For instance, Matthew received an invitation from his IA, inviting him to go kayaking. Yet he had no idea what kayaking was, since it was not a common recreational activity in China. Consequently, Matthew decided to ignore the invitation and spent the weekend with his Chinese peers (Interview, 11.21.18).

Secondly, a few students mentioned that the event was poorly organized and featured low attendance rates, which was not quite as beneficial of an opportunity for them to practice their oral English and socialize with others as described in the email. For instance, Bill shared his experience:

> *我就去过一次，本想找个机会和外国人说说话的。结果去了发现，加上我一共才这么几个人，太尴尬了。根本没人鸟这种活动，连我们自己的 IA 都没去！我去了也谁都不认得，太无聊了。我反正以后再也不去了。。。*
> I only attended one event organized by the OISS. Originally I had planned to go there in the hope to meet and talk with some Americans. However, after I went there, I realized that including me, there were only a few students there. It was so embarrassing. Nobody cared about those events; even my IA ignored this event! I went there only to find that there was nobody that I knew there. It was so boring. Anyways, I will never go there again in the future… (Interview, 11.19.18).

Similar to earlier in the semester, the only exception remained to be Lily, who reported that she enjoyed the support from the OISS, especially thanks to her IA (Interview, 11.19.18). However, Lily was the only one in this study, who had been assigned a Chinese IA who also happened to be an "academic sister" in the same major. According to Lily, her IA was very helpful, as she not only frequently checked in with her to see if she need any academic support, but also organized some interesting social events such as having dim sum in Chinatown together or going to the museum as a group (Interview, 11.19.18).

Lily's appreciation of the support from her IA could be observed in her WeChat public

posts. For instance, as shown in Figure 6.17, Lily had a great time in the social event organized

by her IA, which she described as a "mentor-mentee meeting" (WeChat Observation, 10.7.18).

Moreover, judging from Lily's tone toward the end saying that she felt sorry for a few friends

who did not show up and then offered emoji kisses, it was very likely that this was not the first

social outing organized by her IA, and the students in the group were somewhat close to each

other.

[Translation]
Lily's post content: Today's mentor-mentee event [happy face emoji] turned into a photo shooting event. Big thanks to XXX who is a guru in taking pictures for us [laughing face emoji]

[shy face emoji] Let me show off some pictures from today

Had a great time with XXX and XXX. Unfortunately, XXX and XXX were unable to join us today [emoji showing kisses]

[Pictures from the event]

[The post was liked by many peers]

Figure 6.17. An Example of Lily's Experience with her IA, Public WeChat Post, 10/7/18

Changes observed around midterm: mixed feelings toward support from professors.

As mentioned earlier, by midterm, all participants had met their professors either through

mandatory one-on-one meetings or during self-initiated visits. All participants except for

Matthew had also sought help from their writing tutors, either from the Writing Center or the

English Department. While the participants universally held positive attitudes toward the support received from the tutors, they showed mixed feelings with regards to their experiences with their professors. Although in general, the Chinese international students showed appreciation towards the guidance and support from most of their professors, especially the *ELL Writing* instructors, several students revealed dissatisfaction about their experiences with several of their content-subject professors.

According to the Chinese international students, the most common complaint was that while many of their professors showed sympathy to their language struggles, some did not provide concrete support to facilitate their linguistic functioning in class. Almost all "regular high" students had, at some point, mentioned to their professors the concerns in relation to the language barriers (Research Memo, 10.28.18). However, approximately half of the students reported that after hearing about their difficulties in English, their professors did not take concrete actions to help them. While almost all their professors showed sympathy by comforting them at the meetings, only a small proportion of them provided the students with additional linguistic and academic support, which included (1) initiating regular check-in meetings with the students, (2) requiring mandatory weekly office hour visits by the students, (3) recommending additional language resources, (4) connecting the students with some of their Chinese "academic sisters and brothers" who had taken the same class in the past, and (5) promising to curve the students' score by focusing more on their content performance (Research Memo, 10.28.18).

In most cases, however, the professors were likely to either "pretend as if nothing has happened" when they met again after the meeting, or do nothing except for incorporating some "random," "unhelpful," "funky," and "totally irrelevant" Chinese expressions in their communication to demonstrate their interest and respect to the Chinese language and culture

(Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). For instance, according to Sarah, ever since she revealed her

concerns about English, the professor always tried to incorporate expressions like "*你好*" (hello),

"*谢谢*" (thanks), and "*不客气*" (You're welcome) into their oral or email communication

(Interview, 11.20.18). Yet, Sarah was unhappy about that professor's frequent code-switching to

Chinese, as it not only embarrassed her in front of her American peers, but also was unhelpful in

improving her linguistic functioning in that particular class (Interview, 11.20.18). She explained,

> *我觉得很无语啊。每次老师一说这些弱智的中文，美国同学就会一下都看着我，让*
> *我感觉好尴尬。其实他用不用中文我都不在乎啦，我的问题关键的是他得给我语言*
> *上的支持。弄到最后，我和他练习了几句中文，该 struggle 的地方我继续 struggle，*
> *一点用也没有。。。*
> I really felt speechless. Every time that professor used those stupid Chinese expressions
> to me, my American classmates would stare at me. This made me extremely embarrassed.
> In reality, I didn't really care about whether or not he could use Chinese; my only hope
> was to get support on language. Toward the end, I practiced a few Chinese expressions
> with him, but my struggles in English remained the same. This was totally unhelpful…
> (Interview, 11.20.18).

Toward the End of the Semester: Weeks 10-15

Compared with earlier in the semester, not much has changed with regards to the Chinese

international students' attitudes toward the support received from their professors, tutors,

Chinese peers, and the OISS. The only difference was that, in addition to the aforementioned

sources, the participants also received support from their TAs, the help of whom were regarded

beneficial.

Perceived quality of support from tutors, TAs, and professors remained similar.

Toward the end of the semester, the support from their tutors and TAs has received

overwhelmingly positive remarks from the Chinese international students, and was often

described as "super helpful" and "life saver[s]" (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18, 11.21.18). Yet,

similar to the earlier time points, the participants continued to report mixed-feelings towards the

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support from their professors. While in general, they were grateful to their help, multiple students continued to show dissatisfaction in relation to their experiences with some instructors.

The most common complaint remained to be that some professors did not provide the students with concrete linguistic support; the support received remained to be perceived as "superficial" and "not useful" (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). For instance, Kristin decided to seek support from her *History* professor, because she was consistently given the comment that her essays "lacked depth" (Interview, 11.20.18). During the meeting, she described her frustration of not being able to express her ideas clearly in English; she explained that despite her deep understanding, it was the language barrier that had prevented her to provide a strong argument (Interview, 11.20.18). According to Kristin, by confessing her weaknesses in English, she had originally hoped that her professor, who was bilingual in Chinese and English, could share her own experiences as once an international student and provide her with some advice on history writings. Nevertheless, to her disappointment, the professor simply said "You need to try harder. History writing is hard for everybody!" (Interview, 11.20.18).

Similarly, drawing upon his experiences, William concluded that the effectiveness of the professors' support could simply be summarized by two words, which was "it depends" (Interview, 11.20.18). Shortly after the midterm, William contacted me through WeChat to share his painful experience failing one of his exams. He blamed himself for not being able to spell the jargons correctly in the short-answers questions, which resulted in his failing grade (Informal Communication, 10.30.18). William said that he felt very sorry for letting his professor down, and decided to post a sorry note on his Twitter to apologize to the professor (Informal Communication, 10.30.18).

However, a few weeks later, William contacted me again, informing me that the professor had not only completely misunderstood his Twitter post, but also reported him to the Dean's Office (Informal Communication, 11.14.18). It turned out, that in his post, right after mentioning that he failed the exam because he could not spell the jargons correctly despite his ability to comprehend and explain all the course concepts in Chinese, William mistakenly put down "I am so sorry for my professor!!!!!!!!!" instead of "I am so sorry for letting my professor down" which he had intended to say (Informal Communication, 11.14.18).

Since the expression "I am sorry for somebody" was not an apology but rather a way to show sympathy, the professor was likely to have mistaken the post as a sarcastic way to show William's anger, dissatisfaction, or even hatred (Informal Communication, 11.14.18). This has thus led to William's unpleasant experiences at the Dean's Office:

> 发了推特没多久，我就收到了一封邮件，说是来自 Dean's Office，关于这个老师的课，想找我面谈。我当时很开心，还以为是这个老师觉得我由于语言障碍所以没考好，于是联系 Dean's Office 给我一个补考的机会。结果等我去了才知道，弄了半天，他认为我仇恨他，有心理问题，report 了我去 Dean's Office。。。太无语了，一上来，那个工作人员就说他愿意给我提供心理疏导。我当时就傻了，完全不知道怎么回事，我解释了半天他都没明白，我都不知如何是好。。。
>
> Shortly after I posted the message on Twitter, I got an email from the Dean's Office. The email mentioned that somebody from the office would like to talk with me with regard to this professor's class. I was very happy then, believing that I was contacted, because the professor had understood my language barrier and spoken up for me to earn a second chance by having a make-up exam through the Dean's Office. Yet, it was not until I arrived at the appointment that I found out the professor must have misinterpreted my message, believing that I hated him and I needed psychological support. That's why he reported me to the Dean's Office… I was so speechless. Upon showing up at the meeting, the staff from the office told me that he would like to give me some psychological assistance. I was so confused. I was completely lost. Later, I tried to explain for a long time, but however hard I tried, he could not understand. I didn't know what to do… (Informal Communication, 11.14.18).

However, William said although he was very frustrated due to this incident, he felt lucky to be rescued by another professor who understood the language difficulties that international students were facing, and provided concrete support:

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好在刚好我的另一个教授从这里经过，帮我解了围，还和 Dean's Office 保证，说我是个好学生，每周都在去 office hour，很努力，很积极，肯定不会仇恨老师。就是偶尔会有英语问题，所以导致了误会。然后我的教授还替我说话，说那个 report 我的教授一定是不了解国际生的困难，所以第一时间想到的不是和学生沟通，而是去打小报告。我当时真的好感动！

Luckily, another professor of mine happened to pass by, who rescued me from the meeting. He assured the Dean's Office by saying that I was a good student, because I visited him during the office hours every week. Also, he added that I was a positive and hard-working person, who would surely not threaten or hate that professor. It must have been some language problems that had caused the misunderstanding. Later, he also spoke up for me, and said that the other professor must be someone who did not have a good understanding of the language difficulties of international students; therefore, his first instinct was to report me rather than to communicate with me. I was so grateful to him! (Informal Conversation, 11.14.18).

**Support from Chinese peers remained similar**.

Similar to the middle of the semester, Chinese peers continued to be regarded as valuable sources of support, academically, socially and emotionally. With the final exams approaching, the "academic sisters and brothers" were described as "a more convenient resource than professors" (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). For example, Sarah mentioned that due to the coming finals, she had lots of questions with regards to her *Computer Science* class (Interview, 11.20.18). According to Sarah, due to the status of English being her second language, whenever she brought her questions up to her professor, it usually took her a long time to digest the professor's explanation (Interview, 11.20.18). This was likely because she was faced with the dual challenges from the difficult course content as well as some unfamiliar expressions in English. However, when she sought help from the "academic sisters and brothers" by communicating directly in Chinese via the audio messages function in WeChat, she was able to understand the questions more quickly and easily (Interview, 11.20.18). She concluded,

像这种 STEM 的课还是学长学姐来的快。大家直接中文交流，没有生词障碍，那些英文表达会不会都不重要，反正能把题目作对就好。

For these STEM related questions, support from the "academic sisters and brothers" was more efficient. We could directly communicate in Chinese, and did not need to worry about the barrier from unfamiliar vocabulary. It does not matter whether or not I know

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how to say those English expressions. For STEM problems, the key is to get the answers rights. (Interview, 11.20.18).

Additionally, all my participants mentioned that Chinese peers continued to provide them with valuable emotional support to conquer their academic stress. For instance, Larry reported to be very stressed by the heavy workload at the end of the semester; he posted in his WeChat that he wished to survive this busy week (WeChat Observation, 12.4.18; see Figure 6.18). The post was liked by a few peers; one of them, showed empathy by commenting "I hope so too" and sharing her own burden and stress (WeChat Observation, 12.4.18). In another example, Pat posted on WeChat around midnight to ask whether there were any peers who were still staying up late to study; and if so, he would like to form a study group to prepare for the history exam (WeChat Observation, 12.10.18; see Figure 6.19). Under his post, another student showed excitement about this idea, as he not only immediately agreed to join, but also said that he saw "hope to survive" (WeChat Observation, 12.10.18).
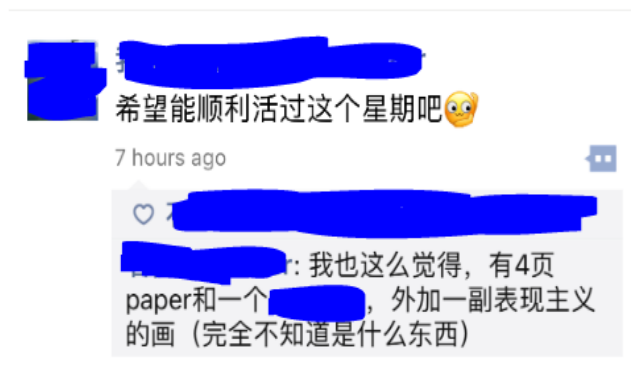
[Translation]
Larry's post content: I hope I can successfully survive this week [hoping face emoji]

[the post was liked by his peers]

Another student: I hope so too. I have a 4-page paper plus another exam from XXX professor, plus an expressionist painting (I have no idea about it at all)

Figure 6.18. An Example of Peers' Emotional Support, Larry's Public Post, 12/4/18
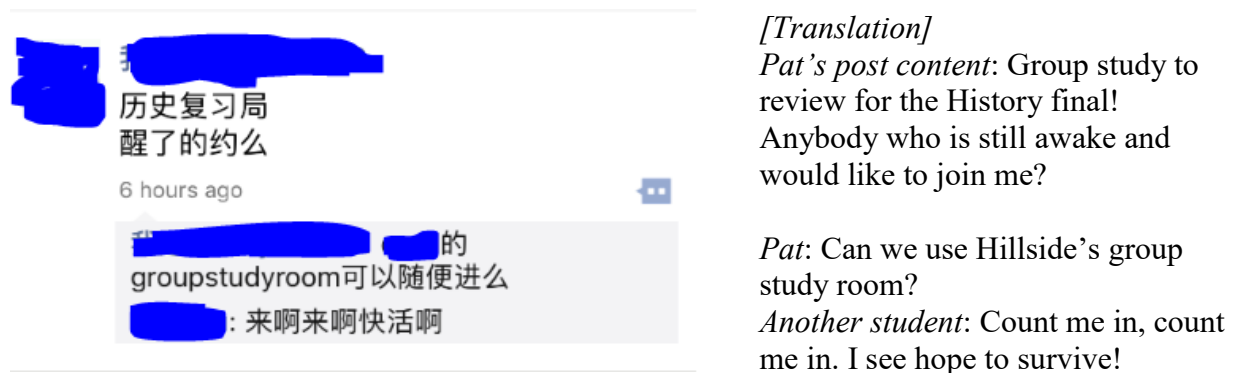
历史复习局
醒了的约么

6 hours ago

groupstudyroom可以随便进么

来啊来啊快活啊

[Translation]
Pat's post content: Group study to review for the History final! Anybody who is still awake and would like to join me?

Pat: Can we use Hillside's group study room?
Another student: Count me in, count me in. I see hope to survive!

Figure 6.19. An Example of Peers' Emotional Support, Pat's Public Post, 12/10/18

Perceived effectiveness of support from the OISS remained similar.

The support from the OISS continued to be viewed negatively by the vast majority of my participants. Although the OISS was said to have tried to provide them with support throughout the semester, especially through email invitations to various social events, none of the students reported to have attended any of those events toward the end of the semester. In fact, all the students except for Lily told me that they found the OISS "just a format" "non-existent" and "unhelpful," and the majority of them revealed that they were likely to directly ignore those emails as long as they identified "OISS" in the subject (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18, 11.21.18). Even Lily, who used to participate in the outings organized by her IA, told me that with the increasing academic stress, she had to skip all social events (Interview, 11.19.18). In spite of this, she remained to be the only one who was still in touch with her IA. According to Lily, her IA, an "academic sister" from the same department, had offered her helpful suggestions on course selection for the upcoming Spring semester (Interview, 11.19.18).

While the vast majority of my participants described the support from the OISS as ineffective and unhelpful, it seemed that they were not bothered at all toward the end of the semester (Research Memo, 12.10.18). Kristin explained,

本来我还觉的怎么 IA 都不管我, OISS 也没给我们什么特别的帮助, 还有点不爽。后来一问周围同学, 原来大家都一样, 我也就完全不在乎了。直接忽略他们就好。
Originally, I felt a little bit annoyed because I felt that I was left unattended by my IA and the OISS. But later, after asking around, it turned out that my friends were all in the same boat. Then I did not care anymore, I decided to directly ignored them [the OISS and IAs] (Interview, 11.19.18).

Sarah, Larry, Pat, and Bill further added that they did not care about whether the OISS could offer any effective support, because the mutual help from the Chinese student community was enough to support their college adjustment and academic difficulties. As Sarah summarized, "*我们在中国小伙伴的互相支持下, 在美国顽强地生活着*" (Thanks to the mutual support among the Chinese international students, we are still surviving fine in the U.S.) (Interview, 11.20.18).

Summary

Chapter 6 presented the 12 Chinese international students' experiences during the middle and later sections of their first semester in college. Throughout the two time points, findings were presented following their linguistic functioning in academic and social settings, coping strategies utilized, and perceived effectiveness of support received from others. Compared with the beginning of the semester (details see Chapter 5), some patterns could be observed with regards to the three aforementioned areas.

In terms of their linguistic functioning in academic and social settings, the first theme that has emerged was that throughout the semester, the existence or absence of cultural and linguistic congruencies remained to stand out as an important factor influencing the Chinese students' academic experiences. The international students were likely to report positive experiences in courses which were perceived as culturally or linguistically responsive (e.g., *History, ELL*

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Writing). In contrast, they tended to have a difficult time meeting the academic and linguistic demands in courses which were culturally and linguistically incongruent (e.g., *Philosophy*).

Secondly, throughout the semester, the students demonstrated a general trend of positive linguistic, academic and social adjustment. Despite their many unexpected struggles at the initial stage of the semester, the Chinese international students showed an overall improvement in their English proficiency and intercultural communication ability throughout the semester. Compared with earlier in the semester, more participants reported to have initiated conversations with their American professors and peers, and four even established friendships with their native English-speaking peers. Yet, regardless of the overall improvement in their linguistic, academic and social adjustment, some individual differences could be observed across cases; this was likely due to a combination of external and internal factors. More discussions regarding this will be presented in Chapter 7.

With regards to the students' coping strategies throughout the semester, the first pattern that could be observed was that the frequency and likelihood of adopting Chinese as a bridging tool to facilitate their linguistic functioning had dropped significantly throughout the semester, even without any intervention from their professors or the university. While it had been widely used and largely welcomed by all the "regular high" students at the beginning of the semester, its popularity naturally decreased as the semester progressed with more and more of the students realizing its potential drawbacks.

The second pattern that could be identified was in relation to their support seeking behavior. While the participants remained to be similarly active in support seeking from their Chinese peers throughout the semester, more and more of the students took the initiative to seek support from other sources such as their professors, tutors and TAs. In particular, the "regular

high" students became more willing to seek support from their "American high" peers, indicating that the tensions between the two groups may have alleviated as the semester progressed.

Finally, with regards to their perceived effectiveness of the support received, throughout the semester, the vast majority of the students remained to hold overall positive attitudes toward the support from their Chinese peers and generally negative opinions toward the assistance provided by the OISS. As for the support from their professors, although the *ELL Writing* professors and tutors were consistently regarded as helpful sources in support of the Chinese international students' academic and linguistic adjustment, more and more students reported to have had mixed experiences with some of their content-subject professors. While some professors were described as very supportive, others were criticized for their lack of tangible actions to facilitate the participants' cultural and linguistic transition.

In Chapter 7, I will synthesize and triangulate findings presented in Chapters 4 through 6 to present answers to the key research questions, and discuss some myths and realities with regards to Chinese international students' first semester experiences in American higher education. Based on the discussion, I will propose a theoretical model to understand Chinese international college freshmen's journeys. Toward the end, I will present concrete implications and suggestions which shed light on how the U.S. tertiary education could better support the linguistic, academic, and cultural transitions among their growing Chinese international student population.

CHAPTER 7

MYTHS AND REALITIES

Introduction

In the previous six chapters, I have painted a comprehensive picture of the twelve Chinese international students' first-semester experiences during their overseas studies in an American higher education institution. The first three chapters presented the rationale and background information of the study, introduced the two theories guiding its theoretical orientation, and explained the methodological approaches in detail. Chapter 4 zoomed into a selected group of participants and highlighted the unique stories with regards to their academic and language experiences throughout their first semester in college. These five participants were intentionally selected to show the distinct journeys of Chinese international students with various language and education backgrounds. Chapters 5 and 6 reported patterns and themes emerged from the twelve participants' linguistic and academic experiences during the three time points, including the beginning of the semester (Weeks 0-4), around midterm (Weeks 5-9), and toward the end of the semester (Weeks 10-15). Results were reported based on how the patterns observed at the initial stage of the semester had changed or remained the same over time to demonstrate the developmental nature of the participants' gradual linguistic and academic acculturation throughout the first half of their freshmen year in an American university.

In Chapter 7, I will synthesize and triangulate findings from the earlier chapters to answer the three guiding research questions. Then I will discuss the Chinese international students' first-semester college experiences based on eight common myths that this dissertation is questioning. Based on the findings of the dissertation, I will propose a theoretical model that specifically

addresses the initial college experiences of the Chinese international students. Drawing upon the key findings discussed and the new theoretical model, I will present corresponding suggestions on how American higher education could better support bilingual international students at the initial stage of their overseas studies as well as implications on research methodology. Finally, I will close the dissertation by discussing limitations of the study and potential directions for future research.

Revisiting the Guiding Research Questions

This dissertation was guided by three key research questions, which tapped into (1) how the focal Chinese international college freshmen functioned linguistically in academic and social settings at the beginning stage of the semester, (2) how they performed linguistically in academic and social settings throughout the course of one academic semester, and (3) what changes regarding their language and academic experiences have occurred over time. The data to the first two questions have been presented in detail at both individual and group levels in Chapters 4 through 6. With regards to the third question, changes were observed in three major areas including the participants' linguist functioning, coping strategies, and support received over time.

Linguistic Functioning at the Beginning of the Semester

At the beginning of the semester (Weeks 0-4), the "American high" students reported no difficulty in their linguistic functioning in college. In addition to being able to function linguistically in classroom settings, they also demonstrated frequent contact with native speakers of English in beyond-classroom contexts. To be specific, the "American high" students were able to initiate contact with their professors through office hour visits, and also had frequent communication with their American peers by establishing friendships. Additionally, none of the "American high" students used Chinese to facilitate their linguistic functioning in academic and

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social settings at the initial stage of their overseas studies in college; however, they all reported to have once relied on Chinese as a bridging tool when they first started high school in the U.S., a coping strategy that they later abandoned due to its ineffectiveness.

In contrast, the nine "regular high" students reported various degrees of difficulties in linguistic functioning in academic and social contexts at the beginning of the semester; the reported linguistic challenges were with regards to the four skills of English speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Four patterns could be observed based on their experiences. Firstly, due to the mismatches between their successful TOEFL performances and various linguistic barriers upon college entry, the "regular high" students reported to have had some shocking experiences at the initial stage of their overseas studies.

Secondly, compared with their "American high" peers, the "regular high" students had significantly less contact with native English speakers. On the one hand, they rarely take advantage of the office hour consultations. On the other hand, the "regular high" students' contact with American peers was very context-based, which rarely extended beyond classroom settings (e.g., required in-class discussions). Their friend circle appeared limited, as they almost exclusively socialized with and sought support from their Chinese peers.

Thirdly, cultural and linguistic congruencies were found to be correlated with the Chinese international students' academic experiences. When the courses were found to be culturally and linguistically congruent (e.g., *ELL Writing*, *History*), they were likely to have positive academic experiences. On the contrary, when the courses were perceived as in lack of cultural and linguistic congruencies (e.g., *Philosophy*, *Mathematics*, *Music*), the students were more prone to have negative academic experiences. Last but not least, all the "regular high" students showed favorable attitudes toward the coping strategy of using Chinese as a bridging tool to facilitate

their linguistic functioning in academic and social contexts. All of them reported to have frequently relied on Chinese at the initial stage of their overseas studies.

The twelve participants generally perceived the support received from their professors and Chinese peers as effective, which exerted positive influences on their initial linguistic functioning and college adjustment. However, the vast majority of the participants showed dissatisfaction toward support from the OISS, especially with regards to the International Student Orientation and the IAs assigned. They described the support as non-tangible and argued that the services provided by the OISS was "nothing but a format" (Interviews, 8.30.18, 9.4.18, 9.6.18). Lily, the only student who thought highly of the support from the OISS was also the only participant with a Chinese IA from the same major.

Linguistic Functioning for the Rest of the Semester

Around the middle of the semester (Weeks 5-9).

As the semester progressed, the gap between the "regular high" and "American high" students' ability to function linguistically in academic and social contexts continued. The "American high" students continued to demonstrate significantly higher abilities in their linguistic functioning across contexts. Not only were they able to meet the linguistic demands in classroom settings, but also they were able to initiate frequent contact with native English speakers and establish friendships with domestic students.

With regards to the "regular high" students' language and academic experiences, many aspects stayed unchanged compared with the beginning of the semester. Firstly, cultural and linguistic congruencies remained to be correlated with their course experiences. In addition, the "regular high" students continued to report various degrees of difficulties in their linguistic

functioning in academic and social settings. Moreover, the vast majority of the "regular high" students continued to socialize primarily with their own kind.

However, some progress could be identified regarding their linguistic functioning and college adjustment. Firstly, more and more "regular high" students started to seek support from their professors and tutors. In fact, by the end of Week 9, all but one student reported to have initiated meetings with their instructors during their office hours. Secondly, while the majority of the "regular high" students primarily socialized with other Chinese international students, their overall contact with native English speaking peers have increased. Half of them expressed interest in communicating with their American peers, and three took concrete actions to approach domestic students. In the most extreme case, Eva decided to socialize almost exclusively with her racially minoritized American peers. Lastly, the popularity of relying on Chinese as a bridging tool has somewhat decreased, with some participants becoming critical and more selective about adopting this method.

During this particular timeframe, three themes emerged. Firstly, compared with the earlier time point, higher linguistic demands on academic English writing could be observed across disciplines. Based on text analysis informed by genre-based pedagogy (Brisk, 2015), the participants showed a general tendency to struggle in areas where severe cultural and linguistic incongruences were identified. To be specific, the two most challenging aspects were found to be thesis statement in argument writing and verb tense consistency; both areas featured drastically different expectations across Chinese and American cultures. Secondly, while the tensions between the "regular high" and "American high" students continued, it seemed that the conflicts between the two groups were less intense. More and more "regular high" students reached out to their "American high" peers for academic support. Thirdly, while the Chinese international

students held similarly negative attitudes toward support received from the OISS and equally positive attitudes toward help from their Chinese peers, they revealed mixed feelings toward their professors. According to the participants, while some of the instructors provided concrete support which was beneficial to their language and academic well-being, others merely demonstrated sympathy without further actions, the help from whom was thus considered superficial and ineffective.

Toward the end of the semester (Weeks 10-15).

With the semester approaching its end, while the "American high" students continued to be linguistically struggle-free throughout the semester, the "regular high" students became more accustomed to American higher education and were faced with fewer barriers in linguistic functioning compared with earlier in the semester. Firstly, there were no longer clearly identifiable patterns regarding the two group of students' support seeking from their professors, tutors, and TAs; except for Matthew who insisted that office hours were exclusively for those students who were in severe trouble and never initiated any office hour consultations with his professors, all other "regular high" students frequently took advantage of the support from their instructors. Secondly, the "regular high" students continued to demonstrate increased contact with their native English-speaking peers; by the end of the semester, several "regular high" students claimed that they became good friends with American students. Additionally, more and more "regular high" students were aware of the shortcomings of relying on Chinese as a bridging tool, and this coping strategy had gradually lost its popularity. With the "regular high" students' increasing linguistic acculturation, the tensions between the two groups of students also alleviated, as an increasing number of "regular high" students reported to have sought help from their "American high" peers.

Toward the end of the semester, cultural and linguistic congruencies remained to be correlated with the participants' academic experiences. With the finals approaching, the Chinese international students expressed their concerns on the exams which were in lack of linguistic congruencies due to the short-answers question format.

Compared with earlier in the semester, the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of support from various sources remained unchanged. While they continued to appreciate support from their TAs, tutors, and Chinese peers, the vast majority of the Chinese international students remained to hold negative attitudes toward the support from the OISS. Professors continued to be perceived as a controversial source of support, towards which the participants held mixed feelings.

Changes Observed Regarding the Participants' Language and Academic Experiences

In general, the "American high" students' language and academic experiences did not go through any remarkable changes; this was likely due to their already high ability to function linguistically and their familiarity with the American education system and culture ever since the beginning of the semester. In contrast, the "regular high" students' journeys went through multiple important changes, especially in the following three areas: (1) linguistic functioning in academic and social settings; (2) coping strategies initiated; and (3) perceived effectiveness of support received from others.

Regarding changes in the participants' linguistic functioning (visual summary see Figure 6.1 in Chapter 6), the following patterns could be observed. Firstly, throughout the semester, while "American high" students had no difficulty functioning linguistically, the "regular high" students all encountered various linguistic barriers in academic and social settings, although over time the degree of their reported language struggles gradually declined. Secondly, throughout the

semester, the participants demonstrated increased frequencies in their communication with native speakers of English, and the major sources of contact also expanded from only professors and American peers to also including tutors and TAs. Thirdly, as the semester progressed, the linguistic demands in academic writing across the discipline became higher, and the students were expected to perform academic writing in increasingly diversified genres. Last but not least, ever since the beginning of the semester, cultural and linguistic congruencies had played an important role in the students' course experiences; with the semester coming to an end, linguistic incongruences caused by the short-answers questions had further led to the participants' concerns in their upcoming content-subject examinations.

With regards to changes in the participants' coping strategies throughout the semester (visual summary see Figure 6.11 in Chapter 6), the following patterns could be identified. Firstly, although the "regular high" students frequently used their heritage language, Mandarin Chinese, at the very beginning of the semester as a popular bridging tool to facilitate their linguistic functioning in English in academic and social setting, the frequency of Chinese usage gradually decreased over time. Toward the end of the semester, Chinese was no longer favored or popular as a bridging tool among all the participants. Secondly, over the course of the semester, the sources of support have been extended from mainly professors and Chinese peers to also including tutors and TAs. The "American high" students have consistently sought frequent help from the aforementioned sources of support throughout the semester. In contrast, while the "regular high" students almost exclusively relied on their Chinese peers at the beginning of the semester, the frequencies of their support-seeking from professors, tutors, and TAs increased substantially over time. Finally, while the tensions between "regular high" and "American high"

students remained observable throughout the semester, such a divide decreased over time with more and more "regular high" students seeking help from their "American high" peers.

With regards to the participants' perceived effectiveness of their support received (visual summary see Figure 6.14 in Chapter 6), different from their overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward support from their professors at the beginning of their college life, more and more participants demonstrated mixed feelings toward their professors' help as the semester progressed. Toward the end of the semester, the Chinese international students concluded that the effectiveness of the support from their instructors was on a case-by-case basis.

Misconceptions Challenged

The findings of the dissertation have questioned eight popular misconceptions about Chinese international students and their experiences studying in American higher education. By presenting counterexamples for each misconception based on the findings of the dissertation, I cast doubt on (1) the homogeneity of the Chinese international student population, (2) the TOEFL's capability in accurately predicting Chinese students' linguistic functioning at college, (3) the necessity of an institution-wide English-only policy, (4) the usefulness of *First-year Writing* in enhancing content-subject writing performances, (5) the effectiveness of office hour consultations, (6) the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic outcomes, (7) the influences of large influxes of foreign students, and (8) factors influencing Chinese international students' college experiences.

Misconception 1: Chinese International Students Are Chinese International Students

One common misconception about Chinese international students is that, they represent a homogeneous group. In recent years, many studies have been conducted to explore the various aspects in relation to Chinese international students' experiences studying in an English-speaking

higher education environment, the focuses of which include but not limited to their psychological distress (Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, 2012), acculturative adjustments (Zhang & Goodson, 2011), attitudes toward counseling (Yoon & Jepsen, 2008), social networks (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011), satisfaction during overseas studies (Douglas, Douglas, & Barnes, 2006), as well as aspirations and expectations (Azmat, Osborne, Le Rossignol, Jogulu, Rentschler, Robonttom, & Malathy, 2013). However, it seemed that throughout all these aforementioned studies, Chinese international students have been treated as a homogenous block, whose within-group variability was largely overlooked. Despite their common status of being Chinese international students, the participants in the study demonstrated strong within-group variability, which consequently played a role in their very different journeys throughout the semester.

One of the most important themes that persisted throughout the semester was the divide between the "American high" and "regular high" Chinese international students. Be it with regards to the linguistic functioning in academic and social settings or the coping strategies utilized, there were many substantial differences between the two groups. Comparatively speaking, the "regular high" students were generally more likely to resort to their heritage language, socialize with peers with similar backgrounds, and experience various degrees of difficulties in their linguistic functioning across contexts.

Beyond the dichotomy of "regular high" and "American high" students, the participants' previous language and education experiences could further be viewed on a continuum (see Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3). In other words, the students' different degrees of cultural, linguistic, and academic acculturation started long before their college entry, which in turn positioned them

at different starting lines upon their overseas studies at Hillside University, making such a block of "Chinese international students" a very varied group with drastically different needs.

To be specific, the students who had the least exposure to the English language as well as the American education system were Larry, Pat, Eva, and William, who attended the so-called traditional "regular high" schools in China. One of the most important goals of their high schools was to prepare students for the Chinese College Entrance Exam, and therefore had no emphasis on overseas studies orientation or TOEFL preparation. They were said to be taught content knowledge mainly through rote memorization. Those students had never encountered any native English-speaking teachers at school, nor did they experience American high school curricula.

Because of such a background, the traditional "regular high" students were faced with the most language and academic challenges upon arrival in an American higher education institution. Not only did they have to adjust to the English-speaking environment, but also they were challenged to learn unfamiliar content knowledge through a language they had never been immersed in. William's initial struggles as presented in Chapter 4 well represented the beginning college experiences of these traditional "regular high" students, during which he compared himself to be "a deaf man" and "an idiot" because of the dual challenge from understanding English and also learning through English. Later into the semester, due to their lack of experience in English and the American education system, the students continued to face the greatest challenges in content-subject learning; they were constantly challenged by the unfamiliar western-centered course content and the dense discipline-specific vocabulary.

Next on the continuum was Matthew, who went to a foreign language high school in Shanghai, one of the most affluent cities in China, followed by Bill, Sarah, Kristin and Lily who attended the international departments within traditional "regular high" schools. Compared with

the traditional "regular high" students, those five students were at slightly more advantageous situations, since they had already had some degree of exposure to either native-speaking English language teachers or the American high school curricula in high school. These two groups of learners were therefore faced with lesser academic challenges upon college entry. Throughout the semester, their previous exposure to English-speaking instructors and some western-centered content subjects allowed them to be more prepared to communicate in the authentic English speaking environment and provided them with more background knowledge to draw upon.

Finally, toward the opposite end of the continuum were Rebecca and Shawn, who had attended one year of high school in China and three years in the U.S., followed by Hugo, who spent all four years in an American high school. Their previous years of immersion in American high schools were found to have prepared them well for their linguistic functioning and college adjustment ever since the beginning of the semester. Therefore, compared with their "regular high" peers, the three "American high" students demonstrated significantly fewer struggles linguistically, academically, and culturally.

Although the twelve participants demonstrated various degrees of linguistic and academic acculturation prior to college entry, the Chinese international students themselves did not seem to have noticed such a continuum with regards to their previous language and education experiences. Instead, they continued to categorize themselves based on the dichotomy of "American high" or "regular high" students.

Such an obvious divide has led to the persisting tensions between the two groups: while the "regular high" students described their "American high" peers as people who frequently showed off their English proficiency, the "American high" students compared their "regular high" counterparts to "sticky rice" and criticized them for constantly staying together and being

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reluctant to step out of their comfort zones. Although such tensions have gradually decreased over time, they remained present throughout the Chinese international students' first-semester college experiences in an American higher education institution.

The constant divide between the two groups of Chinese international students, however, did not infer that the seemingly linguistically struggle-free "American high" students were superior or more intelligent compared with their "regular high" counterparts. Instead it illustrated the distinct stages the participants were at in terms of their linguistic acculturation into the English-speaking environment, which implied that the participants' language experiences could be better understood from a developmental perspective.

Compared with those newly-arrived Chinese international students, the three "American high" students had been immersed in the American education system as well as the second language environment for at least three years longer. This placed them at a more advanced stage in their linguistic transition. In other words, rather than being superior or completely linguistically problem-free, the three "American high" students might be better referred to as "ex-strugglers" who had already gone through the many challenges and difficulties of linguistic acculturation during their high school experiences in America. Contrasting to the "American high" students' advanced stages in their acculturation, the "regular high" international freshmen were at the beginning stage of their linguistic transition. Therefore, they were more prone to various linguistic, academic, and cultural challenges.

It seemed that the tensions between the two groups of students were largely due to their lack of awareness of the contrasting linguistic transitional stages they were situated in. Instead of interpreting the "American high" students' frequent English use and close relationships with American peers as them pretending to be Chinese Americans or trying to show off their high

English proficiency, it was more likely that such behaviors naturally reflected the characteristics of those international students' advanced stages during their linguistic acculturation. It could be possible that when the "regular high" students reach similar stages later in their overseas studies, they would also demonstrate such a tendency of frequent English usage and socialization with local students.

By the same token, the "regular high" students were likely to socialize with their own kind and frequently resort to their heritage language because they were at the earlier phases during their linguistic transition. They needed the additional linguistic, emotional, and academic support from peers with similar language and education backgrounds to facilitate their transition into the English-speaking academic and social contexts. It was again highly possible that the so-called "sticky rice" behavior that the "American high" students criticized for might have been something they themselves had already gone through years ago back in high school.

Finally, by viewing the participants from a developmental perspective and based on their different linguistic acculturation stages, the decreasing tensions between the two groups over time could also be explained. It was likely that when the "regular high" students became more acculturated after months into the new environment, the divide of linguistic acculturation between the two groups was no longer as dramatic, which consequently alleviated their tensions and sense of differences.

Misconception 2: The Chinese International Students' TOEFL Results Accurately Predict Their Ability to Function Linguistically upon College Entry

The TOEFL, as a standardized assessment of nonnative speakers' English proficiency, has been used as a high-stakes gatekeeping tool by English-medium higher education institutions around the world. In the U.S. almost all tertiary education institutions require nonnative-speaking

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international students to pass certain thresholds on the TOEFL before granting admission. Given the crucial role of the TOEFL test in American college admission, it is often considered as an accurate predictor of the international students' ability to function linguistically in college, which consequently plays an important role on those learners' holistic academic performances.

In fact, lots of scholarly studies have been conducted in exploration of the influences of language proficiency on international students' GPA in college (e.g., Hill, Storch, & Lynch, 1999; Huong, 2001; Johnson, 1988; Kerstijens & Nery, 2000; Krausz, Schiff, Schiff, & Hise, 2005; Light, Teh-Yuan, & Weinstein-Shr, 1991; Light, Xu, & Mossop, 1987; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015; Woodrow, 2006), among which the majority have adopted participants' TOEFL scores as a key indicator for their English proficiency. Therefore, it seems that the common underlying assumption throughout these studies is that TOEFL scores equate with international students' ability to function linguistically in college.

Nevertheless, findings of this dissertation cast doubt on this myth, since some discrepancies could be observed between the participants' TOEFL results and their actual language proficiency. The Chinese international students' uniformly successful TOEFL scores did not necessarily lead to their success in functioning linguistically during their overseas studies in an American higher education institution. As detailed in Chapter 5, the participants, especially those "regular high" ones, pointed out that this standardized assessment tended to underestimate the linguistic demands in tertiary education, especially with regards to the TOEFL reading and speaking subtests.

The TOEFL reading subtest was described by my participants as the least authentic assessment given its tendency to underestimate the actual college-level linguistic demands. This test consists of reading a short passage and answering multiple choice questions. In contrast,

college-level content-subject courses such as *Philosophy* and *History* demanded over 50 pages of readings per week that the students needed to understand, annotate, and be prepared to discuss in class. Due to the large discrepancies, successful performances on the TOEFL reading hardly predicted the participants' actual capability to meet the reading demands in college.

Similarly, the TOEFL speaking subtest was also widely criticized by the Chinese international students due to its lack of authenticity. The test requires students to express their opinions on a given topic. In the process, test takers are expected to talk to computers in a monologue style, with their oral production being automatically recorded and strictly timed (e.g., with a 45 second limit). In contrast, to fulfill the oral linguistic demands in college, not only were there no exact time restraint to one's oral production, but also the emphasis was very often placed on the ability to contribute to dialogues. The participants were required to have engaging interactions with their interlocutors through questioning, responding, explaining, and clarifying, during which proper turn-taking skills were also necessary. As these important aspects were not fully assessed in the TOEFL speaking subtest, successful test scores failed to accurately predict the participants' ability to meet the oral linguistic demands upon college entry.

Furthermore, the intense emphasis on passing the test and test preparation rather than on developing language to function in English academic settings may also have exacerbated the problem. The Chinese international students in this dissertation had all attended intensive TOEFL preparation courses prior to the examination, during which training on rote memorization of patterns and tricks was said to be a key component. Moreover, they uniformly reported to have taken the TOEFL repeatedly until successful results were obtained. In the most dramatic case, William doubled his TOEFL score by both participating in test preparation courses and taking the assessment for five times within one year. Considering that language

development is a prolonged process, such a dramatic score increase on the TOEFL within very short duration of time has substantially put the predictability of test results under question.

Misconception 3: An English-only Policy is Necessary in Higher Education to Help International Students Improve Their Linguistic Functioning in English

Despite the rising popularity of English as a Lingual Franca (Jenkins, 2007) and the widely agreed benefits of bilingualism, English-only attitudes still prevail in American society (e.g., Macedo, 2000; White, 2012; Wright, 2004). For example, a recent anti-bilingual comment from Duke University Professor Megan Neely has brought the controversies about the necessity of an English-only policy back into public attention. As the Director of Graduate Studies in Biostatistics at Duke University, Professor Neely sent out a group email, urging all international students to avoid heritage language usage both inside and beyond classroom settings so as to "commit to using English 100% of the time" (Mervosh, 2019). In the email, the professor explicitly commented "[T]hese students were not taking the opportunity to improve their English and were being so impolite as to have a conversation that not everyone on the floor could understand." Targeting Chinese international students, the largest international student group at Duke, she further emphasized "PLEASE[15] PLEASE PLEASE keep these unintended consequences in mind when you choose to speak Chinese in the building…" (Mervosh, 2019).

The Duke professor's comment echoed a commonly held myth in American higher education and beyond, believing that in order to improve English, bilingual students need to be immersed in an English-speaking environment as much as possible; the usage of their heritage language is therefore nothing but a distraction. Nevertheless, the findings from this dissertation

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[15] Text capitalized and emphasized by the original author.

have cast doubt on such a myth, putting the necessity of an English-only policy in American higher education into question.

Firstly, the English-only policy, as adopted throughout all sessions of the *ELL Writing* course, was found to have caused confusion to the participants' linguistic functioning in classroom settings and beyond; instead of facilitating international students' academic performances, such a policy seemed to exert negative influences on their linguistic transition and content-subject learning. While the majority of the courses at Hillside University did not have a clear language usage guideline, the English Department had made it clear that all those who attended the *ELL Writing* course should follow an English-only policy. Such a policy was said to be made with the intention to regulate language usage specifically in that sheltered writing class in order to enhance international students' academic writing ability. Nevertheless, without further clarification from their professors, the vast majority of the Chinese international students in this study interpreted the policy as an institution-level language regulation at Hillside.

Due to their perceived institution-wide English-only policy, multiple "regular high" students mentioned that, they developed negative views toward their heritage language, thinking of it as inferior and "too silly." The participants reported incidences when they were concerned whether they would get punished when using Chinese in non-classroom settings (e.g., bathroom, office hours) to greet their Asian history professor who happened to share the same heritage language.

This potentially further discouraged them from making quick clarifications with their Chinese peers in Mandarin about any uncertainties during the lectures, which not only limited their linguistic functioning and dynamic language use as bilingual individuals, but also failed to facilitate their content-subject learning. On the one hand, since their English was often not good

enough to make quick clarifications with peers, the participants tended to let go of those learnable moments and chose to stay quiet. On the other hand, because very often the confusions those Chinese international students had during lecture were actually due to language barriers, it was almost impossible for them to digest certain knowledge points without the support from their first language as a medium of communication between peers.

In fact, an institution-wide English-only policy is highly unnecessary. For one thing, without allowing Chinese usage at the beginning of the semester to ease some of the tensions and linguistic difficulties, the Chinese international students would have a harder time in their academic, language, and cultural transition, which could lead to negative influences psychologically, emotionally, and academically (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2011). For another, based on the findings of the dissertation, rather than staying as a hurdle minimizing their opportunities to use English, the dependence on Chinese as a bridging tool naturally decreased over time with the participants' improving ability to function linguistically in English. In other words, thanks to the initial support from their heritage language as a bridging tool, the Chinese international students were able to gradually function linguistically in English-speaking academic and social contexts; this has in turn led to their decreased reliance on Chinese.

Misconception 4: First-year Writing Course Guarantees International Students' Successful Writing Performances in Content Area Courses

First-year Writing is often regarded as one of the mandatory core courses in American higher education, designed specifically to improve the academic writing ability of freshmen college students, native and nonnative speakers of English alike. The underlying assumption of providing such a writing course at the initial stage of students' tertiary education is that, with the

writing support received in this course, learners will be able to function linguistically to meet the writing demands in content-subject courses throughout their college experiences.

However, while the Chinese international students in this dissertation all reported overwhelmingly positive experiences in their *ELL Writing*, their success in that particular class did not seem to have naturally translated into high performances in content-subject academic writing. Although *ELL Writing* was highly effective in preparing the international students to meet the writing demands in that particular course, its positive influences were likely to fall short in facilitating academic writing in content-subject courses.

Based on the findings of the dissertation, the participants uniformly described their experiences in *ELL Writing* as positive and valuable. This course has not only developed many essential habits to succeed in college (e.g., office hour visits, taking advantage of tutorship), but also created a safe space for nonnative speakers to participate, support each other, and make progress. Many of the instructional strategies were important, informative, and worth to be adopted in content-subject courses. As experts in second language pedagogy, the *ELL Writing* professors were said to be able to provide culturally and linguistically responsive instruction by allowing the students to bring in their own background knowledge and experiences. This had created a culturally and linguistically congruent safe space which in turn resulted in the Chinese international students' positive experiences in the course. For instance, when learning and practicing to write recounts, the *ELL Writing* instructors encouraged the students to choose their own topics by bringing in their personal experiences and background knowledge. Allowed to bring in their own voices, the Chinese international students demonstrated passion in fulfilling the writing demands in *ELL Writing*. They were able to write in the target genre about some very

personal topics, including but not limited to their sexual orientation, dating experiences, and family stories.

Despite the many benefits of *ELL Writing*, the participants' success in that particular course did not seem to have led to their successful writing performances in content courses based on results from the text analysis in this dissertation. While the students were encouraged to connect to their personal experiences in fulfilling the genre requirements in *ELL Writing*, such opportunities were rare in content-subject courses. In most cases, content area writings required the students to perform in the target genres by making specific connections to course readings and subject-specific concepts, during which the students were not offered ample opportunities to draw upon their own experiences. This has partially explained the mismatches between their writing performances in *ELL Writing* and their actual capability to function linguistically in content-subject essays, considering that the participants were more motivated to write when allowed to draw upon their prior knowledge.

Additionally, in *ELL Writing*, regardless of the topics or content, the better the students could demonstrate their academic English writing ability in the target genres, the more likely they would receive good grades. This mainly because the writing professors, despite being language experts, may not have sufficient expertise in the topics and content that the students chose (e.g., the concept of Yin and Yang based on Chinese legend, the myth of the health benefits of drinking warm water in Chinese culture). In contrast, in content-subject writing, the international students were almost always evaluated simultaneously on their content knowledge and English language ability. In fact, as shown in the cases with regards to the essays written by Lily and Sarah, regardless of their ability to perform academic writing, as long as they failed to demonstrate their content knowledge, their grades would suffer. Given the different degrees of

emphasis on language and content, success in *ELL Writing* may not guarantee successful performances in content-subject writing.

Misconception 5: Office Hour Consultations Always Work Like Magic

Office hour visits are widely recommended as an important practice for college students to raise questions and receive feedback from their professors. While some research has been done focusing on factors that influence the frequencies of students' office hour visits (Griffin et al., 2014), others have examined the various benefits of office hour consultations on learners' academic performances (Schertzer et al., 2014). Since instructor-learner interaction beyond the classroom settings has been consistently found to be beneficial to students' academic well-being (Chickering & Gamson, 1986; Dika 2012; Kuh et al. 2010), office hour consultations are very often perceived in an overwhelmingly positive light. As Chickering and Gamson (1986) summarized as the top element in their proposed *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*:

> Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans. (p. 3).

Contradictory to the overwhelmingly positive role that office hours were widely believed to play in students' academic well-being, the findings of the dissertation suggested that the effectiveness of professors' support during office hour consultations would be better viewed on a case-by-case basis. In spite of the high office hour attendance rates as observed in this dissertation, the participants expressed their mixed feelings toward the effectiveness of office hour visits.

Some participants held positive attitudes toward the support received from their professors during office hour consultations. In addition to showing empathy towards the cultural and linguistic challenges during their transnational experiences, certain professors were said to have taken concrete actions in supporting the Chinese international students. These tangible, culturally and linguistically responsive support to facilitate their linguistic transition and function in content-subject learning included (1) initiating regular check-in meetings with the students, (2) requiring mandatory weekly office hour visits by the students, (3) recommending additional language resources, (4) connecting the students with some of their Chinese "academic sisters and brothers" who had taken the same class in the past, and (5) promising to curve the students' score by focusing more on their content performance (Research Memo, 10.28.18).

Nevertheless, in most other cases the professors have failed to take concrete steps except for showing empathy, incorporating simple expressions such as "*你好*" (hello), or encouraging the Chinese international students to "try harder" (Interview, 11.20.18). The myth about the universal effectiveness of the office hour consultations has thus been put under question.

While some students reported positive attitudes toward those friendly and empathetic gestures, others complained their instructors' occasional Chinese usage to be "random," "unhelpful," "funky," and "totally irrelevant," which had embarrassed them in front of their American peers (Interviews, 11.19.18, 11.20.18). Regardless of how such welcoming gestures were interpreted, in most cases the professors took no additional actions to implement culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy to support the unique needs of newly-arrived bilingual international students. Therefore, as William, "the king of office hours" remarked, the effectiveness of office hour consultations should be viewed on a case by case basis.

Misconception 6: A Student's Socioeconomic Status is Always Positively Correlated with His or Her Education Outcome

It is widely believed that socioeconomic status (SES) plays an important role on students' academic well-being. Previous research has found that lower SES has detrimental influences on learners' academic achievement, because it was found to be correlated with students' behavioral issues (Palardy, Rumberger, & Butler, 2015), teachers' biased perspectives and reduced support on learners (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008), and lowered parental expectations (Lam, 2014).

While agreeing that low SES may jeopardize students' academic outcomes in many ways, the findings of this dissertation have indicated some unexpected negative correlations between Chinese international students' SES and their initial academic and linguistic adjustment in an American higher education institution. It seems that while SES is an important influential factor on students' academic well-being, the nature of its impact may not always be negative.

To be specific, Eva, who reported her overseas studies to be a substantial financial burden on her family, claimed that she constantly felt "too poor" to establish friendships with her mostly affluent Chinese peers. Toward the end, she made her decision to socialize exclusively with her racially minoritized American peers, with whom she felt more at ease. Her frequent contact with native speakers of English has provided her with ample opportunities to use English, which significantly improved her ability to function linguistically in college.

Similarly, William explicitly expressed his awareness of the initial language and educational gap between his peers from those affluent cities (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai) and himself who came from a much less developed region, Taiyuan. His less advantageous SES background has later turned into his motivation to work harder by actively seeking support from various sources, aggressively taking advantage of the office hour consultations, and intentionally

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creating opportunities to socialize with his American peers in order to improve his ability to function linguistically at Hillside University. Throughout the semester, William has made significant progresses in his ability to function linguistically in both academic and social settings.

In contrast, for participants like Matthew from very affluent and powerful family backgrounds, there is little pressure to improve their English or to acculturate into American society. Because those students with high SES backgrounds mainly pursue overseas studies for the purpose of maintaining or improving their families' prestige back in China, they are not driven to step out of their comfort zones to improve their English skills (Park, 2016). Their future goals are less likely to be seeking better career opportunities in the U.S. upon graduation, because regardless of their language and academic achievements in the U.S., their family connections can lay a solid foundation for their future career development back in China. Therefore, they may not be motivated to acculturate into American society, and tend to socialize in an enclave consisting exclusively of Chinese peers. This, in the long run, may not only reduce their opportunity to enhance their bilingualism, but also jeopardize their holistic development as a global citizen.

Misconception 7: The Large Influx of Foreign Students is Always a Negative Phenomenon

The large influx of foreign students has been widely considered as a negative phenomenon; it is often believed that it not only poses challenges to the newcomer students but also exerts negative influences on domestic students' academic performances.

On the one hand, transnational and transcultural education experiences could put the newcomer's academic and psychosocial well-being at risk. For instance, Van Houtte and Stevens's (2010) research on over 10,000 high school students' aspiration to pursue tertiary education has found that the higher the percentage of immigrant students, the less likely those

foreign students intend to finish secondary education and enter college. By analyzing ethnic composition in 85 secondary schools, the researchers concluded that those immigrant students who were enrolled in programs with low influx of newcomers (no more than 20%) were more than twice likely to plan on college studies compared with those who were enrolled in high schools with large influx of foreign students (over 50%) (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2010). Additionally, in Laurie Olsen's (1997) classic book *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools*, the author further pointed out the considerable challenges faced with those newcomers linguistically, emotionally, and socially:

> In making the transition to life here, newcomers face tremendous pressures to adopt racial identities that limit them. For most immigrants, Americanization means leaving behind their fuller national, cultural, and language identities, and abandoning hope that others will see and accept them in their full humanness. (p. 11).

On the other hand, the influx of foreign students was said to also play a negative role on domestic students' academic performances. For instance, Diette and Oyelere (2012) have found that the influx of immigrant students could demonstrate some negative peer effects on domestic students' reading and math performances. Similarly, Economist Julian Betts (1998) referred to the influx of immigrant students in mainstream education as "educational crowding out," as the presence of foreign students was found to have negative influences on domestic students' academic well-being, especially those who were black and Latino (p. 253).

Despite its many long-term negative effects, however, the findings of this dissertation indicated that the influx of foreign students might not always be a negative phenomenon, at least from a short-term perspective. By providing the much needed academic, social, and emotional support, the large number of Chinese international students has demonstrated some benefits to both Chinese international students themselves and their American professors and peers.

Throughout their first semester in college, the cultural and linguistic bond among Chinese international students has contributed to a strong inner-group support system, in which Chinese students received academic, language, and emotional support from each other to facilitate their transnational, transcultural, and translingual experiences during the initial stage of their overseas studies. Since to some degree the American higher education institution failed to provide culturally and linguistically responsive support to facilitate newly-arrived Chinese international students' linguistic and academic transition, such a within-group support system turned out to be a valuable resource to those newcomer students at least in the short run.

At the beginning stage of their overseas studies, the influx of Chinese international students was also found to play a positive role on domestic students and professors, especially with regards to bringing in a global perspective into the existing Western-centered college learning environment. For instance, in his *Philosophy* class, by comparing Plato's wisdom to the famous oriental philosopher, Confucius, Matthew was able to provide his American classmates with new ways of understanding western ideologies. Similarly, in his Marketing seminar which put heavy emphasis on analyzing capitalism and capitalist market, William gathered materials on socialism and socialist market, translated them into English, and presented them to his professor during the office hour visits. This made the professor eventually decide to allocate one lecture to familiarize the class on socialist perspective on marketing.

It is worth noting, however, because the data of the dissertation are limited to one academic semester, it significantly falls short in accurately predicting the long term effects of the large influx of Chinese international students in American higher education. Yet, as illustrated in the findings of the study, several "regular high" students have showed a tendency to stay in their enclaved circles, with Sarah being the most extreme case who almost spent the entire 24 hours

every day with her Chinese roommate. Since the Chinese student community provides strong mutual support, even without experiencing American culture or connecting with local students and support systems, Chinese international students may still be able to function in their overseas studies. Such enclaved experiences could reduce their opportunities to step out of their comfort zones and may deprive them of their long-term opportunities to embrace some desirable linguistic, academic and cultural acculturation.

It might be possible that the large number of Chinese international students make it tempting and convenient for newly-arrived students to select Chinese roommates and socialize exclusively with their own kind. Such enclaved experiences may exert negative influences on Chinese international students' transition into the American learning environment from a long term perspective. Additionally, as indicated in Matthew's case (details see Chapter 4), apart from the missed opportunities to improve their English and intercultural competency, exclusive academic collaboration with Chinese peers without consulting with other resources may also pose the danger of acquiring misconceptions together, which could further jeopardize students' academic well-being in the long run.

Misconception 8: External Factors Determine Chinese International Students' College Experiences

External factors such as SES, support from the institution, and educational environments have consistently played an important role in learners' academic performances (e.g., Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008; Houtte & Stevens, 2010; Lam, 2014; Palardy, Rumberger, & Butler, 2015). Based on the findings of the dissertation, culture stood out as another influential external factor. On the one hand, the different expectations and values with regards to academic writing styles between Chinese and American culture have posed negative influences on the Chinese

international students' writing performances in American higher education. On the other hand, the test-oriented educational culture in China which puts more emphasis on the outcome than the process of learning has exerted influences on the participants' experiences during their overseas studies in America. The overwhelmingly heavier emphasis on test results and final grades over knowledge acquisition has largely explained why the vast majority of the "regular high" students completely gave up their effort to improve their oral participation in *Mathematics*; since participation only took up less than 3% of the final grades, it was unlikely to jeopardize their chance of receiving an A.

But are Chinese international students' experiences solely determined by the various external factors? The findings of the dissertation have indicated that despite the important influences from the aforementioned external factors, the Chinese international students' academic achievement and linguistic functioning did not follow linear paths; some internal factors such as motivation and agency may function as counterforces against the external influences. In other words, while the external factors are crucial elements that could play a role on Chinese international students' transitional experiences, they are far from being determinants; the participants' first-semester journeys are also jointly affected by some internal forces.

Motivation has been found as one of the influential internal factors. For instance, while most of the 'regular high" students in this study remained to socialize primarily with their Chinese peers, William was motivated to establish close friendship with his American peers so as to improve his oral English proficiency. Despite his disadvantaged status of being a traditional "regular high" student who had the least exposure to the English-speaking environment and the U.S. education system, he was able to make significant progress in linguistic functioning

throughout the semester. Highly motivated, William's English had improved so much that he was mistaken as a Chinese American toward the end of the semester (details see Chapter 4).

Yet, motivation alone may not be enough to make a difference on the international students' first semester experiences. Although William, Pat, and Sarah all demonstrated their motivation to improve their English proficiency by socializing with American peers, only William and Pat were able to turn their motivation into concrete actions to practice and improve their English. While William came up with his own strategy to reduce contact with his Chinese peers and intentionally spend more time with local students, Pat pushed himself to initiate conversations with his American peers at the basketball court in order to practice English. In contrast, despite her strong motivation to get to know her American peers and their culture, Sarah did not have much agency to take concrete actions; she socialized exclusively with her Chinese peers, complaining she was "only one step away, yet stuck tight" (details see Chapter 4).

Implications

Based on findings of the dissertation, I would like to revisit the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 2, and adapt it to a new model that directly addresses the initial experiences of Chinese international students in college. Based on the new model, I will present implications of the dissertation on American higher education and on the research methodology.

Revisiting the Integrated Model of the Theoretical Framework

As detailed in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework guiding this dissertation was an integrated model of the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1984, 1985, 1994; Eggins, 2004). In Chapter 4 through 6, data have been presented following the developmental stages of the semester as indicated in the chronosystem, and the findings have captured the participants'

experiences across the micro, meso, and exso systems with the macrosystem as a backdrop. Such a theoretical framework has allowed an investigation of the participants' first semester language and academic experiences across time and contexts, and proposed a framework to view language as a developing process rather than a static concept.

Reflecting on the data collected, I customized the original model to better capture Chinese international students' first semester experiences in American higher education. An updated model is shown in Figure 7.1.

Compared with the earlier model, the following changes have been made to reflect the specific characteristics of Chinese international students' initial transition during their first semester in college. Firstly, at the exosystem, I added a few more elements that were found to be influential based on my participants' experiences, including the large number of Chinese international students, their SES, tutors, TAs, and the OISS. Secondly, I have specified the major factors in the chronosystem of Chinese international freshmen as the different stages during the semester as well as their previous language and education experiences.

Thirdly, I generated some bidirectional arrows, connecting individuals at the center to their microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. By doing so, I would like to indicate that Chinese international students could exert counterforces against influences from these three layers of environments. Rather than being passive recipients of external influences, individuals may also have the power to change their most immediate environment (microsystem; e.g., Pat's decision to initiated "forced conversations" with his American peers), interactions between factors in the microsystem (mesosystem; e.g., Hugo's decision to socialize mainly with newly-arrived Chinese students in academic and social settings), and indirect environment (exosystem;

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e.g., William's decision to aggressively seek support from his professors through office hour consultations).

Lastly, while the majority of the external forces (e.g., SES, race, culture) seemed beyond the control of American higher education, I colored six external factors in green that could possibly be changed and improved by American higher education, including faculty, TAs, tutors, curriculum, the OISS, and institutional policies. Although the Chinese international students' initial college experiences were found to be jointly influenced by various other factors, by addressing and improving these six areas, the students could be provided better opportunities to succeed academically and linguistically during this important transition.
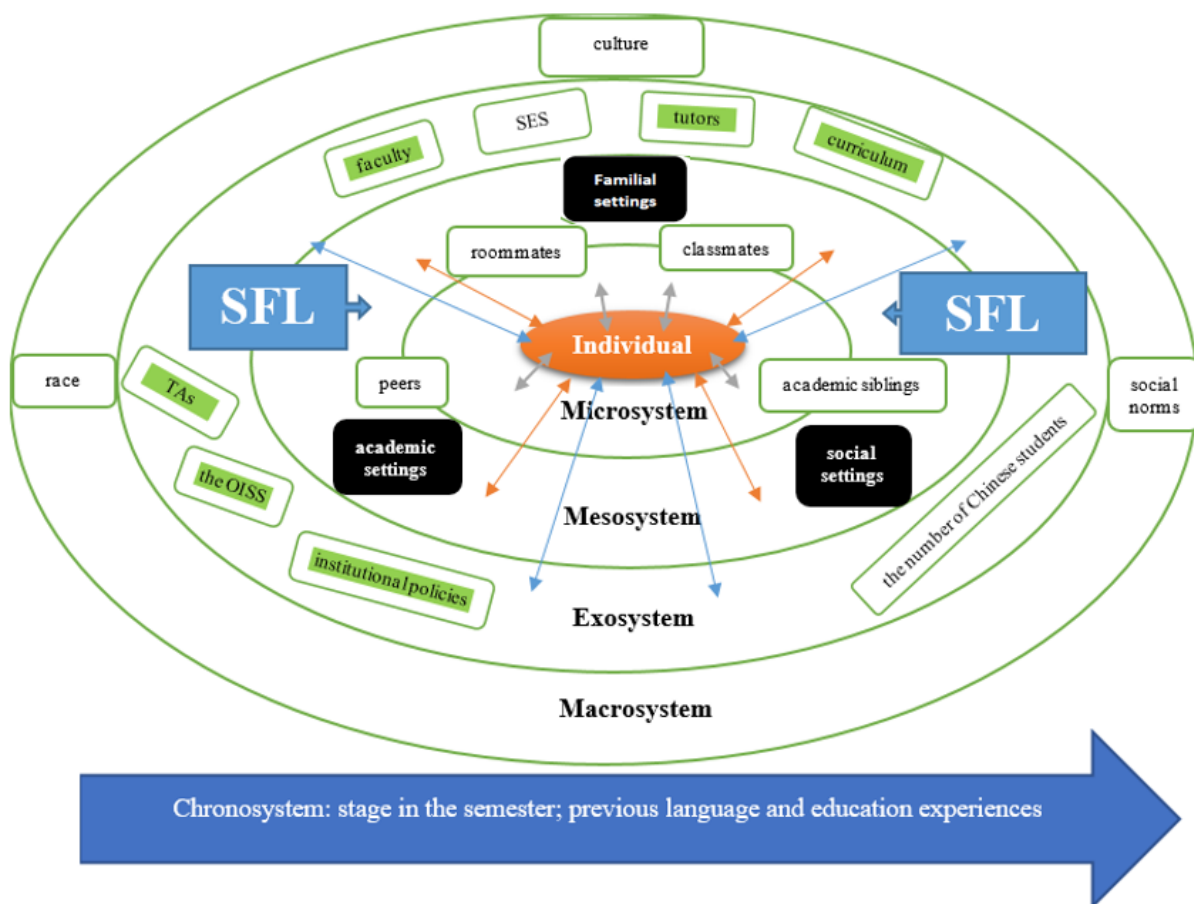

Figure 7.1. Integrated Model Revisited: Chinese International Students' Initial Experiences

Implications on American Higher Education

Reflecting on the aforementioned six external factors which could be enhanced to provide Chinese internationals students with better support during their initial experiences studying in American higher education institutions (see Figure 7.1 marked in green), I propose concrete suggestions which address university leaders, the OISS, and tertiary-level curriculum and instruction.

University leaders.

To a large extent, university leadership determines the culture of an institution. In order to promote diversity and inclusion on campus, the support from university leaders is thus very crucial. To achieve this, it is important for university leaders to be aware of the within-group variability among its international student populations; rather than treating them as static blocks, it is important to understand the various academic and linguistic acculturation stages that the international students are facing and provide customized support based on learners' needs.

In spite of those broad categories such as Chinese international students, the within-group variabilities should not be overlooked: while the "American high" Chinese international students might present themselves as struggle-free, well-adapted, and thus require no additional linguistic support, their "regular high" peers are likely to be faced with many daunting challenges to transition into a distinct culture, an unfamiliar education system, and a new language environment. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to support international students, being able to fully understand this and incorporate it into staff and faculty professional development could set the foundation for their tangible actions to minimize the various cultural, linguistic, and academic challenges facing the newly-arrived international students, especially those who had no previous experiences in American education systems.

Moreover, leaders in American higher education could also make a difference in increasing the cultural and linguistic congruencies so as to provide their international students with better opportunities to excel as they begin their overseas studies experiences. University officials from various support divisions should try to cultivate a welcoming attitude toward cultural and linguistic diversity throughout the institution. It is recommended that American higher education institutions could provide trainings, workshops, events and colloquiums to raise the cross-cultural awareness among all its learner populations, especially the domestic students, who may serve as cultural ambassadors to assist their international peers through the difficult cultural and linguistic transition at the initial stage of their overseas studies.

The OISS.

Working closely and directly with international student populations, the OISS plays an important role in facilitating those learners' academic, linguistic, and psychological well-being during their overseas studies. During the International Student Orientation, the OISS should explicitly explain the prolonged process of linguistic acculturation and the various stages that the students might be at. This will not only help to prevent the on-going tensions between "regular high" and "American high" students, but also facilitate important mutual support among the international student community. Based on the findings of the study, the "American high" students could potentially serve as a crucial source of support for their "regular high" peers due to their shared cultural background, higher English proficiency, and better understanding of the American education systems.

Furthermore, some foundational academic knowledge and social skills should also be explicitly taught during the International Student Orientation so as to facilitate their smooth transitions from secondary to higher education, from China to the U.S., and from a Chinese to an

English speaking environment. Some examples may include topics such as the purposes of office hour visits, how to make appointments with professors through email correspondence, and common ways to initiate a casual conversation with American peers (e.g., small talks usually start with non-conflicting topics such as the weather).

Moreover, the OISS should also strive to increase the cultural and linguistic congruencies experienced by international college freshmen. To be specific, the administrators from the OISS could design activities by striking a balance between introducing Western culture and connecting to the international students' backgrounds. For instance, not only can the students be invited to experience traditional Western events such as Halloween and Thanksgiving, but also they can be encouraged to organize institution-wide events that represent their cultural backgrounds (e.g., Lunar New Year among East Asian international students, Holi among Indian students, Day of the Dead for Mexican students). Through these experiences, international students are empowered through their role as cultural ambassadors, which could in turn motivate them to learn about other cultural traditions and participate in the various other events hosted by the OISS.

Additionally, the OISS should be more mindful in matching international students with their IAs. Reflecting on Lily's positive experiences, it is suggested that if possible, upperclassmen who have extensive knowledge about the international students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds could be recruited as IAs and paired together with newcomer international students. In this way, it is hoped that newly-arrived international students are less likely to feel isolated and would be more comfortable in approaching their IAs for communication and support.

Last but not least, as Sarah suggested, to alleviate the freshmen international college students' initial linguistic shock transitioning into an English-speaking environment, the OISS could provide some opportunities for the students, especially those with no previous schooling backgrounds in the U.S., to experience authentic English-speaking environments through virtual seminars, online workshops, and remote meetings with their IAs prior to the semester starts. If possible, the incoming international students could also be invited to join some summer courses remotely for a short period of time to get a sense of the discipline-specific linguistic demands and course expectations.

These activities could facilitate academic and linguistic acculturation prior to the international students' arrival, which may contribute to their long-term college success. For instance, a 30-minute virtual participation opportunity in a college-level math lecture would be able to raise the incoming international students' awareness of the style of western *Mathematics* courses, in which the students are expected to both perform calculations and orally elaborate their thought processes for problem solving. This will make it possible for international students to preview some content-specific vocabulary and expressions over the summer in preparation for their upcoming college studies overseas.

Tertiary-level curriculum and instruction.

Tertiary-level curriculum and instruction play the most direct influence on international students' initial college experiences. The findings of the dissertation shed light on in-service educator support and pre-service instructor training.

In-service educator support. Firstly, it is necessary for faculty members, TAs and tutors to have access to professional development opportunities, in which they are introduced how to deliver culturally and linguistically responsive instruction to serve the needs of their bilingual

students. One possibility would be to have the *ELL Writing* professors, who are well trained professionals in working with diverse leaners, to lead professional development workshops for content-subject faculty members so as to familiarize them with some foundational knowledge about second language acquisition, emergent bilinguals' writing styles influenced by their cultural backgrounds, as well as strategies to engage bilingual international students into course discussions.

Secondly, faculty members should draw upon international students' previous language and cultural backgrounds to facilitate their initial transition and college adjustment. For *ELL Writing* professors, it may be necessary to initiate explicit whole-class discussions on how culture could play a role in people's academic writing in order to make students aware of the different expectations on writings of the same genre across culture. For content-subject professors, it is helpful to create a safe space for international students to acquire new knowledge while drawing upon their previous backgrounds, especially at the very beginning of the semester. This will provide the international students with important scaffolding to translate their success from *ELL Writing* into authentic content-subject learning.

While it is unrealistic for professors of Western-centered courses such as *Philosophy* to teach philosophical ideologies representing every international students' cultural backgrounds, it is highly feasible to incorporate global perspectives into the Western-centered course content by inviting international students to share some fundamental philosophical ideologies in their culture during whole-class discussion. This process could not only empower the international students by occasionally making them the experts in the learning process and legitimizing their previous knowledge as valuable assets, but also can promote cross-cultural awareness among all students, domestic and international students alike. Another approach for Western-centered

content professors to promote linguistic and cultural congruencies could be to provide more open-ended essay prompts (e.g., "Reflecting on your personal experiences, why do you think Plato's Apology is important?" instead of "Explain the purpose of Plato's Apology."), in which international students are free to connect course content to their background knowledge.

Moreover, it is hoped that by understanding the various developmental stages these international students are at and the different degrees of support that the students need, faculty members could better tailor their instructional practices through differentiated methods. For instance, in response to some newly-arrived Chinese international students' lack of oral class participation at the beginning of the semester, instead of directly deducting grades, faculty members could initiate private check-in meetings to see if the students need additional language assistance to facilitate their listening comprehension and oral production in English. If so, they could direct the students to various support systems such as the university Learning Resources Center, through which the struggling students will receive targeted tutoring services. Furthermore, faculty members could also connect those students with some senior international students (i.e., the "academic sisters and brothers") who share the same culture and language, and have taken the same course in the past so as to provide the new students with additional language, academic, and psychological support.

Finally, knowing that the newly-arrived international students' linguistic transition takes time and support, faulty members could try to create a safe space for translanguaging in their classroom (Garcia & Wei, 2013) in which the students were allowed to occasionally draw upon their home language to facilitate their comprehension and learning. In other words, an English-only policy in the classroom is unlikely to be necessary for first-semester college freshmen. Because for one thing, it might create an extra hurdle for their acculturation into the new

language environment, since they are discouraged from using their home language as a bridging tool; for another, based on the findings of this dissertation, as the international students move into a more advanced stage in their linguistic transition, they would naturally rely less on their home language as a bridging tool over time and get used to the English-speaking environment.

Pre-service instructor training. Different from the case in K-12 teacher education, where trainings on teaching bilingual students are often part of the requirement for teacher licensure, at the tertiary level there are no concrete pre-service instructor preparation standards regulating how to address cultural and linguistic diversity in their instructional practices. Awareness-raising professional development trainings should not be limited to in-service faculty members. It is also crucial for pre-service content-subject professors to be exposed to such preparations in order to provide them with tangible methods to support diverse learner populations prior to the start of their career.

It is therefore essential for American higher education to integrate tertiary-level pre-service instructor training into its teacher preparation and hiring processes. It is suggested that in doctoral program curricula, doctoral candidates (or pre-service professors) should be given structured course training on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy as well as methods to teach bilingual students in their specific disciplines of expertise. Additionally, it is advised that American higher education institutions should put previous training and experiences working with learners with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as one of the required qualifications in their faculty search. In this way, the commitment in advocating for minoritized student populations and skills to address diversity in higher education curriculum and instruction is treated as a prerequisite rather than an optional quality for university faculty members.

It is hoped that after ample pre-service instructor preparation, rather than assessing learners through short answers questions in which the high linguistic demands on accurate spelling could potentially jeopardize the validity of the examination, faculty members could adopt alternative formats of assessment such as multiple choice questions in which the emphasis of testing is put on students' comprehension rather than dictation of terminology. Even if the short answers format is still desirable based on the specific features of certain disciplines, faculty members could consider including a vocabulary list at the end of the assessment in summary of all content-specific terminology encountered throughout the semester. In this way, nonnative English speaking students are free to refer to the spellings whenever necessary.

By the same token, rather than directly deducting points on Chinese international students' writings due to the inconsistent verb tense and a lack of clear thesis statements, it is hoped that content-subject faculty members could provide explicit feedback on the linguistic features of Western academic writings (e.g., saying "you need to present a thesis statement at the beginning of the essay" instead of "your writing is unclear"), direct students to Writing centers for targeted support, and provide them with opportunities to rewrite and resubmit, especially at the earlier stage of the semester. In this way, the international students are offered opportunities to gradually get familiar with the linguistic demands of content-specific writing assignments, which could facilitate their long-term academic success in college.

Implications on Research Methodology

Some methodological implications could be drawn, reflecting on this one-semester-long project integrating online observations informed by digital ethnography with traditional data collection methods. Even though I have conducted a one-semester long digital ethnography

project through WeChat, for the purpose of this dissertation, I have only included data on linguistic functioning related online observations through WeChat as a data source.

Without any material incentives, this 4-month study lasting from August to December has yielded a participant retention rate of 100 percent. In other words, none of the participants dropped out of the study, despite the large commitment in research participation during which each individual was expected to (1) participate in 2 semi-structured interviews and 2 talks-around-texts interviews, (2) allow daily observations on their WeChat social media usage, (3) respond to informal communication initiated by me about their linguistic and academic experiences whenever necessary, (4) provide at least 2 writing samples, and (5) document and report their weekday and weekend language usage by completing a 48-hour language log.

In fact, not only did all the participants stay in this project throughout the semester, but also they showed passion in participation and provided much more data than what I had originally asked for. For example, while I had originally asked for 2 writing samples per student (expected total: 24 samples for 12 participants), the students shared with me a total of 37 writing samples which was more than 1.5 times of my original plan. Among the 37 essays, 29 fell into the predetermined data collection window (Weeks 5 to 7) and were eventually included in the analysis of this dissertation.

Additionally, while I had originally planned to initiate informal conversations through WeChat to make clarifications about their social media posts or follow up with their performances on linguistic functioning, more than half of the participants had taken the initiative to contact me so as to report their experiences. Through these participant-initiated conversations, I was able to yield much richer data than what my original data collection plan could lead to. For instance, without the voice messages from Larry, I would never have known the severe tensions

between "regular high" and "American high" Chinese international students demonstrated in their social media communication through private WeChat group chats (I was only granted access to observe their public posts). Similarly, without the participant-initiated conversations with William, I would never have known the details about his many struggles and gradual achievements over the course of his first semester in college.

Two reasons have stood out as the contributing factors to the perfect retention rate of this study. Firstly, the culturally-responsive social media platform, WeChat, has played an important role in collecting non-intrusive, multi-modal data. Through daily observations of the participants' public posts, this social media application has provided me with the unique opportunity to conduct intensive digital ethnography over time without adding additional stress or burden to the participants. Since all the information has been made public based on the participants' preferences, there is little concern about intruding the participants' privacy or requiring extra effort from them to report to me about their first-semester experiences. This largely explains why I was able to consistently collect digital observation data on the focal participants' experiences even during periods when they were extremely busy due to midterm and final exams. Furthermore, thanks to online observations informed by digital ethnography, I was also able to yield rich multi-modal data in the formats of video, audio, bilingual text, picture, emoji, animation, and Meme, which altogether depicted a vivid picture of their initial linguistic, academic and social adjustment as first-semester international students in an American higher education institution.

Secondly, my identity and lived experiences as a Chinese-English bilingual and once a "regular high" international student from a foreign language high school in China have established a unique bond and sense of trust between the participants and me. On the one hand,

thanks to my bilingual background, I was able to allow participants to choose the media of communication throughout all stages of the data collection; regardless of their decision to communicate in Chinese, English, or translanguage between the two, I responded accordingly in the language forms that were preferred by the participants. For instance, when chatting with the "American high" students Rebecca and Shawn, since they preferred to express themselves in English, I adopted English for the majority of our communication. If they decided to shift back to Chinese in order to discuss any cultural-specific topics, I would also join the conversations using Chinese. In contrast, when chatting with many of the "regular high" students who were still in lack of confidence in their oral English and would prefer to communicate in Chinese, I tried to avoid any English usage during the conversations. In this way, the participants were greeted with lower anxiety, and could feel more relaxed to share their experiences.

On the other hand, my insider identity as an international student from China has played an extremely positive role in establishing a sense of trust and bonding with my participants, which consequently led to their gracious support in research participation and open-hearted sharing of the details of their journeys. The overwhelming support from my participants was evident ever since my participant recruitment at the International Student Orientation. As I was handing out the recruitment flyers, a few students immediately took out their phones to send me friend requests through WeChat and expressed their interest in research participation. After I explained details about the purpose of the study as well as expectations on research participation, one student (Shawn) even approached me and said that he was very inspired by my commitment to advocate for nonnative-English speaking international students. He assured me that no matter what the commitments for participation were, he would always be there to support me. At the end of the first round of interviews, almost all the students kindly asked me to feel free to reach

out to them if I needed any additional information. Around two weeks after the anchor

interviews, I received a few WeChat messages from my participants, asking me about the

progress of my project and invited me to contact them whenever I needed more information.

During data collection throughout the semester, my participants have continuously

offered me gracious support. The bonding and trust established in the process has far transcended

the traditional researcher-participant relationship. Instead of using my name, my participants

chose to call me "学姐" (academic older sister) throughout the data collection process,

perceiving me as a legitimate member of the Chinese international student community. The sense

of trust has allowed my participants to share with me many insider views and provided me with

rich, multi-modal data that might never have been possible to be yielded had I not been accepted

as part of their community. For instance, Sarah revealed her depression and helplessness to me

due to language barriers at the beginning of the semester even before she turned to her mother

for help. Similarly, William took the initiative to contact me via WeChat and share his

unpleasant stories being insulted by an "American high" classmate due to his lack of English

proficiency.

While this unique insider researcher position has benefited my data collection in many

ways, I also strived to simultaneously adopt an outsider stance, trying to place my participants

"at a distance" (Kessen, 1991, p.189) so as to minimize the possibility to impose my own

assumptions on the participants, inhibit their idea expressions and skew data analysis. I aligned

myself with Dwyer and Buckle (2009) and advocated for an integration of insider and outsider

stances in qualitative research. Rather than treating the two perspectives as separate entities, I

adopted an insider-outsider positionality and conducted this dissertation with a stance in

between, in the hope to navigate through a third space of "paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence,

as well as conjunction and disjunction" to bring out the richness and complexity of the phenomenon under study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60).

Conclusion

This dissertation is one of the pioneers in the field to use a combination of online observations informed by digital ethnography and traditional data collection methods to explore undergraduate-level Chinese international students' linguistic functioning across academic and social contexts during their first semester studying in an American education institution. Different from most previous studies on similar topics, which are likely to examine non-native English-speaking international students' experiences through a somewhat deficit view, focusing almost entirely on their English language barriers in the new academic environment, this study has incorporated a bilingual perspective by also taking into consideration the participants' heritage language usage to present a comprehensive picture on their linguistic functioning during their transcultural, transnational, and translingual experiences.

Additionally, rather than merely focusing on the stories of the strugglers who were newcomers to the English-speaking environment, this dissertation also depicted the linguistically problem-free journeys of those Chinese international students who were at more advanced phases during their linguistic acculturation. This has not only brought to attention the important within-group variabilities among the broad category of "Chinese international students," but also extended the understanding of nonnative English-speaking international students' language journeys by viewing them from a developmental perspective.

The significance of the study is two-fold. On the one hand, the findings have shed important light on U.S. higher education administration and instruction in order to better serve the needs of its growing international student population from culturally and linguistically

diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, the methodological implications from the study have also opened up many future research possibilities to take an insider-outsider stance to conduct intensive digital ethnography through culturally-responsive social media applications to explore minoritized populations' experiences in a non-intrusive manner.

Limitations

Like many other studies that have recruited volunteers as research participants, this dissertation bares the potential limitation with regards to its sample selection methods. Given the possibility that those Chinese international students who were interested in voluntary research participation might have certain common traits (e.g., empathy, openness, outgoingness) that may not be fully representative of the entire Chinese international student population, there could be some limitations regarding the representativeness of the sample. In particular, since the main focus of the study is to examine the development of linguistic functioning and adjustment over time, and traits such as outgoingness and openness may function as affective filters that could have positive influences on individuals' second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982), it is possible that the generalizability of the study may be slightly compromised. However, since the aim of this qualitative study is to understand the complex phenomenon in relation to international freshmen's linguistic transition rather than to generalize, this underlying limitation is unlikely to jeopardize the overall rigor of the study (Marshall, 1996).

Additionally, this dissertation, while providing many interesting observations and implications about newly-arrived Chinese international students' initial college journeys, only focused on their first semester experiences. Given that bilingual individuals' cultural, linguistic, and academic acculturation is a prolonged process, the data collected during such a short period over one academic semester fall short in capturing the entire picture of their transitional

experiences and thus may not be able to provide strong predictions for patterns of Chinese international students' long-term linguistic functioning in American higher education.

Future Directions

This dissertation has pointed to the following five directions for future research. Firstly, given the prolonged process of bilinguals' linguistic acculturation, it would be interesting to replicate the present study using a long-term design to closely follow a group of international students throughout their four years in college. By doing this, the nuances and patterns of their growing ability to function linguistically in American higher education could be identified, thanks to which implications on the long-term influences of the transcultural, translingual, and transnational experiences on their language development could be drawn.

Secondly, this study explored Chinese international students' experiences solely from the angle of the college freshmen themselves. It would be interesting for future research to examine the same phenomenon by also bringing in the voices of professors, university administrators, and domestic students. Thirdly, quantitative analysis could be conducted on the rich multi-modal data collected through WeChat; by analyzing the digital ethnography data using both quantitative and qualitative methods, it is possible that some additional patterns with regards to the participants' linguistic functioning, especially their language usage in social settings, could be identified.

Moreover, throughout my contact with the participants, translanguaging has been observed throughout the WeChat postings, personal communication, interviews, and talks around texts. It would be interesting to revisit the data and explore when, how, and why did the Chinese international students adopt translanguaging, and whether such patterns have changed over time. Last but not least, the rich writing samples collected could be thoroughly re-analyzed in exploration of cross-linguistic associations between Mandarin Chinese and English. Since

existing cross-linguistic research in the field has been found to have the tendency to conduct

quantitative analysis using standardized assessment data on younger dual language learners with

relatively lower second language proficiency (Proctor & Zhang-Wu, in press), the current writing

samples in this study provide promising opportunities to initiate a qualitative examination of the

cross-linguistic influences between Chinese and English among a group of adult bilinguals with

advanced second language proficiency.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Anchor Interview at the Beginning of the Semester

➢ *The language of the interview is determined based on interviewees' preferences.*
➢ *These questions only provide a basic guideline. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interview, each participant will be given slightly different questions/prompts based on their responses.*

1. **Can you tell me a little bit about your English learning experiences back in China?**

   (if participant remains silent, the following aspects will be covered in prompts to get more information)
   a. *Length of study*
   b. *English classroom size, learning style, instructional style*
   c. *TOEFL test preparation and TOEFL score*
   d. *Self-evaluation of English proficiency*

2. **Why did you choose to pursue overseas studies at Hillside University in the U.S.?**

3. **What courses are you taking? Tell me about them.**
   (if participant remains silent, the following aspects will be covered in prompts to get more information)
   How do you perceive your language experiences at Hillside University?
   a. *Any language difficulties? If so, in what aspects? Why?*
   b. *How do you evaluate your performance during classroom discussions/participation/teamwork?*
   c. *How do you feel about your current experiences compared with your previous English learning experiences in China?*

4. **How does it feel to be an international student at Hillside?**
   (if participant remains silent, the following aspects will be covered in prompts to get more information)
   a. *Identity as a nonnative speaking international student*
   b. *Perceptions of the English language in relation to Chinese*

5. **In what ways do you think the university supports (or fails to support) Chinese international students?**
   (if participant remains silent, then prompt him/her to discuss with regards to their language experiences in particular)

Second Interview at the End of the Semester

➢ *The language of the interview is determined based on interviewees' preferences.*
➢ *These questions only provide a basic guideline. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interview, each participant will be given slightly different questions/prompts based on their responses.*

1. **How are you recently? How do you describe your first-semester experiences at Hillside University?**
   (if participant remains silent, the following aspects will be covered in prompts to get more information)

   a. *What is your favorite class? Why?*
   b. *What is the course that you find the most challenging? Why?*
   c. *Do you feel stressed? If yes, how so?*

2. **Tell me about your friendship/social life.**
   (if participant remains silent, the following aspects will be covered in prompts to get more information)
   a. *Who do you usually hangout with?Why?*

3. **What are some of your major areas of growth regarding your English proficiency as well as academic studies?**

4. **Are there anything you would wish to have done differently regarding your language and academic experiences?**
   (if participant remains silent, the following aspects will be covered in prompts to get more information)
   a. *Anything you feel regretful regarding to your language experiences?*
   b. *Anything you feel regretful regarding to your academic experiences?*

5. **How does it feel to be an international student at Hillside?**
   (if participant remains silent, the following aspects will be covered in prompts to get more information)
   a. *Identity as a nonnative speaking international student*
   b. *Perceptions of the English language in relation to Chinese*

6. **In what ways do you think the university supports (or fails to support) Chinese international students?**
   (if participant remains silent, then prompt him/her to discuss with regards to their language experiences in particular)

APPENDIX B

GENRE-BASED RUBRICS

Argument—Analysis of Student Work: Purpose and Stages				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Purpose To persuade to do something or to believe about something.				
Verb Tense Appropriate Tense (present, future, past in evidence, and use of modals)				
Title (if required by the medium)				
Thesis statement or claim Background information if needed Preview of reasons				
Reasons supported by evidence				
Reinforcement of statement of position				
Cohesive Text				
Argument—Analysis of Student Work: Language				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Generalized participants				
Language choices to describe reasons and evidence to demonstrate awareness of audience				
Use of technical vocabulary for evidence				
Types of sentences (statements preferred)				
Use of Person Third person, except in letters and sermons where first				

and second person are used.				
Modality				
Evaluative vocabulary To express attitude				
Grading				
Text Connectives No overuse of connectives				
Cohesive paragraphs: Theme/New information (Are they connected? Does the information flow? Does the theme signal what the author is talking about in that paragraph?)				
Additional Notes				

Criteria:
1. Needs substantial support: The student writer needs extensive help developing that aspect of the genre.
2. There are gaps in the writer's understanding pf the specific aspect. The writer has insufficient control. S/he needs instruction and practice.
3. The paper needs revision on one or two instances of the feature. A conference would be sufficient to help the writer meet the standard.
4. The paper reflects what the student should be able to accomplish and write independently given the instruction provided by this grade level (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2004).

Adapted from Brisk (2015)

Explanation—Analysis of Student Work: Purpose and Stages				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Purpose Sequential: Explain phenomena in a linear sequence. Cycle: In a cyclical way. Causal: One step causes the next. System: How a system works. Factorial: Factors that contribute to an event or outcome.				
Verb Tense Appropriate tense (present, unless the participant does not exist any longer, e.g., dinosaurs) and use of passive voice. Factorial historical (past tense)				
Title (if required by the medium)				
Identifying Statement (In historical explanation it may include background)				
Explanation Sequence (Sequential, cyclical, and causal) System: Description, explanation, interaction among components. Factorial: Factors.				
Conclusion Varies depending on type				
Coherent Text Optional for sequential, cyclical, and causal. Systems: Generalization				

	1	2	3	4
Factorial: General statement or reinforcement of factors				
Explanation—Analysis of Student Work: Language				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Verb Groups Action verbs Use of passive voice				
Generalized Participants (frogs, volcanoes, Congress)				
Adjectivals				
Adverbials Be recycled forever (time), is challenged in court (place), balances each branch's powers with the powers of the other branches (manner)				
Use of Clause Complexes Logic-semantic relations are appropriate Accurate conjunctions Missed opportunities				
Audience Choice of topic Choice of amount of information Choice of specific information Choice of specific language to represent processes, participants, and their description, and circumstances				
Voice Choice of types of sentences Person No need for interpersonal theme				
Text Connectives				

Sequential, cyclical, and others: when, before, after Causal: because, therefore, as a result Factorial explanations: first factor, second factor				
Lexical Ties (Collocation) Paper, recycling center, pulping facility, huge vats, pulp				
Additional Notes				

Criteria:
1. Needs substantial support: The student writer needs extensive help developing that aspect of the genre.
2. There are gaps in the writer's understanding pf the specific aspect. The writer has insufficient control. S/he needs instruction and practice.
3. The paper needs revision on one or two instances of the feature. A conference would be sufficient to help the writer meet the standard.
4. The paper reflects what the student should be able to accomplish and write independently given the instruction provided by this grade level (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2004).

Adapted from Brisk (2015)

Recount—Analysis of Student Work: Purpose and Stages				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Purpose Varies depending on the specific type.				
Verb Tense (past, except in direct speech)				
Title (if required by the medium)				
Orientation Personal/Imaginative: who, where, when, what Procedural: Aim Histories: who, where, when (may need background)				
Sequence of Events (Personal, imaginative, procedural)				
Record of Events (historical genres)				
Conclusion Varies depending on type				
Coherent Text (the stages relate well to each other and make sense)				
Paragraph Formation (For Histories: Each paragraph includes information on one aspect of the recount)				
Recount—Analysis of Student Work: Language				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Verb Groups Avoid repetition of the same generic verbs. Variety of types that express what participants are doing, saying, thinking, feeling,				

sensing and relational connections. Appropriate tense (past tense).				
Noun Groups (a) **Describes nouns with adjectivals** (pretty, blue, named Ali, beautiful, one of the most tragic, that rocked the nation)				
(b) **Packs noun groups in place of multiple clauses** "I saw a big piranha" rather than "I saw a piranha. It was big."				
Adverbials *Place*: down the block, in the kitchen *Time*: while Mamma weeds, as the clouds move off *Manner*: quietly, purely, tromping through puddles				
Use of Clause Complexes Appropriate use, including appropriate relationships. Packing of simple clauses to make clause complexes.				
Use of Dialogue (Quoting) Some dialogue.				
Audience Choice of amount of information				

Voice Use of evaluative vocabulary Grading				
Text Connectives No overuse of connectives				
Track Participants through Reference Ties The referents for pronouns are clear and named				
Additional Notes				

Criteria:

5. Needs substantial support: The student writer needs extensive help developing that aspect of the genre.
6. There are gaps in the writer's understanding pf the specific aspect. The writer has insufficient control. S/he needs instruction and practice.
7. The paper needs revision on one or two instances of the feature. A conference would be sufficient to help the writer meet the standard.
8. The paper reflects what the student should be able to accomplish and write independently given the instruction provided by this grade level (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2004).

Adapted from Brisk (2015)

Report—Analysis of Student Work: Purpose and Stages				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Purpose Organize information about a topic				
Verb Tense (present)				
Title (if required by the medium)				
General Statement (identification and classification of the topic)				
Information (organized in bundles or subtopics)				
Conclusion (optional)				
Cohesive Text (Macrotheme and hypertheme, based on graphic organizer for the genre)				
Audience Information and language level of difficulty and amount appropriate for the audience				
Voice Body of text in third person. General statement and conclusion in voice appropriate for audience				
Report—Analysis of Student Work: Language				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Participants Are clear. If generalized, they are consistently used.				
Noun Groups Lexical Ties Nouns and adjectives used are semantically connected to the topic of the report				

Adjectivals: to pack information • Adjectives • Prepositional phrases • Embedded clauses with finite or non-finite verbs • Adjective group after a relational verb				
Clause Complexes To pack information. Meaning, conjunction, order				
Cohesive paragraphs (Theme/New information)				
Additional Notes				

Criteria:

9. Needs substantial support: The student writer needs extensive help developing that aspect of the genre.
10. There are gaps in the writer's understanding pf the specific aspect. The writer has insufficient control. S/he needs instruction and practice.
11. The paper needs revision on one or two instances of the feature. A conference would be sufficient to help the writer meet the standard.
12. The paper reflects what the student should be able to accomplish and write independently given the instruction provided by this grade level (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2004).

Adapted from Brisk (2015)