

# **Overcoming Barriers to Reaching Nativelikeness in Adult Second Language Acquisition**

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**This thesis is submitted to Cardiff University in partial fulfilment of the requirement  
for the degree of PhD in Language and Communication**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the complex questions of *what the obstacles are to becoming nativelike* and *how they can be overcome*. Questions for framing the literature review are developed by means of a down-to-earth preliminary case study of a nativelike French learner of English. The subsequent literature review focuses on key issues such as the supply of input, attention to input, output practise opportunities, attention to output, identity, and learning motivation. An 'ideal' model for reaching nativelikeness is established for further investigation. More specifically, five conditions for overcoming barriers to reaching nativelikeness are hypothesised. In order to test these five conditions, an investigation is reported into the learning of Mandarin by a cohort of undergraduate students of Mandarin at a British university. Using carefully constructed interview questions and questionnaires, details were gathered of their knowledge, approach and attitude to learning, and how they lived during their year abroad in China. Their nativelikeness was judged by independent monolingual Chinese listeners. The main findings are that there are different learning obstacles in the process of L2 learning for different learners, due to both their different language learning experiences and their particular stances relative to the target language. The key conclusion of the study is that nativelikeness is most likely to be achieved when learners have a persistent motivation to speak in a nativelike manner, develop an open/adaptive sense of identification with the L2 native group, have a guaranteed supply of on-going 'ideal' input, and achieve a 'balanced' attention to both input and output.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

I am a non-native speaker of English. First I learned English in my home country, China. Latterly, I came to the UK to study, and continued to learn, in new ways, by living in an English-speaking environment. My ambition is to become fully-nativelike<sup>1</sup>. Yet despite my keen desire and willingness to work hard, pay attention and take risks, it is a goal that to some extent continues to elude me, as it does many other dedicated learners. This thesis is about why that should be. The main research questions (MRQ) addressed are:

- *What are the main obstacles facing adults in learning a second language (L2) <sup>2</sup> (MRQ1)?*
- *How can adults overcome those obstacles and become nativelike (MRQ2)?*

This chapter presents a brief general contextualisation of the issues before outlining the structure of the succeeding debate and investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> As a working definition, 'nativelike' here means being like a native speaker in certain domain(s) of a language in a relatively reliable state rather than just a local and temporary experience. The concept of nativelikeness being a continuum of the impression one creates, linguistically, culturally and physically will be explored further through this thesis and summarised in Chapter 9.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'second language' is used here as a general term regardless of language learning contexts, including both the learning in a foreign language context (often referred to as 'foreign language acquisition (FLA)') and also the learning in the target language context (often referred to as 'second language acquisition (SLA)').

## 1.1 The difficulties in learning a second language as an adult

As far as the difficulties in learning an L2 as an adult are concerned, researchers have identified a major obstacle to nativeness in the form of 'fossilisation', a term first introduced by Selinker (1972) and/or the 'critical period hypothesis' (CPH) proposed by Lenneberg (1967). For a recent comprehensive review of the former see, for instance, Han (2003, 2004a, 2004b; Han & Odlin, 2006). See Hylltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003) for a comprehensive review of research on maturational constraints in second language acquisition, and Marinova-Todd et al. (2000, 2001) for a different view on the CPH.

There are endless examples showing us that based on "an impressionistic look at learners in different acquisition contexts"(Han & Odlin, 2006:221) the majority of adult learners fall into the category of "general failure" (ibid). In other words, failure is the *norm* and passing as a native speaker is *exceptional*, or *special*, (for a long list of citations of researchers regarding the case of achieving nativelikeness as exceptional, see Han, 2004a: Introduction). However, not everyone agrees. For example, Piller (2002) argues that "highly proficient L2 users are not extremely rare exceptions, but more common than is generally assumed" (p. 186).

The question, nevertheless, is why some, regardless of how small the number,

succeed (see, e.g. in Bongaerts, Van Summeren, Planken, & Schils, 1997; loup, Boustagui, El Tigi, & Moselle, 1994), while the majority do not.

Researchers on fossilisation have offered many explanations as to why learners do not become nativelike (see Han, 2004a: Chapter 3, for a list of over 50 putative cause factors of fossilisation). The abundance of explanations also indicates that hardly any agreement has been reached (Towell, 2000). There is no agreement even as to whether fossilisation is a process in, or a product of, L2 learning--an *explanan* or an *explanandum*, being global or local in terms of its scope. Even the validity of the concept itself is questioned (e.g. Birdsong, 2004:87; Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Long, 2003; Nakuma, 2006), especially by those who view language as a dynamic system which constantly changes during the process of use (Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Cooper, 1999; Gleik, 1987; Hall, Cheng, & Carlson, 2006; Keller, 1985; Klein, 1998; Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2002; MacWhinney, 1999). Although the authors in the recent book *Studies Of Fossilization In Second Language Acquisition* (Han & Odlin, 2006), as Fidler's (2006) review puts it, reached some "modicum of essential unity" (p.408), there is still a long way to go.

In order to clarify what Fidler (2006: 409) views as the still "diverse and idiosyncratic" state of fossilisation research, the first question to be addressed in this project is: *What are the main obstacles facing adults in learning a second language? (MRQ1)*

## **1.2 Overcoming obstacles**

Answering the above question (MRQ1) is the first step in being able to find out how adult L2 learners can overcome those obstacles and become nativelike (MRQ2).

Certain key areas of research are interrelated in setting the scene for an investigation into this question. One area is where the quality of the learner's experience and a range of personality traits and personal beliefs are customarily considered under the heading of 'individual differences (ID)'. By means of exploring those factors, ID research has mainly concerned itself with the task of finding factors that predict learning success. Success, however, is usually defined as successfully performing certain learning tasks, instead of a measurement of 'ultimate attainment' (see later for more discussion). Furthermore, ID research has predominantly focussed on classroom learners at a rather low proficiency level, that is, either at beginner or intermediate level (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; R. Ellis, 2004).

Arguably, one is led to look at another area of research, that is, research in higher proficiency, such as 'end state' or 'ultimate attainment' (for the discussion of the concepts 'end state' and 'ultimate attainment', see Birdsong, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Research in end-state, is primarily occupied with comparing the performance (almost exclusively in phonology and syntax,



Piller, 2002:182) of 'near-native speakers' to those of native speakers, so as to test whether or not there exist one or more critical periods for language learning. That is, "the notion that language acquisition is only fully possible if begun in the childhood years" (Singleton & Ryan, 2004:3-4). For the formation and development of Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), see, for instance, Birdsong (1999) and Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003).

The area of CPH research however, leads to "a dead end of sorts" (Moyer, 2004:14), since "evidence and counterevidence have mounted, with no clear direction for moving the investigation forward" (ibid).

While researchers like Moyer (2004) advocate "a new approach" or "an integration of approaches" to get beyond "this impasse" (p.14), more recent research on the question of ultimate attainment has seen a shift of focus, from falsifying or supporting CPH, to exploring learners' potential. That is, interest has moved from learners' failure to learners' success, to establishing "the upper limit of attainment, i.e. the potential of the learner" (Birdsong, 2006:173). Based on evidence from experimental tasks in which some learners fall into the native-like performance range, Birdsong (2006) formulates "a falsifiable hypothesis" that "no feature of an L2 is unlearnable". He terms this "the Universal Learnability Hypothesis" (p.182-183). By this, he means that from an experimental viewpoint "there is no task which all sampled subjects fail to

perform at native levels" (p.182). Clearly, his claims are the opposite of the research on fossilisation, in which learners are claimed to fail to perform at native level.

Nevertheless, what has enabled learners to achieve nativelikeness has hardly been directly investigated from the perspective of end-state. It is either taken for granted (e.g. Ioup et al., 1994 consider it to be a talent) or given only a brief general discussion without going much further (e.g. Bongaerts, Mennen, & Van Der Slik, 2000; Bongaerts et al., 1997). When factors are mentioned, they can be from within a general biologically-based framework or outside such a framework, making reference to, for instance, socio-psychological factors (Abrahamsson, 1999). More often however, no causal factors are mentioned at all (e.g. Coppieters, 1987; Hyltenstam, 1988; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2000; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003; Sorace, 1993).

Thus, although ever since the 1980s attempts have been made to address the factors underlying nativelike achievement, little seems to have changed since Abrahamsson said, a decade ago, that "this research field has not made any significant progress" (Abrahamsson, 1999:571).

It was noted above that rather than focusing on the low probability that adults will acquire nativelikeness in L2s, it may be more productive to examine the

factors that typically lead to nativelike proficiency (Birdsong, 1992, 1999; Marinova-Todd et al., 2000:10; Snow, 1983, 1987). Over the years, some researchers trying to reject the notion of a critical period for L2 acquisition have attempted to identify factors that, in addition to the age of first exposure to the L2 seem to better explain ultimate attainment in L2. They criticise the CPH as offering an overly simplistic view of what is an inherently complex phenomenon and try to interpret the age effect in terms of a combination of socio-psychological factors that co-vary with chronological age (e.g. Flege, 1987; Marinova-Todd et al., 2000, 2001; Moyer, 1999, 2004). For instance, as Bongaerts et al. (1997) state, "certain learner characteristics and learning contexts may work together to override the disadvantages of a late start" (p.462). It seems that the way we learn an L2 is more important than when we learn it, or as Marinova-Todd (2000:9) puts it:

Although older learners are indeed less likely than young children to master L2, a close examination of studies relating age to language acquisition reveals that age differences reflect differences in **situation of learning** rather than in **capacity to learn** (emphasis added).

More specifically, recent research sees consistent correlation between high-proficiency and the amount of L2 use (Flege, Frieda, & Nozawa, 1997; Marinova-Todd, 2003), the intensity of L2 use (Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Bongaerts et al., 1997; Jia, Aaronson, & Wu, 2002; Moyer, 1999), language distance, the educational level of the L2 learners (Bialystok, 1997; Bialystok & Miller, 1999; Flege, 1999), instructional training (Moyer, 1999), the importance

of L2 to the learners (Marinova-Todd, 2003), and certain learning strategies (Abe, 2001).

Nonetheless, one needs to bear in mind that correlation does not equal causation (Brown & Rodgers, 2002:190-191; Gardner, 2000). That is, even recent research that has identified variables that are highly correlated with nativelike performance in L2 does not indicate that those are the factors which have *caused* the L2 learners to have achieved such a performance level (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999:162).

Furthermore, as Moyer (2004:147) observes after reviewing the literature on ultimate attainment and conducting her own study on immigrant advanced learners,

In sum, later SLA is essentially a personal process, one that we hardly glimpse or appreciate in the confines of a structuralist, product-oriented methodology.

An example from the personal experience of a linguist within the relevant field may well illustrate the present state of research in the field. One day she was asked her advice on how to help a friend's daughter deal with the difficulties she had come across when learning a foreign language in middle school. The linguist was taken aback and really could not tell her friend how the child could better learn the language. She did, however, know why she could not give a concrete answer. It was because the research we have been focussing on has

been predominantly post-hoc, that is, we usually give an explanation afterwards, especially in the field of ultimate attainment. We can hypothesise about why a learner *has been* successful or unsuccessful, but we cannot really predict differences in the success of L2 acquisition between two individuals if they have not yet gone through the learning process.

This points to a fundamental problem in regard to ultimate attainment research: how to link the high achievement of those who have achieved nativelikeness or near-nativelikeness with discrete factors.

Researchers have preferred to focus their efforts on discrete factors resulting in disparate literatures dealing with this and that, ... The result is a lot of illumination but somewhat limited explanation. It is clear that learners contribute hugely not just to how fast they learn or how successful they are but also, selectively, to the **acquisitional processes** through which learning takes place. The goal of future research should be the development of a comprehensive theory to account for the nature of this contribution (R. Ellis, 2004:547, emphasis mine).

It therefore seems that there is a need to shift the focus of research from the end-state approach to a developmental approach. That is, instead of focussing on identifying native-like speakers and illuminating the causal factors, it may be more fruitful to identify what causes people, no matter how few, to go all the way to achieving nativelikeness of some kind. In other words, how can learners overcome barriers and become nativelike (MRQ2)?

### **1.3 Outline of the following chapters**

The thesis is laid out as follows.

In contrast to the preliminary investigation introduced in the rest of this chapter (i.e. a case study of an L2 learner who already passed herself off as a native speaker), Chapter 2 uses the research literature to look at learners in general so as to search for patterns in what prevents learners reaching nativelikeness. This leads to a proposed 'ideal' model for reaching nativelikeness.

Being aware of the importance of individual differences and the language learning environment in reaching nativelikeness, Chapter 3 seeks insight into how *actually* to overcome obstacles to reaching nativelikeness, using the research into individual differences and learning in study abroad context. Specific research questions are then identified for the subsequent investigation.

Chapter 4 introduces the main dataset, which explores the learning strategies/styles/beliefs and achievements of a cohort of undergraduate students of Mandarin at a British university. Drawing on evidence from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, certain patterns emerging from the individual differences of the learners are reported in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 reports on a rating investigation of the perceived nativelikeness of

the participants in question. Chapter 7 provides a detailed analysis of the participants' listening comprehension ability, specially in relation to certain formulaic sequences, which had been embedded in the semi-structured interview questions.

All the findings are pulled together and critically evaluated in a general discussion in Chapter 8, with the relevant literature being revisited in the light of them. Chapter 9 draws general conclusions and identifies potential topics for future research.

#### **1.4 A preliminary investigation**

As a prelude to engaging with the theoretical and evidential issues in the literature, the remainder of this chapter will be used to offer a much more down to earth approach. Arguably, the best way to find out what the main obstacles facing adult learners in L2 learning are, and how they can be overcome is to ask someone who has become nativelike<sup>3</sup>. So, a preliminary investigation is reported, in which one individual, Clea, a nativelike learner of English, was studied through interviews and a questionnaire (see Appendix 1.1)<sup>4</sup>. This investigation allows the researcher to explore as many themes as possible (the limitation of this approach will be addressed later). Themes emerging through

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<sup>3</sup> Compare Stevick (1989) 'Success with foreign languages', in which certain advanced learners of foreign languages were studied to find out what worked for their learning success.

<sup>4</sup> The interviews were conducted early on in the research, and the questionnaire was issued later, as a means of checking details of the information more formally. The questionnaire was adapted from the one that had by then been used with the main research cohort (Appendix 4.1).

content analysis are discussed under two headings, which correspond to the two MRQs, namely, “what were Clea’s obstacles to reaching nativelikeness?” and “how did Clea manage to overcome her obstacles and become nativelike?”. In the course of the discussion, review questions for Chapter 2 and 3 will be pulled out, and they are summarised at the end in Section 1.5.

#### **1.4.1 Clea’s learning obstacles**

Being brought up in France with French as her L1, Clea learned English exclusively through classes in school. She did not do any extra work outside of the classroom, nor was she exposed to English through media, since movies and TV programmes made in English were dubbed in France. She had never been in an English speaking country. The only opportunity she ever had to use English outside of school was meeting some British missionaries, who were visiting her local church for a week. Nevertheless, that contact only involved very basic greetings. By the time she came to the UK in 1999 to take a degree in music (soon after her 18th birthday), she had been learning English for only five years. Her score in the CBT TOEFL was only 193<sup>5</sup>. In particular, her score in listening was very low. It is therefore not surprising to learn that she found herself struggling with English in many ways:

- struggling to understand lectures
- struggling to conduct transactions

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<sup>5</sup> For most universities in the UK, the minimum university entrance requirement of the CBT TOEFL is 213 (Paper TOEFL 550), or IELTS 6.0.



- struggling to answer the phone
- struggling to understand radio, TV, and movies
- struggling in talking with her British housemates
- struggling to make friends
- the whole language learning task: "It was so enormous that I felt I could never climb over it"

The discussion below will reveal her struggles through focussing on those seven points.

### ***Understanding lectures***

Clea's primary goal in being abroad was to pursue her degree studies in music, while enjoying life overseas. However, the first time she attended a lecture in the university, she felt like crying. By her own account, it was horrible – she sat in the lecture for two hours but she could not understand a word! Furthermore, when people spoke to her, unless the conversation was quite basic, she did not understand.

### ***Conducting transactions***

Definitely for the whole of the first year, I didn't understand much of what people would be saying<sup>6</sup>... .. I was just (.) I was scared of saying

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<sup>6</sup> As we can see, some of Clea's sayings are not quite nativelike. It therefore might be more accurate to describe her as someone who had got virtually all the way to being nativelike rather than a 'nativelike speaker'. However, as will become clear later through the main investigation and which will be summarised in Chapter 9, nativelikeness for an adult L2 learner is a continuum of the impression one creates rather than an absolute state.

something wrong which would have bad consequences. Like, if you said something wrong to a friend, it doesn't really matter. If I go to bank, if you say something wrong, I could be just asking them to withdraw lots of money or something.

Being abroad by herself, Clea had to conduct daily transactions using English, such as buying things in shops, reserving tickets, and making travel arrangements. The word which Clea used for describing what she felt in her first year in the UK when conducting transactions, was "petrified!" For example, she could not open a bank account.

### ***Answering the phone***

The worst part of interacting with people, according to Clea, was talking with them over the phone.

I wouldn't even understand their name. I wouldn't even understand what the message was, so I kept saying, I think that someone left an important message, but I don't know who it was for or what they said. That was in my first year however, but after it got better, but in my first year as well, we had like, because I had seven housemates, I used to find it hard even to understand what person it is when they're on the phone.

Strikingly, it was not just a temporary problem. In fact, she "hated the phone for about three years actually". The reason for this was:

because ...you can't ask people, you don't see their reaction um you can't like read their lips or anything like that. I hated the phone.

### ***Understanding radio, TV, movies***

Similarly, the absence of visual information made listening to the radio very difficult for her, although Clea hardly listened to radio anyway. However, the presence of visual cues with TV or movies did not seem to make her comprehension any easier:

I find it quite hard to understand TV to be honest, like a long time ...  
Even watching the weather forecast, I used to find it was quite difficult...  
I find films quite hard to understand the whole of my first year. I didn't  
get much real understanding.

The reason for the difficulty in watching TV or movies, once again, according to Clea, was

because I can't question. You see. I can't ask them, can you repeat that  
again please?

In the light of this comment, it might seem that she would have found things much easier in a relaxed situation with a real interlocutor. However, Clea also found it very hard to talk with her British housemates.

### ***Talking with her British housemates***

In Clea's first year, she lived with seven female housemates. Six of them were British, native speakers of English. One was Portuguese, an L2 learner of English, whose English proficiency was similar to that of Clea. However, it seems that not just linguistic but also cultural and personal factors played a role in creating obstacles for L2 learning. For example, Clea had certain

expectations about the sorts of conversation she should have.

In France we talk a lot about politics and about world news and things like that, so we try to speak about this kind of things with people too, even though my English wasn't very good.

According to Clea, she was shocked to find that the British girls were very "ignorant", not caring about many things, not being interested in the news, and so on. This finding, together with the difficulties she had in making friends (see below), resulted in this by nature very 'talkative' girl keeping her mouth shut for nearly three months after she arrived in the UK.

### ***Making friends***

As the account above reveals, Clea liked to ask people questions, especially asking them to repeat or paraphrase what they said, because of her low comprehension ability. However, it seemed that not every one was willing or able to help in this way. Therefore,

Some people I found were frustrating and although I told them to speak slowly, they wouldn't. I just wouldn't bother with them so much. It sounds I was horrible, but basically I made friends the most with the people that, that I could have a conversation with.

### ***The whole language learning task***

As mentioned above, Clea had great difficulties in making friends, in talking with her housemates, in understanding media (such as radio, TV, movies), in answering the phone, in conducting daily transactions, and even in

understanding her academic lectures. It is therefore not surprising to find that the whole language learning task seemed to be so enormous that she felt she could never succeed.

#### **1.4.2 Clea's secret of overcoming obstacles and becoming nativelike**

Due to the difficulties in learning/using L2 as discussed, Clea might well have stopped (or 'fossilised') in her L2, since her initial intention was to stay in the UK for just three years or possibly not even that long:

I enrolled the course for three years [i.e. her first degree in music], but with....maybe my mind's thinking that if after one year if it doesn't work out, I could come back [to France].

However, despite all the difficulties mentioned above, Clea did not stop her L2 learning nor did she go back to France after one year in the UK. She was able to pass herself off as a native-like speaker after being in the UK for three years. This begs the question: how had she actually overcome the difficulties identified above and reached nativelikeness?

In order to clearly contrast Clea's difficulties and the way she overcame them, the discussion in this section will centre on the seven areas identified above:

- understanding lectures
- conducting transactions
- answering the phone

- understanding radio, TV, and movies
- talking with her British housemates
- making friends
- the whole language learning task

#### **1.4.2.1 Understanding lectures**

Unlike most academic students at university, Clea did not need to attend many lectures. Because her major was in music, and more specifically, in flute, most of her time spent in university was either in one-to-one lessons with her flute tutors, or in practising playing the flute by herself. Occasionally she might take part in orchestras or ensembles. As for the very few lectures that she attended, if handouts were given out, she could normally cope all right. Although she could not understand, she did try to write down as much as she could on the handouts and check it later, either in dictionaries or reference books.

Did Clea struggle with understanding her flute tutor then? Yes, she did. However, the situation seemed to be different from that of lectures. Unlike public lectures, one-to-one tutoring presented Clea with a situation in which:

It was in his [Clea's flute tutor] interest as well that I understood.  
...Because I would not have progressed otherwise.

In other words, there was a common interest between Clea and her flute tutor, which seemed to make all the difference. Clea needed to understand her tutor,

and as she did with other people, she was able to ask him either to repeat or paraphrase. In this situation, it was not odd for her to ask questions. In fact, her requests were well-taken, since it was in the interest of her tutor to make sure that she understood him. Not only did he try to speak slowly, but also “he was using fairly plain language and very simple words”. Clea’s personal tutor’s helpfulness, she reports, was quite different from “some British people [who] wouldn’t know how else to explain it because they just haven’t come across the situation [of speaking to foreigners, whose English is not good enough to understand them straightaway]”.

To sum up, apart from Clea’s own efforts, there appear to be three external factors that contributed to helping Clea to overcome her language difficulties at university:

- the reality of having few lectures (i.e. reducing the extent of the problem), plus the help of receiving handouts for later checking
- the reality of having most of her tuition through one-to-one input
- the reality of having helpful tutors who knew how to talk to a foreigner by using simple language, slowing down the delivery speed and so on.

The question of interest therefore is whether, if the situation that faced Clea had been different, she would have been able to overcome her difficulties solely through her own efforts. In other words, firstly, supposing Clea had had

many lectures, and these without 'helpful' 'detailed' handouts, would it have been possible for her to cope with the 'incomprehensible' input? (this will become the focus of Review Question 1, in Chapter 3).

Secondly, supposing that there had not been a common goal for Clea and her flute tutor (i.e. her tutor did not care whether she understood him or not), and also that Clea's flute tutor had not been so helpful (i.e. had not known how to talk to a foreigner or had not been willing to adapt his speech accordingly), would it have been possible for Clea to cope with the incomprehensible input (Review Question 2)?

The answer to the above question, according to Clea's description of her struggle with conducting transactions, seems to be no. As mentioned in the previous section, others less 'helpful' than her 'helpful' tutor and the insensitivity of some in relation to adapting their speech to accommodate her, had made Clea's experiences in conducting transactions a nightmare.

#### **1.4.2.2 Conducting transactions**

Maybe after a year it became easier ... But I have never particularly liked it, and I still (.) No, I don't mind it now, no I don't mind it now. It's fine, but for a long time, a long time it stressed me out.

As mentioned, Clea was petrified in conducting transactions using English,



and it was not just for a temporary period. Even by the time she was interviewed (she had been in the UK for seven years by then), the feeling of anxiety in conducting transactions still seemed to be there. But she had been able to present herself as a native speaker for five years. Why was there a feeling of anxiety still caused *by the thought of* conducting transactions, even after she had been able to present herself as a native speaker for five years?

According to Clea, she probably had been “more scared than necessary”. Yes, to begin with, her English was so poor that she could not understand much of what people were saying. But, as will be seen later, once she had been in the UK for three months, she seemed to progress very quickly in the conversation routines of her daily life, especially with some of her friends (see Section 1.4.2.5). As Clea put it,

literally something like two or three weeks before Christmas [Clea arrived in the UK in September], everything kind of starts to come together much better and I could understand people better and they didn't have to speak so slowly.

The reason for her quick progress in her daily routine conversations, according to Clea, was that

we use such a small um proportion of words, I mean, in a normal conversation. So, only even just for three months you will find that actually people keep on saying the same things all the time. And, and it just becomes easier because even at the beginning you might not understand because it is the colloquial English, which you haven't used in school. But, after three months people keep on saying um you know the same thing it just becomes easier and easier, doesn't it? And so just

exposure, I was exposed to a lot of English all the time so you have to improve really just from, kind of, sheer exposure.

In other words, Clea regarded the high frequency of similar input as the main reason why she was able to progress quickly in the routine conversations of daily life. However, the effect of the high frequency of input did not seem to work for her in the public domain, when she conducted transactions. For example, despite the fact that people at the supermarket till kept asking her “Do you want any cash-back?” she still did not know or even understand what it meant for about a year.

because people there they are not so understanding are they? They're not your friends, so, like if you don't understand and it's like a QUEUE behind you or something, you see what I mean. If you don't understand you can ask them again, sorry, I don't understand, but if you still don't understand because in Britain people will tend to say exactly the same. If you say you don't understand they just repeat, just as fast, using the same words if they're not your friends I still didn't understand. Three times you think I am stuck now. Because I didn't understand and there is a queue behind me. What shall I do? It's just slightly (.) it was horrible I didn't like it.

Here it seems that due to Clea's high anxiety (e.g. “being afraid of any bad consequences” or her interpretation of social expectations of her) she was unable to take in even highly frequent input. Of course, just saying it more often does not make it more meaningful. Thus, this is different to what happened with her friends, where each time she would get a slightly different context and a new attempt at communication.

Nevertheless, her inability to take in highly frequent input was limited just to a

certain period. That is, she did not fossilise for ever. As with the question, "Do you want any cash-back", she was stuck there for about one year. But, eventually, she broke through.

ah I was so scared they asked that every time and so I said no, no, no for one year. Then at one point I thought I'd say yes, and see what happened. I just didn't understand "cash-back". It was like "cash back". I thought that it was like something which I didn't understand so I said "yes" and then he said, "how much", "ah, how much what? how much what?". I was like huh - I just didn't get it. I said, "no, no, no, I don't want any". And I just didn't know what it meant and I just started ask my housemate afterwards.

With the quote above, we can actually see, that from an outsider's point of view, Clea, even within her first year in the UK, was able to reply in an appropriate way, by saying "no" to a yes/ no question. In other words, she was able to catch the words "Do you want any". The only problem is that she did not know what "cash-back" actually meant. As she explained,

I didn't understand what he wanted because we don't have that in France. It's not so much of language I think, it was like I never heard of any (.) at the till. In France people don't ask you anything.

Here, it appears that the absence of a culture/situation transfer from France to Britain made Clea's learning task more difficult – "It's just because I didn't realise. I couldn't even pronounce the word ... so I couldn't work out what even they could be asking I just didn't get it." Or, putting it another way, it seems that Clea tended to try to "work out" her L2 through her knowledge of L1 or other life experiences. And, depending on the availability of the transfer, the language learning task was either easier (if transfer was possible) or harder (if

there was no transfer). The question of interest here is how adult learners' previous life experiences in their L1 or knowledge of their L1 contribute to their L2 learning (Review Question 3).

Eventually, Clea was able to understand what "cash-back" meant, by means of trial and error as mentioned above, and by asking her housemate later. Two things seem to be worth noting here. Firstly, by Clea's account (see Section 1.4.2.5), she would usually ask her "helpful" housemates/coursemates when there was anything that she did not know. But in this particular instance (i.e. the word "cash-back"), she set the problem aside for a year, despite its frequent re-occurrence. According to her, this was "strange". It seems to suggest that certain features/aspects of an L2 might, for some reason, not be picked up as one would expect.

Secondly, the reason that this particular word "cash-back" was not picked up, appears to lie in the fact that there was not much need (at least not an urgent need) for Clea to identify or locate the word. Since, as Clea describes, without knowing actually what "cash-back" meant and by simply answering "no" to the request "do you want any cash-back", her communication with the cashiers on the till could still proceed smoothly. If she had not one day, suddenly out of curiosity, decided to find out what would happen if she answered "yes", then she may never have discovered the meaning of "cash-back". In other words,

input might not become intake, until there is a need for learners to pay attention to it. As mentioned above, Clea's high anxiety also seemed to play a role in constraining her understanding of the input. Therefore, the question of interest here is how adult learners are able to take in the language input around them. More specifically, what are the factors preventing adult L2 learners from taking in input (Review Question 4)?

#### **1.4.2.3 Answering the phone and understanding radio, TV, and movies**

Overall, it appears that along with the improvement in Clea's face-to-face communication with people, especially with her familiar friends (see Section 1.4.2.5), Clea's difficulties in answering the phone and understanding radio, TV, and movies became less and less. More specifically, according to Clea, there seems to be two factors contributing to her improvement.

Firstly, in Clea's view, the main reason why she had difficulties in understanding broadcast media was due to the use of particular words which she did not know. Through trying to speak to people about as many different issues as she could (such as politics and world views – which she enjoyed doing a lot), her vocabulary increased and broadened.

Secondly, although some of her success may have come from her determination to concentrate when she engaged with the media in English,

she also received great help from her “supportive” new housemates (see Section 1.4.2.4).

if someone is next to me I would always ask. Something like, “what's that mean”, “what does that mean”. Not every two seconds. That's really annoying, but if I really didn't get it if someone was there I would ask them.

The relevant question to ask here is whether Clea was exceptional in having this level of opportunity to talk to native speakers on many different subjects/issues, and in receiving help in turning incomprehensible input into comprehensible. In other words, what kinds of input do adult L2 learners typically receive and how is that input usually presented to learners (Review Questions 5)? Is there any particular input that is beneficial to adult L2 learners? (Review Question 6)

#### **1.4.2.4 Talking with her British housemates**

The solution that Clea adopted for dealing with her ‘silly’ British housemates, with whom she was unable to share in common conversational topics, was very simple – she moved out, after living with them for one year. Subsequently, she lived with her British coursemates, and Clea attributed the most part of her language learning success to them.

As Clea's course in university was quite busy in the sense that it started in the morning and finished quite late, she did not have much time to spend with her

'silly' housemates anyway. On the other hand, because she needed to spend most of her time in the university and because the nature of her course required her to have breaks every so often (she could not practise for more than one hour – it would be extremely tiring both physically and mentally), she ended up spending most of her time chatting with her coursemates, all of whom were native speakers of English.

#### **1.4.2.5 Making friends**

It would not be unreasonable to wonder whether making friends with people willing to adapt their language to accommodate one's low level of knowledge might actually constrain one's learning. However, this seems not to be the case (see later discussion of comprehensible input) and certainly was not so for Clea. Instead, their cooperation facilitated the building of important relationships. For instance, amongst the coursemates with whom she spent most of her time whilst at the university, there were three with whom she was able to develop a very close and deep relationship. It was those three that eventually became Clea's housemates. Not only were they able to share a conversation with Clea, but also helped her greatly to improve her language.

As Clea put it,

We got on extremely well and I lived with them for two years and that made a big difference. They were the ones that I would ask the most what everything meant. But they were such good friends they didn't mind at all um and they have been really lovely too.

Because of the great help that Clea received from her 'supportive' friends, it led Clea to the following conclusion:

I think really, learning the language depends a lot on what support you get from people around you and I think that can make a big difference.

Clea's support from friends was not just from her new housemates (or coursemates), but also from friends that she knew through a local church. As she was already a Christian before arriving in the UK, she easily assimilated into a local church in the UK. She was warmly welcomed. Very quickly, she became part of a team in the church, providing activities for international students. Later on, after her graduation, she and her "supportive" housemates/coursemates went their separate ways. However, it did not seem to create a big problem for her. Firstly, her English was so good that she could almost pass herself off as a native speaker. Secondly, through her engagement with the local church, her former coursemates could be replaced by the British girls that she knew from church – she moved to live with them instead. Moreover, through the church, she got to know a local British man and they eventually married.

The question of interest however is, supposing that everything had worked against Clea in the sense that she could not choose who were to be her friends, nor get support and be accepted into a local community, would she still have been able to make the progress in her L2 that she did? In other words,



what is the role of integration into the L2 speech community within adult L2 learning (Review Question 7)?

#### **1.4.2.6 The whole language learning task**

On being immersed in the target language country and with an initially fairly low proficiency in the L2, the task of learning the language seemed impossible to Clea and she felt that she could never succeed. But, eventually she was successful. In this section, the different periods of Clea's progress in the L2 will be mentioned first, so as to give us a general picture of Clea's language improvement. After that, so as to present fully Clea's struggles and successes, her own internal contribution to the process of language learning will be revealed – a contrast to the above discussion which focussed more on external factors.

There seem to have been three different periods in the progress of her language proficiency towards nativelikeness. The first period was the first three months in the UK. During this period, according to her, it was “both very frustrating and satisfying”. The reason why she felt it was “satisfying” despite all the struggles mentioned above, is that at the end of her initial three months' stay in the UK, she could see obvious progress in her language learning – that is, an improvement in holding daily conversations.

The second period of her language development was the remaining part of the first year. During this period, she felt that she progressed very quickly, although not as quickly as during the first three months. The third period is everything after the first year, during which she regarded her progress as being much slower.

Now, let us consider Clea's own contribution to her L2 learning. If the discussion above has been more about how the facilitative environment (e.g. the content of her academic engagement, and the help that she received from others) contributed to her reaching nativelikeness, then the discussion below will focus more on factors present within Clea herself, such as her learning attitudes or beliefs, and learning strategies.

As far as her attitude towards the whole learning task is concerned, she was very frustrated from the very beginning, as mentioned before. However, there was also another side to Clea, and that was that she always seemed to enjoy learning languages. She had learned German as well as English in school when she was in France. Her great interest in learning language was the reason, she believed, why she did so well in language learning in school (i.e. always being top among her language class back in France). Moreover, Clea was able to feel rewarded with even the smallest success. For instance, at the very beginning, she would share with her Portuguese housemate, who had

also just arrived in the UK, the new terms and words that they had learnt during the day. This was very exciting for her. Also, Clea saw it as a victory, if she was able to impress people with her usage of long technical words, which she had risked translating directly from French into English.

Furthermore, regardless of her struggles with language in the UK, she was not hard on herself: either in terms of language accuracy, or in terms of her interaction with native speakers. Firstly, in terms of language accuracy, she would not try to construct a sentence and make sure that it was correct before saying it. The reason why she would not do so was because of many factors.

On the one hand, she regarded highly the importance of grammar and she seemed to have achieved a high level of proficiency in grammar from what she had learnt in France. She thought highly of the teaching method that she had received in France, which was “learning lists of vocabulary, learning grammar, tenses, how the language is done” rather than “actually speaking the language”. Recalling her initial problems when she first arrived in the UK, she would think that it was mainly because people spoke too fast and also that she did not know enough vocabulary. Her academic achievement back in France, such as being able to understand texts and write small essays, made her believe that she already had a good understanding of the language. She just was not very confident. She even believed that if people had allowed her to

concentrate and construct her sentences, then she would have been able to speak well even at the beginning, although “it just didn't come naturally, but that's normal, I think”. In other words, the very reason why she did not construct every sentence in her head before speaking, according to her, was not because she did not want to, but because technically the pressure from real-life interaction did not allow her. As she realised, “it would take too long”.

On the other hand, she was also aware that she was unable to discern correct from incorrect forms:

If I try to say everything right probably it wouldn't be exactly right anyway because you know you don't have the control of the language that is good enough in order to make it ... I would try my best to make it. That was important. I would get as right as possible but knowing probably wouldn't be better anyway. So think a little bit before speaking. But, no. I wouldn't construct the whole sentence as a native speaker would and be more spontaneous I would say.

Her strategy in her intensive interaction with the native speakers (e.g. with her coursemates), was not to worry about the actual form of the language much. This was because she would try to copy whatever was said, knowing that it would be right anyway – however, she could not copy the international students, for she knew that their language would probably be full of mistakes.

The reason why she tried to copy whatever her native speaker peers said was not mainly because of their language, which Clea assumed to be “correct”, but because of Clea's own agenda.

My priority was to succeed in my studies, to improving my stay and to enjoying my time here.

The big part in improving her stay and helping her enjoy her time in the UK, as will be mentioned later, was to be like one of her peers. And the quickest way seemed to be to copy whatever her peers did.

On the one hand, Clea felt that everything was at stake in the UK. As her parents were paying for her study, she was very eager to succeed, very keen to learn and desperate for everything to work out right. This seemed to have a great impact on her way of learning the language:

Whatever people were saying I would try to copy, I was like a sponge trying to absorb everything that was around me to copy it and that's why I became quite I didn't realise this to start with but yeh I think I just did that. I wanted to copy people

This, however, may also have been due to her "immature" age, since she tried to:

create this "impressive" image, because when you're young when you're eighteen you're trying to impress people you want people to like you. It's a new country, it's a new culture, so somehow you want to do everything. It's very immature really, but it's one thing to fit in with people and therefore you do whatever they do and even speak like they do and then I think just to fit in.

The consequences of this way of learning were shocking to her later on (she did not realise it at first). That is, she became an "artificial person", who "wasn't me any more". Furthermore, this seemed to have a different impact upon her when dealing with people from different social networks:

I became this kind of multifaceted person that could change according to whoever I was speaking to ... on Sunday [at church] I would be a very different person than I would be on a Monday [with non-Christian peers] I would speak differently in reacting definitely.

However, Clea's 'weird' sense of unsettled identification with subparts of the L2 group did not last long. As mentioned, she maintained good contact with the local church, was well accepted there, met her husband, and eventually settled down. Meanwhile, through her interaction with the church, she gradually came to realise that "the level of her English" was "too young" or "rude", and not "elegant" or "formal" enough. Just as she received help from her 'supportive' peer coursemates, she also received help from her local fellow believers, and later from her husband. In other words, she was eventually able to adapt her level of English to different speakers.

From the above discussion, one might be able to say that the reason why Clea was able to reach nativelikeness in the end was on account of who she was and the environment she happened to be in (c.f. the case of Nora in Wong Fillmore, 1979, whose success was argued be made out of both Nora's personality and the environment she happened to be in). Nevertheless, two things seem to stand out here. One is the type of attention that Clea paid to linguistic forms. The other is the extent and nature of her identification with the L2 group.. Supposing Clea had not paid the kind of attention that she had to linguistic forms, would she still be as successful as she was? In other words,

what is the appropriate attention for an L2 learner to pay to both input and output in order to reach nativelikeness (Review Question 8)? Meanwhile, because Clea also wanted to be liked, to be accepted in the new community, it seemed to impact greatly on the way that she approached the language. The question of interest is what role one's capacity to identify with the L2 native group plays in L2 learning (Review Question 9).

### **1.5 Summary of review questions**

Through the above discussion of Clea's personal learning struggles and learning success at the end, nine review questions for general learning patterns have been identified, as follows:

- Review Question 1: How is it possible for adult L2 learners to cope with incomprehensible input such as lectures?
- Review Question 2: Without any modification in native speakers' speech, will learners be able to cope with incomprehensible input?
- Review Question 3: How do adult learners' previous life experiences in their L1 or knowledge of their L1 contribute to their L2 learning?
- Review Question 4: What are the factors preventing adult L2 learners from taking in input?
- Review Question 5: What kinds of input do adult L2 learners typically receive and how are those inputs usually presented to learners?
- Review Question 6: Is there any particular input that is most beneficial

for adult L2 learning in general?

- Review Question 7: What role does integration into the L2 speech community play in adult L2 learning?
- Review Question 8: What is the appropriate attention for an L2 learner to pay to both input and output in order to reach nativelikeness?
- Review Question 9: What role does identifying in some way with the L2 group play in L2 learning?

These nine review questions will be addressed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

Chapter 2 will seek general patterns in adult L2 learning in terms of obstacles to becoming nativelike, through focussing on the following topics:

- Supply of input (Review Question 5 and 6)
- Attention to input (Review Question 3, 4 and 8)
- Opportunities for output (Review Question 8)
- Attention to output (Review Question 3 and 9)
- Extent of identification with the L2 native group (Review Question 7 and 9)

Narrowing the scope of research, the issue of how exactly *individual* adult L2 learners are able to overcome difficulties in reaching nativelikeness in *specific* learning contexts (i.e. study abroad contexts) will be explored in Chapter 3. The specific issues as raised in Review Question 1 and Question 2 will be



considered, namely, “how can it be possible for adult L2 learners to cope with incomprehensible input such as lectures?” and “without the modification in native speakers’ speech, will learners be able to cope with incomprehensible input?”.

## **Chapter 2 Barriers to reaching nativelikeness**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Instead of looking at individual learners (such as the case study of Clea in Chapter 1), this chapter will look at learners in general, so as to search for patterns. More specifically, in order to identify the barriers preventing L2 adult learners from reaching nativelikeness, this chapter will consider five areas for discussion:

- Supply of input
- Attention to input
- Opportunities for output
- Attention to output
- Extent of identification with the L2 native group

There is a wealth of literature on each of these aspects (see, e.g. Han, 2004: 25-38 who lists over 50 putative causal factors of fossilisation). However, the purpose here is not to review it all in minute detail. Rather, the intention is to select key claims from the literature on each factor, and then use them to develop a narrative that takes us through the factors in a logical way. The result will be one of thousands of possible narratives using different selections.

The choices made obviously affect the conclusions drawn, and the reader might, at any point, challenge the selection and prefer a different route to have been taken. However, the aim is to explore the relationship between the factors, using significant observations from the literature as a device for doing so, rather than to provide some definitive account of how all learners learn – that would in any case be impossible.

The discussion of these five areas will lead, at the end of the chapter, to a model, which will be the basis for questions and predictions for the ensuing empirical work.

## **2.2 Supply of input**

If we ask what language input surrounds adult L2 learners, it seems clear that there are at least two basic kinds: input reflecting the desired target and input in some way deviant from the desired target<sup>7</sup>. Immediately, one might ask what the 'desired target' is. This involves issues such as which kind of native speaker embodies the target, whether there is just one target or whether there are different desiderata for different aspects of knowledge (see, e.g. Davies, 2003; Han, 2004c for attempts on unfolding these complex issues). Since the present thesis specifically focuses on people who end up sounding nativelike,

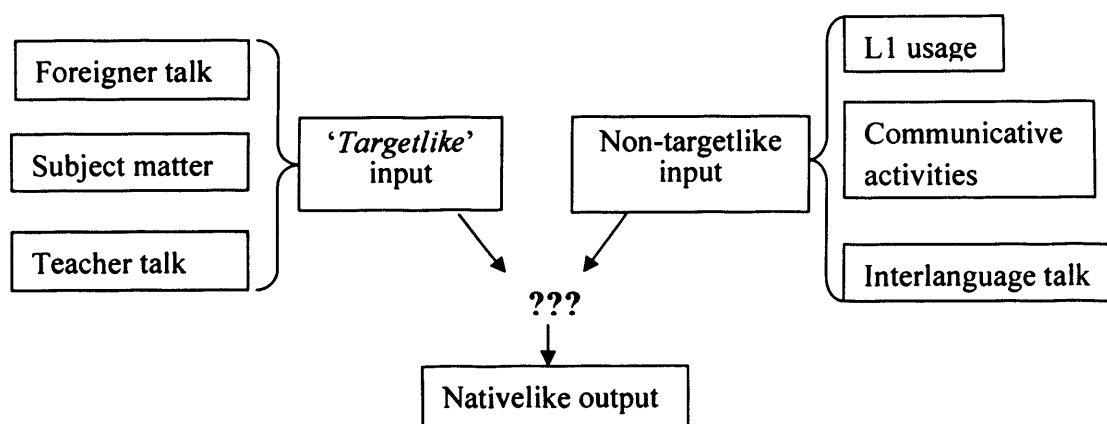
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<sup>7</sup> Unless explicitly stated otherwise, in this thesis 'input' is defined as language available to learners, including both target(like) and non-targetlike.

without going into the complexities concerning the definition of 'target', at this stage of discussion it will be taken for granted that it is the learners' intention to do so. Their targets can be certain aspects of how certain native speakers speak. Meanwhile, it is acknowledged also that their targets, as reflected in Norton's (2001) notion of 'imagined communities', can vary from person to person, from time to time, and from place to place.

Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 2.1 below, there is a strong possibility that L2 learners will have to face all sorts of mixed input, either targetlike, or non-targetlike, from their peer learners or from their instructors. For example, in a foreign language learning setting (i.e. where the target language "plays no major role in the community and is primarily learnt only in the classroom" R. Ellis, 1994:12), learners will continue to use their L1 outside/inside the classroom. While it still remains unclear as to what exactly is the effect of continual usage of L1 upon L2 learning, research has shown that even in the target language setting the continual usage of L1 is highly correlated with failing to reach nativelikeness (see, e.g. Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Bongaerts et al., 1997; Flege et al., 1997; Jia et al., 2002; Marinova-Todd, 2003; Moyer, 1999).

**Figure 2.1 Input issues facing adult L2 learners**



In the classroom, the input that learners receive can be categorised into four types: 'subject matter', 'communicative tasks', 'teacher talk', and 'interlanguage talk'. Following the traditional grammar-translation teaching method, the input provided to the learners may be treated as 'subject matter' (i.e. a decontextualised body of explicit knowledge about language such as rules and patterns). This kind of input, according to some researchers (e.g. Krashen, 1981), may not be converted into implicit 'acquired' knowledge<sup>8</sup> through practice. The consequence of attaining this 'learned' knowledge, according to Krashen, is that it will not enable learners to have spontaneous language production. In other words, the 'subject matter' input will not lead to nativelike output.

<sup>8</sup> There is a whole literature on implicit and explicit issues, which cannot be explored here. The key to the issues lies in the three main positions on the relationship (i.e. interface) between explicit and implicit: *the strong interface position* (i.e. both sides can be interchanged), *the weak interface position* (i.e. some aspects can facilitate the others), and *the noninterface position* (i.e. both sides cannot be interchanged) (see, R. Ellis, 2004b; 2007; R. Ellis and Loewen, 2005; cf. N. Ellis, 2005; Isemonger, 2007).

Following a communicative language teaching method (e.g. 'the natural approach', 'cooperative language learning', 'content-based teaching', 'task-based teaching'; see, e.g. Richards and Rodger, 2001 for the detailed discussion of those methods), the input provided to the classroom learners may be characterised as something occurring within communicative activities. However, communicative activities, such as role-playing, pair practice, simulations, games, creative activities, group teaching, though being communicative in orientation, still face the issue of transferring what is being learned in class to functional language use in real life (Riley, 1977).

Furthermore, what is also important to the present discussion (i.e. the attainment of nativelikeness) is language use among learners through communicative activities, often referred to as 'interlanguage talk' (ILT). As R. Ellis (1994) notes, "ILT constitutes the primary source of input for many learners" (p. 266)<sup>9</sup>. The problem however is that this source of input, as its name 'interlanguage talk' suggests, is full of non-targetlikeness. Is it possible for learners to make use of this source of input and come out with targetlike output? Certainly, for the learner who seeks to become nativelike, there is only a subset of the input that is worth learning: not what is non-nativelike. Immediately, it raises the question of how learners know what is nativelike and

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<sup>9</sup> As Krashen (1981) notes, ILT is not usually viewed as input in the literature (p. 121).

what is not. It is not surprising to find that learners, especially at the lower proficiency level, are not very capable of detecting 'errors' themselves (e.g. Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996). Even when they do detect their 'errors', quite often they turn to their teachers for assistance (Williams, 2001). This leads to another problem with their source input, that is, teacher talk.

While it is understandable that teachers are there in a classroom to provide help and guidance to learners, studies in teacher talk (see. e.g. Chaudron, 1988: Chapter 3 for a comprehensive survey), show that teachers modify their speech in the classroom in many ways (such as in vocabulary, syntax, discourse) due to their high awareness of learners' proficiency levels. On the one hand, this modified input by teachers can solve the problems of incomprehensibility of input, which might not be available outside of the classroom. Other people, such as a native speaker that might be met in the street, may not be sensitive to a learner's proficiency level and thus would not modify their speech accordingly. It might therefore make 'the street input' incomprehensible to learners (see. e.g. Pica & Long, 1986 who found that teachers were more likely than native speakers to check comprehension in informal conversations). On the other hand, it is exactly because the kind of modification used by teachers might not be available in the 'real' world, that the input from teacher talk can lead to, as Riley (1977) puts it, "teachers –

falsification of the target language” (p. 110). In other words, the input delivered by teachers could be different from the learner’s conception of ‘target’ input. Or, the learner might latch onto the teacher’s language as the target.

Similarly, outside of the classroom, the input that L2 learners receive from native speakers can also be modified (i.e. foreigner talk (FT)). FT can be ungrammatical (see Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991 for a research review). FT can be simplified through lowering speech rate, articulation rate, silent pauses, and avoiding/reducing difficult words and so on (e.g. in Hatch, 1983). FT can be regulated (i.e. selection of ‘basic’ or ‘explicit’ forms) and elaborated (i.e. often involving lengthening sentences to make clear the meaning). Both regulation and elaboration show native speakers’ attempts to lessen the learners’ task of processing input. However, counter-intentionally, they might actually lead to the introduction of incomprehensible input (e.g. in Chaudron, 1983).

The deficiencies in L2 input discussed above are not intended to be an exhaustive list. For example, there is also the issue of ‘input text’, that is, whether what reference books claim native speaker usage consists of is actually what native speakers say or write (see e.g. Lightbown & d’Anglejan, 1985). However, as indicated by the question marks in Figure 2.1 (see earlier



in this section), it is less than clear how an L2 learner is able to take in those different types of input and produce nativelike output. Does successful L2 learning entail receiving the 'purest', 'most perfect' possible input, or is successful L2 learning still possible given the 'deficiency' in input? With the exception of Universal Grammar Theory (White, 1989:39-40), theories tend not to directly address this question (see Table 2.1 for the summary that Ortega makes for the role of input in nine contemporary mainstream SLA theories).

**Table 2.1 The role of input in nine contemporary SLA theories (Ortega, 2006:236)**

<b>The Theory</b>	<b>Input</b>
Universal grammar theory (White, 2006)	Triggers deduction of knowledge
Autonomous induction theory (S. E. Carroll, 2006)	Can trigger processing failure, can afford cues for extraction
Associate-Cognitive CREED Framework (N. Ellis, 2006a)	Associate learning is input-driven
Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 2006)	One ingredient only, necessary but not sufficient
Input processing theory (VanPatten, 2006)	How learners process input during comprehension is important
Processability theory (Pienemann, 2006)	Developmental constraints or functional processing principles determine what can get processed, which in turn is reflected in production
Concept-Oriented Approach (Bardovi-Harlig, 2006)	
Interaction Framework (Gass & Mackey, 2006)	One ingredient only, necessary but not sufficient
Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006)	One ingredient only

As Table 2.1 shows, UG claims that our knowledge of language goes beyond the input. What input does to language learning is a matter of triggering:

learners acquiring an L2 with *wh*-movement will require input to motivate the +*wh*-movement value of the parameter. However, once they have established that the L2 involves *wh*-movement, they will NOT require input to determine that island constraints operate; these come for free, so to speak (White, 2006:50).

Nevertheless, it is still acknowledged in UG theory that “prior knowledge of another language and possible deficiencies in the input ... might prevent native-like attainment” (White, 2006:46). That is, in order to have successful L2 learning, input that provides “suitable positive evidence to motivate resetting” (p. 51) is still necessary. However, as White admits, what kind of input can be counted as providing “suitable positive evidence to motivate resetting” is not clear (ibid).

As an opposite extreme to UG, according to N. Ellis’(2006b) Associate-Cognitive CREED Framework (ACCF) the whole L2 learning, is driven by input. As Ortega (2006) summarises it,

Every time constructions and exemplars in the linguistic input are experienced by the learner (through listening, reading, or both), neural connections are fired and strengthened, and memory traces are established until networks of associations emerge into a complex system (p. 235)

In other words, whatever input learners receive (whether deficient input or

'purest' input), according to N. Ellis' framework, still matters. All of it will have a direct impact on the building up of a learner's language system. It is therefore not surprising to find that proponents of this framework advocate that input even in a classroom setting needs to be "as abundant, rich, and authentic as possible" (Ortega, 2006:241). Consequently, it seems that according to the ACCF, successful L2 learning does entail receiving the 'purest', 'most perfect' possible input. However, as will become clear later, the main focus of the ACCF (see, e.g. N. Ellis, 2006c, 2006e) seems to be the failure side of L2 learning (due to a so-called 'L1 learned attention') rather than the success side (see discussion on Section 2.3.2 "Attention to input").

In-between UG and the ACCF (i.e. the two opposite extremes), theories such as Interaction Framework (Gass & Mackey, 2006) see most of the 'deficient input' identified above (e.g. teacher talk, foreign talk, or interlanguage talk) as useful/helpful to L2 learning. Or to put it another way, they stress the beneficial side of 'deficient input' (in their terms, 'modified input' or 'learners' interaction'). For example, simplifications make the input comprehensible to learner and elaborations provide learners with additional semantic details.

In spite of the different positions (either complementary or oppositional) in the field regarding the role of input, one thing appears to be certain and that is that

if L2 successful learning is going to be possible, learners need to overcome the negative effect of the 'deficient input' while making use of its possible positive effect. Furthermore, there seem to be no theories that reject the necessity of having 'ideal' input<sup>10</sup>, no matter how little 'ideal' input is needed (e.g. even input only as a trigger in UG Theory). In other words, given the reality of the input issues facing adult L2 learners (as shown in Figure 2.1), L2 learners, in order to reach nativelikeness, have to undertake at least two tasks. One is to overcome the negative effect of 'deficient input' while maximising the positive side of it. The other is to get 'ideal' input. (We will turn to research on how learners are actually able to get 'ideal' input in Chapter 3.)

If the above discussion is mainly concerned with the purity of input (i.e. non-targetlike vs. targetlike), then there are still issues regarding the quantity and variety (i.e. different situations/occasions) of input. In other words, how much input is needed for reaching nativelikeness? How many situations/occasions are needed in order to cover all the requirements for being nativelike? Since these questions clearly entail the matter of what it means to achieve nativelikeness, they will be discussed in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 when we discuss output.

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<sup>10</sup> For the time being, 'ideal' input is defined as input without any the undesirable characteristics of 'deficient' input.

Now, supposing that the problems with input issue have been resolved, would a learner automatically become nativelike? Answering this question requires us to look at the learners' *attention to input*.

## **2.3 Attention to input**

According to many commentators, including Peter Skehan, Nick Ellis, and Alison Wray, even if there is no problem with the supply of input, which is very unlikely (see Chapter 3), there still exist certain obstacles in relation to how learners pay attention to the input, which consequently affect their effective use of it. To focus our discussion, the following three angles will be addressed:

- Natural inclination to focus on meaning, not on form (Skehan, 1998a)
- L1 learned biased attention – input fails to become intake (N. Ellis, 2006b)
- Adult intelligence tendency – breaking down input instead of taking it as a whole (Wray, 2002)

### **2.3.1 Natural inclination to focus on meaning, not on form**

As is known, within a communication context, there are a variety of cues available (apart from linguistic form) for extracting meaning, such as setting, topic, power, role relationship and so on. Skehan (1998a) claims that as we

grow older<sup>11</sup> we become more effective in using all sorts of resources in extracting meaning. For instance, we can infer more from the context rather than rely on the linguistic words, by using strategies of communication and exploiting schematic knowledge. That is, it is increasingly possible that we can exploit the collaborative construction of meaning without resorting to words (p. 3). As a consequence of this, he argues that even if there were no critical period the so-called language acquisition device (LAD) "would not be needed to extract meaning, and so the quality of the new material which would be input to the acquisition processes would be impoverished" (ibid)<sup>12</sup>.

To illustrate his points of an adult's ability in getting meaning without resorting much to linguistic form, Skehan gives the example of an exchange between an airline passenger and a steward on an early morning flight<sup>13</sup>. When the steward was clearly about to return to the front of the cabin with a coffee jug in hand, the passenger called out, "I say!". Immediately, the steward replied "Empty". This exchange is interpreted by Skehan as "lack[ing] for nothing, given that the context, including the passenger's obvious fear of caffeine deprivation, renders the need for complete sentences irrelevant" (p. 3). According

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<sup>11</sup> Although Skehan also raises the question of "what, or rather when, is the discontinuity between 'younger' and 'older'?" (1998a:222), the concept 'older' has been referred to as 'post-critical period' many times in Skehan (1998a).

<sup>12</sup> Notice the difference between Skehan's claims and those of Van Patten's (2004) Input Processing Model, in which VanPatten argues that L2 learners' most basic and overarching principle in input processing is processing input for meaning before processing it for form (p. 7). While Skehan emphasises getting meaning without resorting much to linguistic form, VanPatten focuses his attention on linguistic form itself, that is, how actually learners process linguistic form for meaning.'

<sup>13</sup> It is unclear from Skehan's illustration whether the exchange was between a native speaker and a non-native speaker, or between two native speakers.

to Skehan, since “meaning can be extracted without exhaustive analyses of the structural aspects of language” (ibid), it is very likely for adult learners to “bypass a pivotal role” for form in interaction (ibid). In other words, adult learners are not making the most use of the input (i.e. here, linguistic form). However, Skehan’s example, and the claims associated with it, are problematic in at least three ways.

Firstly, as Skehan acknowledges, what he claims about this natural inclination for adult learners to focus on meaning rather than on form is just an assumption: “It is that *meaning* takes priority for older learners, and that the *form* of language has secondary importance” (Skehan, 1998:3; emphasis original). While the airline example can be used as an illustration for the redundancy of relying on linguistic form for an effective communication, one still might wonder what is wrong with this kind of nativelike interaction. After all, we are not supposed to make every interaction specific, only or mostly through the means of linguistic form. Otherwise, it would not be a normal way of communication in the ‘real’ world, just imagining the absence of body language in a face-to-face communication. In contrast however, a detailed, ‘modified’ input provided by the teachers in a classroom is possible in exhausting the means of linguistic form rather than resorting to other means of communication (still, see the discussion on Section 2.2 on the limitation of such ‘modified input’

by teachers). Perhaps, the strongest part of Skehan's argument is not that there is no form to what was said, but that there is form—just not the form one would get in a textbook. In other words, this is the right form for a situation like this, rather than it being deficient in some way.

Secondly, Skehan himself admits (1998:3) that he is only assuming that adults focus on meaning more than form while children do the reverse. In fact, his assumption seems contrary to the claims of many researchers (e.g. Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Klein, 1986; Peters, 1985; Sharwood Smith, 1986; VanPatten, 2004; Wong Fillmore, 1976) that all human communication (either young or old, either L1 or L2) is driven by looking for the meaning in input.

Thirdly, according to Skehan, this natural inclination for adults to focus on meaning rather than on form seems to apply to everyone, irrespective of their learning situation or style. In order to overcome this inclination, Skehan suggests a need for using “methods of contriving a focus on form” (Skehan, 1998a:4) to capture learners' attention in order that “they may incorporate newly-noticed forms into their developing language systems” (ibid). However, a dilemma seems to exist, when we look at the actual implementation of using methods to contrive a focus on form, that is, task-based instruction (TBI), as advocated by Skehan and others (Crookes & Gass, 1993; Skehan, 1996, 1998b, 2000, 2003; Skehan & Foster, 1997, 1999, 2001). On the one hand,



there is a need to focus on form, as Skehan's claims suggest. On the other hand, there is also a need to engage form in tasks, as he assumes that "language is learned for communication, and that meaning is primary" (Skehan, 1998a:4). The need to engage with meaning and communicate, might, as Skehan admits, "de-emphasize form even further than might be the case otherwise" (Skehan, 1998a:4). The challenge therefore, as Skehan puts it, "is to contrive sufficient focus on form to enable interlanguage development to proceed without compromising the naturalness of the communication that task can generate" (ibid). In other words, one needs to strike a balance between making the task meaningful and providing opportunities to notice the forms. Of course, in practice, TBI has its own problems, since it brings learners together. When engaging in tasks a lot of the L2 exchange is between learners, which means that the input to the learners is not targetlike. But that is not intrinsically a problem with the idea of TBI.

Supposing that a good balance between meaning and form is provided and that even 'ideal' input is available, could it be said that a nativelike achievement is guaranteed? As the following discussion indicates, according to N. Ellis, the answer seems to be no.

### 2.3.2 L1 learned biased attention – input fails to become intake

Based on the observation of the discrepancy between the targetlike input surrounding naturalistic learners and their language production (e.g. Perdue, 1993; Schmidt, 1984; J. H. Schumann, 1978), N. Ellis (2005, 2006b, 2006c, 2006e) argues that L2 learning by default fails to turn 'input' into 'intake'<sup>14</sup>. The reason behind this failure in L2 learning, in contrast to the success of "rational" learning of L1 (i.e. "simple exposure to normal linguistic input suffices and no explicit instruction is needed" N. Ellis, 2008:119), is argued to lie in a so-called "learned attention"<sup>15</sup>.

In associative learning theory (Cheng & Holyoak, 1995; Rescorla & Wagner, 1972), "learned attention" is claimed to be shaped by the process of L1 learning (N. Ellis, 2006e:165). More specifically, the impact of L1 upon L2 learning is through standard phenomena of associative learning, such as attentional shifting in perceptual learning, latent inhibition, blocking, overshadowing, or other effects of salience, transfer, or inhibition (N. Ellis, 2006c:2). They are described as perceptually biased mechanisms that "filter and color the perception of second language" (N. Ellis, 2006b:110). In order to illustrate his claims, N. Ellis gives the example of multiple cues, where

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<sup>14</sup> Note: N. Ellis defines 'input' as "the available target language" and intake as "that subset of input that actually gets in and that the learner utilizes in some way" (2007:83).

<sup>15</sup> Immediately, one might also want to argue for two points here. Firstly, is it fair to refer to a 'failure in L2 learning'? Not learning everything you are exposed to is probably essential, just as not remembering everything you see and hear is: you would go mad. Attention is, in other words, natural and essential, not part of a problem. (The problems might start if you attend to the wrong things). Secondly, who said that children convert all input to intake? It seems quite certain that they do not.

inflections marking grammatical meaning such as tense, are present together with temporal adverbs. Although L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition are governed by the same general principles of associative learning, the case of multiple cues has different consequences. According to N. Ellis, because of the low saliency and low contingency of grammatical forms, "in L1 acquisition young children are unable to acquire grammatical forms until they have a critical mass of content words, providing enough top-down structure to permit perception and learning of those closed-class items that occur to the right or left of 'real words'" (N. Ellis, 2006e:171). However, in L2 acquisition, because adult L2 learners already know temporal adverbs, looking for temporal adverbs alone is sufficient for them to interpret meaning<sup>16</sup>. In other words, inflections marking grammatical meaning such as tense are overshadowed by temporal adverbs, due to L2 learners' pre-existing knowledge of them. The consequence of the L1 learned bias, according to N. Ellis, is:

Under normal L1 circumstances, usage optimally tunes the language system to the input; however, in the L2 situation, forms of low salience may be blocked by prior L1 experience, and all the extra input in the world may not result in advancement (N. Ellis, 2006a:84).

Here, we can see the similarity and difference between N. Ellis' claims and Skehan's. On the whole, both of them are concerned with cue distraction. However, they come from different angles. While Skehan stresses that

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<sup>16</sup> The notion of perceptual bias seems to fall in line with VanPatten's Input Processing Theory (VanPatten, 2006), in which certain input processing preference principles are advocated. For example, "the Lexical Preference Principle" states that "learners will process lexical items for meaning before grammatical forms when both encode the same semantic information" (p. 118).

non-linguistic cues may distract adult learners *from focussing on linguistic form*, N. Ellis emphasises that due to the process of L1 learning, L2 learners are biased in paying attention *to only certain linguistic forms*. Meanwhile, in terms of the difference between adult and child language acquisition, Skehan believes that the older learner's natural inclination to focus on meaning rather than form "gives a LAD a more difficult task to accomplish" (1998:3) than for younger learners. In N. Ellis's view, however, the L1 system is optimally tuned to the input but L2 is not.

It is therefore not surprising to find that N. Ellis regards as dubious the possibility of achieving nativelikeness in L2 (N. Ellis, 2006b):

Many aspects of a second language are unlearnable – or at best are acquired very slowly – from implicit processes alone (N. Ellis, 2005:307).

Drawing on the notion of implicit and explicit learning/knowledge, N. Ellis maintains that the "knowledge of the frequencies of the elements of language" is acquired naturally<sup>17</sup> (i.e. without conscious operation), namely, on the basis of implicit learning (N. Ellis, 2002:146). This 'natural' acquisition is used in contrast to 'explicit' learning. N. Ellis defines implicit learning and explicit learning as follows (N. Ellis, 2007:1):

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<sup>17</sup> N. Ellis (2005) makes explicit his agreement with Krashen (1985)'s distinction and dissociation between acquisition and learning. However, N. Ellis argues for an interaction between implicit and explicit knowledge.

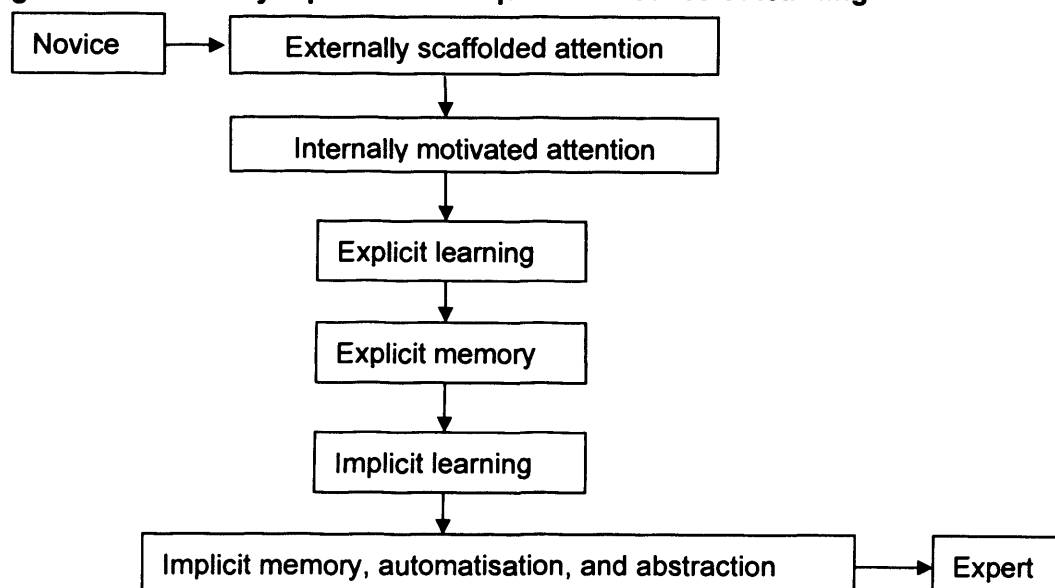
Implicit learning is acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of a complex stimulus environment by a process which takes place naturally, simply and without conscious operations. Explicit learning is a more conscious problem-solving where the individual makes and tests hypotheses in a search for structure.

While arguing that “the bulk of language acquisition is implicit learning from usage” (N. Ellis, 2005:306), N. Ellis maintains that the only possibility for L2ers of achieving nativelikeness is through utilising techniques of attentional refocus and explicit learning (N. Ellis, 2006c:20, cf. Skehan’s, 1998 task-based instruction). More specifically, it is through

recruiting learner consciousness, putting them into a dialectic tension between the conflicting forces of their current stable states of interlanguage and the evidence of explicit form-focused feedback, either linguistic, pragmatic, or metalinguistic, that allows socially scaffolded development(N. Ellis, 2006b:100).

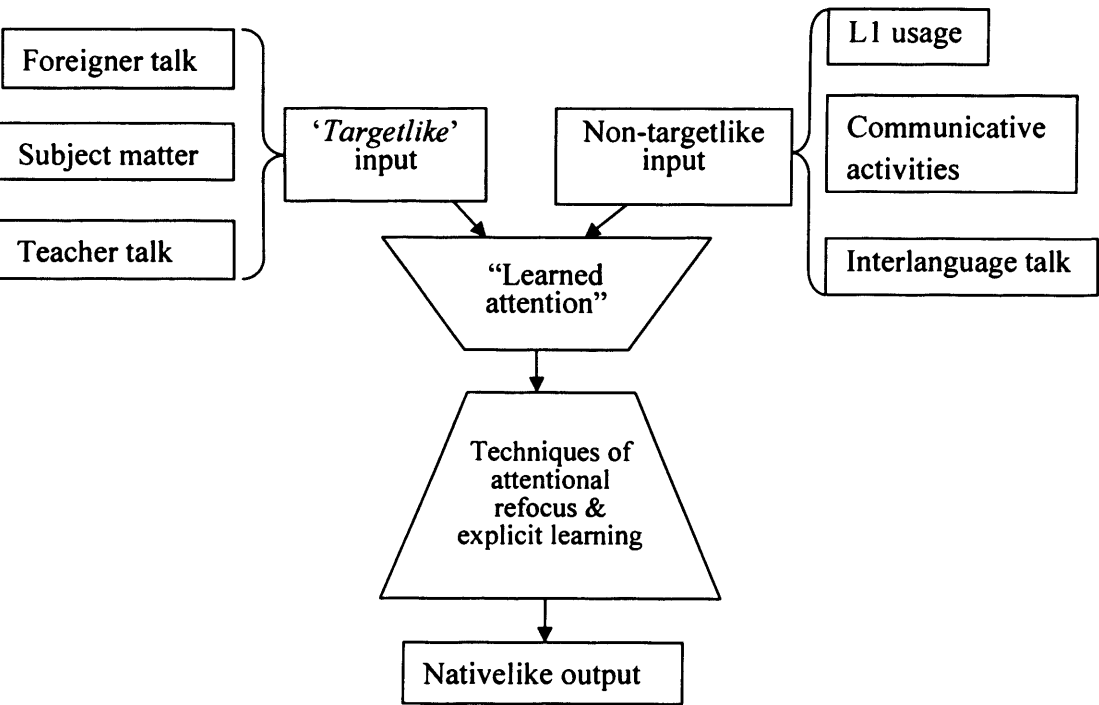
Thus, this leads him to advocate the sequential motives of learning as (N. Ellis, 2005:340):

**Figure 2.2 N. Ellis’ synopsis of the sequential motives of learning**



However, in terms of input, it appears that N. Ellis' main concern in relation to input is the "available target language". What is less clear is whether he takes into account modifications of the target input (e.g. 'foreigner talk'), target input out of context (e.g. 'subject matter'), and the mixed input occurring during the interaction inside/outside the classroom among learners (see Figure 2.3 below). If those are included in his concept of 'input', the outcome of the input will automatically become problematic, regardless of the issue of input becoming intake. For instance, in his theory of implicit learning, the mechanisms are rational language processing, exemplar-based abstraction and attraction, emergent relations and patterns. All of those are input-driven.

**Figure 2.3 Input issues facing L2 learners interpreted in N. Ellis' Framework**



One is therefore left to wonder how those mixed types of input, both targetlike and non-targetlike, could through the implicit learning mechanisms mentioned-above, ever possibly become one type – nativelike. In other words, if N. Ellis is right in advocating that implicit learning through rational language processing, exemplar-based abstraction and attraction, emergent relations and patterns is the main mechanism for language acquisition, then the exposure to all of these mixed inputs, by default, will turn out to be mixed output, regardless of whether input succeeds in becoming intake or not. However, as a given fact, some L2 learners are eventually able to produce nativelike output (e.g. Bongaerts et al., 1997; loup et al., 1994), in spite of their mixed input. Thus, solely reliance on implicit learning, though arguably the main mechanism, is obviously not sufficient for explaining the success of achieving nativelike outcomes. In other words, combining the issues in supply of input as discussed in Section 2.2, Ellis's framework will only work if there is some means of excluding the rogue input. One possibility of excluding the rogue input might be through an aspect of 'learned attention' to the most plausible material. However, it must be accepted that if the 'target' is perceived in certain ways (e.g. certain formulaic sequences, which are made up of common individual words, may be treated as 'slangs'), then aspects of what is most natural for native speakers will be rejected as undesirable, creating a version of the 'target' that is 'cleaned up'.

We now turn to another kind of barrier to how learners pay attention to the input – Wray's claims regarding adult L2 learners' perception of input, namely, the tendency to break down input instead of taking it as a whole.

### **2.3.3 Adult tendency – breaking down input instead of taking it as a whole**

While Skehan and N. Ellis argue from the perspective of cue distraction, which prevents L2 learners from focussing on either linguistic form or certain linguistic forms, Wray (1992, 1999, 2002) holds that the barrier preventing L2 learners becoming nativelike lies in their analytic way of dealing with input and their consequent building up of output from scratch. Here we will engage with Wray's view on learners' attention to input first, and consider her view on learners' attention to output in Section 2.5.

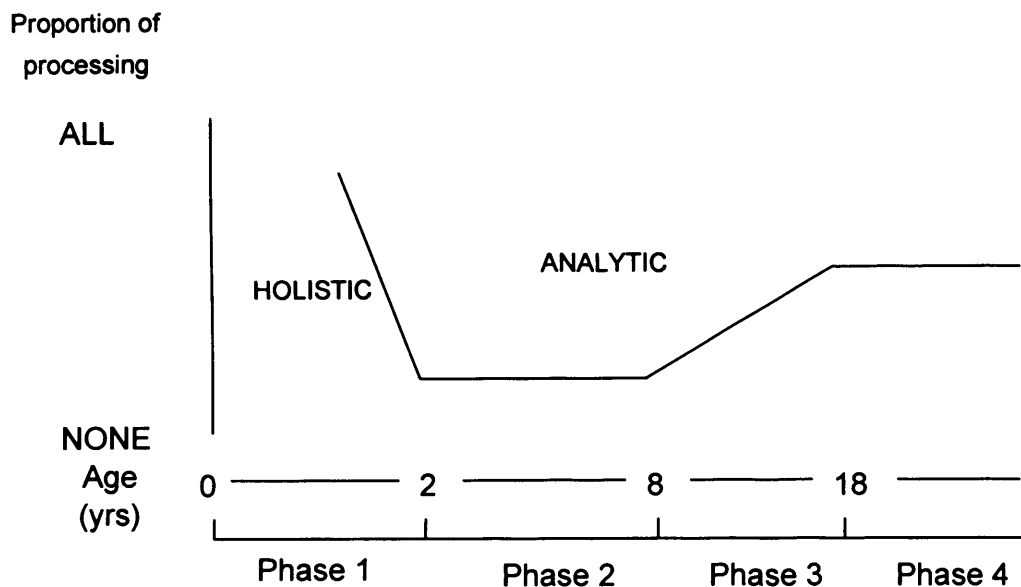
According to Wray, what seems to cause a problem for L2 adult learners even in a naturalistic setting (i.e. supposing that the input provided to them is 'ideal') is their tendency to break down linguistic strings as they deliberately aim to acquire "a lexicon of word-sized units" (Wray, 2002:206). By doing this, they throw away "all the really important information, namely, what [individual words] occurred with" (ibid). In other words, the input is impoverished by deliberately focussing on individual words only.



The outcome of this breaking down tendency, in Wray's view, is that "the relative balance of words to formulaic word strings will be quite different from those of a native speaker" (ibid). This difference is very important, as Wray claims that formulaic sequences assist in both comprehension and production by reducing processing. Consequently, on the one hand, "language production and comprehension might always feel more effortful than in the native language" (p. 210). (For the importance/function of formulaic word strings (i.e. formulaic sequences), see Section 2.5 "Attention to Output".) On the other hand, even if L2 adult learners have created their own formulaic sequences, thus being able to alleviate their processing effort, it seems very unlikely that L2 adult learners could pass themselves off as nativelike (see also Section 2.5 on how formulaic sequence production contributes to being perceived as being nativelike).

Building on the work of Locke (1993, 1995, 1997), Wray and Perkins (2000) propose a model of formulaicity in language acquisition (see Figure 2.4).

**Figure 2.4 The balance of holistic and analytic processing from birth to adulthood (Wray, 2002:133)**



In this model, four phases of the balance between holistic and analytic processing in L1 learning are proposed (see Wray 2002:132-5 for the detailed description of the four phases). What lies at the heart of this model of four phase language development is “Needs-Only Analysis” (p. 130-2). Challenging the wide assumption that “language is and must be analytically processed” (Wray, 1992:5), Wray argues that “although we have tremendous capacity for grammatical processing, this is not our only, nor even our preferred, way of coping with language input and output” (Wray, 2002:10). In other words, “much of our entirely regular input and output is not processed analytically, even

though it could be" (Wray, 2002:10). As far as L1 acquisition is concerned, "the process of analysis is a highly restricted operation. The basic principle is to operate with the largest possible unit" (p.138).

While this balance of analytic and holistic processing is adjusted perfectly by the L1 learners to meet their changing needs in their different stages in life (see Figure 2.2 for the illustration of different stages), according to Wray, a similar adjustment of balance is required by L2 learners in order to meet their own needs. Because L1 learners and L2 learners start their language learning at different stages of their life, their linguistic resources (see Section 2.2 for the issue of input supply facing L2 learners) and learning needs are different. For example, while language learning for an L1 learner might be just part of the natural growing-up process, language learning for an adult L2 learner might be a means to pass a test. Consequently, the balance between analytic and holistic processing that L1 learners and L2 learners need is different (Wray, 2002: 205). In sum, adult L2 learners, on account of their needs, will break down input more often than an L1 learner (or child L2 learner) would.

There seem to be two specific factors suggested by Wray which explain why adult L2 learners tend to break down input more often than L1 learners do. The first factor is adult L2 learners' "awareness of the word as a possible unit of linguistic processing" (Wray, 2002:206). This is argued to be a "natural product

of having passed through Phase 2 and of being literate” (ibid). More specifically, “any tuition, including self-study, that relies on the written medium, will ... underline the importance of small units over language ones” (Wray, 2002:206). The manifestation of this factor, as Wray observes, is that it makes “the learner feel uncomfortable with not knowing how a memorized string breaks down or is written” (ibid).

The other factor, according to Wray, is the need to break down input as imposed by the expectations of the teacher and pupil in relation to ‘effective learning’. For example, you do not know the language unless you know lots of words and rules; it is not enough to know how to express idea X; you need to know how to use that to express ideas Y and Z too (i.e. paradigm production).

Nevertheless, Wray considers the difference between L1 and L2 acquisition as circumstantial (2002:213):

There is no inherent reason why individuals should not, as adults, learn a language to fully nativelike competence (which is a useful prediction, since people occasionally do exactly that), but there are a great many obstacles which their social and intellectual experience and their learning situation will set up to prevent it. The critical age, seen from this view, is a conglomeration of factors which affect the individual's approach to learning. The learning itself is subservient to the real agenda, which is to accommodate the immediate needs – all of them – of the individual, not only as a learner but as a functional entity in his or

her own complex world (p. 213).

In other words, native-like competence is difficult to achieve but is still achievable in Wray's model.

One is therefore led to wonder about the exact ways in which adult L2 learners could overcome their breaking-down-input tendency and take input as a whole (in the same way that native speakers do). According to Wray, one possibility is by "residing and fully interacting for some time in the L2 environment" (Wray, 2002:210) (see also Section 2.5 for Wray's more detailed proposal – three conditions for successful learning). The direct reason behind this suggestion is that nativelike formulaic sequences need to be learned piecemeal due to their non-generalisability:

knowing how to greet someone informally does not give you a head start in knowing how to greet someone formally, and knowing how to congratulate on his or her birthday will not necessarily be helpful when the occasion is a wedding (Wray, 2002:295).

However, the main reason for operating in the L2 environment if you want to become nativelike, according to Wray (*personal communication*) is:

to create a situation in which you are so fixed on interaction that your needs change: you now are more like a child, in that your only interest is in working out how to do the interaction effectively (so as to communicate effectively, promote self, save face, etc) and you are frankly not interested in whether it is nativelike or not. It's when this situation holds that Needs Only Analysis will allow the learner to attach meaning to large chunks of input and accept it as it is, probably because

the learner is not even trying to learn it, just survive the interaction. Then implicit learning can take place: you did not mean to learn it, but it just went in: form and meaning together, with all the words and grammar contained in the whole.

To sum up what has been discussed in this section on attention to input, there are at least three barriers identified by researchers to nativelike achievement, namely:

- the natural inclination to focus on meaning, not on form (Skehan);
- the L1 learned biased attention – input fails to become intake (N. Ellis); and,
- the adult intelligence tendency – breaking down input instead of taking it as a whole (Wray).

While Skehan and Ellis advocate the necessity of explicit learning for successful SLA (N. Ellis, 2007:4; Skehan, 1998a), Wray essentially denies the validity of explicit learning as a means to becoming nativelike, unless there is an analytic route to nativelikeness, which she doubts. How could Wray's view be reconciled with the other two? Can they all be true at once? One possibility why these three commentators differ in view might be due to the fact that each commentator is actually dealing with a different 'target' of language achievement. In other words, Skehan and Ellis might not actually believe that explicit learning would lead to full nativelikeness<sup>18</sup> and are content with the high-proficiency non-nativelikeness, which is commonly regarded as 'success'

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<sup>18</sup> Although N. Ellis regards explicit learning as a remedy to implicit learning (i.e. to be able to increase the rate of acquisition and ultimate attainment, by paying more attention to language form, see N. Ellis 2007:4), he also acknowledges the limitation of this remedy (N. Ellis, 2005:331).

in terms of performing certain tasks well in the classroom.

Now supposing that the input provided to adult L2 learners is 'ideal' and their attention to input is 'appropriate', in the sense that they have overcome the barriers mentioned above, would they be able to reach nativelikeness automatically? According to the discussion that follows, the answer seems to be no.

## **2.4 Producing output opportunities**

'Output' has a form and a context of use. A learner needs to be in a situation where it is possible to produce it. In other words, the nature of output is intimately related to the nature and circumstances of input. Supposing there is lots of good quality, comprehensible input surrounding learners, will they become nativelike in output? The classic place to look for an answer would be in successful immersion programmes.

Based on the research taking place in the context of French immersion programmes in Canada, Swain (Swain, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2005; Swain & Suzuki, 2007) observes that the students at intermediate and higher grade levels in immersion programmes, while being extremely proficient and exceptionally fluent, failed to produce targetlike morphology and syntax and

also that their language usages were limited to a certain range of language functions. However, they were able to understand much of what they heard and read, even at early grade levels.

Within French immersion programmes, “students study content material such as mathematics, history, geography, and science for at least 50 percent of the school day using French, a language which they are also simultaneously learning” (Swain, 2000:199). Closer observation seemed to reveal that they did not talk as much during the French portion of the day (in French, i.e. their L2) as they did during the English portion of the day (in English, i.e. their L1). Meanwhile, as Swain observes, “the teacher did not “push” the students to [talk French] in a manner that was grammatically accurate or sociolinguistically appropriate” (Swain, 2005:472). All the observations lead Swain to suggest:

Simply getting one's message across can and does occur with grammatically deviant forms and sociolinguistically inappropriate language. Negotiating meaning needs to incorporate the notion of being pushed toward the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately (Swain, 2005: 472-3).

Consequently, Swain declares that “an input-rich, communicatively oriented classroom does not provide all that is needed for the development of targetlike proficiency” (Swain, 1998:65). Meanwhile, she also holds that “teaching grammar lessons out of context, as paradigms to be rehearsed and



memorized, is also insufficient" (ibid). What the students lacked in order to reach nativelikeness, according to Swain, were sufficient opportunities for producing 'pushed' output.

Swain argues that through language production, learners are forced to move from comprehension (i.e. a focus on meaning) to syntactic use of language (i.e. a focus on form):

Output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended, non-deterministic, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production. Output, thus, would seem to have a potentially significant role in the development of syntax and morphology (Swain 1995, p. 128).

More specifically, three potential roles of output in second language learning are proposed by Swain <sup>19</sup> : the noticing/triggering function, the hypothesis-testing function and the metalinguistic (reflective) function (Swain, 1995, 1998, 2005).

By *noticing*, Swain means the following:

in producing the target language, learners may encounter a linguistic problem leading them to notice what they do not know, or know only partially. In other words, the activity of producing the target language may prompt second language learners to consciously recognize some

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<sup>19</sup> Gass and Mackey (2006:180) suggest another function of output: the promotion of automaticity (i.e. the routinisation of language use; compare also DeKeyser's (2007) promotion of automaticity through practice in his skill acquisition theory). Skehan (1998) proposes six functions of output: to generate better input, to force syntactic processing, to test hypotheses, to develop automaticity, to develop discourse skills, and to develop a personal voice.

of their linguistic problems; it may make them aware of something they need to find out about their L2 (Swain, 1995:129).

The hypothesis-testing function is described as learners' use of their output as a way of trying out new language forms (hypotheses). The metalinguistic (reflective) function is the learners' use of language to reflect on language use, that is, "the learners' own language indicates an awareness of something about their own, or their interlocutor's, use of language" (Swain, 1998:68). This is argued to serve "the function of deepening the students' awareness of forms and rules, and the relationship of the forms and rules to the meaning they are trying to express" (p.69) and also in "helping students to understand the relationship between meaning, forms, and function in a highly context-sensitive situation" (ibid).

As a whole, the three functions are related more to accuracy than to fluency. That is, it is argued that producing language plays a role in stimulating learners' awareness of linguistic forms and encouraging learners to pay attention to L2 grammar (Swain, 2005). In other words, what really matters for Swain is the learner's 'appropriate' attention to both input and output, through being given sufficient opportunities for producing pushed output.

Swain's output hypothesis itself is a challenge to Krashen's input hypothesis. That is, according to Swain, simply receiving comprehensible input does not

guarantee that learners will pay 'appropriate' attention to input. Learners need to be pushed to do so through the process of producing output in a particular way. That is, learners need to be given sufficient opportunities to produce output pushed towards "the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately" (Swain, 2005: 473). However, how exactly learners are to be pushed along the process of producing language remains unresolved.

For instance, in Swain's (1998) study, the learners were asked to produce certain pushed output (i.e. a dictogloss task – a procedure that encourages students to reflect on their own output). The result of the study indicates that the learners were able to learn in the sense that they tended to remember their incorrect solutions. However, what they learnt was wrong in the sense that they "believed that they had solved their linguistic problem, but they did so incorrectly" (p. 80). Although this leads Swain to suggest the importance of teachers' availability during collaborative activities and also the importance of drawing learners' attention to the accuracy of the "final" product subsequent to the completion of collaborative activities, Swain acknowledges that the students might well have their own goals and agendas in relation to what they focus on (ibid). In other words, making pushed output (e.g. dictogloss) work requires the learners to collaborate, that is, the power of determinacy is

ultimately placed upon the learners themselves. What it is about learners' own control of attention or learning goals that can prevent them from reaching nativelikeness, will be discussed in Section 2.6.

So, where have we got to? Supposing that adult L2 learners are provided with 'ideal' input and attend to it appropriately, and also that certain tasks are designed so that learners are pushed towards the accuracy of language production, can adult L2 learners reach nativelikeness automatically? According to Wray (1992, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, Forthcoming; 2003; 2008), the answer seems to be no.

## **2.5 Attention to output**

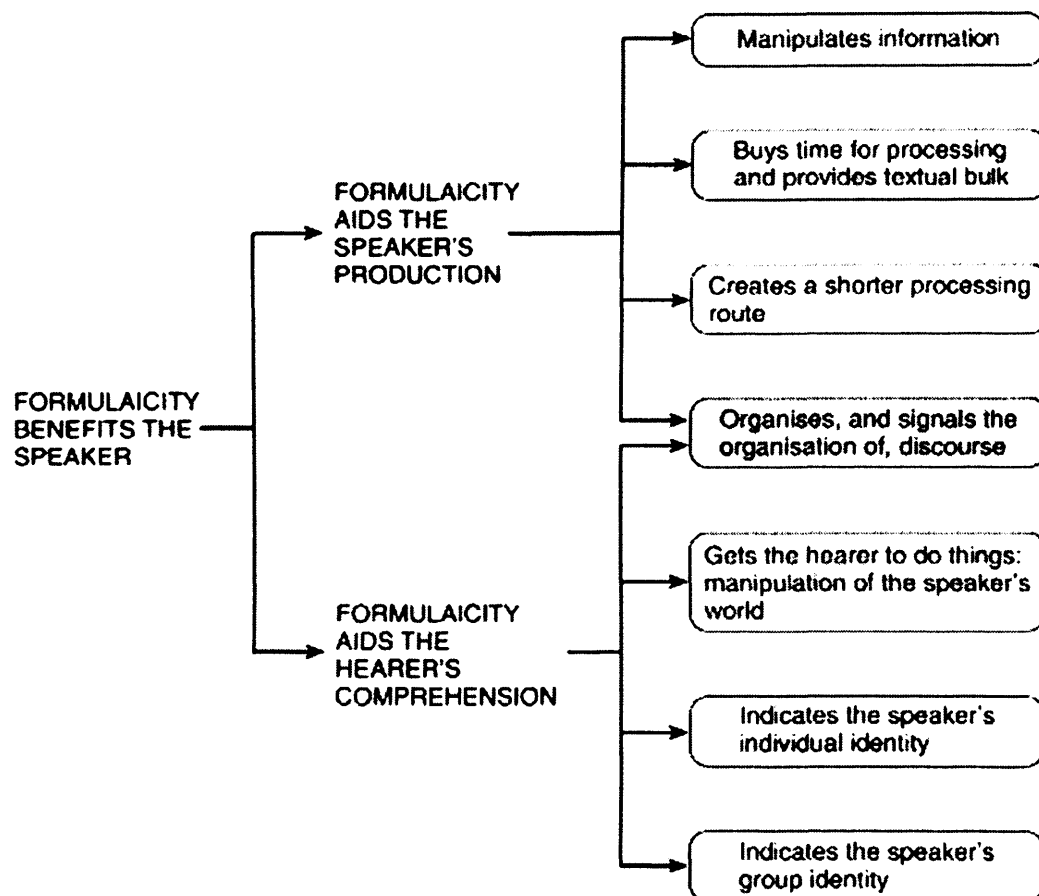
The barrier facing adult L2 learners, when they deal with their attention to output, according to Wray, is the way they construct output.

Before going into details about Wray's claims on adult L2 learners' ways of constructing output, it seems necessary to mention the significance of formulaic sequences in language production, as proposed by Wray and others (Wray, 2000, 2002, 2005a, 2006, 2007; Wray & Perkins, 2000).

Evaluating the two main functions of formulaicity (i.e. saving effort in

processing and achieving social-interactive function) that are proposed in the literature, Wray subcategorises each of them into three types (Wray, 2000; Wray & Perkins, 2000). For example, the function of saving effort in processing is made up of sub-functions, such as, “processing short-cuts”, “time buyers” and “manipulation of information” (Wray & Perkins, 2000:16). “Manipulation of others”, “asserting separate identities” and “asserting group identity” are part of achieving social-interactive function (Wray & Perkins, 2000:14). The identification of different sub-functions enables Wray (2000) to propose the relationship between the two main functions, as shown in Figure 2.5.

**Figure 2.5 The functions of formulaic sequences (Wray 2000:478)**



All the functions of formulaicity, according to Wray, “actually serve a single goal: the promotion of the speaker’s interests” (Wray, 2002:95). The interests of speakers are served through saving their own processing effort (as presented in the top part of the diagram in Figure 2.5) and through supporting their interactive goals by maximising the chance of their hearers’ comprehension (as represented in the bottom part of the diagram) (Wray, 2000:478)

If the functions of formulaicity shown in Figure 2.5 are made good use of by L1 speakers, as Wray claims, adult L2 learners seem unable to use them well, at least not to the extent that L1 speakers do. In other words, the problems that adult L2 learners have in language production are caused here.

As part of a model of formulaicity in language acquisition (see Section 2.3.3), Wray claims that when adult L2 learners try to express an idea they have to “compose it out of individual words” (Wray, 2002:206) because they have not stored whole the nativelike idiomatic expression of it. This is argued to be the result of adult L2 learners’ tendency to break down input (see Section 2.3.3 for the discussion on this tendency). The direct problem in having to construct output from scratch, according to Wray, is that the learners face too much choice:

there are plenty of comprehensible and grammatical ways of expressing an idea, but only those combinations which are stored formulaically by native speakers will be received as idiomatic (Wray, 2002:206).

Having to make choices among many possibilities not only slows down the process of production and requires much effort (compare the benefits of using formulaic sequences for saving processing effort), but also leads to the potential of producing non-nativelike outcomes. Comparing the benefits of using formulaic sequences for maximising the hearer’s comprehension, this potential of producing non-nativelike outcomes will have two different impacts

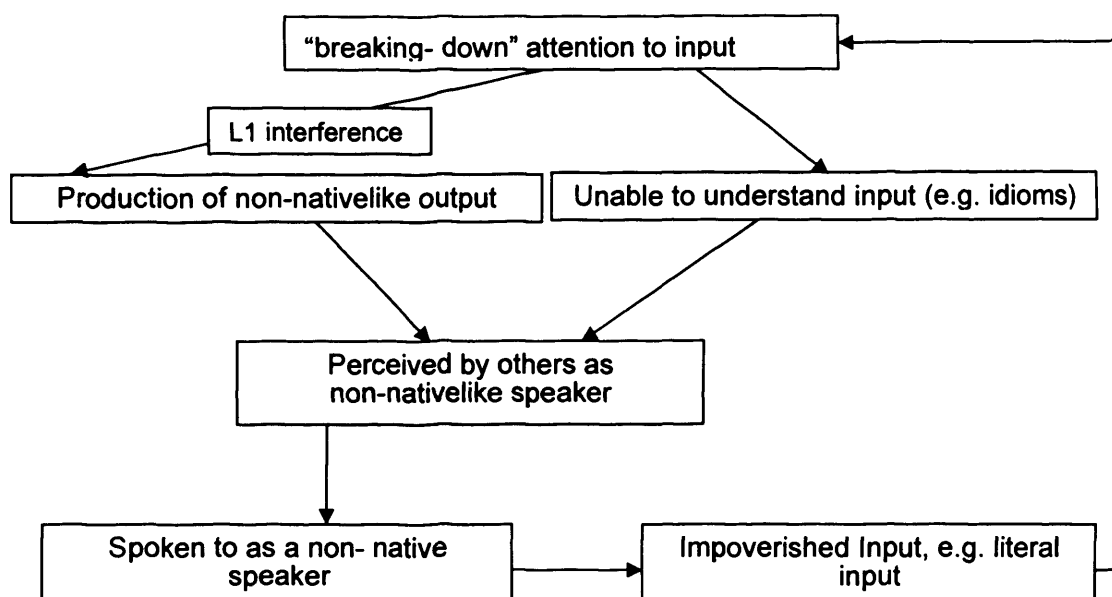
upon the hearer depending on the situation. For example, if the outcome is being non-nativelike but at least grammatical and comprehensible, the hearer just cannot look up large prefabricated strings. However, if the non-nativelike outcome is actually being ungrammatical or less comprehensible, it adds another layer of effort to the hearer.

Meanwhile, according to Wray, the lack of formulaic sequence knowledge also causes learners to employ whatever is closest to hand that appears to be able to fulfil their communication needs (e.g. making themselves understood), such as their interlanguage knowledge, or their L1 knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that L1 influence may be detected in learners' speech.

Furthermore, Wray points out that there is another consequence for adult L2 learners who produce non-nativelike outcomes in regard to the response of the native speakers (Wray, 2002:99-100). When adult L2 learners fail to produce nativelike formulaic sequences, it signals to the native speakers that they cannot cope with certain forms. Accordingly, the native speakers edit their speech in order to make themselves understood (compare the notion of 'foreigner talk'). In other words, the input provided to the learners becomes impoverished. This takes us back to the issues noted in Section 2.2. – concerning input supply barriers (see Figure 2.6).



**Figure 2.6 Barriers to nativelikeness predicted in Wray's model**



As shown in Figure 2.6, adult L2 learners' tendency for breaking down input has two direct consequences. One is that they might not be able to understand input in the case of an idiom, or something heavily covered in holistic pragmatics, although this will not be a problem for most input. The other is that it will lead them to produce output from scratch. During the process of building up output, L1 interference may come in, due to a lack of linguistic resources. The building-up-from-scratch approach to output production potentially makes the production sound non-nativelike. Consequently, along with the possibility of not being able to understand input, the learners may be treated as non-native with native speakers. This then leads to the possibility that learners might be provided with modified/deficient/impoverished input (e.g. literal input,

instead of idiomatic, holistic input). Moreover, the provision of literal input might reinforce learners' tendency to break down input. That is because it is very easy to break down literal input, whereas idiomatic, holistic input might be irregular or semantically obscure, which would mean that learners could not so easily access meaning that way.

In order to overcome all these barriers, Wray suggests three conditions (Wray, 2002:99-100):

- Condition 1: Engaging with native speakers in a genuinely interactive environment;
- Condition 2: The interaction being equal (that is, native speakers being equally motivated to ensure that the non-native speaker understands and reacts to their messages, as the reverse)
- Condition 3: The non-native speaker being sufficiently confident to pick up and use new forms, even without fully understanding them.

Using the success of Nora, one of the participants in Wong Fillmore's (1976) longitudinal case study in learning English as L2 in a naturalistic setting, Wray seems able to provide evidence to support her proposed three conditions in overcoming barriers in L2 learning (Wray, 2002:159-161).

According to Wong Fillmore (1976, 1979), the five learners she studied differed greatly in the pace at which they learned the L2. Among them, "Nora was the most successful learner" (Wong Fillmore, 1979:221). More specifically, "by the end of the study period [a period of one school year], Nora herself was

speaking nearly as well as her friends who came from bilingual homes, and very nearly as well as her English monolingual friends" (p. 207). In other words, Nora had nearly reached nativelikeness.

Although Wong Fillmore had identified a list of factors explaining Nora's success (e.g. her interests, inclinations, skills, temperament, needs, and motivations), the primary factor was that Nora, together with the other three successful learners, "never seemed particularly motivated to learn the new language as they were to get along with the people who spoke it" (p. 208). Wray points out that this is significant in a number of ways (Wray, 2002:160).

Firstly, Nora was acquiring the L2 through "engaging with native speakers in a genuinely interactive environment" (Condition 1, in Wray's proposal) instead of learning the language for the sake of learning. This obviously provides a good quality of input, as Nora was exposed to the language where it was used in social situations which involved her. In other words, there was no issue of transferring what was learned to 'real' life situations. Secondly, because Nora's primary agenda was to be like the people who spoke the L2, she was "strongly motivated to be associated with the English-speaking children and sought them out to play with" (Wong Fillmore, 1979:221). This guaranteed/maximised the supply of nativelike input.

Thirdly, because Nora's primary goal was to be part of the L2 social group, it lays down the basis for Condition 2 and 3. As Wray puts it,

Had Nora's primary agenda been to learn the language, there would have been a fundamental misalignment of her purposes in interaction and those of her interlocutors. As it was, they all shared the same priority, to operate as a social group, and Nora's linguistic disadvantage was everyone's problem in equal measure. Every effort that Nora made was matched by the efforts of her friends, all in the interests of their social aims, not linguistic ones. The upshot was a commitment to understand on Nora's part, and a commitment to facilitate understanding on the part of her friends (Wray, 2002: 160).

Nevertheless, as Wray (2002:160) points out, the fulfilment of the three conditions to overcoming barriers to nativelikeness, as evidenced in Nora's success, depends on two factors. One is who the learner is. Nora was the only one out of the five children in question, who was "sufficiently confident to pick up and use new forms, even without fully understanding them" (Condition 3). The other factor is a supportive environment. And, not every learner had one. For example,

Nora was not the only child motivated to play with English-speaking children out of school hours, but she was the one who was fortunate enough to have her best friend living nearby. She was also fortunate that the children she made friends with chose to welcome her into their group, and that her friends were talkative. One of the other subjects, Ana, had only one English-speaking friend, who was neither particularly talkative nor sympathetic. Nora's friends also combined a sensitivity that led them to make their input comprehensible, with a working assumption that Nora could, or would, understand what they said (Wray 2002:160).

If we accept, as both Wray and Wong Fillmore claim, that whatever it was that

Nora did, in the environment she was in, happened to promote language acquisition (see also Wong Fillmore, 1976:221), we can see that the same applies to Clea, as reported in Chapter 1. The question of interest, therefore, is whether it is possible for one to make/create a supportive environment when the current environment surrounding the learner is not supportive. If the answer is yes, how? What ability does that then require? These questions will be addressed in Chapter 3 when we deal with individual differences and the study abroad learning context.

Now, let us sum up what we have considered so far. There is the issue of input supply, the issue of attention to input, the issue of producing output opportunities and, in this section, the issue of attention to output. Arguably, all these four issues are more or less linguistic. For instance, attention to input and attention to output are linked with learners' linguistic ability/propensity to deal with input/output in certain ways. Supply of input and producing output opportunities are concerned with the linguistic environment learners are in. However, in the next section, we will be dealing with aspects of identity, which seems rather separate from ability or environment, but arguably impacts upon the four issues just mentioned.

## 2.6 Identity

In Wray's view, one of the roles of formulaic sequences is to express identity. In native speakers this reinforces nativelike behaviour. But what does it mean for non-native speakers? As just discussed, Nora's primary agenda was not learning the language but rather becoming part of her L2 peer group. Her strong sense of integration within the L2 community, as mentioned, had a great impact upon her language learning. Wray and Fitzpatrick (2008)'s study seems to also indicate that one's sense of identification with the L2 group plays a great role in adult L2 learning as well. In order to illustrate what they mean by 'identity' in this context, below we will have a close look at their study.

In Wray and Fitzpatrick (2008) and also Fitzpatrick and Wray (2006), six adult L2 learners of English were provided with targetlike input in the sense that the learners supplied the meaning they wanted to convey in a situation salient to them and the native speaker (Fitzpatrick) provided them with her nativelike way of saying it. Although the targetlike input was provided only in an audio format on a CD and the learners "were advised not to transcribe the material or make notes" (Fitzpatrick & Wray, 2006:38), the nativelike input was made available to the learners for practice at any time, as they were actually given the CD to take away. Through negotiating the target language strings and practising models with the researcher, focus on form was achieved. However,

the study shows that deviations from the targetlike input provided, were abundant in the learners' real-life language production.

One possibility for explaining the learners' non-targetlike output in their real life performance is, as Wray and Fitzpatrick note, "the dynamics of real conversations can make it difficult for a learner to display her full ability" (Fitzpatrick & Wray, 2006:52).

Another possibility could be, as Wray and Fitzpatrick (2008) also suggest, that the learners' non-targetlike output in their real life performance provides support for Wray's model of formulaicity in second language. That is, adult L2 learners' tendency to break down input makes the task of reproducing nativelike input hard to perform, because, when dealing with input at the beginning, they have thrown away the important information about how the smaller linguistic units are combined together. Consequently, when they produce output, they have "many choices" (Wray, 2002:206). This therefore leads to a variety of possible outputs, some of which could deviate from the small set of idiomatic nativelike versions.

However, there is also another possibility which appears to have nothing to do with the problems of adult L2 learners that we have covered so far. As Wray

and Fitzpatrick note, there seems to be a sense of personal identity involved here – “some participants felt compelled not to produce utterances too close to the target” (Fitzpatrick & Wray, 2006:50). A comment from one of the participants well illustrates how important it is for learners to position themselves appropriately in relation to the L2 group:

Sometimes I change [the phrases] maybe I think there is a difference between British thinking and Chinese thinking ... We have to do something in my thinking ... actually we ...haven't really changed Chinese thinking to English thinking so sometime I have to change some words just for me to easy to ... find a way to express my emotions (Fitzpatrick & Wray, 2006:50-1).

In other words, learners' resistance to identifying with the L2 group can easily prevent them producing nativelike output (Preston, 1989). Looking from a different angle, it might be safe to assume that certain formulaic sequences are associated with certain identities. For instance, when a Christian says, e.g. '[We'll be back here next year], God willing' or '[but things are never hopeless], Praise the Lord' or 'God Bless', etc, these are discourse markers that signal Christian identity, in the same way that having a fish symbol on your car or your lapel, or wearing a cross, also does.

Therefore, if they do not want to be identified as belonging to a certain group (such as the L2 speech community), it is very likely that learners will not adopt the formulaic sequences which they perceive as being strongly associated with



the L2 group. In other words, their level (or perhaps the nature) of identification with the L2 group could well be one of the factors that prevent learners reaching/aiming for nativelikeness. Indeed, it has been pointed out that not every adult L2 learner has the goal of achieving nativelikeness (Noels, Pelletier, Clement, & Vallerand, 2003; Skehan, 1996:59). As Birdsong (2007) puts it,

Different levels of L2 ultimate attainment have been linked to individual differences along psycho-social and sociocultural dimensions. People vary in their experiences of society and culture, their ideologies of the L1 and the L2, and in their reasons for learning the L2. Individuals' goals for the outcome of learning vary as well. To a certain degree, therefore, the level of attainment and the way L2 knowledge is implemented in L2 use are determined by the learner (Gillette, 1994). In such instances it would be pointless to speak of deficiencies in learning ability (Birdsong & Paik, 2007).

Moreover, even if L2 speakers, to a certain extent, have gained the ability to pass themselves off as nativelike, the actual demonstration of their nativelikeness also seems to depend on factors such as their wish to be treated as nativelike:

Nativelikeness also depends on whether the L2 speaker wishes to be dealt with as a foreigner (which sometimes provokes stereotypical attitudes from interlocutors). Many L2 users seem to weigh, consciously or not, the benefits and disadvantages of the passing-for-native act; this calculus plays out in their L2 speech, with resulting variations in perceived nativelikeness (Birdsong & Paik, 2007).

## 2.7 Summing-up and a way forward

Through the discussion in this chapter, there are six areas which have been identified as barriers to reaching nativelikeness:

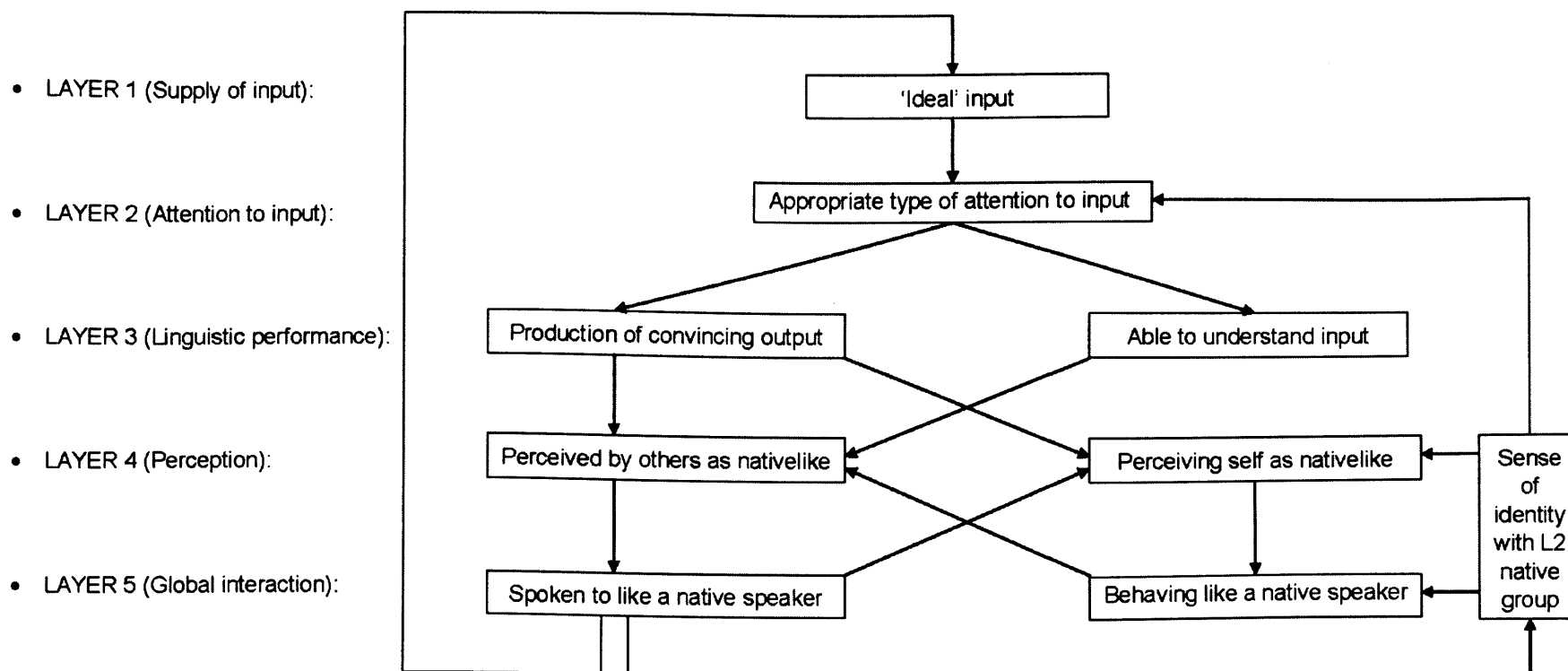
- Supply of input
- Attention to input
- Opportunities for output
- Attention to output
- Identification with the L2 native group<sup>20</sup>
- Nativelikeness intention

Drawing together the discussion in this chapter, it is therefore proposed that in order to overcome the barriers to nativelikeness, the 'ideal' way would be as follows (see Figure 2.7).

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<sup>20</sup> In order to not confuse the focal issue, which is how the learner identifies with the L2 community, with the much more complex issue of 'identity' as a whole, an effort has been made in this thesis to speak of 'identification with' rather than 'identity'. It will be seen that the two do interact sometimes. For example, Joy (a learner in the later investigation in this thesis), being ethnically Chinese, had more general issues around her Chinese 'identity' (as well, of course, as her British identity, her identity as a student, as a woman, etc) which had an effect on her capacity and willingness to identify with native speakers of Mandarin.

**Figure 2.7 An 'ideal' model for reaching nativelikeness (the Reaching-Nativelikeness Model)**



As shown in Figure 2.7, there are five layers in the model, from top to bottom:

- Layer 1: Supply of input
- Layer 2: Attention to input
- Layer 3: Linguistic performance
- Layer 4: Perception
- Layer 5: Global interaction

In between Layer 4 (perception) and Layer 5 (outward interaction), there lies a rather 'intertwining' factor – how far the learner can, or chooses to, identify with the L2 group. That is, issues related to identification are inextricably intertwined with Layer 4 and Layer 5. Unlike many general descriptive model, such as Spolsky's (1989:28) preference model of second language learning, which lists some more or less unrelated statements, this model is dynamic in nature. The arrows within the model indicate a causative effect. Through those five layers and the identification factor, the dynamic interaction, externally and internally, is captured. Externally, we can see the supply of input to the learners (Layer 1), linguistic performance of the learners (Layer 3), and a wider picture of interaction between the learners and their interlocutors (i.e. global interaction – Layer 5), which includes non-verbal communication, such as body language. Internally, the capture is made of both the learners and also their interlocutors. First of all, there is the learners' reaction to input (i.e. their attention to input – Layer 2). Secondly, there are the learners' perception of

their nativelikeness and other people's perception of their nativelikeness.

Thirdly, there is the learners' level of identification with the L2 group. As the arrows indicate, those different layers and factors affect one another. It is hypothesised here that in order to overcome the barriers to nativelikeness, successful adult L2 learning needs to meet at least the following five conditions:

- Condition 1: An intention to produce nativelike output (Intention)
- Condition 2: An adaptive capacity to identify with the L2 native group (L2-oriented identification)
- Condition 3: A guaranteed on-going supply of 'ideal' input (Ideal-input)
- Condition 4: An appropriate type of attention to the input (Attention-to-input)
- Condition 5: An appropriate type of attention to the output (Attention-to-output)

These five conditions are manifested through the interactions among the five layers and the identification factor outlined in the model (Figure 2.7).

According to our discussion in the previous section, not everyone has the intention/goal of sounding nativelike when they approach a new language. Thus it seems pointless to talk about reaching nativelikeness if one does not intend to. In other words, an intention to be nativelike is the first condition for

reaching nativelikeness. This is not to deny the possibility of 'incidental learning' (i.e. learning without intention). Rather, it is simply taken as read that not wanting to become nativelike will be an obstacle to reaching nativelikeness (see Han, 2004 on 'satisfaction of communicative needs', which is argued to be one of the major causal factors of fossilisation).

Even if one has an intention to sound nativelike, as revealed in the Identity Section (2.6), if there are impediments to a sense of identification with the L2 group, then one might not be perceived as nativelike. That is, one might reject certain verbal forms (such as formulaic sequences) and non-verbal forms (such as certain gestures). It is therefore proposed that in order to overcome barriers to reaching nativelikeness (if there are any<sup>21</sup>), one needs to be able to identify with the L2 community group, which will allow one to adapt/integrate into the speech community (Condition 2). This arguably will impact upon the learners' perception of and behaviour towards the L2 group, that is, in perceiving themselves as nativelike (in Layer 4) and behaving like a native speaker (in Layer 5). Moreover, as discussed, it might impact upon their attention to input, namely, being open/adaptive to certain expressions, instead of rejecting/ignoring them.

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<sup>21</sup> Not all linguistic forms or features of non-verbal communication will be directly indexed to the speaker's identification with the L2 group, so sometimes there will not be a problem.

If Conditions 1 and 2 are there to prepare learners for an open/adaptive mind/attitude towards the L2, then certainly the initial point of L2 learning starts from the supply of input. According to the discussion in Section 2.2 concerning Layer 1 – supply of input – in order to reach nativelikeness, learners need to undertake at least two tasks. One is to overcome the negative effect of ‘deficient input’ while maximising the positive side of it. The other is to get ‘ideal’ input (i.e. the opposite of ‘deficient input’). Nevertheless, it is common sense that learners will not be able to handle input in real-life situations straightaway when being exposed to the L2 for the first time. If we accept that the supply of ‘deficient input’ is a necessary/inevitable step before adult learners are able to handle input in real-life situations, delivered by native speakers without any modification (i.e. in the sense that learners are treated as native speakers, see Layer 5), what really matters at the end of overcoming barriers to reaching nativelikeness would be to get ‘ideal’ input (Layer 1) and handle it in an appropriate way (i.e. paying appropriate attention to input – Layer 2), as suggested throughout the discussion in this chapter. The question of interest is how learners are able to do that. This will be the focus of investigation in what follows.

As far as “appropriate” attention to input is concerned, Skehan and N. Ellis

stress the importance of encouraging learners to focus on form(s). Similarly, through an emphasis on “pushed output”, Swain also advocates the need for learners to focus on form(s) (i.e. either their own output or others’ input). However, Wray maintains that learners need to be sufficiently confident to pick up and use new forms, even without fully understanding them. It therefore remains to see what the ‘appropriate’ attention to input and output for reaching nativelikeness turns out to be for the learners’ in the study to be reported later in this thesis.

The discussion of identification and the intention to become nativelike has made us aware that the ultimate determiner of whether learners reach nativelikeness is the learners themselves. This is not to dismiss the agency of teachers, those providing other input, those providing the help within the learners’ ‘proximal development zone’ (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998) and possible developmental factors outside the learner’s control, and so on. Rather, it is to acknowledge the importance of individual differences that reside within learners themselves, such as ‘aptitude’ and ‘motivation’ (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; R. Ellis, 2004). As will be revealed in Chapter 3, it seems to be something within the learners themselves that makes them differ from each other, in either getting the ‘ideal’ input, or in paying a certain type of attention to the input.



## **Chapter 3 Meeting learning conditions: Insights from individual difference research and study abroad research**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of the present research, if we recall, is to find out how adult L2 learners can overcome barriers to reaching nativelikeness. Through engaging with the literature on the general tendencies/propensities which act as barriers in preventing learners from reaching nativelikeness, an 'ideal' model for reaching nativelikeness was established in the previous chapter. More specifically, five conditions for reaching nativelikeness have been proposed, namely:

- Condition 1: An intention to reach nativelikeness (Intention)
- Condition 2: An adaptive capacity to identify with the L2 native group (L2-oriented identification)
- Condition 3: A guaranteed on-going supply of 'ideal' input (Ideal-input)
- Condition 4: An appropriate type of attention to the input (Attention-to-input)
- Condition 5: An appropriate type of attention to the output (Attention-to-output)

The relevant question to ask here is how learners can fulfil the five hypothesised conditions. Drawing from research on individual differences and research on the study abroad context, this chapter will specially look at *how those conditions can be met*. By the end of the chapter, specific research questions will be pulled out for further investigation.

### **3.2 Challenges in meeting the nativelike-intention condition**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, it is important to have a nativelike intention because without this intention/motivation an adult L2 learner might be simply content with his/her current interlanguage and his/her language knowledge might become fossilised. In other words, nativelike intention acts as an impetus pushing L2 learners towards nativelikeness. Three points can be drawn specifically from individual difference research and study abroad context research.

Firstly, nativelike-intention or motivation is important for the success of L2 learning in general. As Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) note, "individual differences in second language learning, principally foreign language aptitude and motivation, have generated the most consistent predictors of second language success" (p.590) and "aside from age of onset, no other potential predictors of second language learning success consistently achieve such



levels" (ibid).

Secondly, the notion of 'motivation' is rather complex (for a detailed review, see, e.g. Dörnyei, 2005: Chapter 4). For example, the conceptualisation of 'motivation' has been going through various types of orientation, such as Gardner and Lambert's (1972) 'integrative motivation', Noels, Pelletier, Clement, and Vallerand's (2000) 'intrinsic motivation', 'extrinsic motivation', and 'amotivation', Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) 'motivational evolution', and Norton's (2001) 'investment' and 'imagined community'. Without going into details regarding the complexity in the notion of 'motivation', what we can draw from the research is the observation that motivation is changeable and is subject to many intertwined factors, such as learning achievement, identity, power and so on.

Thirdly, within the study abroad context, nativelike intention seems to be even more important in sustaining the process of mastering an L2. As Hassall (2006) observes, motivation is the key to understanding learners' behaviour abroad and those "who reject opportunities for interaction lack a sufficiently strong motivation to learn the language" (p. 33). Arguably, the study abroad context is supposed to be a target-input rich context (see Section 3.4 on Challenges in meeting the ideal-input condition). However, research in the

study abroad context (e.g. Isabelli-García, 2004, 2006; Kinginger, 2004; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Kinginger & Whitworth, 2005; John H. Schumann, 1997; Wilkinson, 1998a) shows that there are many context-specific factors which might lead to a learner's *demotivation* (i.e. "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action" Dörnyei, 2001:143). For example, as DeKeyser (2007a:212) puts it,

For many students, especially for native speakers of English, particularly for those at the lower levels of proficiency and most particularly for those in more or less sheltered programs, the temptation to speak their native language is great. Not only does speaking the L1 take less effort, it conveys many other advantages as well. It may allow for more precise and more rapid communication, it may allow students to say things they do not want the native speakers of the second language in question to understand, and it may create a bond with other students and their shared (sub) culture (e.g., Levin, 2001). The importance of the latter factor is not to be underestimated at a time when students may be experiencing something between mild homesickness and severe culture shock. The native speaker language thus becomes a protective capsule, a symbolic withdrawal from a cultural context they cannot withdraw from physically.

### **3.3 Challenges in meeting the L2-oriented identification condition**

How can adult L2 learners within a study abroad context have an adaptive/open approach to identifying with the local community? As shown in the previous section, there are many factors which tempt L2 learners to withdraw from using the language. These factors obviously have an effect

upon their integration within the local community (see also Pellegrino, 2005 on how L2 learners' experience abroad affects their construction of 'self'). Furthermore, the length of study abroad programme is usually no more than one year (cf. Moyer, 2004 who argues that the intention to stay has an impact upon learners' construction of identity). The key here seems to lie in the learners' personal attitudes. For example, Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002) report that a L2 learner's ability to be open and mature was more important to their initial adjustment than their language aptitude (see, also Dörnyei, Durow, & Zahran, 2004). As with the case of Clea, Kinginger (2004) and Kinginger and Farrell (2004; 2005) found that despite some unpleasant contacts, L2 learners were able to create a social network, if they remained open to the L2 culture and developed a close relationship with their native speaker peers.

### **3.4 Challenges in meeting the 'ideal'-input condition**

A guaranteed on-going supply of 'ideal' input is advocated by many study abroad programmes, with immersion within the target language community. However, simply being abroad within the target language community, as many studies (e.g. FreedDuFon & Churchill, 2006; 1995b) show, does not guarantee that one will get this supply. The problem of input can be due to:

- Incomprehensible input
- Passive input (i.e. lack of interaction)

- Limited topics/situations
- Lack of recurring similar situations

As revealed in Clea's study in Chapter 1, the biggest problem for her was to understand the local native speakers. Although adult L2 learners are bound to be surrounded by incomprehensible input, the key seems to lie in how they manage to turn incomprehensible input into comprehensible and then make use of the input.

The input received by adult L2 learners may be entirely passive, such as simply listening to lectures in the classroom, to the radio, or to tour guides, watching TV or eavesdropping on conversations (e.g. Wilkinson, 2002). This not only does not provide an opportunity for output practice (e.g. Gao, 2003) but also, as DeKeyser (2007a) puts it, "may be very repetitive or very hard to comprehend" (p. 213). However, there seems to be no clear division between the beneficial effect of interactive input into L2 learning as opposed to that of non-interactive input into L2 learning. For example, Freed (1990) found that non-interactive out of classroom contact was more beneficial to upper-level students than lower-level students.

As for interactional input, Spada (1986) found that intermediate-level students benefited most from their interactive out of class contact with native speakers,

when their classroom instruction was based on a combination of grammar and communicative approaches.

However, even when interaction with native speakers truly occurs, it may be limited to certain routine conversations. In other words, it is clear that there is the potential for input to be limited in terms of the varieties of situations and registers (see, e.g. Freed, 1990 on the type and amount of input that the students receive during their study abroad). On the other hand, although a too narrow set of routines is limiting, learners still need routines. Otherwise, they will not get automaticity (see, e.g. DeKeyser, 1997 on his skills acquisition theory). In other words, learners need to receive plenty of input in similar, recurring situations in order to become automatic in language production (DeKeyser, 2007b:213). While a few situations are very common (e.g. greeting a friend, buying food), many situations are not so frequent (e.g. undertaking transactions in a bank). Given the fact that the time studying abroad is limited, usually ranging from a few weeks to one year, learners face the potential difficulty of obtaining both a sufficient range of input, and being able to make the best use of it. That is, they may not be able to transfer it into becoming automatic output.

Moreover, the authenticity of input, even in the study abroad context, is also

questioned by Wilkinson (2002). Through an investigation on the home-stay students, Wilkinson found that the native speakers and the learners relied heavily on classroom roles and discourse structures to manage their interactions. The inappropriate transfer of didactic discourse patterns to out-of-class interactions was either initiated by the learners themselves or by the home-stay families, who assumed the role of teacher. This finding leads Wilkinson to cast doubt upon the assumption that language use with a native-speaking host family liberates students from classroom limitations. In other words, within the study abroad context there exists the issue of transferring appropriate classroom input into real life language use.

Based on the above challenges in meeting the 'ideal' input condition, as a tentative solution, an 'ideal' input is hypothesised as input meeting the following criteria:

- Comprehensible: A gradual unfolding of input, which is comprehensible within the learner's 'zone of proximal development (ZPD)'<sup>22</sup>
- Authentic: Functional language use in real life
- Interactive: Requiring certain reaction, namely, producing online output

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'zone of proximal development' is borrowed from Vygotsky (1978) to describe the distance between "the actual development level" and the "potential development level" (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998:415). As argued in Dunn and Lantolf (1998), this concept seems to be able to solve the problem of operating in searching for an appropriate level of input comprehensibility for learners. For example, "the actual development level" is determined by "independent problem solving", while "the potential development level" by "problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (ibid). In other words, the essence of 'help' or 'collaboration' from others is stressed and captured under this concept.



- Abundant: Plenty of recurring similar situations
- Rich: various situations

### **3.5 Challenges in meeting the appropriate-attention-to-input condition**

The change in study context from the typical classroom to studying abroad seems to have a great impact upon the way learners approach input (Adams, 2006; Gao, 2003; Tamada, 1996). For example, in Gao (2003), learners' perception of their new context is that they felt that they were faced with a huge influx of vocabulary: "everywhere there are new words" (p.50), "loads of new words were upon me all of a sudden" (p.51). The result of this, as suggested in Gao, is that learners tend to change their learning strategies in dealing with new vocabulary. According to Gao, L2 learners seemed not to check in the dictionary for new words as often as before. More importantly, most of them "were no longer interested in memorizing or consolidating [a new word's] acquisition but chose to wait for it to appear again in the environment so that they might decide on its importance before finally learning it" (p. 51). In other words, they would evaluate the relevance of any new words to their future needs.

They believe that it was not necessary for them to learn some words because they were "not going to become an expert on words"... and would not be involved in professions "that purely rely upon the use of English language (Gao, 2003:52-3).

Consequently, they tended to “put their vocabulary problems aside” (p. 53). In other words, input was not becoming intake, simply because learners decided not to pay attention to it. This suggests that you can fail to respond to input even without having a deficiency in relation to attention.

Priorities could affect learning in other ways. For example, in contrast to Clea, who did not have academic assignments involving lots of reading using L2, the participants in Gao’s (2003, 2006) study needed to go through a huge amount of reading as quickly as possible. Consequently, they “had little intention to learn the new words that they came across in their reading” (Gao, 2003:53).

Meanwhile, the actual requirements of their academic learning might also affect L2 learners’ ways of attending to the input. For example, Gao (2003) found that the Chinese students living in the UK did not have the desire to memorise new words simply because they were not required to do so in the UK, in contrast to the requirement to do so in China.

Similar to Gao’s finding that learners abroad tend to focus on understanding meaning, Tamada (1996) found that the majority of his Japanese learners of English, whilst being in the UK, would ask the speaker to slow down or say it

again if they could not understand the English. However, they would not ask for help from native speakers when they came across unfamiliar words or phrases.

Consistent with Wray's claim that adult L2 learners tend to break down input (see Chapter 2), the majority of Japanese learners in Tamada's (1996) study, even when in the UK, always used the 'analysing expression' strategy. That is, "I find the meaning of the new word by dividing it into parts that I understand (e.g. restructure – re+structure)" (p. 107). Furthermore, Tamada interpreted the continual use of this analytic strategy as being the result of the English teachers' recommendation to the students. This interpretation supports what Wray suggests – one of the reasons why adult learners tend to break down input is because of the expectations of the teacher and pupil in relation to 'effective learning'.

### **3.6 Challenges in meeting the appropriate-attention-to-output condition**

A general observation on the study abroad context is that learners tend to improve their fluency rather than their grammar after having been abroad (Longcope, 2003).

Moreover, Kinginger and Farrell (2004) found that the frequency of a learner's

usage of colloquial vocabulary increased significantly during the time abroad, although it still was not as frequent as that of native speakers (see also Dewaele & Regan, 2001). Meanwhile, Kinginger and Whitworth's (2005) study suggests that engagement with native speakers is a better predictor of the acquisition of colloquial vocabulary than formal classroom instruction. This seems to support Wray's claims that three conditions for overcoming nativelikeness are

- Condition 1: Engaging with native speakers in a genuinely interactive environment;
- Condition 2: The interaction being equal (that is, native speakers being as equally motivated in ensuring that the non-native speaker understands and reacts to their messages, as with the reverse)
- Condition 3: The non-native speaker being sufficiently confident to pick up and use new forms, even without fully understanding them.

More specifically, in terms of the way that learners pay attention to their output, Tamada (1996) found that the majority of learners tended to use the strategy "If I can't remember a word during a conversation in English, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing" (p. 108). In other words, this finding seems to support Wray's claim that adult L2 learners tend to construct sentences from scratch, thus possibly preventing them being nativelike.

### **3.7 Summing-up and a way forward: A new interpretation of ‘aptitude’**

As the above discussion indicates, there are many obstacles in the study abroad context that prevent learners from reaching nativelikeness. The question of interest is how learners can overcome those obstacles and become nativelike. In other words, in relation to the model proposed in Chapter 2, how can learners fulfil the five hypothesised conditions? One key contributor may well be ‘aptitude’.

Let us suppose that one wants to predict how well a person’s language learning is going to be, when he/she starts to learn a language. Much has been made, over the years, of the notion of individuals’ aptitude for language learning, although it remains unclear just what aptitude really is. ‘Aptitude’ is generally regarded as “strengths individual learners have – relative to their population – in the cognitive abilities information processing draws on during L2 learning and performance in various contexts and at different stages” (Robinson, 2005:46). The sorts of skills/abilities that are commonly viewed as contributing to aptitude (as often captured in aptitude tests) are, for instance, in Carroll and Sapon’s (1959) Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT):

- Phonetic coding ability - an ability to identify distinct sounds, to form associations between those sounds and symbols representing them, and to retain these associations;
- Grammatical sensitivity — the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words (or other linguistic entities) in sentence structures;

- Rote learning ability for foreign language materials — the ability to learn associations between sounds and meanings rapidly and efficiently, and to retain these associations; and
- Inductive language learning ability — the ability to infer or induce the rules governing a set of language materials, given samples of language materials that permit such inferences.

However, various ways of characterising aptitude across different theoretical frameworks exist (see Robinson, 2005 for a recent review on aptitude). Although the traditional concept of 'aptitude', as measured by MLAT, cannot offer us much, for some reason MLAT remains widely used regardless of its limitations (see. e.g. Dörnyei, 2005; 2006 on the reason why). On the other hand, researchers, such as R. Ellis (2001) and Robinson (2003), have even abandoned using the term, or simply use 'ability' instead (e.g. R. Ellis, 2004).

Teasing apart the nature of aptitude reveals some interesting issues. We must suppose that 'aptitude' means a reliable predictor of language learning outcomes, and this makes tests such as MLAT, which aims to measure 'aptitude' prior to learning the language, very attractive. However, in fact such tests do not take us very far, because it is ultimately the test, not the testee, that is under scrutiny. Thus, if some aptitude test predicts that someone is going to be successful, but at the end the person does not turn out to be successful, then all that can be said is that the aptitude test does not measure what 'aptitude' is really supposed to be.

As we have discussed in Chapter 1, Clea quite clearly had a good 'aptitude' for reaching nativelikeness. What is 'aptitude' then? In light of the model proposed in Chapter 2 and the five hypothesised conditions explored in study abroad contexts in this chapter, 'aptitude' fundamentally includes the ability to draw on the environment/situation productively. Recently, Sternberg (2002)'s dynamic 'trainable' notion of aptitude appears to offer us an option to capture this kind of 'aptitude'. His theory distinguishes three types of aptitude: analytical intelligence (involving the skills of analysing, evaluating, judging or comparing and contrasting), creative intelligence (the skills of creating, inventing and discovering), and practical intelligence (the skills of applying, implementing or using knowledge). By distinguishing these three types of aptitude, Sternberg is able to rightly point out that the abilities/skills contributing to aptitude will affect the interaction with the processing demands of real world and instructional classroom contexts. Nevertheless, as demonstrated later by the learners in this thesis, who had very different pathways to success, there seems to be more than one way to display high aptitude in this general sense of bringing 'cognitive strengths' to the task. In other words, there is more to aptitude than just the cognitive abilities that Sternberg mentions, such as personality in relation to social interaction, persistence, confidence, etc.

Drawing from the model proposed in Chapter 2 and the five hypothesised

conditions explored in study abroad contexts in this chapter, a new interpretation of 'aptitude' is now proposed. It is proposed that what 'aptitude'<sup>23</sup> means is everything about the learner and their learning context. In other words, the Reaching-Nativelikeness Model (see Figure 2.7) is a model of which APTITUDE works:

- how learners respond to situations, and
- what situations they are able to find/put themselves in

The picture of what this model of APTITUDE entails is one of how effectively one is able to progress. If one is able to progress to the point where one is perceived as a native speaker, then that will be a sign of one's APTITUDE.

It is argued here that APTITUDE will enable researchers to capture both the basic idea of 'aptitude' as being an *ability* and also (more importantly) the various kinds of reality and situations that individual learners are engaging in. Moreover, the logical output from the Reaching-Nativelikeness Model as proposed in Chapter 2 will try to capture what questions 'aptitude' tests ought be asking, namely:

- What kind of nativlike intention is one going to have? (responding to  
Condition 1 – nativlike intention)

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<sup>23</sup> To distinguish between the new interpretation of 'aptitude' proposed here and the other interpretation of 'aptitude' mentioned in the literature, a capitalised 'APTITUDE' for the new interpretation will be used.



- How adaptive is one going to be in adjusting one's level of identification with the L2 native group? (responding to Condition 2 - L2-oriented identification)
- How ideal is one's input going to be? (responding to Condition 3 – ideal-input)
- What kind of attention is one going to pay towards input? (responding to Condition 4 – attention-to-input)
- What kind of attention is one going to pay towards output? (responding to Condition 5 – attention-to output)

In order to test this model and the predictions it entails, the next step is to see how it works within a specific context. The following chapters will examine this model through the investigation of a group of British students learning Mandarin in China.

## **Chapter 4 Investigation of a group of adult L2 learners in a study abroad context**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the design of the main investigation of the thesis. The aim of the investigation was to discover how well the Reaching-Nativeness Model was able to predict learners' L2 learning outcomes. There were two aspects to the investigation.

The first aspect was to measure how well a group of learners of Chinese in a British university were able to meet the five hypothesised conditions (the result will be reported in Chapter 5):

- What kind of nativelike intention do the most successful learners have? (responding to Condition 1 – nativelike intention)
- How adaptive is one going to be in adjusting one's level of identification with the L2 native group? (responding to Condition 2 - L2-oriented identification)
- How ideal is one's input going to be? (responding to Condition 3 – ideal-input)
- What kind of attention is one going to have towards input? (responding to Condition 4 – attention-to-input)
- What kind of attention is one going to have towards output? (responding to Condition 5 – attention-to output)

The second aspect of the study was to measure how well they were able to

reach nativelikeness (both in overall language proficiency and in formulaic language acquisition) (The results will be reported in Chapters 6 and 7).

Due to the existence of different research approaches (for a review, see. e.g. Norris & Ortega, 2003) when assessing individual differences and native-like achievement, it is important to understand how different approaches work and how the information they provide may differ from the procedures adopted in this study. This subject will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. The discussion will justify the methods that were selected and the instruments that were developed for the data collection. After that, the whole data collection procedure will be reported.

## **4.2 Selecting methods**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of the present investigation was to test the Reaching-Nativelikeness Model (RN Model, see Chapter 2). Since the RN Model is a model of how effectively one's L2 learning is able to progress, it requires us to include a developmental/historical view. That is, it entails an investigation of one's learning journey, including how one interacts with the environment over time. During this journey, one can get stuck and stop progressing, due to a failure to fulfil some of the conditions hypothesised as being necessary for reaching nativelikeness. Moreover, this model also takes into account the changeability or dynamic nature of its components (i.e. the five different layers and five different necessary conditions), as indicated by the arrows in the model (see Figure 2.7). The relevant question to ask here is which research instruments can best assist in

examining this model. On the one hand, there already exist various approaches to the study of individual differences (see Table 4.1 for the frequently used ones).

**Table 4.1 Frequently used instruments in researching individual difference factors in SLA (R. Ellis, 2004:528)**

<b>Individual differences factor</b>	<b>Research instrument</b>	<b>Brief description</b>
<b>Language aptitude</b>	Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll & Sapon, 1959)	A battery of tests measuring phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity and rote learning ability.
<b>Learning style</b>	Group Embedded Figures Test (Witkin et al. 1971)	A test requiring learners to identify geometrical shapes embedded within larger figures.
	Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (Reid, 1987)	A questionnaire measuring four perceptual learning styles (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile) and two social styles (group and individual).
<b>Motivation</b>	Attitude Motivation Index (Gardner, 1985)	A questionnaire designed to measure learner attitudes, orientations, desire to learn the L2 and motivational intensity.
<b>Anxiety</b>	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986)	A questionnaire measuring the degree and source of learners' classroom language anxiety at three levels of processing.
	Input Anxiety Scale, Processing Anxiety Scale and Output Anxiety Scale (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994)	Three short questionnaires designed to investigate learners' anxiety at three levels of processing.
<b>Personality</b>	Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1964)	A psychological questionnaire measuring different personality traits, including extroversion/introversion.
<b>Learner beliefs</b>	Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1987)	A questionnaire investigating five areas of learner beliefs; language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, effective learning and communication strategies, and motivation.
<b>Learning strategies</b>	The Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990)	A questionnaire that exists in several forms (e.g. for learners of English as a second language (ESL) and for English speaking learners of foreign languages) measuring direct and indirect learning strategies.

Therefore, as far as the aim of the measurement in this project is concerned, one could simply select existing instruments for measuring the five hypothesised conditions. For example, Gardner's (1985) 'Attitude Motivation Test Battery' (AMTB) could be used for measuring Conditions 1 and 2 – nativelike intention and extent of identification with the L2 group, while Oxford's (1990) 'Strategy Inventory for Language Learning' (SILL) could be used for the way that learners gather and deal with input and produce output (i.e. Conditions 3, 4 and 5). In fact, those two instruments have been widely used in the study abroad context research (see, e.g. Adams, 2006; Gao, 2003; Kojic-Sabo & Lightbown, 1999; Kuntz, 1999; Tamada, 1996).

As R. Ellis (R. Ellis, 2004) points out, there are three features common to these approaches:

- A reliance predominantly on quantitative methods
- The use of survey questionnaires, which mainly rely on learners' self-reporting and correlational analysis (e.g. Pearson Product Moment correlation, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, or multiple regression), although other tests exist as well.
- The identification of relationships among individual difference variables and/or the relationship between a specific factor (e.g. strategy or belief) and a measure of L2 achievement or proficiency.

It is understandable that the approaches which have been adopted by individual difference researchers, to a certain extent, have served their aims. The whole rationale of ID research is, first, the search for "enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree" (Dörnyei, 2005:4) and, then, the attempt to establish

causation between the identified variables and language achievement. That is, it involves fundamentally two basic processes: the identification / generalisation / separation / isolation of variables from their real-life context and the justification / explanation for the variables being independent. However, these two processes inevitably lead to a tension between explanation and prediction (Skehan, 1998a:191).

Following on from the above limitations of traditional approaches, two responses to the tension between explanation and prediction can be identified. On the one hand, researchers have continued to use the instruments in question. On the other hand, some researchers have dismissed them and have argued in favour of the exclusive use of qualitative methods (e.g. Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

Spolsky (2000) and R. Ellis (2004), therefore, suggest that a better approach is to “use quantitative methods alongside such qualitative approaches as interviews, learner diaries, and learner autobiographical narratives” (R. Ellis, 2004:529). Similarly, as mentioned before, Dörnyei (2005) points out that the first step in solving the dilemma in ID research (i.e. finding general patterns while justifying individual uniqueness) is to look at each individual case within its own historical context, to see how that person has developed. This certainly requires the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, Schumann (1997) seems to indicate that a great amount of time and effort is required of the researcher, if using a hybrid approach.

In light of the limitations of either solely using quantitative methods or qualitative methods (Dörnyei, 2005; R. Ellis, 2004; Spolsky, 2000) and also of the requirement of the RN Model (i.e. looking into learners' learning progress journeys, while trying to maintain a good comparison across learners), it was decided that the present investigation would combine both methods.

Moreover, with regard to how to combine the two research methods (quantitative and qualitative) (see Brown & Rodgers, 2002 for methodology issues; see John H. Schumann, 1997 for one excellent example), methodological triangulation<sup>24</sup> was used by combining interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations during the process of gathering data (with the focus on questionnaires and interviews). That is, instead of simply using questionnaires to gather learner ID information, interviews and observation during interviews were used to both clarify and to further explore the relevant issues arising from the questionnaires.

### **4.3 Selecting a population**

Being aware of the complexity involved in the RN Model and the fact that every single human's experience is unique, any effective study must control as many variables as possible, in order to study learners' characteristics and how they progress in reaction to the environment that they are in. One possible way of achieving this would be to select a relatively uniform sample based on certain characteristics. Since age factors are potent variables in L2 studies, but not a focus of this study, selecting a sample of subjects with a similar age is one way

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<sup>24</sup> "In the social sciences, triangulation refers to the attempt to understand some aspect of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint, often making use of both quantitative and qualitative data in doing so" (Brown and Rodgers, 2002:243).

of achieving a relatively uniform group. However, age involves both the age of initial learning (i.e. the age when they started learning the language) and the age of language attainment (i.e. the age when they are assessed on their language proficiency). It seems that the ideal subjects would be those who started language learning at a similar age and who were learning over a similar time period. Therefore, the subjects were selected on the basis that at the time of assessment they were of a similar age and had started learning at the same point.

#### **4.3.1 Which target language?**

Due to the fact that the researcher's L1 and dominant language is Mandarin - and also because the common practice in language study is for researchers to study their own language or the language they teach, it was decided that the target L2 in the present experiment would be Mandarin.

#### **4.3.2 Which learners?**

Choosing Mandarin as the target language considerably narrowed the range of possible learner populations. The most consistent formal learning of Chinese outside of the armed forces occurs in universities. Therefore, university-based learners were selected. Of the available courses, the one at Leeds University was selected on account of the following considerations.

Since the main theme of the whole project is how adult L2 learners achieve native-likeness, it seemed better to target a learner group which had the potential to become native-like in certain respects. However, unlike French,



German, and Spanish, Mandarin is not commonly taught as a foreign language in British schools. At the university (Coleman, 2004) level, although Mandarin has become more popular and more widely available, a survey on-line in 2004, when the experiments were being designed, indicated that there were only two top universities offering Mandarin as a major for undergraduates. These two universities were Cambridge University and Leeds University.

A close look at the course requirements and outlines of the courses at these two universities showed that, although there was some similarity in what they were offering to the students and what they expected the students to eventually achieve, there were differences which were relevant to this research. Namely, although the course length at both universities was the same (i.e. four years and with no requirement for any previous knowledge of Mandarin), particular aspects of the course content were quite different. While the course at Cambridge University focussed on both language (modern Chinese and classical Chinese) and culture as a Single Honours, the Single Honours at Leeds University focussed on language (i.e. modern Mandarin) with only two compulsory modules on modern Chinese history and institutions. In other words, the Leeds study seemed to be more focussed on language learning and less on history and culture. Leeds University also offered a Joint Honours, namely modern Mandarin together with a social studies subject or linguistics. A closer look also showed that Cambridge stressed written language, while the Leeds course was more evenly balanced between oral and written language.

Since the research focus is native-likeness, especially from an oral proficiency

point of view, it was decided that the students who were taking the course at Leeds University would become the target population for the experiment.

Their whole course was spread over four years. The first year started from scratch and provided students with basic language skills before the second year abroad in mainland China or Taiwan. The purpose of the second year was to greatly improve their Mandarin. The advanced language work in the third and fourth years was intended to build further on the language gained from the year abroad<sup>25</sup>. To maximise the opportunity to investigate oral native-likeness, it was decided that the experiment would study the students who had just returned from their year abroad. This took into account two main research findings on study abroad (SA) (see, DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995c). One is that there is an oral proficiency gain after SA. That is, it has been found that SA students improve their oral proficiency (particularly in the areas of pragmatics, pronunciation and fluency) over the course of a semester or more abroad and “even learners who go abroad for only a few weeks have been found to improve their oral proficiency” (Churchill & DuFon, 2006:5; cf. Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004). Meanwhile, “student growth in the target language slows down radically upon their return from a year abroad” (Freed, 1995a:10). Studying students who had just returned from their year abroad was therefore the best way to catch them at the peak of their oral language development while making a comparison with the findings in SA research.

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<sup>25</sup> See [http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas\\_content/undergraduate/degree\\_options.asp](http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas_content/undergraduate/degree_options.asp) for the course outline; for more details of the course, see the course module [http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas\\_content/undergraduate/floats/SH\\_chinese\\_modules.htm](http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas_content/undergraduate/floats/SH_chinese_modules.htm) and module handbook [http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas\\_content/undergraduate/documents/FINALModHB0607.pdf](http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas_content/undergraduate/documents/FINALModHB0607.pdf). All the main on-line information on the course has remained almost unchanged since the experiment was conducted in 2005 (accessed again in 2007 and in January 2008).

## **4.4 Selecting instruments**

### **4.4.1 Measuring oral proficiency**

It was important to find a reliable and effective measure of oral proficiency. The Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is one commonly used approach (Churchill & DuFon, 2006:4) but it has long been criticised for its construct validity (for a recent review, see, e.g. Liskin-Gasparro, 2003; Malone, 2002, 2003; Salaberry, 2000). The key criticisms include:

- the power differential between tester and testee (Van Lier, 1989:496).
- situational constraints on displaying one's full ability (Malvern & Richards, 2002:87)
- detachment from real life situations (Chalhoub-Deville, 1995; Salaberry, 2000:299).

It is therefore important to take into account those limitations when designing a means of measuring learners' learning achievement (see especially Section 4.5).

### **4.4.2 Selection of instruments**

Given the specific target learner group in question (Mandarin learners having just returned from a year abroad), it was decided to analyse the language they produced during a semi-structured interview (see later on why Mandarin was chosen as the medium language for interview). The use of a semi-structured format for the interview offered two important advantages for the study. Firstly, the structure ensured that certain key features of everyone's language performance would be adequately represented. Secondly, by not constraining the interview fully, it was possible to give informants opportunities to expand

on topics of interest, thus allowing them to display their full range of abilities and knowledge. This would make it possible:

- To produce data of relative depth
- To obtain information that might not be available through other means (e.g. questionnaires)
- To reveal participants' efforts to "designate, diagnose, evaluate, self-analyze and theorize" their learning behaviours (Wenden, 1986:189)
- To investigate the developmental process of strategy use over time, via participants' own retrospective accounts

A further consideration was given to what should be the topics and questions in the interview, whilst keeping the authentic nature of real-life conversation and encouraging the participants to fully express themselves.

The good news, ...is that people in general like to express their opinions and do not mind answering questions as long as they think that the survey is related to a worthy cause and that their opinion matters (Dörnyei, 2003:84).

In the light of Dörnyei's view, it seemed authentic, reasonable and interesting for them to talk about their own learning experience in China. By integrating the interview questions with the design of the questionnaires, it was possible, additionally to use the interview to clarify and further explore the information gathered from the questionnaire. As will be seen later, the questionnaire was mainly based on their learning experiences abroad. In order to provide specific sorts of data for analysis, a number of formulaic expressions were embedded into the interview questions (for further details see Section 4.5.2.2).

## **4.5 Designing instruments**

Having justified the selection of these instruments, the specifics of their design can be described.

### **4.5.1 Questionnaire**

Three points were especially considered when developing the questionnaire:

1. the appropriate number and types of testing items in the questionnaire
2. the limitation of relying on a closed-ended questionnaire
3. the language used for the questionnaire

Firstly, the present experiment aimed to study as many relevant ID variables as possible, so as to most fully establish the extent to which the target learners were fulfilling the hypothesised conditions. However, published research reveals the limitations in studying learners' variables. For example, Gardner et al. (1997) selected only six classes of ID variables, and among these classes only selected 25 ID variables all together, with about 8-10 testing items for each variable. Even so, the total quantity of testing items for ID was over 200, excluding the testing items measuring proficiency variables. Measuring all the variables entailed them in administering two questionnaires in two sessions separately, which took the participants approximately 90 minutes for each session. This indicates a potential problem with length, as Dörnyei points out

When we design a questionnaire, the general temptation is always to cover too much ground by asking everything that might turn out to be interesting. This must be resisted: in questionnaire design less is often more because long questionnaires can become counterproductive (Dörnyei, 2003:18).

Meanwhile, the first in a list of things which Brown and Rodgers (2002) suggest avoiding is "overly long items" (p.143). More specifically, as a principle, Dörnyei (2003) suggests, for a questionnaire, a limit of 4-6 pages in length and

half an hour for completion. It can be seen that the questionnaire design in Gardner et al. (1997) was far too long both in terms of content and also in the time required for completion. Therefore the challenge was to combine all the targeted ID variables into a questionnaire of reasonable length.

Secondly, taking into account one of the general limitations of traditional ID assessment instruments (i.e. the decontextualised testing of items by using closed questions), the present questionnaire included the testing format of open-ended items for asking selected key questions. However, in keeping with Dörnyei's (2003:48) suggestion, the open-ended questions were placed at the end of the schedule, so that the information from the close-ended questions could be gathered reliably first.

Thirdly, taking into account the possibility that there might be various levels of language proficiency among the participants and also the fact that they had been learning the language for just two years, it was decided that the questionnaire should be written in their mother tongue – English (see, e.g. the problem of using L2 for instruction in Perceptual Learning Styles Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) in Wintergerst, DeCapua, & Itzen, 2001)<sup>26</sup>.

In all, through a critical review of the literature, in-depth discussion with various people of expertise (e.g. experienced researchers in the field<sup>27</sup>, the Mandarin course tutor in Leeds, and various successful learners), and reflection based

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<sup>26</sup> Wintergerst et al. (2001) found that their results of the PLSPQ and the oral interviews contradicted each other on several occasions. One of the reasons for explaining such a lack of congruence as they claimed, may well be due to the fact that the participants' language levels were not good enough for them to fully understand the questionnaire.

<sup>27</sup> The development of the questionnaire owed much to Alison Wray and Tess Fitzpatrick for helpful advice and guidance, especially for pointing out the importance of Gardner's AMTB and providing their own versions of certain questions, against which I could compare and develop my own.

on the researcher's own observation and learning experience, the questionnaire was constructed, to consist of four sections (see Appendix 4.1):

1. Demographic information and general language background (i.e. for the participants to be eased in gently at the start)
2. Knowledge of Mandarin before starting the course and before going to China
3. Learning experience in mainland China or in Taiwan
4. Perceptions of language learning

The first section was intended be an easy beginning, with only three questions.

The first two sections were mainly developed from the survey and criticism on language background questionnaires (see, e.g. Elder, 2000; Li, Sepanski, & Zhao, 2006), with a focus on multilingual issues. As is observed in the literature, generally, the more foreign languages that subjects have learned, the better their performance on measures of vocabulary size, grammar knowledge and language use will tend to be in a given other language. The third section, which focused on the target language contact, was based on the survey "Language contact profile" (Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz, & Halter, 2004).

The fourth section combined all of the relevant traditional ID factors, with a focus on learners' beliefs, language anxiety, learning style, learning strategies, learning goals and motivation. Testing items in this section were developed mainly from AMTB and BALLI, in a multi-item scale (i.e. a cluster of several differently worded items that focus on the same target, e.g. four or five items targeting beliefs about one's language aptitude). Particularly, an indication of learners' perceived changes in view about language learning due to one year abroad was also asked. This was a modest attempt to gain some of the

information that a longitudinal study would have been able to gather.

Given the fact that there was a certain amount of information to be obtained, and not wishing to make the pages look crowded and also wanting to encourage participants to give their opinions as fully as possible within the open-ended questions, the questionnaire extended to eight pages. However, in order not to intimidate the participants by the number of pages, the questionnaire was deliberately printed two-sided and bound together. An explicit note saying that it would only take around 20-30 minutes to complete (see Section 4.5.3 for pilot testing) was given at the beginning of the questionnaire administration (see Section 4.7 for the procedure).



**Table 4.2 List and description of the ID variables used in the experiment**

<b>ID classes of variables</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Item format</b>	<b>No. of items</b>
Learning beliefs <sup>28</sup>	Foreign language	Adapted from BALLI	Closed	2
	Difficulty of language learning	3 items Adapted from BALLI, 1 item on the hardest thing to master in spoken Mandarin	Closed; Open-ended	4
	Nature of language learning	Adapted from BALLI	Closed	4
	Learning and communication	Adapted from BALLI	Closed	8
	Motivations	Adapted from BALLI	Closed	3
Language Anxiety	Mandarin class anxiety	Developed from AMTB: distinguish between the time abroad and at present	Open-ended	2
	Mandarin use anxiety	Developed from AMTB: distinguish between academic use and transaction use	Open-ended	2
	Learning style or strategies	Adapted from Fitzpatrick and Wray (2006) : 3 open-ended items on the usefulness of phrases, grammar rules, single word; 1 rank order item on desire of the five language skills to be improved; 8 closed items with 2 point Likert scales on the way of language learning	Open-ended; Closed	12
Attitude or motivation	Orientation Index	Developed from AMTB	Open-ended	1
	Language target	Adapted from Fitzpatrick and Wray (2006): being native-like, attitude towards foreign accents	Open-ended	3
	Holistic perception	Adapted from Fitzpatrick and Wray (2006): a rank order item combining learning beliefs, attitudes, and strategies or styles.	Closed	1

<sup>28</sup> In order to see whether the participant's learning beliefs had changed over the year abroad, at the end of the section on learning beliefs, certain space was left to ask participants to mention any differences they were aware of in their beliefs before and after their time in mainland China or Taiwan.

## **4.5.2 Interview**

### **4.5.2.1 Topics**

Eight topics which reflected their common experience in China were chosen:

- Feelings about being back in the UK
- Travel experiences in China
- Attitudes towards Chinese traffic
- Feelings about Chinese weather
- Spare-time activities in China
- Food
- Chinese friends
- Feelings in general

These topics were consistent with suggestions made by Dörnyei et al (2004) and various individuals with relevant expertise or personal experience, whose advice was sought. The pilot was also used to evaluate the appropriateness of these topics.

To this, then, was added the formulaic dimension (i.e. colloquial expressions). The purpose of including formulaic sequences in the questions was to investigate levels of comprehension. Comprehension of formulaic language has been investigated relatively little, compared to production. Key research into formulaic language production includes Bradley (2003), De Cock (2004), De Cock et al. (1998), Fitzpatrick and Wray (2006), Foster (2001), Qi (2006), Su (2004) and Wray (2004).

To date there appears to be only one study, Bradley (2003) which directly compares the effect of the study abroad experience on oral production in terms of formulaic language (Su, 2004). Through a simulated oral proficiency interview, Bradley compared students who had and had not studied abroad, analysing the interviews both quantitatively and qualitatively for the participants' formulaic language use. The analysis process was done through looking at the interview transcription. No correlation between proficiency level and the amount of formulaic language produced was found. However, interestingly, the study abroad students were better able to cope with tasks above their actual proficiency. Moreover, to untrained raters<sup>29</sup>, the study abroad students appeared to be more linguistically competent regardless of their proficiency level. This was interpreted by the author as a result of their being more adept at using formulaic language and also having a wider repertoire of formulaic language to draw upon, due to their overseas experience.

Moreover, the change of study context from the typical classroom to studying abroad, as shown in Gao (2003), leads to learners being faced with a huge influx of vocabulary: "everywhere there are new words" (p.50), "loads of new words were upon me all of sudden" (p.51). This is one of the factors that Gao suggests leads to the changing of learners' strategies in dealing with new vocabulary. If Bradley (2003) draws us once again to the significance of formulaic language knowledge in making one sound more linguistically competent (cf. Wray, 2002 on the functions of formulaic language), there still remains the question of how able an L2 learner is in interpreting formulaic

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<sup>29</sup> We will come to the issue of untrained raters later in Chapter 6 when a rating investigation of the present study is reported.

language, which seems to be everywhere (Schmitt & Carter, 2004).

In order to gain a clear understanding of how study abroad had affected the learners' knowledge of formulaic language and to ascertain whether their formulaic language knowledge was related to their general proficiency, it was decided that instead of following Bradley (2003) in looking at learners' production of formulaic language—which did not correlate with general proficiency--this investigation would focus on their comprehension ability.

#### **4.5.2.2 Selecting the target formulaic sequences**

The target formulaic sequences which were embedded in the specific questions for each topic (see Appendix 4.2), were selected according to the following three main criteria:

- Occurring with some degree of frequency in normal language use
- Being appropriate to their year abroad environment (i.e. being connected with both common informal public discourse and academic discourse)
- Being useful to students and being worthwhile to learn

Three steps were taken in order to ensure that all the selected formulaic sequences had a good chance of having been encountered by the subjects. Firstly, according to the topic, a pool of testing items was created from various Mandarin textbooks and also from the researcher's own tuition as a native speaker and Mandarin teacher. Secondly, certain testing items were selected after discussion with Mandarin native speakers and Mandarin learners. Thirdly, each item was checked using the Google search engine to confirm its

frequency and appropriate context.

Meanwhile, following similar steps, some very colloquial sayings (rarely appearing in text-books or the classroom) were chosen, in order to test the degree of their learning effort and interaction with the local people (Wilkinson, 2002).

Alternative sayings in educated/simple language had been prepared in case some participants were unable to understand the test items. This would allow the flow of the conversation to be maintained. For example, the question “在中国的时候，有没有到哪里走走啊 (Did you travel around when you were in China?)” would be asked first. If the participant could not understand the formulaic sequence “走走[zǒu zou] (travel around)”, another similar formulaic sequence “走一走[zǒu yi zǒu]”<sup>30</sup> would be repeated. If the participant still could not understand, then a well-known and commonly-taught phrase “旅游 [lǚ yóu] (do some travelling)” would be said to them. This was done simply to maintain the flow of the conversation, since it would be awkward if the participant did not know what was being said.

As we can see from Appendix 4.2, there are all together 30 questions on 8 topics. Sixteen testing formulaic sequences or words were embedded within those questions.

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<sup>30</sup> As it stands, this ‘similar’ formulaic sequence seems to be identical to the original except that there’s a “一” in it. “一”, which looks like a hyphen, literally means “one” in Chinese.

### 4.5.3 Pilot Testing

if you do not have the resources to pilot-test your questionnaire, don't do the study" (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982:283).

Firstly, the questionnaire was subjected to an item-by-item scrutiny by several people (L1= English, including lay people who were either used to or not used to questionnaire surveys, and specialists in the field), in order to check the clarity of both items and instruction, and the appearance of the questionnaire. Secondly, in order to know the exact amount of time required and the level of difficulty in completing the questionnaire, it was given to a learner of Mandarin in Cardiff, who was representative of the target sample (L1=English, undergraduate). Thirdly, pre-testing (two days in advance of the main data gathering) was carried out with two of the target sample without telling them that this was the experiment under construction, thus seeing how well the questionnaire and interview worked in actual practice.

As a whole, the questionnaire was found to be clear, and consistent with the objectives of the test, although slight changes were made to make it clearer and more precise (see Appendix 4.1, for the final version of the questionnaire). As a result of the pre-testing, the topics chosen for the interview became sharper and more directed towards the learners' own interests.

## 4.6 Participants

Through approaching the target population from the top<sup>31</sup> (a strategy recommended by Dörnyei, 2003), 20 Leeds students (ten women and ten

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<sup>31</sup> Many thanks are due to my supervisor for approaching the head of the target department.

men) were willing to participate in this investigation (see Chapter 9 for issues regarding the small sample size). Of the 20 who volunteered, 17 were just ordinary: the right age, the right background, and taking part in the right course. But there were 3 others who were not strictly part of the intended target population. They were Paul, Dan and Frank (all participants' names are pseudonyms). Paul was a mature student in his 70s, retired and taking the course together with his wife. Dan was an MA student, who had been abroad in Taiwan for one year, several years ago. Frank, was a BA student in Finance, who happened to take an elective module “Chinese Language: Theory and Practice”, as did the rest of the participants. All three were very eager to participate in the investigation, especially for the chance to practise their Mandarin during the interview. Therefore, for socially-motivated reasons, it was decided also to collect data from them, even though they were not within the intended target population. However, as it turned out, there were interesting things to learn, so that some of that data is reported later.

Meanwhile, there were two participants belonging to the target population, who did not sign up for the interview. They were recommended by their classmates who had participated in the interview, for various reasons (we will discuss these reasons later), and were approached by the researcher.

As discussed before, all the participants (except Dan and Frank) were undergraduate students who studied Mandarin as either single honours or joint honours in combination with other subjects (see Table 4.3 for their specific registered course, gender, ethnic background, language background, and place of study abroad in China).

**Table 4.3 Demographic information and language background**

Name	Gender	L1(s)	Prior knowledge of Mandarin	Abroad before	Degree	Place in China	Ethnicity
<b>Faith</b>	F	English/ <u>French</u>	0	0	J-	Beijing	French & British
<b>Joy</b>	F	Cantonese/ <u>English</u>	0	0	S	Beijing	British-born-Chinese
<b>Renate</b>	F	German	0	0	J	Taiwan	German
<b>Cain</b>	M	English	0	0	J	Beijing	British
<b>Louise</b>	F	English	0	0	J-	Beijing	British
<b>Mag</b>	F	English	0	0	S	Beijing	British
<b>Pete</b>	M	English	≈0	0	J-	Beijing	British
<b>Grace</b>	F	English/ <u>German</u>	≈0	0	J	Beijing	German
<b>Ann</b>	F	English	≈0	0	J-	Tianjin	British
<b>Frank</b>	M	Hakka/ <u>English</u>	3000 words	0-6 ms in CN	BA	/	British
<b>Paul</b>	M	English	a little (2ys ec)	0	S	Taiwan	British
<b>Mac</b>	M	Cantonese/ <u>English</u>	very basic Speaking	2ms CN	S	Beijing	British & Chinese
<b>Cat</b>	F	English	very basic greetings	6ms in CN	J	Beijing	British
<b>Tom</b>	M	English	basic Speaking skills	6ms in CN	S	Beijing	British
<b>Jim</b>	M	English	Writing (500 Characters), Speaking (poor)	1y CN	S	Beijing	British
<b>Sam</b>	M	Hebrew/ <u>English</u>	near to 1y study	2ys in CN	J	Beijing	British
<b>Sarah</b>	F	English	2ys Baccalaureate Chinese Ab Initio studies in HK	a few ws	J	Tianjin	British-born-Chinese
<b>Lily</b>	F	English	4ys in Mandarin primary sc	often to SG	J	Beijing	Malay Chinese
<b>Joan</b>	F	English/ <u>French</u>	some grasp of Speaking & Writing: lesson 1h/w from aged 13	6ms in CN	J+	Tianjin	British
<b>Dan</b>	M	German	7ys ss in German + 1y TW	1y in TW	MA	Taiwan	German

Notes: S=Single Honours; J=Joint Honours [Mandarin + non-linguistic subject]; J-=Joint Honours [Mandarin + a European language]; J+=Joint Honours [Mandarin + a Non-European language]; BA=a non-linguistic joint Honours; MA=MA in Chinese studies). Ways of learning (fm=from family members; ec=evening classes; la=living abroad; lt=living in the target language community; pt=private tutoring; rl=learning from relatives; sa=study abroad; sc=at school; ss=self-studying; tr=travelling; u=at university), Time (ys=years; ms=months; ws=weeks)



The table is arranged according to their pre-existing knowledge of Mandarin (i.e. before the Mandarin course in Leeds). Although one could easily make many assumptions and also imagine it possible to investigate “stable and systematic deviations from a normative blueprint” (Dörnyei, 2005:4), the actual data itself reminds us once again that each individual is unique.

## **4.7 Procedure**

Each participant first filled in the questionnaire and then was interviewed at Leeds University in the autumn term. Four participants did the questionnaire together in a classroom after one of their final lectures in the afternoon and were interviewed during the following day or two. The remaining 16 were interviewed after filling in the questionnaire in a room especially provided by the department for conducting the research. In order to create a friendly and informal atmosphere (Young & He, 1998), soft drinks and chocolate were offered to the participants. Before the interview began, the participants were reassured in English that all of the information they gave would be treated confidentially and were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix 4.3).

### **4.7.1 Questionnaire procedure**

The written questionnaire was administered by the researcher herself. Oral instruction was given in English to explicitly explain:

- The purpose of the study
- The structure of the study: questionnaire and interview

- The approximate amount of time required for completing the questionnaire (i.e. 20 to 30 minutes)

The researcher then quickly went through the questionnaire with them. When going through the first three sections, it was pointed out that the sections were about the participant's language learning background and learning experiences and therefore the participants were asked to answer them as accurately as possible. However, for the last section about perception of language learning, it was stressed that it was intended for their immediate reaction and that they did not need to spend time thinking about each statement (see Gardner, 1985; see Appendix 4.4 for the oral instruction).

The researcher was present all the time, in case anything needed to be clarified.

#### **4.7.2 Interview procedure**

The participants were individually scheduled to be interviewed for 30 minutes each within a period of six days. However, the gap between answering the questionnaire and participating in the interview for each participant was roughly the same. This gap allowed the researcher to go through the questionnaires and to ask the participants for clarification in English before the interview. Meanwhile, in order to control the effect of pre-planning as much as possible, due to the fact that each participant took their interview at different times, an explicit statement was given to each of them after the interview. Two points were made clear. Firstly, the exact content of the interview would be different for each of them. Secondly, they were asked not to tell the others

what was asked in the interview. This was for the purpose of being fair to each of them, so as not to allow the people who were being interviewed later to have more preparation time for improving their performance.

In order to lead the participants into speaking Mandarin, the interview instruction (see Appendix 4.5) was given slowly and clearly in Mandarin. To ensure that they understood it, the instruction was double-checked by asking the participants explicitly whether they understood it and whether it needed to be given in English. The whole interview was conducted in Mandarin and audio-recorded.

Treating each participant as similarly as possible, the interview topics were introduced in the same order. This was done using an interview protocol with the key words for each topic. However, due to the flow of the conversation, there were a few exceptions in which the questions were put in a slightly different order.

Meanwhile, since some participants were available and willing to communicate more, extra time was spent for clarification and further exploration after covering all of the topics in the interview guides.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In addressing the limitations of individual difference instrumental measurements, a learner-context based instrument was developed and used to gather information for answering specific research questions:

- Research question 1: What kind of nativelike intention do individual learners have? (RQ1)
- Research question 2: How do individuals adjust their level of identification with the L2 group? (RQ2)
- Research Question 3: What kind of input are they able to get? (RQ3)
- Research Question 4: What kind of attention do they pay to input? (RQ4)
- Research Question 5: What kind of attention do they pay to output? (RQ5)
- Research question 6: What kind of learning achievement will they be able to get at the end? (RQ6)

The result of RQs 1-5 will be analysed and reported in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 will look at RQ6, by first looking at the learners' overall language achievement in Chapter 6 and then looking at the learners' specific formulaic language knowledge in Chapter 7.

## **Chapter 5 The actual learning conditions and reactions:**

### **Individual differences and patterns**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

As hypothesised in Chapter 2, successful adult L2 learning needs to meet at least the following five conditions in order to overcome the barriers to nativelikeness:

Condition 1: An intention to reach nativelikeness (Intention)

Condition 2: An adaptive capacity to identify with the L2 native group (L2-oriented identification)

Condition 3: A guaranteed on-going supply of 'ideal' input (Ideal-input-supply)

Condition 4: An appropriate type of attention to the input (Attention-to-input)

Condition 5: An appropriate type of attention to the output (Attention-to output)

Based on data collected from the questionnaire and interviews, this chapter will try to answer the following specific questions:

- Did the learners have the intention of producing nativelike output?
- What kind of sense of identification with the L2 group did the learners have?
- What was the real input which the learners encountered?
- What kind of attention was applied to their input?

- What kind of attention was applied to their output?

Answering the above questions aims to detect both patterns and individual differences in the particular learner group in question<sup>32</sup>. At the end of each section, a brief comment is given on who had scored the best/worst on the hypothesised criterion. This will then provide a basis for comparing the extent to which the conditions were met with the actual performance achieved. It will be relevant in the discussion in Chapter 8, where the most successful learners are considered in detail.

## **5.2 Contextual information**

Before answering the above questions, some information which does not fit into the questions will be briefly discussed in order to contextualise the real-life experiences the Leeds student encountered in China. A brief profile summary of each learner will be given to help with interpreting the findings.

### **5.2.1 Perceived changes in view about language learning.**

It will be recalled that one of the things that the participants were asked to do was indicate whether any of the beliefs that they held now about language

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to the approach to analysis reported here, the researcher also undertook analysis using a different approach, but abandoned it when the results did not seem sufficiently informative. In summary, this other approach entailed using SPSS 14 and NVivo 7. All closed-ended items were directly coded into SPSS. All open-ended items were first coded by NVivo 7, and then most of them were re-coded into SPSS numerically, allowing the items to be treated as quantitative data. Specific open-ended questions (i.e. about factual information) were coded into SPSS, by using a coding frame which was generated through the first coding. Unsurprisingly, the statistic results of ID variables did not show significant correlation with the learning outcomes. This seems to suggest the effect of an interplay of variable factors, which tends to cancel out any significant individual factors (see Schmitt, Dörnyei, Adolphs and Durow 2004, for a similar outcome when using quantitative analysis methods).

learning were different to what they believed the previous year, i.e. before spending time in China (see Section 4.5.1). This was a modest attempt to gain some of the information that a longitudinal study would have been able to gather. As shown in Table 5.1, the majority of the participants (14 out of 19) reported changes in their learning beliefs/strategies due to their year abroad.

**Table 5.1 Changes of typical ID variables due to one year abroad**

Variables	Name	Previous Value	Present Value
Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages	Joy	2	3
	Ruth	5	1
It is important to repeat and practise a lot.	Joan	3	1
	Cat	5	4
I feel shy speaking Mandarin with other people.	Faith	3	2
	Lily	4	2
	Sam	1	1*
	Pete	4	1
If students are permitted to make errors in Mandarin when they start learning, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	Ruth	4	2
	Sam	1	4
	Sarah	2	3
	Ann	4	5
The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	Ann	4	5
	Ann	4	5
It is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language.	Mag	2	4
	Faith	4	2
I believe that I will learn to speak Mandarin very well.	Louise	4	1
	Pete	4	2
	Lily	3	1
	Lily	3	1
It is easier to read and write Mandarin than to speak and understand it.	Grace	2	4
It is important to speak Mandarin with excellent pronunciation.	Faith	3	2
It is necessary to know about Mandarin-speaking cultures in order to speak Mandarin.	Joan	2	1
	Grace	3	2
I enjoy practising Mandarin with the Chinese people I meet.	Sarah	3	1
	Tom	3	1
	Faith	3	2
It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in Mandarin.	Tom	3	1
	Cat	b	c
In my view, the hardest thing to master in spoken Mandarin is:	Pete	e	a
	Pete	e	a

\* Sam's change of attitude only occurred during the period of study abroad (see Section 5.4 for more details).

However, one cannot and should not look for clear patterns across Table 5.1, such as a tendency to choose higher numbers after than before the year abroad. This is because one cannot classify, say, a move to 1 ('strongly agree') from another choice in the same way for each question. For example how should we interpret Faith's and Tom's belief that they were more in favour of guessing after the year abroad than they had been before? Being prepared to guess is not intrinsically good or bad: it depends on (a) what situations arise, and (b) one's personality. In other words, these perceptions are not a tick list of progress towards an ideal, but a way of capturing individual differences. Nevertheless, these results do indicate that the participants tended to see the year abroad as a catalyst of change in their approach to learning. Moreover, this information about their changes in belief will help explain some seemingly 'conflicting' findings in the later sections.

### **5.2.2 Profile summary**

In the interests of easy reference during the later discussion, below Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 are profile summaries of each learner (in alphabetical order of their names). The information is not intended to be exhaustive—for the more detailed profiles see Chapter 4. Claims about their level of knowledge of other languages derive from their own report and comments by their coursemates, and could not, of course, be independently validated.



**Table 5.2 Demographic Information**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>L1(s)</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Place in China</b>
<b>Ann</b>	British	English	J-	Tianjin
<b>Cain</b>	British	English	J	Beijing
<b>Cat</b>	British	English	J	Beijing
<b>Dan</b>	German	German	MA	Taiwan*
<b>Faith</b>	French & British	English/ <u>French</u>	J-	Beijing
<b>Frank</b>	British	Hakka/ <u>English</u>	BA	/**
<b>Grace</b>	German	English/ <u>German</u>	J	Beijing
<b>Jim</b>	British	English	S	Beijing
<b>Joan</b>	British	English/ <u>French</u>	J+	Tianjin
<b>Joy</b>	British-born-Chinese	Cantonese/ <u>English</u>	S	Beijing
<b>Lily</b>	Malay Chinese	English	J	Beijing
<b>Louise</b>	British	English	J-	Beijing
<b>Mac</b>	British & Chinese	Cantonese/ <u>English</u>	S	Beijing
<b>Mag</b>	British	English	S	Beijing
<b>Paul</b>	British	English	S	Taiwan
<b>Pete</b>	British	English	J-	Beijing
<b>Renate</b>	German	German	J	Taiwan
<b>Sam</b>	British	Hebrew/ <u>English</u>	J	Beijing
<b>Sarah</b>	British-born-Chinese	English	J	Tianjin
<b>Tom</b>	British	English	S	Beijing

Notes: S=Single Honours; J=Joint Honours [Mandarin + non-linguistic subject]; J-=Joint Honours [Mandarin + a European language]; J+ =Joint Honours [Mandarin + a Non-European language]; BA=a non-linguistic joint Honours; MA=MA in Chinese studies).

\* Although Dan did not actually take part in the study abroad programme in Leeds, he had been in Taiwan previously studying Mandarin for a year.

\*\* Frank was not in the study abroad programme.

**Table 5.3 Language knowledge**

Name	L2s	Ways/places/length of Learning	Pre-knowledge of Mandarin	Abroad before for Mandarin learning
<b>Ann</b>	French (=3), German (A-Level=2), Spanish (GCSE =3), Portuguese (=4)	At school, at university; At school; At school, travelling; Living abroad 1 year	≈0	0
<b>Cain</b>	Spanish (A-L [A]=5), Portuguese (=2.5)	Living abroad 1 year; Living abroad	0	0
<b>Cat</b>	French (GCSE [A*]=2)	At school	very basic greetings	6 months in China
<b>Dan</b>	English (A-Level=5), Mandarin (=3)	At school, self-study, living abroad, from family members; At school, living abroad	7 years self study in German + 1 year in Taiwan	1 year in Taiwan
<b>Faith</b>	French (Bilingual=5), Dutch (=3), Spanish (=3), Mandarin (=3), German (=1)	Living in Belgium all the time, at school; At school 9 years; At school, at university; At university; At school 2 years	0	0
<b>Frank</b>	Hakka(Bilingual=5)	From family members	3000 words	0-6 months in China
<b>Grace</b>	English (Bilingual=5), French (=4-5), Italian (=4-5), Spanish (= 1-2), Hebrew (=1)	From family members; At school 5 years, from friends; Private teachers, relatives in Italy; At school; At university	≈0	0
<b>Jim</b>	French(GCSE=2), German (=1), Latin (=1), Japanese (GCSE=2)	At school; At school; At school; Evening classes	Writing (500 Characters), Speaking (poor)	1 year in China
<b>Joan</b>	French (Bilingual=5), Japanese (=3), German (GCSE=2), Russian (GCSE=2)	Living abroad 15 years; At university 2 or 3 years; At school 8 years; At school 5 years;	some grasp of Speaking & Writing: lesson 1 hour a week from aged 16	6 months in China
<b>Joy</b>	Cantonese (Bilingual=5) French (GCSE [A]=3), German (GCSE [A] = 3), Latin (GCSE [A] = 1)	From family member; At school; At school; At school;	0	0
<b>Lily</b>	French (GCSE [A]=3), Malay (GCSE [A] =4)	At school; Living in Malaysia	4 years in Mandarin primary school	often to Singapore
<b>Louise</b>	Spanish(GCSE[A] =3-4), French (A-Level[B]=4)	From family members, evening classes, at school, at university; At school, at university 1 year	0	0
<b>Mac</b>	Cantonese (=5)	From family members	very basic Speaking	2 months China
<b>Mag</b>	French (GCSE[A*] = 2)	At school	0	0
<b>Paul</b>	French (=3)	Evening classes	a little (2 years evening classes)	0
<b>Pete</b>	Spanish (A-Level[A] =4)	At school, at university	≈0	0
<b>Renate</b>	French(A-Level[A]=4), Spanish (AS-Level=3), English(A-Level[A]=4/5)	At school 7 years, study abroad (home stay) 5-6 weeks; Study abroad 2 months At school 9 years, living abroad	0	0
<b>Sam</b>	French (GCSE =2), German (=1)	At school 5 years, at university 1 year; At school 2 years	near to 1 year study	2 years in China
<b>Sarah</b>	Spanish (GCSE)	At school	2 years Baccalaureate Chinese Ab Initio studies in Hong Kong	a few weeks
<b>Tom</b>	French (GCSE =1), Mandarin (= 3)	At school; At university, self study	basic Speaking skills	6 months in China

Since this was not a longitudinal study, and the subjects were not contacted until after their return from the year abroad, it was, of course, not possible to measure their proficiency at the point of leaving for China. However, some key information was gleaned from the questions asked during interview, which implied that those who went to Tianjin were the top students in the class during the preceding year. In addition, it seems that Jim was a high performer in year one, on account of his previous knowledge and the contribution to learning made by his having a Chinese girlfriend. In contrast, Cain, according to his own report, was doing badly in the class before going abroad. Perhaps, ideally, a more robust way of measuring their pre-year abroad proficiency could have been pursued. On the other hand, the focus of the study was on the students' performance on their return, and on their own narrative about the reasons for their level of success.

As we can see from the brief profile summary above, each person is an individual, not only in relation to how they learn but also where they start from. The researcher had planned to collect data from a homogeneous group: all students who started Mandarin at university at the same time, on the same course. Nevertheless they are all very different in what they brought to that starting point.

The summary profiles show us that many of the participants had been brought

up bilingual while some had hardly had any substantial previous language learning experience. One might therefore hypothesise that bilinguals, and/or people with substantial previous language learning experience, would be more settled in their views about how to learn and what languages are for, than someone with rather little experience (or with an instrumental motive as some of the ethnic Chinese maybe had). In counterbalance to the later chapter on the successful learners, the question of interest here is “is an inexperienced learner at a disadvantage and why?”. For example, Mag appeared by far the least experienced. She would not only possibly find learning a language harder, but also more intimidating—Chinese is a huge step from GCSE French. In fact, it is surprising that she was allowed onto the course, as most courses require an A level in a language. One clear possibility is that she would be tripped up, when learning Mandarin, by whatever it was that tripped her up earlier, leading to her not pursuing more languages at school—e.g. maybe she could not see the point, or did not know how to learn, or lacked confidence in dealing with grammar. In other words, it will be interesting for us to find out under what circumstances the barriers to nativelikeness are very *unlikely* to be overcome. The finding for this will be reported at the end of each section when a brief comment is given on who had scored the best/worst on the hypothesised criterion for successful learning.

### 5.3 Nativelike intention

*Did the learners have the intention of producing nativelike output?*

At a glance, the question of whether the learners had the intention of producing nativelike output seems rather straightforward. After all, why would they learn Mandarin at all if they did not have some sort of dream of conversing in a nativelike way? Unsurprisingly, the finding appears to suggest that was the case. The majority of participants (17 out of 20) explicitly wished to sound nativelike, that is, answering 'yes' to the question 'would you like to speak Mandarin like a native speaker does?'. However, the kind of nativelikeness that they wished for varied from learner to learner.

Some seemed to have a particular type of nativelikeness in mind, such as to be like 'a newsreader', 'an educated Beijinger', 'an educated urban dweller', 'an educated well spoken native speaker', 'a standard native speaker', or 'a sophisticated native speaker with a clear and neutral pronunciation (not with a local accent like in Beijing)'. One learner (Jim) associated his goals with limited purposes:

I would like to speak like a native speaker to reach the above result [be understood, be accepted, effectively translate or express everything I can say in my native tongue], besides this I have no desire.

Some learners did not have any particular nativelikeness in mind. And some, as we shall see below, even openly stated that they were not concerned about

the nativelikeness outcome.

The distant objective of 'nativelikeness' may have been rather ill-defined for some, whose goals were perhaps rather overambitious. For example, Pete made the following comment:

When I speak Mandarin I would like to speak like a native speaker as this is the goal of all language learning. I would like to have a standard accent but to be able to communicate in regional variations also.

Moreover, there were some who did not just want to sound nativelike but wished to be treated like a native speaker. For example, as Faith put it:

I would like people to think I've lived in China all my life. I would like people to be amazed. I would like Chinese people in China to treat me as if I was Chinese myself.

However, there were also two learners who seemed to be doubtful as to the feasibility of their becoming nativelike and did not explicitly express a wish to sound nativelike. Nevertheless, one of them (Cat) felt that it would be possible if she married a native speaker.

There was only one learner (Louise) who openly expressed no intention of becoming nativelike, when asked the question 'would you like to speak Mandarin like a native speaker does':

No. There is no chance that I will ever sound native because there are sounds that I can't make like 'ri'.

To sum up, the kinds of nativelikeness reported ranged from those who had the wish but who also expressed doubts as to the feasibility of achieving nativelikeness, to those who wanted more than 'nativelikeness'. Given the diversity and complexities involved in their language learning backgrounds and experiences, it seems unfeasible that one could ever make clear links between the individual profiles and answers to questions such as 'what is a realistic ambition in relation to becoming nativelike?'. Nevertheless, with regard to even this relatively straightforward aim of their Mandarin learning, such differences remain interesting. Moreover, according to the hypothesis, one needs to want to be nativelike in order to reach nativelikeness, anyone whose ambition falls short of that is predicted not to do well. Therefore, it is predicted here that Louise would not have done well.

#### **5.4 L2-oriented identification**

*What kind of sense of identification with the L2 group did the learners have?*

Of course, the learners all knew they were learners, so there was no question, in the short term, of their believing they could be anything else. Yet, as we saw in the previous section, they could have very ambitious expectations about future prospects. Can we infer from Faith's comment in the previous section that she could envisage a time when – since others would be identifying her as Chinese – she also would identify herself as Chinese? Or is that too simplistic?

The particular cases of the ethnic Chinese participants (Frank, Lily, Mac, and Joy) are interesting in regard to L2-oriented identification, since they could more easily imagine being taken for Chinese – but does that mean that they could fully identify with Chinese speakers of Mandarin? It must be more complicated than that, or else every German person learning English to a high standard, or British person learning French, would be expected to simply slip on a new identity as their competence increased. How should we expect learners to construe their identity when talking about their language learning? We might look for expressions of alignment and of difference, and in what follows such expressions are inferred on the basis of their views towards the following six statements:

- I feel strange when I speak Mandarin – like a different person. I feel like I'm acting. I even think my voice changes.
- It is necessary to know about Mandarin-speaking cultures in order to speak Mandarin.
- I would like to improve my Mandarin so that I can get to know Chinese people better.
- I would like to have Chinese friends.
- I enjoy practising Mandarin with the Chinese people I meet.
- I feel shy speaking Mandarin with other people (i.e. non-Chinese).

Among the participants, only Louise and Sam particularly identified themselves



with the statement 'I feel strange when I speak Mandarin – like a different person. I feel like I'm acting. I even think my voice changes'. Interestingly, these two, along with Frank (hardly ever having been in China at all), were the only ones who did not consider it necessary to know about Mandarin-speaking cultures in order to speak Mandarin. In other words, language and culture seem to be two separable things for them. That is, they appeared to believe that they could distance themselves from the target language culture while being able to learn the language well.

Sam, like the majority of the participants, agreed with the statement 'I would like to improve my Mandarin so that I can get to know Chinese people better', while Louise was the only one who disagreed with this statement, along with Sarah and Mag, who did not agree or disagree. For Sam, it seems understandable that he, after being in China for two years before the Mandarin course in Leeds, might harbour an ambition to know Chinese people better, and choose it as one of the reasons why he learned Mandarin, while as a whole still believing that he could distance himself from Chinese culture. Sam's previous experience of living in China certainly did not apply to Louise, Sarah or Mag. Although it remains unknown why Mag held her 'neutral' attitude, Louise and Sarah's one year experiences in China seem to show the great effect of real life experience on shaping one's beliefs. We will look at Sarah first and then return to Louise in more detail.

Although Sarah did not agree or disagree with the statement 'I would like to improve my Mandarin so that I can get to know Chinese people better', the real picture of her being in China seemed to be more complicated than this simple statement. The reality in China was that she met a Chinese man and fell in love with him. This romantic experience of hers led her even to belittle her linguistic achievement in China. That is, she regarded her romantic experience as being her biggest achievement during her one year abroad in China, while her linguistic achievement became secondary. Consequently, we can understand why her view of 'I enjoy practising Mandarin with the Chinese people I meet' had changed from '3=neither agree nor disagree' to '1=strongly agree' – all the participants strongly agreed or agreed with this statement after their year abroad in China. Meanwhile, they all either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I would like to have Chinese friends', except for Joy. We will come to Joy in detail in Chapter 8.

In contrast to Mag and Sarah, Louise explicitly stressed her need for 'a real life' throughout the interview. That is, language learning was important, but it was not the most important thing in her life. She needed to have an authentic life as herself, either in China or in the UK. In other words, she needed to enjoy her life as a western woman, in China too. However, she found it very hard to get along with her Chinese friends, who seemed not to share the same interests as her. Putting it another way, her habit of living was in conflict with

the Chinese people's. For example, she loved to go to clubs, while her Chinese friends liked to go to Karaoke. It was thus that she only had two good Chinese friends. Meanwhile, she felt helpless in clubs, where Chinese people would speak to her in English, and she found that their English was actually better than her Mandarin. Under these circumstances, she seemed to lose her confidence and did not know how to proceed in practising her Mandarin. According to some other participants, the problem of encountering Chinese people in Beijing who were very good at English and who tried to practise their English with the Leeds students was very common.

Sam, Sarah and Louise's cases above suggest that the impact on L2 learning of one's capacity to identify with the L2 group is more complicated than just being a product of one's life experience. Because of being in China for two years between school and university, Sam believed that his Mandarin knowledge on starting the course was almost equal to the level of a student at the end of the first year. That is, he identified himself as a good student in the sense of having a high level of knowledge. Unfortunately, this seemed to result in his making no effort to practise with others, except for his Mandarin teachers, when he was in the UK. Interestingly, this was not the reason he gave for not practising outside of class. He stated that "I feel shy and awkward, mainly when speaking Chinese in a non-Mandarin speaking environment. When in China I hardly feel shy at all". In other words, he found it easier to

perceive himself as a competent L2 speaker when he was in China than when he was in the UK.

It is worth noting here that the above statement was given by Sam with reference to the question about whether he felt his language learning beliefs had changed as a result of being abroad for a year – specifically in relation to the prompt “I feel shy speaking Mandarin with other people”. Had one simply looked at the rating value which Sam put down for that prompt, all of this information would have been missed, for the two values (for the period before study abroad and the period after study abroad) were exactly the same, that is, 1 (=strongly agree). It was only through the interview that the researcher came to realise that there existed fundamentally different attitudes within him, activated in different learning environments. This confirms the necessity of having qualitative investigation alongside the traditionally predominant quantitative emphasis in ID research, so as to prevent the figures from covering up important information (see Chapter 8 for discussion on Renate and Joy’s special capacity to identify with the L2 group).

As noted above, of particular interest in relation to identity are the four ethnically Chinese learners. We can well imagine that their ability to identify with the L2 population would have been greater, since they had the potential to be taken for natives (i.e. outwardly they looked Chinese) if they could master

the language sufficiently, whereas the Caucasian learners were always likely to be viewed as outsiders. However, things were not that simple. In order to contextualise the L2-orientation issues in relation to identity in the four ethnic Chinese, it is useful first to review brief details of their situations.

The four were Frank, Lily, Mac, and Joy. All but Lily were British-born Chinese and had been educated in the UK. Lily was a Malay Chinese brought up and educated in Malaysia. While Lily, Mac and Joy had been abroad in China for one year, Frank was not in China with them for the year, since Mandarin learning was just one of the elective models within his BA Accountancy & Finance course. Meanwhile, while Mac, Joy and Frank had mastered a Chinese language as their L1 (Mac and Joy Cantonese; Frank Hakka), Lily's L1 was English although she had grown up in a multilingual society (Malaysia) where many Chinese languages were spoken.

We are now in a position to consider how each individual's background and experience impacted on the extent to which they were able to identify themselves as members of the L2 native speaker group.

Looking Chinese and having just spent a year in China might be expected to influence their capacity to identify with the L2 group somewhat. Frank, of course, was the exception, since he had not been in China at all. Among the

other three, there was considerable variation. The determining factor seemed to be the ways in which they responded to the Chinese environment.

While Joy viewed herself as Chinese despite the fact that she grew up in the UK, Mac thought of himself as a white British person, regardless of the fact that his mother was Chinese. Joy felt ashamed of not being able to speak Mandarin properly and therefore pushed herself to learn as quickly as possible, while Mac saw himself as an outsider and took whatever was available or required of him to learn. Lily, being a remote descendant of Chinese immigrants to Malaysia, seemed to have lost almost everything about being Chinese, except for her appearance. She grew up not speaking Chinese. Her learning outcome in Mandarin seemed not much different to that of the European students, even though she had spent four years in a Mandarin-speaking primary school.

To sum up, mainly based on their answers to the six statements:

- I feel strange when I speak Mandarin – like a different person. I feel like I'm acting. I even think my voice changes.
- It is necessary to know about Mandarin-speaking cultures in order to speak Mandarin.
- I would like to improve my Mandarin so that I can get to know Chinese people better.

- I would like to have Chinese friends.
- I enjoy practising Mandarin with the Chinese people I meet.
- I feel shy speaking Mandarin with other people.

it appears that the learners in question were, as a whole, a rather uniform group in terms of their capacity to identify with the L2 group, except for those mentioned above. In other words, they seemed to be rather open to Chinese people, either wanting to know the culture/people or enjoying practising Mandarin with them. That is, in general they looked as if they met the 'ideal' condition of 'an adaptive capacity to identify with the L2 native group'. However, as revealed in the cases of Sam, Louise, Sarah and the ethnic Chinese participants, the issue of identification with the L2 group is not as straightforward as one might have expected. Rather, one's life experience seems to play a big part in shaping it. Moreover, a dynamic co-construction of identity between one and the people one meets also appears to contribute to the shaping of a reality. For example, between, Louise and the Chinese whose English were good and tried to practise their English with her, Louise, being who she was, compromised and did not practise Mandarin to the extent she wished to. Meanwhile, there seems to be personality involved as well, such as feeling shy when speaking a foreign language with other people (e.g. Sam and five other participants).

Now, if we look at the hypothesised 'ideal' condition, it appears that Sam and

the other five participants (Frank, Louise, Jim, Paul, Tom) who felt shy speaking Mandarin with non-Chinese people would be in the worst position for fulfilling the 'ideal' condition, that is, in not being very adaptive/open to the L2 group. According to the Reaching Nativelikeness Model (RN Model) proposed in Chapter 2, a low level of identification with the L2 group would affect their reaching nativelikeness. Meanwhile, among the four ethnic Chinese participants the RN model suggests that Joy would achieve most in terms of perceived proficiency, being driven by her strong desire to be accepted as a Chinese. As the aim of the present investigation is to develop testable hypotheses about who will perform well and who will not, in order to translate these individual stories into something compatible and measurable, Table 5.4 locates each person on a rough scale, in which their position was judged by their level of identification with the L2 group.



**Table 5.4 Summary of level of identification with the L2 group**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Fairly Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Fairly high</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Ann</b>				✓	
<b>Cain</b>			✓		
<b>Cat</b>			✓		
<b>Dan</b>			✓		
<b>Faith</b>			✓		
<b>Frank</b>		✓			
<b>Grace</b>			✓		
<b>Jim</b>		✓			
<b>Joan</b>			✓		
<b>Joy</b>					✓
<b>Lily</b>			✓		
<b>Louise</b>		✓			
<b>Mac</b>			✓		
<b>Mag</b>			✓		
<b>Paul</b>		✓			
<b>Pete</b>				✓	
<b>Renate</b>				✓	
<b>Sam</b>		✓			
<b>Sarah</b>				✓	
<b>Tom</b>		✓			

## 5.5 Input supply

*What real input did the learners encounter?*

As specified in Chapter 3, the 'ideal' input is hypothesised as input meeting the following criteria:

- **Comprehensible:** A gradual unfolding of input, which is comprehensible within the learner's 'zone of proximal development (ZPD)'
- **Authentic:** Functional language use in real life
- **Interactive:** Requiring certain reaction, namely, producing online output
- **Abundant:** Plenty of recurring similar situations

- Rich: various situations

To examine how well the learners' experiences had been able to meet those criteria, we will consider each of them in turn.

### **5.5.1 Comprehensibility**

As reflected in their answers to the question of how they felt when they had to conduct a transaction using Mandarin, it seems that at the beginning of their stay many participants had difficulty in understanding even the 'simple' conversations in shops, which presumably had been taught and practised in the classroom. Their struggle in comprehension was further reflected in their attitude towards the difficulty of different language skills. All the participants who were abroad in China chose either to 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' in rating the statement 'it is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language', except for Paul, Renate, and Tom. This furthermore confirmed what was mentioned by the learners reported by Gao (2003): that they were overwhelmed by the sea of unknown input. Their beliefs about their own comprehension were put to the test when they were actually given unfamiliar input in the interview (see Chapter 7). However, the challenge of understanding incomprehensible input in China seemed to have an impact upon the way in which they perceived the difficulty of interactive input/output and non-interactive input/output. For sample, Grace explicitly stated that 'I used to find it easier to read than understand'. There were only two people

(Paul and Tom) who either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'it is easier to read and write Mandarin than to speak and understand it'.

Here one thing needs to be pointed out about the exceptional cases of Paul, Tom and Renate. Based on Paul and Tom's previous experiences in Mandarin learning, it is understandable that both of them did not regard speaking/understanding as being more difficult than reading/writing. For example, Paul had spent about two years in evening classes learning basic Mandarin conversation before the Mandarin course in Leeds. Tom had spent six months abroad in China and admitted that he had grasped basic speaking skills before the Mandarin course in Leeds. However, for someone like Renate, who had no experience/knowledge in Mandarin before the course, the fact of her sharing Paul and Tom's perception appears rather unusual (see Chapter 8 for the detailed discussion of Renate's case).

### **5.5.2 Authenticity**

As far as classroom input is concerned, there were different emphases in teaching methods experienced by those in Taipei (Paul, Renate, and Sam) and those in Beijing and Tianjin. The Chinese language classes in Taipei concentrated mainly on conversation (i.e. communicative teaching methods), while those in Beijing and Tianjin focused on grammar and vocabulary (i.e. traditional translation grammar methods). In other words, arguably the input

received by the students in Taipei might be more 'authentic' in function, if not in form, than that received by the students in Beijing and Tainjin. The amount of time spent in the classroom was about 20 hours per week for most of the learners (see Section 5.5.4.2 for the amount of formally instructed input). To a certain extent, this limited the learners' 'authentic' real life input. Still, one might argue that because the classes were conducted in Chinese, they were presumably authentic in form, even if not in function. Moreover, it is interesting to find that the Mandarin classes were generally *not* considered a major part of learning. Less than half of the participants attributed 60-85% (mean=65%) of their learning to the classes, with more than half attributing 15-40% (mean=28%). Rather strikingly, Joy, attributed 0%.

### **5.5.3 Interaction**

As mentioned in the previous section about the authenticity of input, the degree of interaction (i.e. requiring certain reaction, namely, producing online output) might well have been different due to the different emphases in teaching methods between those in Taipei and those in Beijing and Tianjin. Arguably, the participants in Taipei would have received more interactive input inside a Mandarin class than those in Beijing and Tianjin.

As far as interaction outside of the classroom is concerned, finding opportunities to practise Mandarin in China was generally regarded as either

easy (12 participants out of 19<sup>33</sup>) or fairly easy (7 out of 19). In the interview, many of them said they did not really take the opportunity to practise their Mandarin with native speakers while they were in China. Meanwhile, while it was quite clear that they had spent some, though not a huge amount of<sup>34</sup>, time with the non-native speakers (e.g. the Korean and Japanese students) speaking Mandarin, they seemed to attribute little of their language improvement to the interaction they had with the non-native speakers (see Section 5.5.4.4). Furthermore, according to the report of their spare-time activities, it seems that as a whole they had hardly spent time in non-interactive language use, such as listening to radio, watching TV, or reading books. This observation seems to be confirmed by the fact that only one of the participants (Lily) actually attributed her language improvement to non-interactive language contact (listening to radio and watching TV). In other words, the time which the majority of participants spent in using the language in real-life contexts either with native speakers or with the non-native speakers, no matter how limited, was mainly interactive by nature, that is, it gave them certain opportunities to produce on-line output.

#### **5.5.4 Abundance and richness**

In exploring the abundance and richness of the participants' input, three

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<sup>33</sup> Frank was not included in the calculation, since he did not go abroad and this part of the questionnaire was not relevant to him.

<sup>34</sup> Some participants commented that the Japanese students tended to spend their time together and did not seem to like to spend time with other foreigners. The same applied to the Korean students.

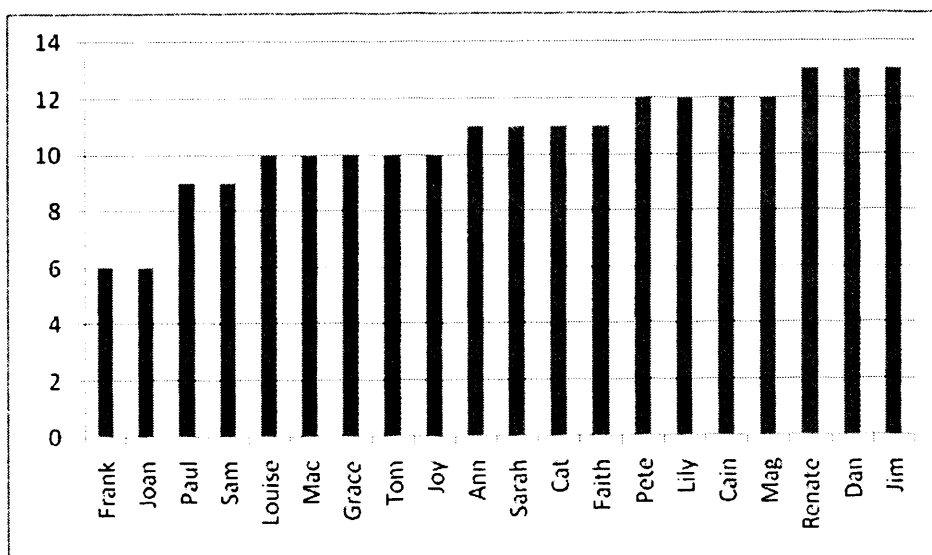
indicators will be used:

- Total possible input: amount of time abroad
- Amount of formally instructed input
- Amount of Mandarin use, as a medium for other formal study

#### 5.5.4.1 Total possible input: Amount of time abroad

Although all the participants (except for Frank and Joan<sup>35</sup>) were supposed to study in China for one year, their actual time abroad (see Figure 5.1 below) varied in length from 9 to 13 months (mean=10.6 months).

**Figure 5.1 Number of months abroad**



Although the difference between 13 months (the longest time abroad) and 9

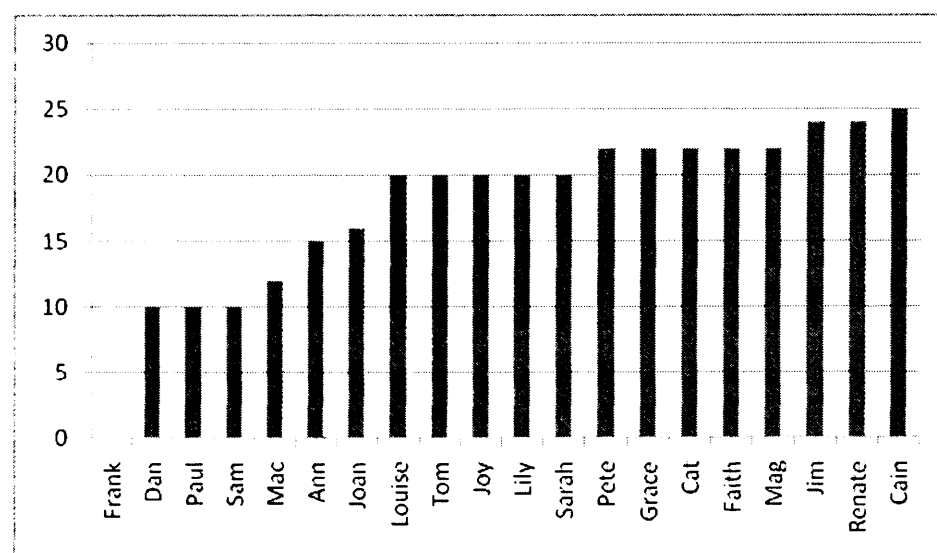
<sup>35</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 4 and earlier, Frank did not participate in the study abroad programme. His time in China was just made up of holiday visits to his relatives, which added up to less than 6 months all together. Due to the fact that Joan studied both Chinese and Japanese, her time abroad was made up of 6 months in Japan initially, followed by 6 months with her Leeds coursemates in China.

months (the shortest time abroad) is merely 4 months, 4 months is still almost half of 9 months. Thus, for those who spent 13 months abroad (Renate, Dan, Jim), their time in China was almost half as long again as that of those who spent just 9 months abroad (Paul, Sam).

#### 5.5.4.2 Amount of formally instructed input

The amount of instructed input that the participants had in the classroom during the year abroad varied considerably (see Figure 5.2) from 10 hours per week to 25 hours per week (mean = 18.74 hours per week).

**Figure 5.2 Number of hours per week of Mandarin instruction**



These differences might be partly due to the different choices available to learners. According to their course descriptions, the learners in both Beijing

and Tianjin were supposed to take at least 20 hours of classroom instruction per week, while the learners in Taipei had a choice varying from 10 to 24 hours per week. For example, because Paul and Sam were in Taipei, they spent only 10 hours in class while the majority of the other participants had to spend much more time. Nevertheless, it seems to have been down to the individual choice that each participant made. For instance, Ann regarded oral practice in daily life as so important, that she would spend as little time on formal classroom instruction as possible (i.e. 15 hours per week) and instead chatted with the local people in markets, in the street, in the library and so on. In contrast, Cain valued instructed input so much, that apart from his normal hours in Mandarin classes, he even had two private tutors<sup>36</sup> for his Mandarin learning: one for oral instruction and one for grammar instruction. This increased his hours of formal instruction to 25 hours or so per week. Renate, given the choice of having as few as 10 hours or as many as 24 hours, chose 24 hours. This was not because Renate held formal instruction in as high a regard as Cain did, nor because she did not stress oral interaction as Ann did, but rather because the class provided for her in Taiwan, concentrated mainly on conversation practice and fitted in with her desire for oral interaction (see Chapter 8 for more discussion of Renate).

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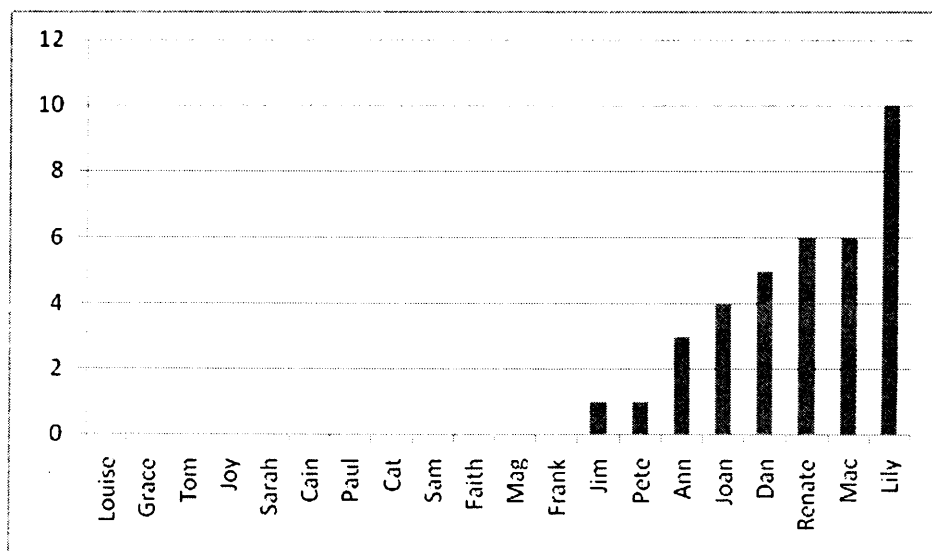
<sup>36</sup> Cain also stressed that another very important reason why he had private tutoring was that the cost was relatively cheap in China. For example, it generally cost less than two pounds for one hour.



#### 5.5.4.3 Amount of Mandarin use as a medium for other formal study

As seen in Figure 5.3, the majority of participants (12 out of 20) did not take part in any other subject study through the medium of Mandarin. Among those who did use Mandarin as a medium for other study, the majority still studied subjects related to the Mandarin language, such as Chinese culture or Chinese literature. Rather surprisingly, Pete and Renate studied other languages through the medium of Mandarin. Pete attended a Spanish listening class for one hour a week at the start of term, but dropped it after several weeks. Renate continually studied Taiwanese for four hours a week and Cantonese for two hours a week.

**Figure 5.3 Number of hours per week using Mandarin as a medium of instruction**



Lily seems to have spent a huge amount of time inside the classroom:

Newspaper Reading class (four hours per week), Contemporary Chinese

Literature (two hours per week), International Trade (four hours per week). Furthermore, she attributed 20% of her Mandarin improvement to activities such as watching TV, listening to radio and travelling – it seems to suggest that Lily spent a rather large amount of time in getting receptive input, rather than interactive input. Based on Lily's particularly high amount of receptive input, it will be interesting to see whether she outperformed the others in comprehension ability (see Chapter 7 for the result).

#### **5.5.4.4 The degree of integration with native speakers**

As mentioned in Section 5.5.3, most of the participants did not really take the opportunity to integrate with native speakers while they were within the native speaker community. The exceptions were Ann, Pete, Sarah, and Renate.

In China, although Ann still stayed in the dormitory with foreign students, she mentioned that it did not make much sense staying with foreign students. She was therefore determined to go out to seek every opportunity to practise her Mandarin: talking to strangers in the street, in the markets, making many Chinese friends. As commented on by one of her course-mates, Ann was “so desperate” to talk with Chinese that even when she was in the library and suddenly heard someone speak in Mandarin she would rush over and start a conversation. While some of Ann's course-mates said that Ann did not even allow her Chinese friends to practise English with her, Ann did say that she

exchanged some English and Mandarin with her Chinese friends.

Similar to Ann, Pete was also very active in seeking opportunities for practising his Mandarin, even in the first year in Leeds. Furthermore, Pete spent his last month with a peasant family, in the southern China, who had no knowledge of English at all. In other words, Pete needed to find ways to communicate with them solely in Mandarin.

Sarah, as mentioned earlier, at the later stage of her year abroad had a Chinese boyfriend<sup>37</sup>. She cherished their relationship greatly and spent most of the time with him and his family.

Very different from the rest of her Leeds coursemates, Renate had managed to live with local Chinese people throughout her stay abroad and refused to use any language in communication with anyone except for Mandarin (see Chapter 8 for more details).

Nevertheless, the majority of participants attributed a sizeable proportion of their Mandarin improvement to the interaction that they had with the native speakers (ranging from 50% to 10%, mean=26%). Rather strikingly, however, Joy attributed more of her Mandarin improvement (40%) to the interaction she

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<sup>37</sup> Although Jim had a Chinese girlfriend even before the year abroad and she also went to Beijing together with him during his year abroad, their conversations were mainly conducted in English instead of Mandarin, for Jim's girlfriend's English was very advanced. According to Jim, it was much easier for them to speak in English than in Mandarin. Meanwhile, Jim seemed to lose the desire/motivation to find opportunities to practise Mandarin; as mentioned, he had been top of the Mandarin class during the first year study in Leeds.

had with non-native speakers than with native speakers (30%). In comparison, seven participants did not attribute any proportion of their Mandarin improvement to the interaction they had with non-native speakers, with the remaining ten participants abroad in China attributing 30% to 2% (mean=10.7%).

Having explored the kinds of input the learners had encountered when they were in China through comprehensibility, authenticity, interaction, abundance and richness, it is time for us to see who came closest to the 'ideal' and who did not.

In general, it seems that the majority of the participants in fulfilling the 'ideal' input supply condition fell into the category of 'intermediate'. That is, their fulfilments were rather average. However, Ann, Pete, Sarah and Renate seemed to be exceptional in meeting the condition, especially Renate. Firstly, for certain reasons (see Chapter 8), unlike the majority of the other participants, other people's incomprehensibility seemed not to be a problem for her. Secondly, being in Taiwan, her classroom input arguably was more 'authentic' in function, if not in form, than that received by the students in Beijing and Tainjin. Thirdly, by living with native speakers and trying to use the target language all the time, she availed herself of relatively abundant and rich interaction with the native speakers. The abundant, rich input was enhanced

even more by the fact that she, along with two other participants, spent the longest time abroad (13 months), that is, almost three months more than the average time that all the participants spent abroad (10.6 months). In addition, she seemed to have used all sorts of means for using Mandarin. For example, she took a Taiwanese language course (4 hours per week), a Cantonese course (2 hours per week) and Taichi, through the medium of Mandarin (see Chapter 8 for more details).

In general, it appears that the experiences of Renate, Pete, and Sarah, especially Renate, would best fulfil the hypothesised 'ideal' condition. The RN model predicts that they would score highest in nativelikeness. As for Table 5.4, it is useful to categorise the input for each person on a rough scale (see Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5 Summary of level of 'ideal' input supply**

Name	Low	Fairly Low	Moderate	Fairly high	High
Ann				✓	
Cain				✓	
Cat			✓		
Dan				✓	
Faith			✓		
Frank	✓				
Grace			✓		
Jim			✓		
Joan			✓		
Joy				✓	
Lily				✓	
Louise			✓		
Mac			✓		
Mag			✓		
Paul		✓			
Pete				✓	
Renate					✓
Sam		✓			
Sarah				✓	
Tom			✓		

## 5.6 Attention to input

There are various methods for capturing how learners pay attention to input, including thinking-aloud, questionnaires, interviews, and diary-keeping. Here, the participants' attention to input was analysed mainly through their answers to the following questions in the questionnaire (for the limitation of this method, see Chapter 9):

- 'Does it matter if you don't understand every word?'
- 'Do you always ask people to explain things you don't understand?'<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The first two questions have been rephrased from statements in the questionnaire (Appendix 4.1), to which the participants were asked to respond by circling 'Agree' or 'Disagree'. Similar changes have also

- 'Does memorising single words improve your Mandarin? If so, how?'
- 'Does memorising complete phrases improve your Mandarin? If so, how?'
- 'Does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin? If so, how?'

The majority of participants (16 out of 20) agreed that it did not matter if they did not understand every word. Meanwhile, many of them (14 out of 20) said they always asked people to explain things that they did not understand. In other words, what seemed to matter most to the participants during interaction was the meaning of the input rather than individual words.

Exceptionally, it did matter to Ann, Frank, Jim and Tom if they did not understand every word. However, Ann and Tom said they did not always ask people to explain things which they did not understand. In other words, what seemed to be the focus for Ann and Tom was individual words rather than the meaning of the input. Even more exceptionally, Renate was not bothered by being unable to understand every word, nor did she try to ask people to explain things that she did not understand (see Chapter 9 for more discussion on Renate's way of handling input).

As far as memorising single words is concerned (see Table 5.6 below), it

seems to have been the learning strategy that the majority of participants (15 out of 20) utilised.

**Table 5.6 Answers to the question ‘does memorising single words improve your Mandarin?’**

Answers	No. of Participants	Participants
No	1	Joan
Sometimes	3	Louise, Mag, Tom
Yes	16	The rest

While many of the participants (16 out of 20) regarded memorising single words as a way of building up vocabulary, some of them still thought that words needed to be learned in context (e.g. Ann, Cat, Dan, Sam, Pete). Some participants (20%) felt that memorising single words had limited use. From a positive angle, May found that sometimes memorising single words helped her to analyse the language so that she was able to work out what a word of two or more characters might mean. From a negative angle, Louise, for instance, found that she would tend to forget single words straightaway if she had to learn them one by one. Similarly, Tom regarded learning single words as being important, but felt that it was not the fastest way to learn. As discussed later, memorising complete phrases was much more useful to Tom, for “it is remembering the vocabulary, style and grammar all in one”. Joan, in contrast, did not seem to find the strategy of memorising single words useful “unless you



know how to use them in context". In other words, there was a small proportion of the participants who would tend to take the input as a whole, rather than breaking it down into individual words.

In terms of memorising complete phrases (see Table 5.7), the picture seems to be rather mixed.

**Table 5.7 Answers to the question 'does memorising complete phrases improve your Mandarin?'**

Answers	No. of Participants	Participants
No	7	Cain, Dan, Frank, Jim, Joy, Mac, Renate
Sometimes	4	Ann, Cat, Joan, Mag
Yes	9	The others

A close look at their answers to the open-ended questions reveals that there were various reasons why they regarded the memorising of complete phrase strategies as useful or not. For those who did not think that memorising complete phrases was useful, there seemed to be two main reasons. One was "memorising the phrases does not mean that you understand the phrases" (Renate). The other is that they preferred to learn the words separately and then make the most of their different uses; as Joy put it, "I feel it makes me more flexible than learning whole sentences". In other words, understanding the content of the words seemed to be the primary agenda for those learners. Meanwhile, most of them tended to analyse the language a lot, as will also be

evident in the way that they described utilising grammar rules (see later).

Amongst those who regarded memorising complete phrases as having some, but limited, value, from the positive side it was viewed as being useful for colloquial speaking (e.g. Ann, Joan, Mag). In other words, it would be helpful for their later output. On the negative side, it was regarded by Cat as “boring and have a low saturation point”. Two points seem worth mentioning here. One is that the usefulness of memorising complete phrases seems to have a deeper meaning for Ann. Although she commented that she only used this strategy in small doses, she thought that she could manipulate memorised complete phrases to express other meanings. The other point is that the link between memorising complete phrases and one’s judgement of the familiarity of phrases seems to be evident in Joan:

Sometimes I memorise complete [phrases] if they are a typical colloquial Chinese [phrase] that is (feels) unnatural to me.

There seemed to be two main reasons for those who regarded the usefulness of memorising complete phrases highly. One was that it helped them remember words in context, the relevant grammar or the tone. The other was that they could use it for the later construction of output. That is, it enabled them to respond quickly. As Sam put it,

It means that you can reply with more complete sentences much more quickly. And once comfortable using the phrase and all its words you can adapt the phrase to fit the situation’s needs.

Now let us turn to the way that they dealt with learning grammar rules. As seen in Table 5.8, all the participants, except for Renate, felt that learning grammar rules improved their Mandarin.

**Table 5.8 Answers to the question ‘does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin?’**

Answers	No. of Participants	Participants
No	1	Renate
Sometimes	0	/
Yes	19	The others

Nevertheless, the way that they considered grammar rules to help their Mandarin learning varied. Predominantly, the participants viewed the importance of learning grammar rules from the point of output construction. Only Peter mentioned that it aided his understanding. Most of them regarded learning grammar rules as helping them consciously construct sentences or fine-tune their Mandarin, while some found that it would speed up the process of translation by “using grammatical frameworks and fitting the new and old vocabulary around” (Tom).

Meanwhile, some found that learning grammar rules gave them a sense of how Mandarin works, which might be different from their mother tongue (e.g. Cat, Dan and Mac). Others stressed the limitations of learning grammar rules (e.g. Ann, Louise and Sarah). For instance, as Sarah put it, “you must also learn how to use them practically”. Similarly, Louise commented, “it is

important to spend more time practising than learning – makes you sound more colloquial”. In contrast to Sarah and Louise, Ann seemed to stress the importance of a ‘mental’ grammar rather than explicitly taught grammar rules:

A feeling for the language is much more important than having a fixed set of grammar rules in my head.

In complete contrast to the other participants, Renate denied the importance of learning grammar rules (for Renate’s specific ways of dealing with input, see Chapter 8). Answering the question ‘does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin?’, she said:

Not really, the more time you spend in the country, the more you will improve without thinking in grammatical terms.

Having explored the learners’ ways of paying attention to input, it is time for us to assess whose type of attention to input should be considered closest to the ‘ideal’.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there seems to be no agreement among researchers on what should be counted as ‘ideal’ in the way learners pay attention to input. One possibly way of discovering the answer as conducted in the present project, is to see how those who had managed to achieve nativelikeness did in comparison to how those who had not managed to reach nativelikeness did (see Chapter 9 for the limitation of this method).

As a whole, the learners studied were generally rather uniform in the way they paid attention to input, as measured by the five questions in the questionnaire (see Table 5.9 for Summary of the types of attention to input). For an explanation of the scoring system, see the text after the table.

**Table 5.9 Summary of the types of attention to input**

Name	Does it matter if you don't understand every word	Do you always ask people to explain things you don't understand	Does memorising single words improve your Mandarin	Does memorising complete phrases improve your Mandarin	Does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin	Total scores for meeting the 'ideal'	Position in a scale from 'low' to 'high'
Ann	✓		✓	*	✓	3.5**	Fairly high
Cain		✓	✓		✓	3	Modest
Cat		✓	✓	*	✓	3.5	Fairly high
Dan			✓		✓	4	Fairly high
Faith		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	Fairly high
Frank	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	Low
Grace		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	Fairly high
Jim	✓	✓	✓		✓	2	Low
Joan		✓	✓	*	✓	2.5	Modest
Joy		✓	✓		✓	3	Modest
Lily		✓		✓	✓	4	Fairly high
Louise		✓	✓*		✓	3.5	Fairly high
Mac		✓			✓	3	Modest
Mag		✓	✓*	✓*	✓	3	Modest
Paul			✓	✓	✓	4	Fairly high
Pete			✓			5	High
Renate			✓	✓	✓	3	Modest
Sam			✓	✓	✓	5	High
Sarah		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	Fairly high
Tom	✓		*	✓	✓	3.5	Fairly high

\*='sometimes'.

\*\* 0.5 point is given to sometimes, while 1 point is given to a general tendency.

One possible explanation for their uniform answers is that indeed they were a

rather uniform group – for the project selected participants that met certain criteria (see Chapter 4). On the other hand, as revealed in Chapter 3, it could also be that the questionnaire was not sufficient to capture the dynamic nature of individual differences across time and space.

Although everyone seemed to agree on the importance of memorising single words, obtaining input, whether a word or phrase, from its context seemed to be a ‘priority’ among the learners who made most progress (e.g. Ann, Joan, Louise, Sarah and Renate). Joy, however, was the exception to this pattern. We will explore her case further in Chapter 8.

Meanwhile, everyone seemed to agree on the importance of learning grammar rules. However, Renate – a western learner with no previous knowledge of Mandarin, who managed to reach nativelikeness within two years’ study – denied the importance of grammar rules. For detail on her way of paying attention, see Chapter 8.

It will be clear from Table 5.9 that the scores awarded are not simply the sums of the ticks, so some explanation is needed here. The scores have taken into account the fact that some of the ticks are indicative of progress towards the ideal, while others are potential impediments to reaching it. In Chapter 2, it was seen that commentators differ in their views about what counts as appropriate

attention to input. For example, the importance of encouraging learners to focus on form(s) is stressed by Skehan and N. Ellis. Similarly, through an emphasis on “pushed output”, Swain advocates the need for learners to focus on form(s) (i.e. either in their own output or others’ input). In contrast, Wray examines the potential usefulness for learners of being sufficiently confident to pick up and use new forms even without fully understanding them. Combining the above views, it is hypothesised here that an appropriate attention to input entails maintaining a ‘balanced’ attention to input. Specifically, the ideal will be most closely approximated by those who said ‘no’ to the questions ‘Does it matter if you don’t understand every word?’ and ‘Do you always ask people to explain things you don’t understand?’. Meanwhile, a successful learner should focus on input in certain ways. The closest to the ideal will be those learners who said ‘yes’ to the questions ‘Does memorising single words improve your Mandarin?’ ‘Does memorising complete phrases improve your Mandarin?’ and ‘Does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin?’. This explains the scoring in Table 5.9, where Sam and Pete are revealed to most closely match the ideal as defined in that way. In Chapter 8, when, we consider how well each learner actually did, in the light of the composite predictions from this chapter, it will be possible to review the plausibility of the assumptions associated with these hypotheses.

## 5.7 Attention to output

As with attention to input, there are various methods for exploring individuals' approaches to paying attention to output, including thinking-aloud, questionnaires, interviews and diary-keeping. Here, the participants' attention to output was analysed mainly through their answers to the following questions in the questionnaire (for the limitation of this method, see Chapter 9):

- 'Do you try to use new words as soon as you have learned them?'
- 'Do you sometimes use words without being sure of what they mean?'
- 'Do you plan what you are going to say before you speak?'
- 'Do you want your Mandarin to be perfect and do you always try very hard to be correct when you speak Mandarin? Do you hate making mistakes and want to be corrected when you do?'
- 'Does it bother you if you make mistakes?'
- 'Do you feel that you make a lot of mistakes when you speak but you don't care – people understand you mostly?'
- 'If you know you can't express an idea easily, do you bother trying?'
- 'If someone doesn't understand you, do you try to say it another way?'
- 'Does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin?'

As far as trying to use new words as soon as possible was concerned, all the participants agreed that this was the way they learned Mandarin, except for Cat who only tried to do it sometimes. However, their responses to the



statement 'I sometimes use words without being sure of what they mean' gave a more varied picture (see Table 5.10).

**Table 5.10 Responses to the statement 'I sometimes use words without being sure of what they mean'**

Answers	No. of Participants	Participants
Agree	12	The rest
Disagree	8	Cat, Faith, <u>Frank</u> , Jim, <u>Joy</u> , <u>Lily</u> , Louise, Sarah

As Table 5.10 shows, well over half the participants believed they picked up words without fully understanding them. Moreover, regarding whether they consciously planned their speech or not, it appears that many of them did not (see Table 5.11).

**Table 5.11 Responses to the statement 'I plan what I am going to say before I speak'**

Answers	No. of Participants	Participants
Agree	7	Cain, <u>Frank</u> , <u>Joy</u> , <u>Lily</u> , Mag, Sam, Tom
Disagree	13	The rest

Through comparing Table 5.11 and Table 5.12, we can see that only Frank, Joy and Lily (all Chinese) consciously analysed their output a lot (since they would not use words without being aware of what they meant) and also planned what they were going to say before speaking. The reason why they were so conscious about their output was probably due to the fact that all three

of them cared about the accuracy of their output very much. Meanwhile, it might also suggest that the Chinese participants, except for Mac who seemed to have a rather laid-back attitude, paid more attention to accuracy than the non-Chinese participants. This might be due to their Chinese culture, in which things generally tend to be taken more seriously.

The factors underlying the participants' way of paying attention to output also seems to vary. As far as accuracy was concerned, most of them (12 out of 20) wanted their Mandarin to be perfect and would always try very hard to be correct when speaking Mandarin. They hated making mistakes and wanted to be corrected when they did. However, somewhat conflictingly, among those 12 people, seven also felt sometimes that they knew they were making a lot of mistakes when speaking, but did not care because people could mostly understand them. Their rather 'loose' attitude towards accuracy was confirmed by the responses to the statement 'it doesn't bother me if I make mistakes' (see Table 5.12)

**Table 5.12 Responses to the statement 'It doesn't bother me if I make mistakes'**

<b>Answers</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Agree	14	The rest
Disagree	6	Ann, Cain, Faith, Frank, Sam, Tom

As can be seen, most of the participants agreed that they were not really

concerned about making mistakes.

Similarly, when it came to the problem of expressing themselves, due to the lack of knowledge of the language, the majority of them (17) would persevere with constructing their output when they could not express an idea easily (see Table 5.13).

**Table 5.13 Responses to the statement ‘If I know I can’t express an idea easily, I don’t bother trying’**

Answers	No. of Participants	Participants
Agree	3	Faith, Frank, Renate
Disagree	17	The rest

Likewise, drawing upon their responses to the question ‘if someone doesn’t understand you, do you try to say it another way?’, all of the participants except for Paul, agreed that they would try to structure their output another way if someone could not understand them.

As mentioned in the previous section, grammar rules seemed to play an important part in the way that participants, other than Renate, consciously constructed output.

Having explored how the learners’ paid attention to output, it is time for us to

assess whose approach can be counted as 'ideal'.

As with attention to input, there seems to be no agreement among researchers on what should count as 'ideal' in the way learners pay attention to output (see Chapter 2). As one possibility in exploring the issue, the present project will see how those who had managed to achieve nativelikeness did in comparison to how those who had not managed to reach nativelikeness did (see Chapter 9 for the limitation of this method).

As a whole, unlike the rather uniform findings for 'attention to input' in the previous section, the ways that the learners paid their attention to output were diverse, with the exception of their responses to the statements 'if I know I can't express an idea easily, I don't bother trying' and "If someone doesn't understand me, I try to say it another way" (see Table 5.14 for a summary). Unfortunately it is not clear how these results can easily be graded to make a clear prediction about who will be closest to the ideal. Instead, we can only return, in chapter 8, to this information and use it to elucidate the outcomes of the learning.

**Table 5.14 Summary of the types of attention to output**

<b>Name</b>	Do you try to use new words as soon as you have learned them	Do you sometimes use words without being sure of what they mean	Do you plan what you are going to say before you speak	Do you want your Mandarin to be perfect and do you always try very hard to be correct when you speak Mandarin? Do you hate making mistakes and want to be corrected when you do	Does it bother you if you make mistakes	Do you feel that you make a lot of mistakes when you speak but you don't care – people understand you mostly	If you know you can't express an idea easily, do you bother trying	If someone doesn't understand you, do you try to say it another way	Does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin
<b>Ann</b>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
<b>Cain</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓
<b>Cat</b>	*			*		✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Dan</b>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
<b>Faith</b>	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓
<b>Frank</b>	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
<b>Grace</b>	✓	✓		*		✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Jim</b>	✓			✓		*	✓	✓	✓
<b>Joan</b>	✓	✓		✓		*	✓	✓	✓
<b>Joy</b>	✓		✓	✓		*	✓	✓	✓
<b>Lily</b>	✓		✓	✓		*	✓	✓	✓
<b>Louise</b>	✓					*	✓	✓	✓
<b>Mac</b>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
<b>Mag</b>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Paul</b>	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
<b>Pete</b>	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Renate</b>	✓	✓		✓		*		✓	✓
<b>Sam</b>	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	*	✓	✓	✓
<b>Sarah</b>	✓			*		✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Tom</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓

\*='sometimes'

## 5.8 Summing-up and way forward

This chapter has explored participants' reported actual fulfilment of the five hypothesised conditions. However, it is only possible to draw on four of the five conditions to make a clear prediction because the results from the condition 'attention to output', as pointed out in Section 5.7, did not enable the

researcher to draw a clear prediction of who would be closest to the ideal. On the basis of the four conditions (see Table 5.15)., we can see that Ann, Joy, Peter, Renate and Sarah most often figure as meeting the criteria, especially Renate (in terms of input condition) and Joy (in terms of L2-oriented identification condition). In contrast, Frank, Jim, Louise, Paul, and Sam least often do, especially Frank and Paul (in terms of both input condition and L2-oriented identification condition).

**Table 5.15 Summary of meeting four conditions**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Fairly Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Fairly high</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Ann</b>				✓ ✓ ✓	✓
<b>Cain</b>			✓ ✓	✓	✓
<b>Cat</b>			✓ ✓	✓	✓
<b>Dan</b>			✓	✓ ✓	✓
<b>Faith</b>			✓ ✓	✓	✓
<b>Frank</b>	✓ ✓	✓			✓
<b>Grace</b>			✓ ✓	✓	✓
<b>Jim</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓
<b>Joan</b>			✓ ✓ ✓		✓
<b>Joy</b>			✓	✓	✓ ✓
<b>Lily</b>			✓	✓ ✓	✓
<b>Louise</b>		✓ ✓	✓	✓	
<b>Mac</b>			✓ ✓ ✓		✓
<b>Mag</b>			✓ ✓ ✓		✓
<b>Paul</b>		✓ ✓		✓	✓
<b>Pete</b>				✓ ✓	✓ ✓
<b>Renate</b>			✓	✓	✓ ✓
<b>Sam</b>		✓ ✓			✓ ✓
<b>Sarah</b>				✓ ✓ ✓	✓
<b>Tom</b>		✓	✓	✓	✓

The RN model predicts that, when native speaker judges listened to recordings

of all the participants, it should be Renate and Joy that were identified as most advanced and Paul and Frank as least, with the others in between. We shall return to these predictions at the end of chapter 6 and see if they are borne out. Since one of the criteria (attention to output) could not be converted into predictions, we shall see how the other criteria work out in terms of their predictions and then work backwards to see whether, on the basis of who learned most successfully, we can tentatively extrapolate indications about which strategies for attention to output are most successful.

The information that has been reported so far will be used as a baseline for the discussion in chapter 8. At the macro-level, a rating of their general oral achievement in the interview will be reported in the next chapter (6). After focussing on their language comprehension ability, there will be a discussion based on a micro-level analysis of their oral input, with particular reference to the formulaic sequences embedded in the interview questions, and certain vocabulary features. All these elements will enable us to draw a clearer picture of the learners in question – how did they manage to overcome learning barriers and to what extent did they reach nativelikeness?

## **Chapter 6 Nativelikeness perceived: A rating investigation in China**

### **6.1 Introduction**

As indicated in Chapter 4, part of the function of the oral interview with the participants was to try to provide a basis for judging how far they had progressed towards nativelikeness. More specifically, it aimed to see how nativelike they were, as judged by native speakers. The first section of this chapter looks at how this aim was achieved by considering the selection of raters, the development of rating criteria and the issue of rater training. After that, the whole rating procedure is reported. The third section is the analysis and results of the rating, in which the predictions of the participants' language achievement in Chapter 5 are checked. A brief summary is given at the end of the chapter.

### **6.2 Meeting the aim of the rating procedure**

As mentioned, the aim of the present rating investigation was to see how nativelike the participants were perceived to be by native speakers. At a glance, there seem to be three possibilities for meeting this aim: trained professional raters; teachers or others who are used to speaking with non-natives; or 'naïve' judges, that is, monolinguals with no experience of the learner language. In the present study, the judges were naïve monolinguals. A brief justification will be given for why they were preferred over the other two types of judge, before their judgements are presented.



Trained professional raters and teachers are usually employed for rating an oral proficiency interview (OPI, or ACTFL procedure<sup>39</sup>). However, the procedures that best meet the objectives and aims of a standard oral proficiency interview would not necessarily match the present aim of the project. The discussion of this issue, below, will not directly address the specific limitations of OPI, for which see Liskin-Gasparro (2003) and Salaberry (2000). There are two main reasons why the present study needed a different treatment in rating the interview.

This study sought to discover the impressions that the participants made on native speakers. Although trained teachers may well be native speakers, they are not representative of the population at large, and will tend to respond differently to hearing a non-native speaker. As Carlsen (2003) puts it:

Through their profession, language teachers gain an increased tolerance for language variation, and one would assume them to understand learner language better than people who are less familiar with foreign accents. At the same time the teachers' job is to improve the language of their students. One could therefore also expect them to be relatively focused on formal aspects of learner language. In any case, it is likely that their daily contact with foreign accents will affect their perception of learner language in one way or another (p. 99).

Okamura (1995), comparing native teachers' and native non-teachers' perception of four elementary learners' spoken Japanese, found that teachers tended to be more critical than non-teachers.

Similarly, Hadden (1991), after comparing teacher and non-teacher perceptions of

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<sup>39</sup> ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) procedures refer to ACTFL Guideline 1986 and ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking 1999.

second-language communication, found a significant difference in the evaluation of non-native speech by the two groups. Non-teachers tended to interpret a speaker's linguistic ability as interrelated with comprehensibility. Teachers on the other hand, treated the rating criteria as separate from each other.

Meanwhile, examining the interrelationships between accentedness, perceived comprehensibility and intelligibility in the speech of L2 learners, Munro and Derwing (1995) suggest a hierarchy of importance followed by native speakers in making judgements on a learner's language production: intelligibility<sup>40</sup>, followed by comprehensibility, with accentedness the least important. In other words, making one's speech comprehensible has a great impact upon the listeners' judgement of the speech.

Furthermore, during the interviews and questionnaires for the present project, some participants indicated that they found it easier to communicate with people who were used to talking with English speakers of Mandarin, than with monolingual Chinese people. According to what they had experienced, it seemed that the former could more easily understand them, whilst the latter might not be able to. Indeed, when they spoke, although the researcher, who has been an L2 learner of English, was able to guess what they meant, still the question remained as to how well the majority of Chinese (i.e. those who had hardly any knowledge of English), would be able to understand them.

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<sup>40</sup> Native speakers of English were asked to transcribe the utterances in standard orthography and the transcriptions intelligibility scores were assigned on the basis of exact word matches.

In order to address the problems described above and also to test how well the Leeds students had really managed to develop the capacity to make themselves understood even by ordinary Chinese people, who make up the majority of the population in China<sup>41</sup>, it was decided that the targeted raters for the present investigation would be individuals with very little knowledge of English. The aim was to establish how nativelike the learners had become (so that this information could be used as a reference point when assessing how they had achieved as much as they did). Therefore, there was only limited value in applying the formal test criteria as would be used of OPI or ACTFL procedures. Rather, a much more direct measure was needed: what sort of impression did the speakers make on native speakers unaccustomed to talking to foreigners? Ideally, one would have wanted to know how successfully the speakers could interact with such native speakers. However, it was not possible to introduce the learners directly to such judges for logistical reasons. Therefore, a methodology was devised that would make it possible to make reasonable inferences about the ease of interaction, were they to meet face to face. The recordings made in Leeds were taken to China and played to the judges, who were asked to rate their confidence in being able to have a successful conversation with the speakers.

### **6.2.1 Participants**

The selection of participants was achieved by issuing a survey questionnaire (Appendix 6.1) to staff at a clothing factory in Puning City, employing about 100

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<sup>41</sup> The majority of Chinese educated over the past twenty to thirty years did not progress beyond middle-school level. The level of English attained at that point is barely sufficient to hold a simple conversation, as became clear when the targeted raters' knowledge of English was checked.

workers. Five workers were chosen based on the following three criteria (see Table 6.1 for their demographic information):

- Language background: they needed to be monolingual Mandarin speakers
- Knowledge of English: none, or, hardly any
- Educational level: as high as possible<sup>42</sup>

**Table 6.1 Judges' demographic information**

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Gender</u>
J1	32	Middle-school	Male
J2	20	Middle-school	Female
J3	24	High-school	Male
J4	23	High-school	Male
J5	27	Middle-school	Male

**6.2.2 Developing the rating instrument**

The whole process of developing the rating instrument focussed on the following issues: rating criteria, rater training, sampling speech, and pilot testing.

**6.2.2.1 Rating criteria and rater training**

As the judges were not previously familiar with judgemental tasks of this kind, it was decided to use holistic criteria for the judgements. Also, only a limited amount of specific training was feasible for practical reasons. The advantage of using holistic judgements was that it captured the essence of the *impression*

<sup>42</sup> As has been mentioned, the majority of Chinese people have been educated up to middle-school level. However, it is not uncommon to find people who have attended high school working in manual jobs.

made upon the judge, without attempting to over-analyse why. This is something that the judges could not reliably have done. As Douglas (1994) and Salaberry (2000) have indicated, there are severe difficulties in ensuring reliability in detailed, analytic ratings even between trained raters:

[S]ince test designers cannot completely control raters' interpretations of the scales, particularly in terms of the weights individual raters may unconsciously assign to various components . . . the likelihood is strong that no two raters will arrive at the same rating for the same reasons" (Douglas, 1994:126).

Thus, arguably little was lost in taking this approach and a lot was gained.

Unlike the usual practice in the western world, where a five-point or a seven-point scale is commonly used, a ten-point linear rating scale marked from 0 to 10 was provided for the raters. The reason for this decision was to take into account the habitual practice of Chinese people, especially the lay population, of using a scale of ten for many different purposes. In other words, whereas the quantity concept of "on a scale between one and five" (as well as "what percentage of X") is widely used in the western world, it is customary in China to say something like (if directly translated) "what out of 10". Therefore, the judges were asked to make judgements on a scale of 0 to 10.

The judgements were based on the judges' confidence in conversing with the speaker. When listening to a participant's one-minute speech segment (see the speech sampling below), they were asked to imagine that this person had just entered the room, and to indicate how much confidence they would have in

chatting with him/her in Mandarin: “0 points means that you have no confidence in conversing with him in Mandarin at all. 10 points means that you have full confidence, that he can talk with you as a normal Chinese in Mandarin, completely” (see Appendix 6.2 for the full instruction to the raters). In this way, the judges were encouraged to rely on their own holistic impression, regardless of the relative weight that they might place on intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accent.

Note that in this context, the concept of ‘nativelikeness’ was quite specific and tailored to the learners’ general aims and the judges’ capacities and experience. That is, rather than asking the judges to comment on how like a native speaker the subjects were, which was judged too difficult for them, given their limited experience with non-Chinese learners of Mandarin, the rating task focussed on their perceived capacity to communicate with the speaker as effectively as with a native speaker. Although this somewhat distorts the customary western concept of ‘nativelikeness’, which tends to focus on correct forms and accent, it does capture the essence of the *functional* nativelikeness continuum, and undoubtedly helped ensure that the raters could relate to their task.

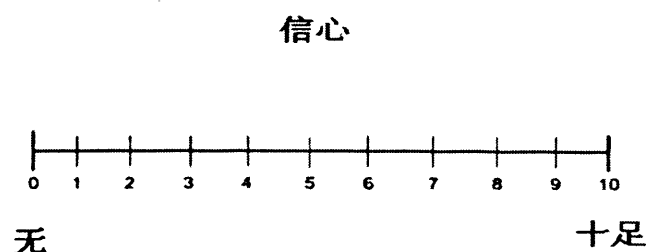
Given the fact that the learners in question went to different places in China, such as Beijing, Tianjin and Taiwan, where different accents of Mandarin exist, and also that the majority of monolingual Chinese (e.g. the raters) usually speak their own local accented Mandarin, it was decided that the raters should be asked not to take into account of the learners’ accent. The explanation to the raters is:

You don't need to pay attention to their accents. It's very normal for every one of us to have our own local accent, isn't it? Therefore, please don't take into account their accents.

It is not clear cut that the raters would be able to differentiate a foreign accent from a regional one, and it is not uncommon to hear non-native speaker Mandarin from within China. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that the raters might have been somewhat influenced, even confused, by the instruction to ignore accent when, in some cases, the pronunciation would have been a significant impediment to effective communication. In retrospect, a differently worded instruction might have been better.

Being aware of raters' tendency to use their own criteria either consciously or unconsciously (Douglas, 1994; Van Lier, 1989), it was decided to take steps to ensure comparability across raters. Three steps were taken. Firstly, in selecting raters (see the description of the participants above), only those whose L1 was Mandarin (rather than other Chinese dialects) were admitted. Additionally they should have hardly any knowledge of English. Secondly, to encourage the rating criteria to be followed, a visual scale between 0 and 10 on a piece of paper was presented to each rater, which would reflect his/her confidence in being able to hold a successful conversation with that speaker (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1 Visual scale for raters**



Thirdly, in order to gain an insight into the rating process, the researcher was present with the raters and encouraged them verbally to report the criteria by which they made their judgement. This procedure helped the researcher to better understand how the test scores ought to be interpreted.

#### **6.2.2.2 Sampling speech**

For the rating exercise, a CD was created, containing 48 samples. Although the samples were always presented in the same order, the danger of an order effect was minimised by including three samples from each speaker, and the samples were sequenced randomly.

The raters heard short extracts only, because “it is possible for teachers to reach a reliable consensus about the relative abilities of a group of school pupils based on a relatively brief tape recording of performance in a verbal task” (Brown et al., 1984:75). Having three samples from each speaker made it possible to assess intra-rater reliability.



It is standard practice in rater tasks, to use samples of between 45 seconds and two minutes (Carlsen, 2003; Freed, 1995b). Therefore, segments of 60 seconds duration were extracted from the original recording. This segment length enabled all the ratings to be done in one session. It took into account a reasonable length of time for a rater to do all the rating in one go; that is, all together it would take 48 minutes for the rater to finish the rating without any break. In order to keep the rating session manageable, it was decided to present recordings of only 16 of the 20 speakers used in the original investigation. The speakers selected for exclusion were the two who had done the pilot testing during the main experiment (i.e. Jim and Pete), the MA student in Mandarin learning (Dan), and the one participant who filled in the questionnaire after the interview rather than before (Cat). The exclusion of Jim, Pete and Cat instead of others, was to ensure that the data collected followed as precise a procedure as possible. Although both Dan and Frank did not actually belong to the BA course in Mandarin as did the other participants (see Chapter 4 for their demographic information), Frank was chosen over Dan for two reasons. Firstly, Frank was of a similar age to the majority of the participants and was doing a BA course, while Dan was more than twenty years older than the majority of the participants and was doing a MA course. Secondly, Frank was ethnic Chinese while Dan was German. Due to the fact that the target language in question is Mandarin Chinese, choosing Frank over Dan seemed best able to provide a good comparison with the rest of the three ethnic Chinese participants, especially for identity issues (see Chapter 5). The process of speech sampling was conducted using Adobe Audition 1.5. The speech segments were randomly selected from the middle of the interview, thereby avoiding both the

beginning and the end of the conversation. This was to ensure that the selected performance of the participants reflected as closely as possible their actual ability, since there might be some uneasiness or unnaturalness occurring towards the beginning or end of the interview. The actual start and end of the sampled material was decided by back-tracking to the point where the interviewer asked a question. This was to avoid a sample being incomprehensible through a lack of context.

#### **6.2.2.3 Pilot testing**

The study was initially run with two participants (J1 and J2), according to the procedure below. The validity and reliability of the rating method were checked for consistency:

- How well were they able to understand the rating instruction?
- How demanding was the whole rating procedure?

The instructions seemed to be very straightforward for them and they seemed able to apply them straight away in their rating. The length of the rating was found to be acceptable and reasonable to them.

### **6.3 Procedure**

The rating took place over a period of two days. It was conducted in a private room inside the factory, made available by the owner of the factory. Due to the special relationship between the researcher and the owner (sister and brother), the workers were very willing to participate. Not only were they allowed to take

time off work for the rating, but they were also offered fifty Chinese Yuan (about a day's wages) by the researcher for doing so.

The oral instructions, which included the purpose and background of the rating and also the rating criteria, were given in Mandarin to the raters (see Appendix 6.2 for the instructions).

As scheduled, the rating process took about one and a half hours for each rater. The rater was presented with a visual scale between 0 and 10 on a piece of paper, which reflected his/her confidence of being able to hold a successful conversation with that speaker. After the rater had listened to each speech segment, the recording was paused and the rater wrote the score on a separate piece of paper against the corresponding recording number. The rater was then asked to report why he/she rated the way that he/she did. The whole rating process was audio-recorded to provide, if needed, later checking as to why they rated the way they did.

## 6.4 Analysis and results

There were two stages involved in the analysis. Firstly, all the scores were arranged in a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel, as shown in Table 6.2<sup>43</sup> below.

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<sup>43</sup> As noted above, the judges were asked to rate the recordings according to a scale of 0 to 10. However, subconsciously, the judges seemed to fine tune their judgement by using fractions. One of the possible reasons for this might be due to the unique marking system used in schools in China, where a scale of 0 to 100 is used. Even when asked to try to stick to a scale of 0 to 10, the judges who used fractions still insisted on having them – they felt that it was more precise. The table was arranged in ascending order according to the scores for the first speech segment (the one that the raters heard first and also the one that the speaker said first). S=speech segment, J=judge. For example, S1J1 means the rating on the 1st Speech Segment from Judge 1.

This allowed the researcher to have a relatively systematic screening of the data before the statistical analysis. Through this stage, certain 'odd' (i.e. inconsistent) ratings both from the same rater and across different raters could be identified. These scores were not removed when the analyses were conducted.

**Table 6.2 Rating scores for each participant on each speech segment**

	S1J1	S1J2	S1J3	S1J4	S1J5	S2J1	S2J2	S2J3	S2J4	S2J5	S3J1	S3J2	S3J3	S3J4	S3J5
<b>Paul</b>	0	0.5	2	1	0	1	0.5	2	2	2	2	1	7.5	1	1
<b>Faith</b>	1	1.5	8	3	1.5	0.5	0.8	7	4	3	3	9	8	2	6
<b>Sarah</b>	3	4.5	1	5	6	8	6	10	9	10	7	9.8	7	5	8
<b>Sam</b>	4	3	8	6	6	3	3.5	3	2	5	7	3.5	6	2	2
<b>Frank</b>	4.5	1	6	2	2	7	7.5	8	7	8	2	4	2	3	3
<b>Louise</b>	5	7.5	6	4	6	6	9	10	7	7	6.5	8.5	8	4	7
<b>Mag</b>	6	3.5	8.5	7	6	5	5.5	6	5	7	6.5	4.5	3	3	6
<b>Renate</b>	6.5	8	8.5	7	8.5	8	5	3	3	6	9.5	8	9	8	8.5
<b>Ann</b>	6.5	4	6.5	9	7	9.5	6.5	8	7	8	8.5	5	9.8	8	8
<b>Tom</b>	7	5	8.5	4	5	1	2.5	1	2	5	8	3.5	7.5	2	5
<b>Grace</b>	7.5	6	10	8	9.5	9.5	9.5	1	6	9	8.5	1	6	7	6
<b>Cain</b>	7.5	1.5	6	7	8	1.5	9.5	9	4	9	9.5	7	8	7	7
<b>Joan</b>	8	3.5	9	5	6.5	7.5	7	6	8	8	8.5	6.5	3	6	8
<b>Lily</b>	8.5	8.5	8	7	8.5	6.5	0	5	7	6	8	4	9.5	3	8
<b>Mac</b>	9	8	8	6	8	8.5	8	9	8	9	7	9.9	10	7	9
<b>Joy</b>	10	3	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	6	8	9	9.5

For example, for the first speech segment of Joy, the rating score '3' from Judge 2 stood out from the rest of the scores, since the other judges all rated it as '10'. Similarly, for Lily, the score for Speech Segment 2 from Judge 2 was '0', which seemed to be totally out of place compared with the rest of the ratings, either from the same judge or from different judges. An interpretation of the 'odd' ratings was gained through listening to the verbal report of the raters. This will be discussed

later.

Secondly, in order to check both the intra-rater reliability and inter-rater reliability, a visual exploration through graphs was performed. This was then followed by a calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Bachman, 2004:160-170) through SPSS 16.

#### 6.4.1 Intra-rater reliability

Figures 6.2 to 6.6 present the ratings by judges 1 to 5 respectively.

Figure 6.2 Judge 1's scores on each speech segment

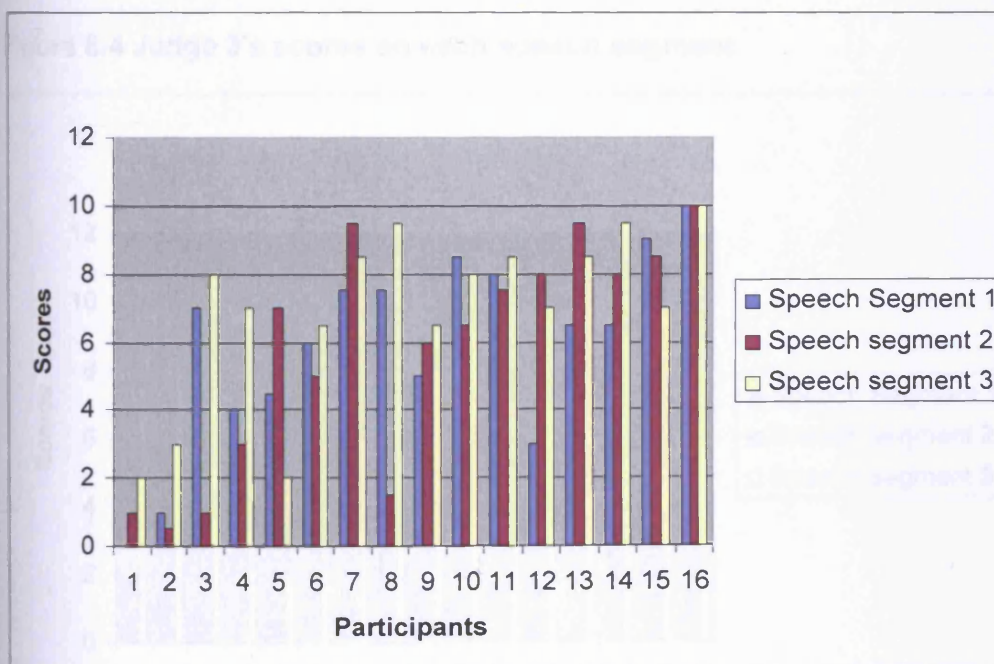


Figure 6.3 Judge 2's scores on each speech segment

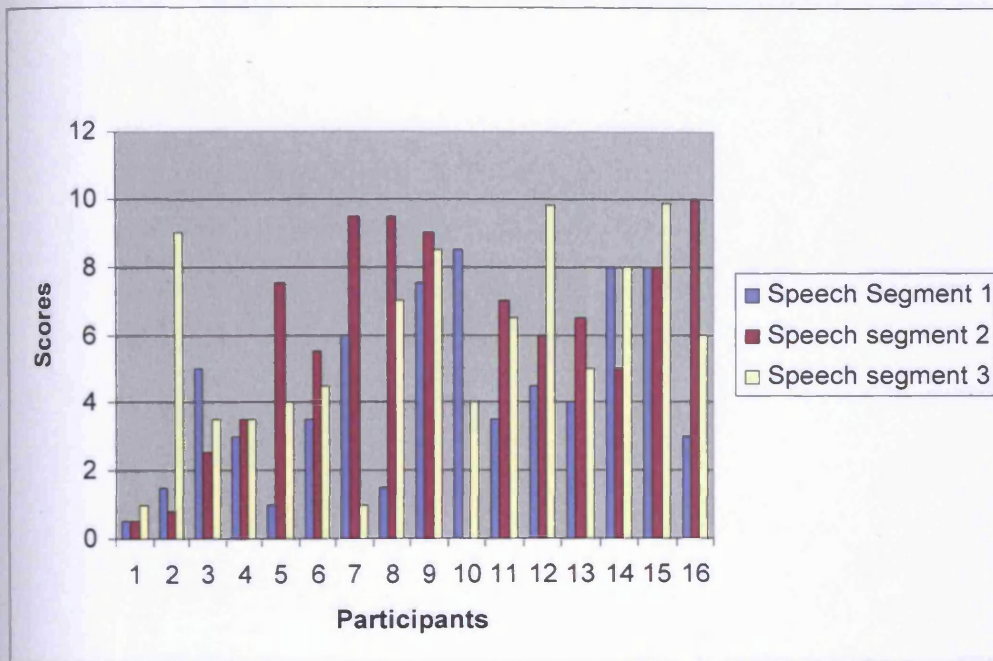


Figure 6.4 Judge 3's scores on each speech segment

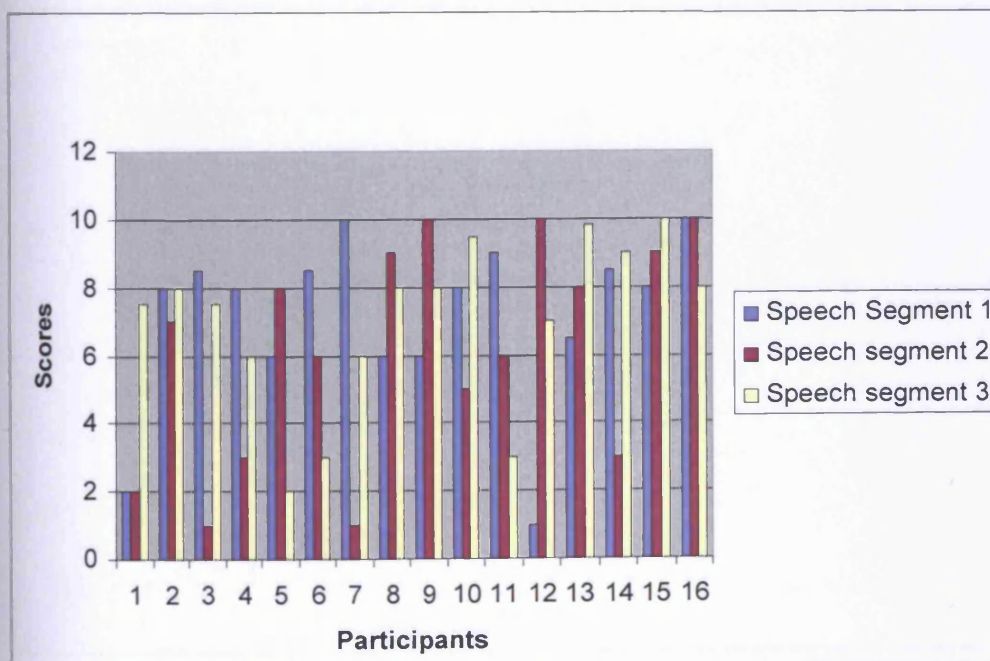




Figure 6.5 Judge 4's scores on each speech segment

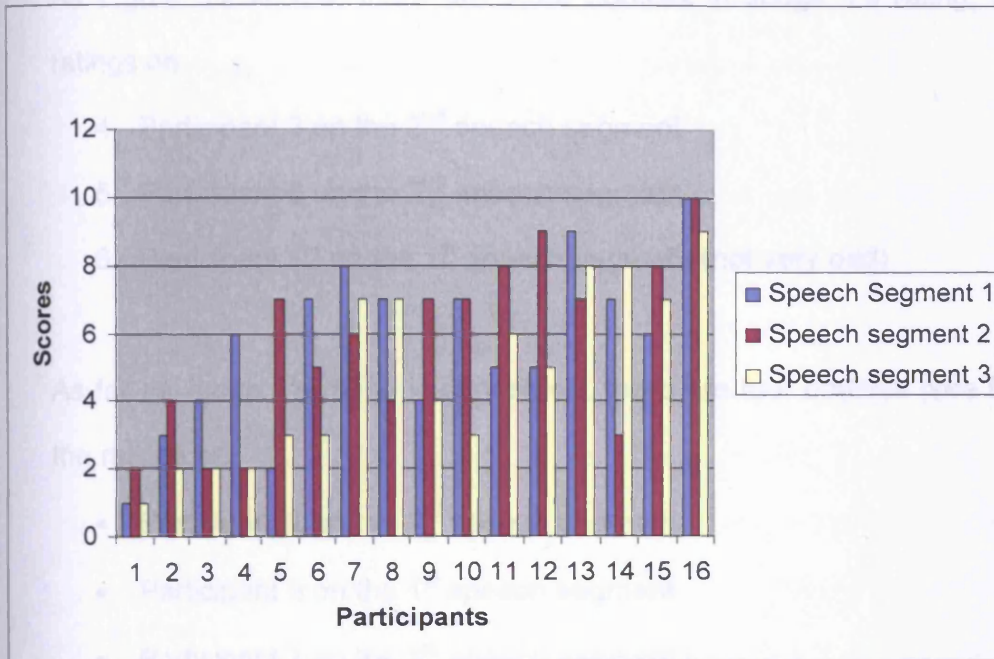
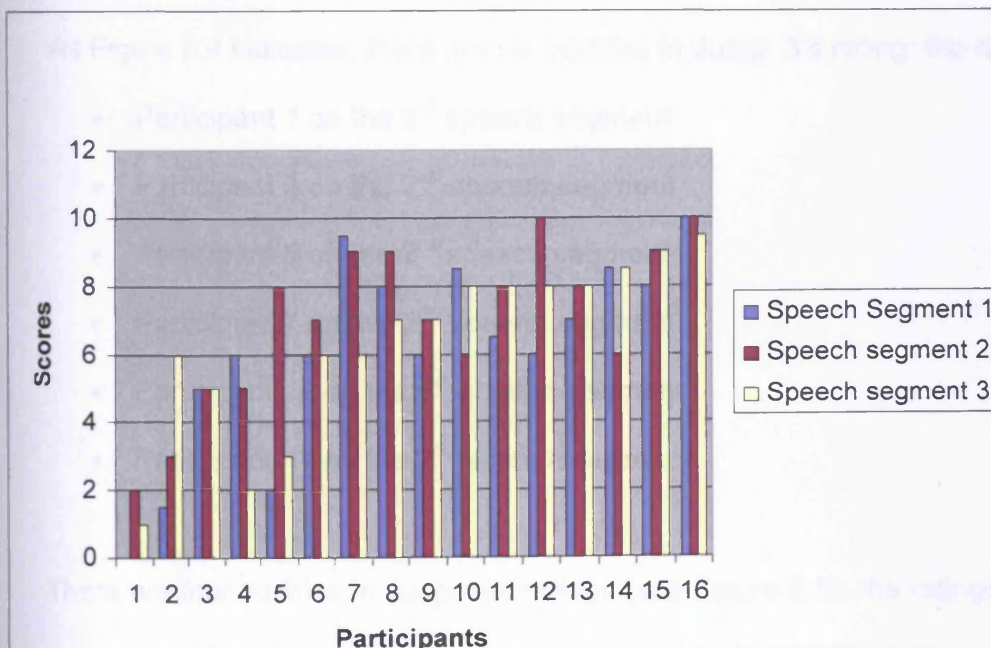


Figure 6.6 Judge 5's scores on each speech segment



As Figure 6.2 shows, there are three oddities in Judge 1's rating, that is, the ratings on

4. Participant 3 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment
5. Participant 8 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment.
6. Participant 12 on the 1<sup>st</sup> speech segment (not very odd)

As far as Judge 2's rating is concerned, there are four oddities (see Figure 6.3): the ratings on

- Participant 2 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment
- Participant 5 on the 1<sup>st</sup> speech segment
- Participant 7 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment
- Participant 10 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment

As Figure 6.4 indicates, there are six oddities in Judge 3's rating: the ratings on

- Participant 1 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment
- Participant 3 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment
- Participant 5 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment
- Participant 7 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment
- Participant 12 on the 1<sup>st</sup> speech segment
- Participant 14 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment

There are four oddities in Judge 4's ratings (see Figure 6.5): the ratings on

- Participant 4 on the 1<sup>st</sup> speech segment (not very odd)
- Participant 5 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment (not very odd)



- Participant 10 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment (not very odd)
- Participant 14 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment (not very odd)

As Figure 6.6 illustrates, there is only one oddity in Judge 5 ratings, that is, the rating on participant 5 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment.

If we assume that the three speech segments of each participant 'deserved' (see later discussion) equal judgements, we can see that, in general, Judge 5 is highly consistent in rating, with Judges 1 and 4 fairly consistent, while Judges 2 and 3 seem not to be very consistent. This observation is further confirmed through running Cronbach's alpha coefficient of different speech segments from each judge (see Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3 Cronbach's alpha coefficient results of different speech segments from each judge**

Judge 1	Judge 2	Judge 3	Judge 4	Judge 5
$\alpha=.803$	$\alpha=.413$	$\alpha=-.233$	$\alpha=.786$	$\alpha=.863$

To sum up, Judge 1 and 5 had high intra-rater reliability, while Judge 4's rating was fairly consistent. However, intra-rater reliability was found to be not very high for Judges 2 and 3. This therefore requires us to look further at different judges' rating on a same speech segment, to see whether this discrepancy among judges lay in the judges themselves or in the speech segments.

#### 6.4.2 Inter-rater reliability

Figures 6.6 to 6.8 present the ratings by all the judges from Speech Segments 1 to 3 respectively.

Figure 6.7 Judges' scores on the 1st speech segment

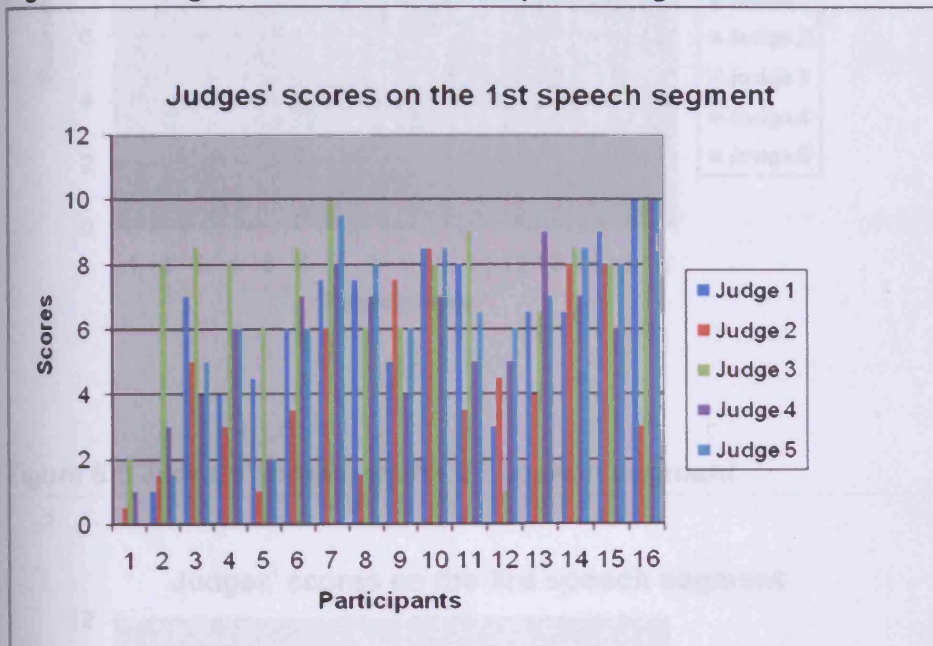


Figure 6.8 Judges' scores on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment

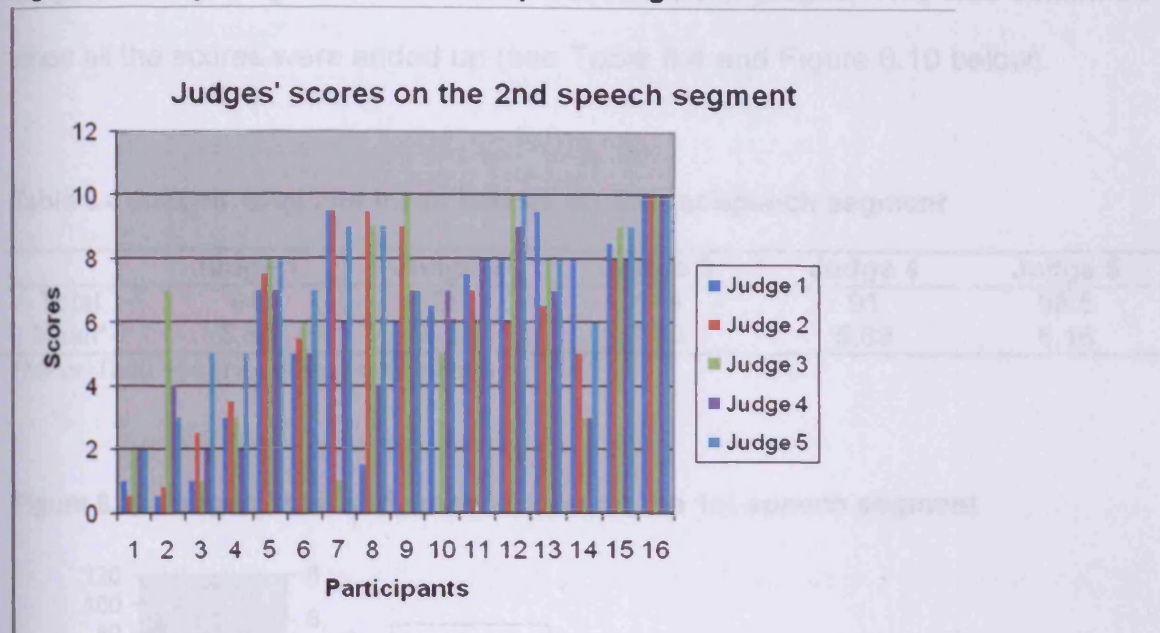
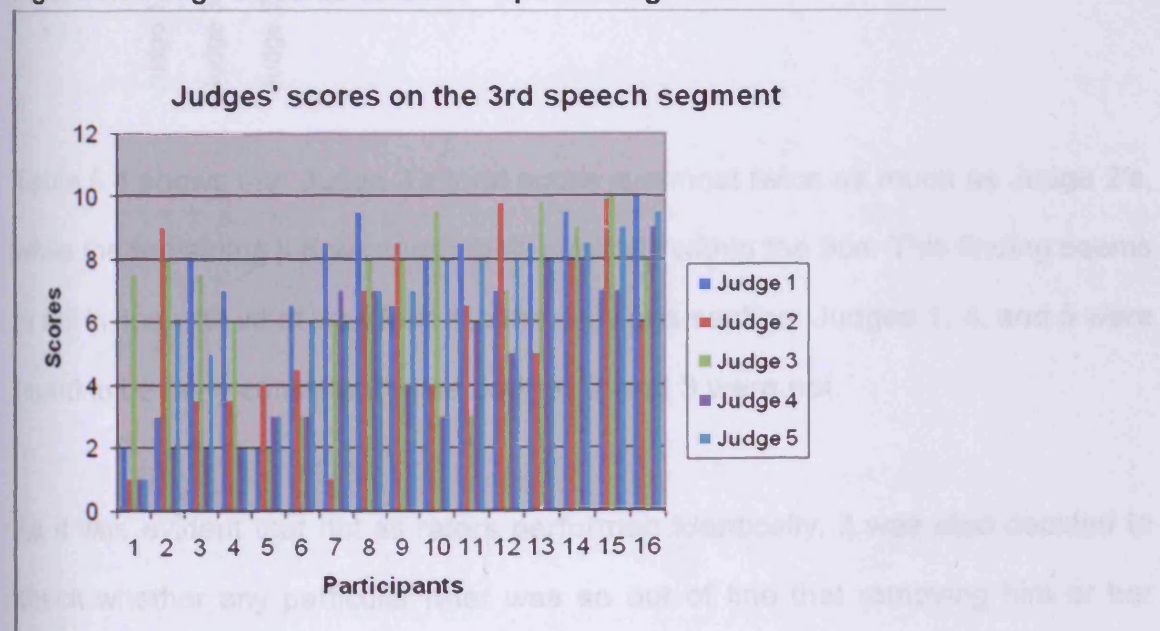


Figure 6.9 Judge's scores on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment



As far as the 1<sup>st</sup> speech segments are concerned, Figure 6.7 seems to indicate that Judge 3 tended to give higher scores than the other judges. In contrast,

Judge 2 tended to give lower scores than the other judges. This was confirmed when all the scores were added up (see Table 6.4 and Figure 6.10 below).

Table 6.4 Judges' total and mean scores on the 1st speech segment

	Judge 1	Judge 2	Judge 3	Judge 4	Judge 5
Total	94	69	114	91	98.5
Mean*	5.88	4.31	7.13	5.69	6.16

\*Mean=Total ÷16 (No. of the participants)

Figure 6.10 Judges' total and mean scores on the 1st speech segment

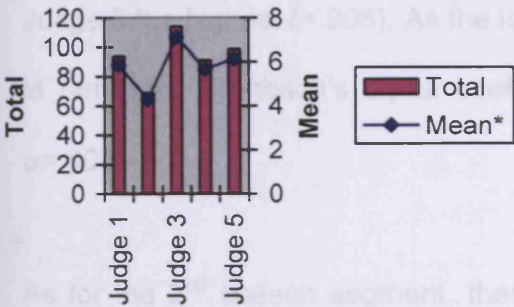


Table 6.4 shows that Judge 3's total score is almost twice as much as Judge 2's, while the remaining judges score fairly similarly within the 90s. This finding seems to fall in line with what was found in the previous section: Judges 1, 4, and 5 were found to be fairly consistent while Judges 2 and 3 were not.

As it was evident that not all raters performed identically, it was also decided to check whether any particular rater was so out of line that removing him or her would improve the reliability (see Tables 6.5, 6.7 and 6.9).

**Table 6.5 Cronbach's alpha coefficients between raters on the 1st speech segment**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
S1-J1	23.281	72.366	.854	.823
S1-J2	24.844	88.691	.510	.903
S1-J3	22.031	87.116	.579	.887
S1-J4	23.469	80.882	.767	.847
S1-J5	23.000	69.600	.905	.809

According to Table 6.5, Judge 2 has the lowest item total correlation ( $=.510$ ), with Judge 5 the highest ( $=.905$ ). As the last column of the table shows, when Judge 2 is removed, Cronbach's alpha coefficient will improve a little: from  $\alpha=.882$  to  $\alpha=.903$ .

As for the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment, there seems to be a fairly good match among judges' scores (see Figure 6.8), though Judge 3 still tended to rate slightly higher than the others, while Judge 2 tended to rate slightly lower than the others (Table 6.6). Meanwhile, Judge 5 tended to rate higher than all the other four judges on this segment.

**Table 6.6 Judges' total and mean scores on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment**

	Judge 1	Judge 2	Judge 3	Judge 4	Judge 5
Total	92.5	90.8	98	91	112
Mean	5.78	5.68	6.13	5.69	7.00

One possible explanation for the rather good consistency of the judgements on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment might be because this speech segment for each

participant was placed in the middle of the recordings. In other words, it is much less likely that a practice or ceiling effect was in operation.

Unsurprisingly, when Cronbach's alpha coefficients were run, as a whole a fairly high inter-rater reliability was found:  $\alpha=.883$  (see Table 6.7).

**Table 6.7 Cronbach's alpha coefficients between raters on the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
S2-J1	24.488	98.589	.678	.870
S2-J2	24.594	96.607	.714	.861
S2-J3	24.144	105.411	.579	.893
S2-J4	24.581	103.459	.844	.835
S2-J5	23.269	105.956	.889	.832

Furthermore, as seen in Table 6.7, this time it is Judge 3 (instead of Judge 2) who has the lowest item total correlation ( $=.579$ ), with Judge 5 the highest ( $=.889$ ). According to the last column of the table, when Judge 3 is removed, Cronbach's alpha coefficient will improve slightly: from  $\alpha=.883$  to  $\alpha=.893$ .

For the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment (see Figure 6.9), it seems that Judge 2 still tended to score less than the other judges while Judge 3 tended to score more highly. Moreover, as Figure 6.9 shows Judge 4 also tended to score less as well, even lower than Judge 2. This observation is confirmed when their total and mean scores are put together (see Table 6.8).



**Table 6.8 Judges' total and mean scores on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment**

	Judge 1	Judge 2	Judge 3	Judge 4	Judge 5
<b>Total</b>	111.5	91.2	112.3	77	102
<b>Mean</b>	6.97	5.70	7.02	4.81	6.38

Nevertheless, a close look at the Cronbach's alpha coefficients between raters on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment shows that a fairly high reliability was achieved:  $\alpha=.809$  (see Table 6.9).

**Table 6.9 Cronbach's alpha coefficients between raters on the 3<sup>rd</sup> speech segment**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
S3-J1	23.906	64.490	.605	.769
S3-J2	25.175	66.883	.440	.823
S3-J3	23.856	72.335	.413	.822
S3-J4	26.062	60.478	.697	.740
S3-J5	24.500	56.456	.873	.684

In Table 6.9, Judge 3 has the lowest item total correlation ( $=.413$ ), with Judge 5 the highest ( $=.873$ ). As the last column of the table shows, when Judge 3 is removed, Cronbach's alpha coefficient will improve a little: from  $\alpha=.809$  to  $\alpha=.822$ .

However, drawing together the results of Cronbach's alpha coefficients between raters on the the speech segments (Tables 6.5, 6.7 and 6.9), it seems that there is no need to remove any judge, since it is not always one particular judge who was always out of line.

To sum up, as a whole, the comparison between judges across different speech segments has shown a reasonable level of inter-rater reliability. In other words, a rather good inter-rater reliability was found, especially for the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment. What has limited the attainment of a very high inter-rater reliability, as revealed above, seems to be Judge 2's tendency to score lower than the other judges while Judge 3 tended to score more highly.

#### **6.4.3 Perceived nativelikeness profiles**

Having focused on the raters, so as to explore the reliability issue a bit further, let us now switch the focus onto the individual learners. First, we will look at some of the odd scores found among the individual learners' three speech segments across the five judges. The discussion below is not meant to address all the seemingly odd scores found in the individual learners. Rather, it is intended to suggest what the main reasons for causing those odd scores might be and how those odd scores could be interpreted. After exploring the reasons, we will look at the data in relation to its main purpose, that is, who was best and why.

One of the reasons for the odd scores might be simply the procedure of selecting speech segments. For example, if we look at the scores of the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment of Participant 3 (Tom) across different raters (see Figures 6.1- 6.5), they are all consistently low. In other words, Participant 3 was not doing well in the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment regardless of the rater reliability issue, although he seemed to do well in the other two segments. It could be argued that the inconsistent ratings for Participant 3 were due to this particular speech segment itself rather than to rater reliability. Listening to his three speech segments again confirmed that indeed



Participant 3 was not doing well in the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment, while in the other two segments he was doing rather well, being able to understand and answer the interview questions fairly well. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment, he was struggling with picking up a new word (a common fruit name in China and also a tested item embedded in the interview question), which required the researcher to repeat it a few times. Although he intended to copy the pronunciation of the word, he was not able to copy it very well. The fact that he did not know the common fruit name in China and his inability to pick it up in sound might have led him to be rated very low in this speech segment. In a way, this vindicates the pseudo-random selection of sections: it would have been very easy to bias the results by selecting the particular sections that most matched the researcher's own views about the speakers. Furthermore, looking at where in the sequence of recordings this segment occurred for the judges, it was in a little after halfway through. In other words, it seems very unlikely that the 'odd' scores were due to judgement practice or ceiling effect.

The other reason for the odd scores – and this could be the main reason – might be the raters' different judging criteria. Regarding the 2<sup>nd</sup> segment of Participant 8, a comparison with other judges shows that indeed he was given a remarkably low score (1.5) by Judge 1, as three other judges gave him 9.5, 9 and 9 respectively. However, listening to Judge 1's comment revealed that the judge felt that he would need to use gestures to communicate with Participant 8 because he seemed to require time to think and had lots of repetitions. This comment seemed to be quite similar to that of Judge 4, who only gave him the score of 4.

Nevertheless, Judge 4 also found that his pronunciation of individual words was pretty good and accurate. This seemed to result in more credit than he got from Judge 1. In other words, Participant 8's good pronunciation of individual words seemed be rewarded by some judges more so than others, in spite of his broken speech and repetitions. As mentioned earlier in Section 6.2, despite the fact that the judges were provided with criteria for making their judgements, it seems inevitable that judges subconsciously will use their own criteria anyway. The likelihood of this inevitable variation in criteria vindicates the researcher's inclusion of discussion with the judges, to shed light on their choices.

In summing up what has been discussed about intra-rater reliability and inter-rater reliability, it seems that in general a relatively good reliability ( $\alpha=.917$ ,  $N=15$ ), especially among Judges 1, 4 and 5 was found. Meanwhile, it indicates that Judge 2 tended to give lower scores than the others, while Judge 3 tended to give higher scores. This discrepancy, as discussed, seems to reveal either different emphasises for each judge (such as on the accuracy of pronouncing the individual words or on the actual comprehension itself) or the seemingly unavoidable question of variation in rater severity (Congdon and McQueen, 2000; Eckes, 2004). Nevertheless, since the discrepancies among judges were not very great, it was decided that a mean score of all the raters would be used for ranking the participants (see Table 6.10).

**Table 6.10 Average scores of the raters**

	Mean*	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	Total 1	Total 2	Total 3
<b>Paul</b>	1.57	0.70	1.50	2.50	3.50	7.50	12.50
<b>Faith</b>	3.89	3.00	3.06	5.60	15.00	15.30	28.00
<b>Sam</b>	4.27	5.40	3.30	4.10	27.00	16.50	20.50
<b>Frank</b>	4.47	3.10	7.50	2.80	15.50	37.50	14.00
<b>Tom</b>	4.47	5.90	2.30	5.20	29.50	11.50	26.00
<b>Mag</b>	5.50	6.20	5.70	4.60	31.00	28.50	23.00
<b>Lily</b>	6.50	8.10	4.90	6.50	40.50	24.50	32.50
<b>Sarah</b>	6.62	3.90	8.60	7.36	19.50	43.00	36.80
<b>Joan</b>	6.70	6.40	7.30	6.40	32.00	36.50	32.00
<b>Louise</b>	6.77	5.70	7.80	6.80	28.50	39.00	34.00
<b>Cain</b>	6.77	6.00	6.60	7.70	30.00	33.00	38.50
<b>Grace</b>	6.97	8.20	7.00	5.70	41.00	35.00	28.50
<b>Renate</b>	7.10	7.70	5.00	8.60	38.50	25.00	43.00
<b>Ann</b>	7.42	6.60	7.80	7.86	33.00	39.00	39.30
<b>Mac</b>	8.29	7.80	8.50	8.58	39.00	42.50	42.90
<b>Joy</b>	9.03	8.60	10.00	8.50	43.00	50.00	42.50

\*Mean=the mean score of all the average scores for each segment.

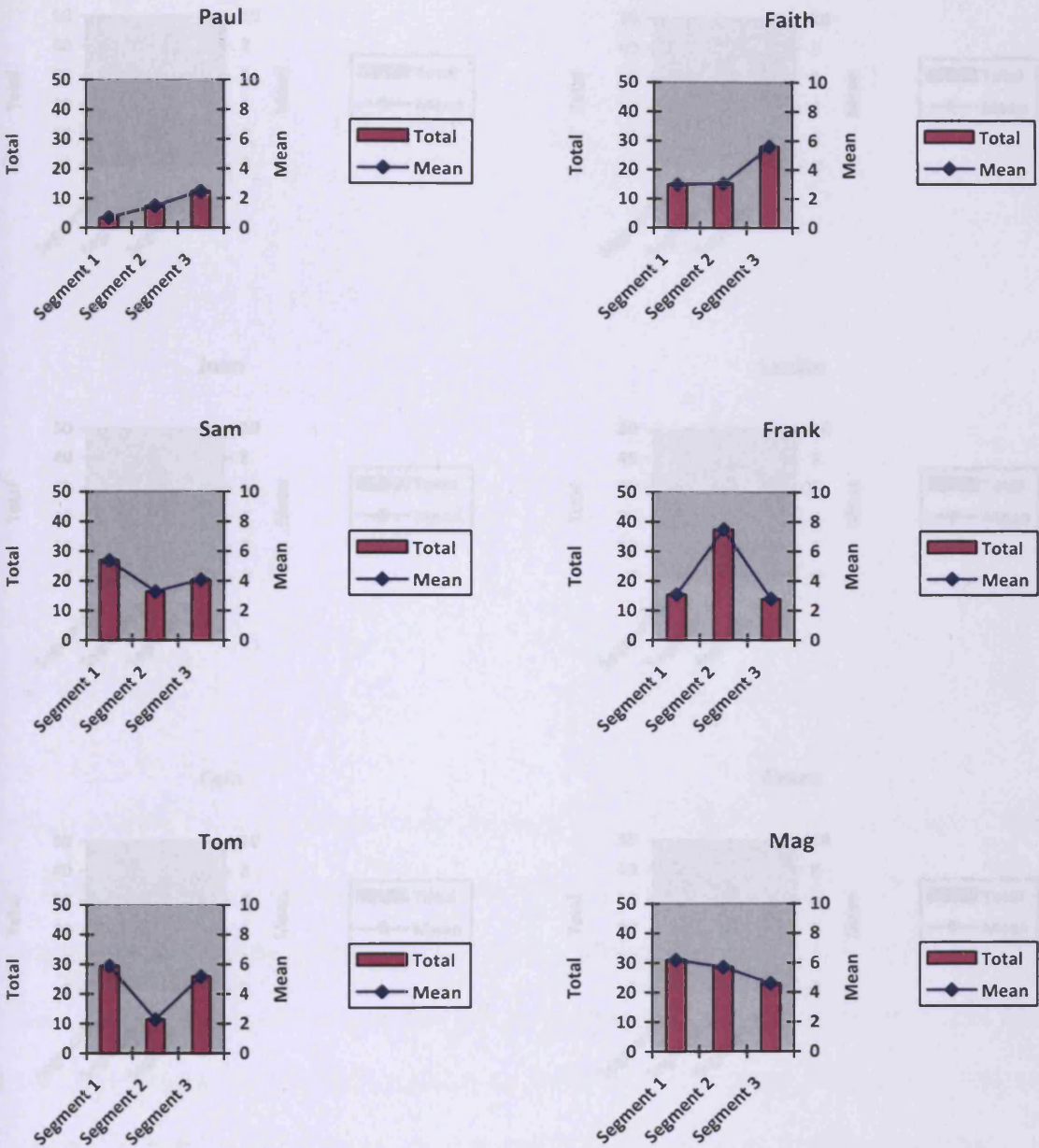
In order to explain the differences, for example, between Frank and Tom attaining the same mean of means (4.47) but having hugely different profiles, a Friedman test was run to attain the repeated measures of each participant's perceived

nativelikeness under different conditions (3 different speech segments, 5 different judges judging). The effect of different speech segments was found to be insignificant,  $\chi^2(2) = 0.60$ ;  $p = 0.74$ . However, the effect of different judges was found to be significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 19.12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ . And, the combination effect between speech segments and judges was found to be significant too,  $\chi^2(14) = 36.19$ ;  $p < 0.05$ . In other words, statistically these results indicate that the proficiency of each participant was rated differently by the different judges where a single speech segment was concerned. However, the raters seemed to be consistent in their rating differently across speech segments. Therefore, the combination of using different speech segments and judges, as captured by the mean in Table 6.10, still seems to be a good indicator of each participant's perceived nativelikeness *for now*.

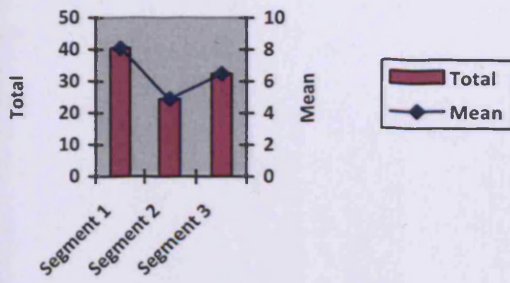
As indicated in Table 6.10, the raters' scores, if reliable, suggest that the oral proficiency of the learners varied, ranging from what we might take to be a low-intermediate level to an approximate nativelikeness.

More specially, as illustrated in Figure 6.11, each participant's proficiency profile was rather different.

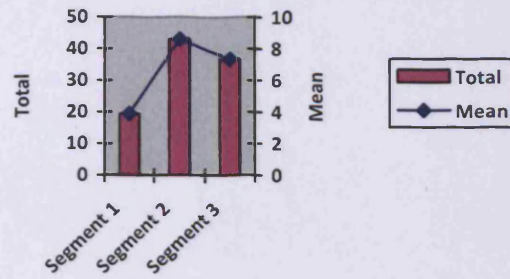
Figure 6.11 Each participant's total and mean scores of the three segments



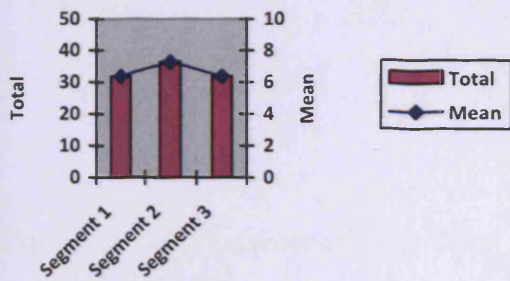
Lily



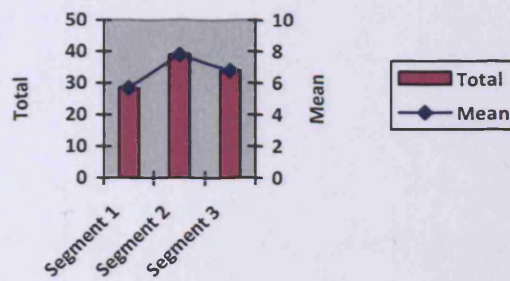
Sarah



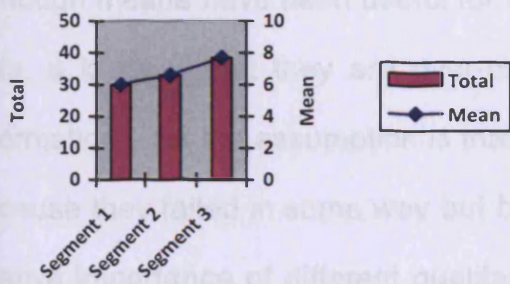
Joan



Louise



Cain



Grace

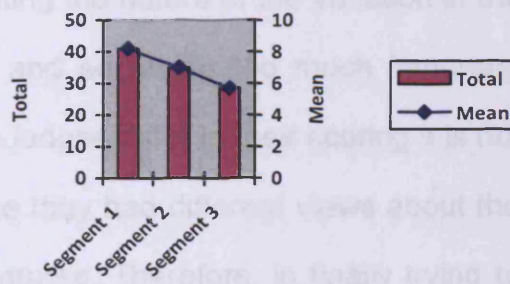
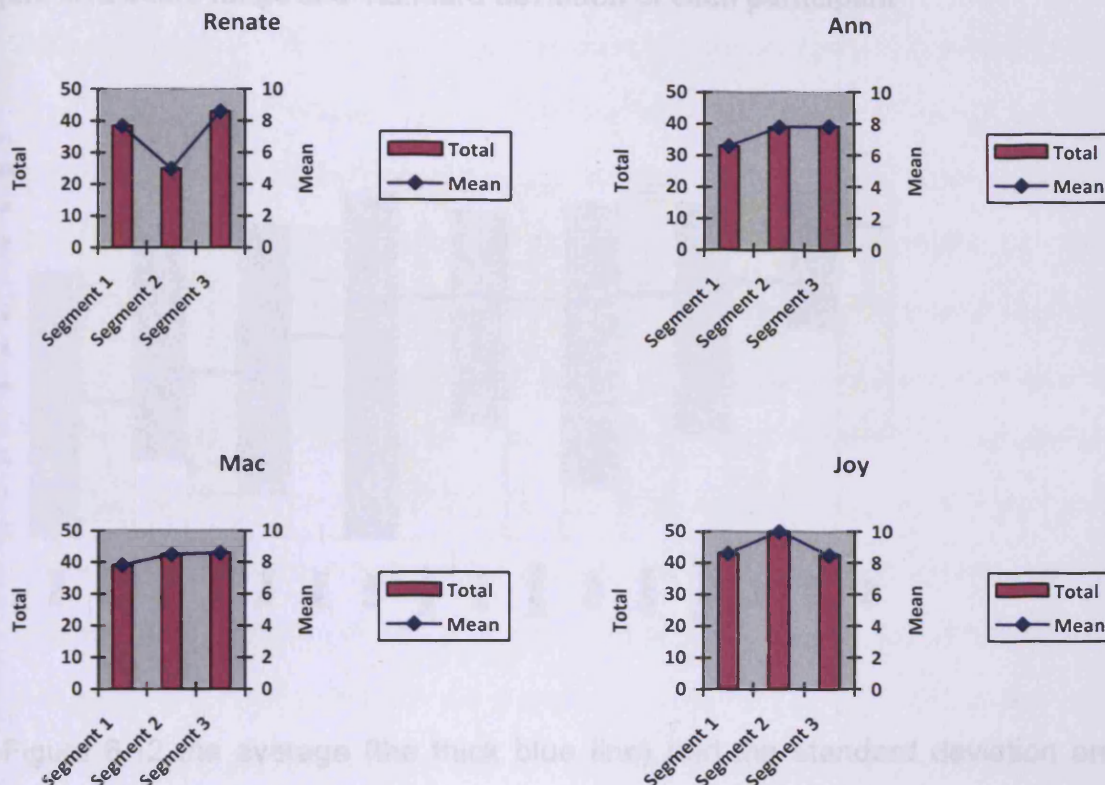




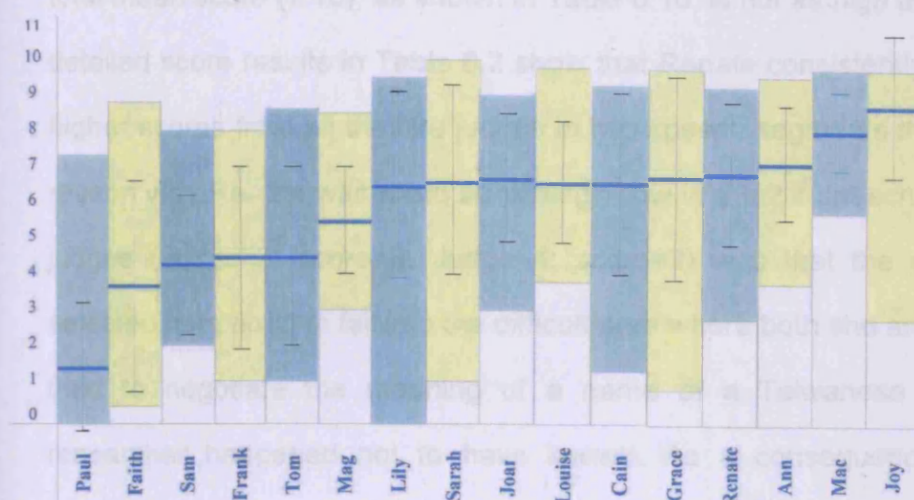
Figure 6.12 Score range and standard deviation of each participant



Although means have been useful for evaluating the nature of the variation in the data, it is clear that they are over-precise and set aside too much important information – for the assumption is that when judges differ in their scoring it is not because they failed in some way but because they had different views about the relative importance of different qualitative features. Therefore, in finally trying to establish the relative proficiency of the participants, it was decided to create a ranking.

In order to do the ranking, firstly, a graph of the score range and standard deviation of each participant was created (see Figure 6.12).

**Figure 6.12 Score range and standard deviation of each participant**



In Figure 6.12 the average (the thick blue line) and the standard deviation are plotted through the bars that mark the upper and lower range of the 15 scores that each participant received.

As seen in Figure 6.12, it still seems impossible to place exactly every person somewhere in the rank order, due to their different standard deviations and different means. Nevertheless, among them clearly Joy and Mac stood up as the best and Paul the worst. More specially, Joy was uniformly regarded by all raters as being close to a native speaker in Speech Segment 2. Some judges mentioned that her pronunciation of Mandarin was even more “standard” than theirs. In contrast, Paul was regarded by all the raters as “impossible to communicate with”. In between lie the majority of learners, who were viewed by the raters as being either “OK”, or, “possibly we can have a little conversation together” and so on.



Meanwhile, among all the westerners, Renate seemed to stand out. Although her total mean score (7.10), as shown in Table 6.10, is not as high as Ann (7.42), the detailed score results in Table 6.2 show that Renate consistently achieved much higher scores from all the five judges in two speech segments than Ann did. The reason why Renate was rated surprisingly low in the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech segment by two judges (Judge 3: score=3; Judge 4: score=3) was that the speech segment selected happened to fall into the difficult area where both she and the researcher tried to negotiate the meaning of a name of a Taiwanese fruit, which the researcher happened not to have known. As a consequence, there was a repetition and hesitation on her part. According to the verbal reports of the judges, this seemed to cause different reactions from them. Judge 1, based on the fact that the interlocutor of Renate did not need to slow down or provide support because of her seemingly 'disfluency', seemed to forgive her and still gave her a high score of 8. However, Judge 3, though tending to give higher scores than other judges did, did not forgive her repetition and hesitation, and neither did Judge 4. Nevertheless, as we can see, Renate still received two rather 'neutral' above-intermediate scores from the other two judges (5 and 6). Moreover, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, rather strikingly, Renate's speech throughout the whole interview was very nativelike, especially as far as formulaicity and fluency were concerned.

Drawing together the judges' ratings, their comments and the researchers' observation during the interview, in order to show a clear picture of who was best and who worst and where people lay in between, five categories of their likelihood

of being able to converse (i.e. low – fairly low – moderate – fairly high – high) were created (see Table 6.11).

**Table 6.11 Ranking of each participant**

Low	Fairly low	Moderate	Fairly high	High
Paul	Tom, Frank, Sam, Faith	Mag	Ann, Grace, Cain, Louise, Joan, Sarah, Dan*, Pete*, Lily	Joy, Mac, Renate

\*Due to the fact that Dan and Pete were not included inside the rating by the five Chinese judges, a rough ranking is given by mainly relying on the researcher's observation of their performance throughout the interview.

Each person in a category is arranged roughly from the highest to the lowest. For example, inside the category 'High', Joy is in front of Mac because her proficiency was higher than Mac, who in turn was higher than Renate. Nevertheless, there is not a clear-cut especially within the category 'Fairly High', where the global language command of each person was quite similar.

Clearly, the huge differences in all the participants' global speaking command as rated by native speakers of Chinese begs an explanation. Therefore, in the next chapter, we will look in more detail at what and how the participants learned.

Now that we have established the relative performance of the participants, it is time to see whether the predictions raised in Chapter 5 about their language achievement are borne out.

In Chapter 5, Renate and Joy were identified as being most likely to perform at an advanced level and Paul and Frank as least likely, with the others in between. Now, if we compare this prediction and the ranking of each participant in Table 6.11, then Joy and Renate were indeed two of the most advanced three and Paul and Frank two of the poorest three. In other words, those who achieved most in learning were, overall, those whose learning opportunities were closest to the ideals for the hypothesised criteria (see Chapter 9 for a detailed report of the findings in each criterion's predicting power, and also for the special case of Mac, who the criteria did not seem to pick up although he was doing well)

## **6.5 Summary**

This chapter has reported how nativelike the participants were, as perceived by native speakers who marked according to their confidence in conversing with the participants. This was carried out by initially considering the selection of raters and the development of rating criteria. After that, the intra-rater and inter-rater reliability was checked, before a detailed analysis of the rating results was given. Using the raters' scores, it was possible to rank the participants' spoken abilities along a continuum from being rather difficult to converse with, to being as easy to converse with as a native. The next step is to look at what it was about each person's language command that gave this impression. Specifically, in the light of the account in chapter 2 about the role of formulaic language in supporting fluency and providing access to nativelike turns of phrase, their formulaic language knowledge will be examined in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7 Formulaic Sequence Comprehension Ability**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In contrast to the rater experiment which focused on outsiders' judgements of the learners' conversational ability, this chapter examines how well learners were able to comprehend a native speaker's speech. This was achieved through a detailed analysis of the learners' comprehension of certain selected formulaic sequences and vocabulary items, which were embedded within the semi-structured interview questions, and delivered by the native speaker researcher (see Chapter 4). The analysis is based on a rating procedure, which will be explained. There are two parts to this explanation: the criteria used for rating and the way in which they were applied.

### **7.2 The selection of the rating criteria**

The objective was to ascertain the extent to which the participants had understood the formulaic sequences and colloquial words used during the interview. This was done in order to gain a clearer understanding of how study abroad had affected the learners' knowledge of formulaic language and also to ascertain whether their formulaic language knowledge was related to their general language ability. The rating criteria for the present investigation were

developed by taking into account the following two factors:

- The nature of the interview itself
- The nature of formulaic sequences

As described in Chapter 4, the interview was based on a discussion of the learner's own learning experience in China. Clearly, an interview only works if the interviewee understands the questions. In an interview about one's experiences, the focus is on the content of the answers. The language of the interview can become a means for delivering information rather than, as in many listening comprehension tests (Buck, 2001; Rost, 2002), being the focus itself. This tends to encourage the interviewee to take measures to avoid being caught out by unknown vocabulary and expressions. Therefore, material that they might not know and which could not be easily worked out otherwise (i.e. due to the nature of formulaic sequences) was inserted into the input, in order to find out how unknown material would be handled. As it was intended to check understanding of the embedded items, the learners' understanding of the testing items was double checked (by explicitly asking what it meant), in case the learners appeared to understand the question and then carried on with the conversation.

Being aware of the complex aspects of listening comprehension, a holistic assessment approach seemed to be best suited to the present investigation.

Due to the fact that a scale of five levels is typically used in holistic assessment (Rost, 2002:182), a five-point rating scale was created:

- '5': if an item was understood at once;
- '4': if
  - an item was understood after repetition (i.e. 4a); or
  - the item was not known, but the meaning was guessed immediately from the context (i.e. 4b);
- '3': if an item was understood after repetition and paraphrase, and was used immediately;
- '2': if
  - an item was understood after repetition and paraphrase, but was not<sup>44</sup> used immediately (i.e. 2a); or,
  - an item was understood after repetition, paraphrase and further explanation in English, and was then used immediately (i.e. 2b);
- '1': if an item was understood after repetition, paraphrase and further explanation in English, but was not used immediately;
- '0': if an item was still not understood even after support from the researcher.

As seen above, the rating criteria took into account not only the learners' linguistic knowledge but also their listening skills and strategies. For example, if a learner were able to use the context to infer its correct meaning even though he/she did not know the specific testing item, then he/she would still be credited with an ability to use 'schematic knowledge' (a suggestion made by Anderson and Lynch, 1988:80-94). This also involves less effort from

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<sup>44</sup> Here "not using" means that they did not use the testing item in the discussion following, when the opportunity occurred. Instead, they used the paraphrased item.

interlocutors, since they do not need to go through either repetition, paraphrase, and so on, in order to get their meaning across. Most importantly, it may increase the chance that a speaker will be perceived, and/or treated, as nativelike (recalling the dynamic nature within the RN Model, see Figure 2.7). Meanwhile, the ability to pick up a 'new' input straightaway was taken as a good sign of phonological decoding ability (recalling Wray's proposal on the three conditions for reaching natelikeness). Consequently, this was also credited towards their listening comprehension ability.

Nevertheless, as can be seen from this five-point scale, both points 3 and 4 seem to require very similar comprehension ability. The scale therefore does not claim to have equal intervals. However, there is an overarching continuum implied, that reflects the effective handling of one's knowledge and its limitations – something that native speakers also have to do. Thus, the intention of the scale is that getting a 5 entails a more nativelike response than a 4, with a gradual transition from what one does when one knows something, to how one copes successfully with not knowing something.

Each participant's comprehension of the embedded test items was rated in accordance with this scale, with each person being given a separate score for each formulaic item.

### **7.3 Analysis procedure**

The researcher listened to each interview at least three times for the purposes of applying the rating criteria. The first time was used to form an holistic impression of the interviewee's comprehension ability. It also enabled the researcher to gauge the flow of the whole interview (i.e. the context of the testing items). This formed the foundation for the second hearing, which enabled the researcher to focus on the specific testing items and to score them according to the rating criteria. The third time was used to double check the reliability of the rating.

### **7.4 Results**

A table of scores was generated (see Table 7.1; for illustrations of the specific testing items, see Section 4.4.2.2 in Chapter 4). Two of the participants (Jim and Pete) were part of the pilot testing (see Chapter 4) and contributed much useful information for refining the interview topics, such as suggesting the topics of traffic and the weather. As the interviews with them did not cover the same test items as those used for the other participants, it was decided that their interviews would be excluded from this stage of formulaic sequence analysis.



**Table 7.1 Scores for each selected formulaic sequences**

	走走	交通	适不适应	气候	暖气	空调	超市	市场	榴莲	菜系	民以食为天	餐桌(上的)礼仪	课外活动/课余时间	跟.....走得近	收获	建议
	<i>Travel around</i>	<i>Traffic</i>	<i>get used to</i>	<i>climate</i>	<i>heating</i>	<i>air conditioner</i>	<i>super-market</i>	<i>market</i>	<i>durian</i>	<i>cuisines</i>	<i>people regard food as the prime need</i>	<i>table manners</i>	<i>Extracurricular activities or spare-time</i>	<i>be close to somebody</i>	<i>Achievement</i>	<i>give somebody some suggestion or advice</i>
Paul	2a	2b	2a	2a	5	5	1	1	*	1	0	5	1	2b	1	1
Faith	2a	3	3	5	5	5	4a	4a	*	3	0	1	1	1	1	5
Dan	3	2a+	5	2a+	5	5	5	5	*	3	*	*	*	2a+	5	5
Mag	3	2b	2a	5	5	5	5	5	1	3	2a	2a	2a	3	1	5
Cain	4b+	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	1	2a	5	2a	5	*	2b+	5
Cat	4b+	5	3	5	3	5	5	5	2a	3	*	4b+	2a	*	1	*
Grace	4b	1	3	3	5	3	5	5	1	*	*	2a	4a	3	3+	5
Joan	4b+	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	4a	5	3	4a	4a	5	5
Sam	4a	5	2a	3	5	5	4a	5	2a	2a	2a	3	2a	4b	3	5
Tom	4a	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	2a	2a	0	1	*	2a	1	4a+
Ann	5	2b	4b	5	5	5	5	5	2a	2a	5	3	5	5	4a	5
Joy	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4b	5	5	5	2a	5	5
Lily	5	5	5	4a	5	5	5	5	5	2a	5	5	5	2b+	5	5
Louise	5	5	3	5	4a	5	5	5	*	4a	1	1	5	2b+	2a+	5
Mac	5	5	4a	5	5	5	5	5	*	5	5	5	4a	5	5	5
Renate	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	2a	4b	5	4b	5	2a+	2a+	5
Sarah	5	5	4a	5	5	5	5	5	2a	5	*	5	5	4a	5	5
Frank	*	5	5	5	5	3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	2b+	*	3

Note: "\*" means that the item was not explicitly asked, due to the flow of the conversation or to the relevance of individual experience  
 "+." means that the participant took the initiative to ask for meaning if they could not understand the sequence.

As the five-point rating scale did not have equal intervals, mean scores were not used to compare learners' comprehension ability. A frequency score for each person was employed instead (see Table 7.2 below).

**Table 7.2 Formulaic sequence frequency score for each participant**

	5	4a	4b	3	2a	2b	1	0	Total items tested	Total already known	% already known
<b>Paul</b>	3	0	0	0	3	2	6	1	15	3	20
<b>Grace</b>	4	1	1	5	1	0	2	0	14	5	36
<b>Mag</b>	6	0	0	3	4	1	2	0	16	6	38
<b>Cat</b>	5	0	2	3	2	0	1	0	13	5	38
<b>Faith</b>	4	2	0	3	1	0	4	1	15	6	40
<b>Sam</b>	5	2	1	3	5	0	0	0	16	7	44
<b>Tom</b>	6	2	0	1	3	0	2	1	15	8	53
<b>Cain</b>	8	0	1	2	2	1	1	0	15	8	53
<b>Frank</b>	4	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	7	4	57
<b>Dan</b>	7	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	12	7	58
<b>Louise</b>	8	2	0	1	1	1	2	0	15	10	67
<b>Ann</b>	10	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	16	11	69
<b>Renate</b>	11	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	16	11	69
<b>Joan</b>	10	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	16	13	81
<b>Lily</b>	13	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	16	14	88
<b>Joy</b>	14	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	16	14	88
<b>Sarah</b>	12	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	15	14	93
<b>Mac</b>	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	100

Notes: 1. 'Total already known' refers to the total number of testing items which the participants had already known (i.e. =No. of '5' + No. of '4a'). For example, Paul scored 3 on '5' and 0 on '4a', so his 'Total already known' is 3.

2. '% already known' refers to the number of 'Total already known' divided by 'Total items tested'. For example, Paul scored 3 on 'Total already known' and he was tested on 15 items, so his '% already known' is 20% (=3/15).

Thus, the '5' and '4a' scores indicate their proficiency (knowledge of the test items) and the rest display their preferences for handling what was unknown

For example, with the formulaic sequences '跟.....走得近 (be close with someone)', the researcher would ask '你跟他们走得近 (were you close with them)?'. If the reply was '很近(very close)', it immediately showed that they already knew the sequence. Therefore, the person would get '5' for the tested item.

If, however, the person did not seem to understand the question and asked the researcher to repeat it, and then immediately after the question was repeated, he/she replied with an appropriate answer such as '挺近的 (rather close)', then he/she would be credited with '4a'. However, if the answer was something like '不近 (a non-nativelike combination of 'not close')', it showed that the person could guess the meaning from the context but probably did not know the item. The researcher would then explicitly ask whether the person had known the item before and would ask him/her for the meaning. Consequently, a '4a' or '4b' would be credited to the person.

If the person did not understand the item after repetition, the researcher would paraphrase it by saying '你和他们的关系很亲近吗(were you having a close relationship)?'. If the person understood it now and provided an appropriate answer such as '是的.我们走得很近 (Yes, we were very close)', then he/she would be credited with '3'. However, if the answer was just '是的 (Yes)', the person would be given '2a'. If the person still could not answer after the

paraphrase, the researcher would say it in English directly 'were you close with them?'. If the person then replied with an appropriate answer, such as '是的.我们走得很近' (Yes, we were very close)', then '2b' would be given to the person. '1' would be given, if the answer was just '是的' or '我明白了' (I understand now). '0' would be given, if the person still failed to understand the tested item after all the support provided by the researcher.

In order to have a complete picture of learners' language outcomes, the results of the learners' perceived nativelikeness and their formulaic sequence comprehensibility were put together. Statistically it showed a significant Spearman correlation 0.746 ( $p < 0.01$ ) between the mean scores of all the speech segments and their '5' and '4a' scores of formulaic sequences tested,

In other words, each participant's comprehension ability was significantly correlated with their perceived nativelikeness. Is this correlation surprising? No. Comprehension and production levels should be linked in some way after a year abroad. This finding seems to confirm the correlation found between second language (L2) proficiency and L2 listening comprehension in Vandergrift (2006). However, there could be a second reason, if the judges heard some of the same formulaic material being handled – the researcher and they were probably judging something rather similar. The relation between overall language command and formulaic language comprehension ability will

be addressed in the next chapter.

## **7.5 Summary**

This chapter has reported the comprehension ability rating of the targeted formulaic sequences and colloquial word items. A comparison between the scores of the participants' perceived nativelikeness and that of their formulaic language comprehension ability was made. There was a significant correlation between the two.

The next step will be to draw together all the findings (both how learners fulfilled the five hypothesised conditions and the degree of nativelikeness that they reached) and unfold the relationship between the two. This will be carried out in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 8 The ideal and the reality meet – How to overcome barriers to reach nativelikeness**

### **8.1 Introduction**

It was proposed in Chapter 2 that successful adult L2 learning needs to meet at least the following five conditions in order to overcome the barriers to nativelikeness,:

- Condition 1: An intention to reach nativelikeness (Intention)
- Condition 2: An adaptive capacity to identify with the L2 native group (L2-oriented identification)
- Condition 3: A guaranteed on-going supply of 'ideal' input (Ideal-input)
- Condition 4: An appropriate type of attention to the input (Attention-to-input)
- Condition 5: An appropriate type of attention to the output (Attention-to-output)

The results in Chapters 6 and 7 show that Joy (among all the ethnic Chinese) and Renate (among all the westerners) seemed to stand out. They even seemed able to pass themselves off as nativelike at certain points, especially Joy. Since the focus of this thesis is on nativelikeness, the discussion in this chapter will centre on those two learners, as well as Clea from Chapter 1, with

the remaining learners used for comparison, so as to illustrate their success.

Drawing together the analysis from Chapters 5, 6 and 7, this chapter will focus on answering the following questions:

- **Nativelike-intention question:** Did the nativelike learners have the intention of producing nativelike output?
- **L2-oriented identification questions:** To what extent did the nativelike learners identify with the L2 group? To what extent did their level of identification match the ideal for an L2 speaker to adopt? What were the consequences of the discrepancy between the two?
- **Ideal-input questions:** What kind of input was supplied to the nativelike learners? To what extent did the input match the ideal input? What were the supposed consequences of the discrepancy between the ideal input and the real input?
- **Attention-to-input questions:** What kind of attention was applied to their input by the nativelike learners? How did their patterns of attention relate to the claims made by N. Ellis in regard to explicit conscious attention, and Wray in regard to needs-only-analysis?
- **Attention-to-output questions:** What kind of attention was applied to their output by the nativelike learners? How did their patterns of attention relate to the claims made by N. Ellis in regard to explicit conscious attention, and Wray in regard to needs-only-analysis?

## **8.2 Nativelike-intention question**

*Did the nativelylike learners have the intention of producing nativelylike output?*

Both Renate and Joy's answers to this question seem to be rather simple, that is, yes. However, a close look reveals a qualitative difference in their nativelylike intentions.

### **8.2.1 Renate – On a near-native speaker level**

When asked in the questionnaire whether she would like to speak Mandarin like a native speaker, her answer was "Of course". And, her answer to the kind of native speaker that she wanted to sound like, was "a sophisticated native speaker with a clear and neutral pronunciation (not with [a] local accent like in Beijing)". During the interview however, when asked whether she would like to sound like a native speaker, her answer was: "It is my aim, but I know I would never reach it". Furthermore, when she was asked during the interview about her attitude towards accents, she answered:

As long as I understand it, as long as my accent is not too bad, that'd be all right.

Nevertheless, the above seeming conflicts between ideal and reality seem to closely match her 'realistic' Mandarin learning aim. In response to the prompt "I want to speak Mandarin well enough to", she wrote, "communicate effectively with native speakers on a near-native speaker level". In other words, this may not be a conflict, but the key to being able to stick with it. Unreasonably high



expectations can backfire, if one never feels that one has achieved anything good enough.

It seems that for Renate, as with most of the adult learners, what mattered to her the most was the communication itself – understanding input and producing comprehensible output. Chapter 2 suggests that Renate would be likely to fail to pay attention to input and output if she was so focussed on communication, but clearly that cannot have been the case. One of the possibilities could be that she had different attention at different times in her learning, so she might first get fluent and then pay attention to the details of form. Or, she focussed on communication during interaction and checked things out later to see how she could have said them better. We will come to her actual attention to input and output in Sections 8.5 and 8.6.

### **8.2.2 Joy – The Premier of China’s translator**

When asked whether she would like to speak Mandarin like a native speaker, Joy’s answer was “Yes”. And, her answer to the kind of native speaker that she wanted to sound like was “Probably like a newsreader”. In other words, Joy was very specific about the kind of nativelikeness that she wanted to achieve as opposed to that of most of her coursemates, who simply had a very general wish, such as “like a well educated native speaker” (see Chapter 5). Moreover, her answer to the question “I want to speak Mandarin well enough to...” “be

the Premier of China's translator" reveals that Joy's aim was not just simply to be a nativelike or near-nativelike speaker, but rather more ambitiously, to be 'super'-nativelike – linguistically more skilled than native speakers of Chinese. Below we will see how her nativelike intention actually affected the other aspects of her learning.

### **8.3 Questions of L2-oriented identification**

In this section the following three questions will be addressed in sequence:

- *To what extent did the nativelike learners identify with the L2 group?*
- *To what extent did their level of identification match the ideal for an L2 speaker to adopt?*
- *What were the consequences of the discrepancy between the two?*

In addressing these questions in sequence, we will first focus on Renate and then move onto Joy. At the end of this section, a brief comparison between Renate and Joy in relation to each question will be given.

#### **8.3.1 Renate: Becoming cosmopolitan**

As discussed in Chapter 2, an 'ideal' sense of identity is hypothesised as being open/adaptive towards the L2 native group. A close look at Renate's orientation towards Chinese culture reveals that she was prepared to have and indeed did show great interest in it. She liked to have Chinese friends, and as

discussed above, she managed to maintain an active relationship with them.

However, her focus seemed to be very different from the other Leeds students:

I like to use them [languages]. I just like to use them. They are like the gateway to the world. If you could only speak your own mother tongue then you would never be able to go out. That is the first step to learning other cultures, becoming more cosmopolitan.

Learning about Chinese culture as well as other cultures, was part of her perception of being cosmopolitan. In other words, instead of identifying herself with any particular culture, she identified with all cultures, including Chinese culture, and saw them as windows to view the whole world.

Perhaps her cosmopolitan identity was best reflected in the way that she viewed study abroad. For Renate, studying abroad was the best and most important way to learn a language. She had tried several ways of studying abroad for her different language learning:

- Home stay during a summer programme for French learning in France for 5-6 weeks in 2001
- Staying in a dormitory with other foreign language students during a summer programme for Spanish learning in Spain for 2 months in 2003
- Living with local Chinese people during her Leeds BA course for Mandarin learning in Taiwan for one year from 2004 to 2005

Her conclusion was that the best way to study abroad was to stay with a local family where the parents would take the initiative in helping learners to learn the language (cf. Pellegrino, 2005, for the difficulties that learners have on interacting with their host families), such as with her stay in France when she

was younger. However, according to Renate, it may be better for a university student to live with their peers among the local people, where they can both practise the language and enjoy freedom as an adult.

Based on the information on Renate's ability to identify with the L2 group here (see also Section 8.4 on how she interacted with local people in China), it seems that she had fulfilled this condition in that she appeared to be open to Chinese culture. Nevertheless, she seemed to remain at a distance from the L2 culture/group. In other words, unlike Clea, who strongly desired to be liked/accepted and therefore seemed to have integrated well with the local people, Renate appeared to remain as she was – a foreigner who studied the local language. This seemed to have a great impact on the way that she interacted with local people. For example, as revealed in Section 8.4, instead of engaging in Chinese pastimes (e.g. films, theatre, books), she spent most of her spare time alone surfing. She was treated as a foreigner and provided with 'foreigner talk' input and she was happy to be like that. So again, we must ask, how come she did so well?

### **8.3.2 Joy: Having Chinese identity as well as British identity**

Unlike either of her Chinese coursemates (Lily and Mac) or her Western coursemates (see Chapter 5), Joy identified with two distinct groups. On the one hand, she was actually a British born Chinese, growing up in the UK. On

the other hand, in appearance she looked just like a Chinese person and also she perceived herself as being Chinese rather than British.

The direct consequence of this balance of identities meant that every time she encountered a Chinese and tried to speak in Mandarin, there was both a need for her to explain her life history and also an evocation of her self-consciousness. Repeatedly narrativising the reason for being a Chinese yet having such poor Mandarin, eventually she discovered a good way of telling her story in “a most simple and easy way”, namely, saying that she was from Hong Kong. As far as she knew, people from Hong Kong spoke very poor Mandarin. Besides, her parents were originally from Hong Kong. The Chinese would immediately reply, “I see, I see”. It saved Joy lots of trouble in explaining and yet gave her a legitimate identity within China.

However, Joy also experienced some negative consequences of her different identities, with self-consciousness having some impact. During her first year in Leeds, due to this self-awareness, she felt too shy (or even too afraid) to seek out a Chinese language partner:

我有点怕(.)他们。因为，也许是这个问题 — 我好像中国人。去问他们，他们可能会觉得我很奇怪：“为什么要问我啊(.)做那个语言伙伴？！(Translated: *I was a bit afraid of them. Because, maybe this was the problem – I look like a Chinese. If I went and asked them, they probably would have felt that I was very weird, saying “why do you ask me to be your language partner?”*).

This shyness or fear was still with her during the first semester in China. As mentioned later in Section 8.4, she felt very weird when speaking more slowly than a normal Chinese would speak. Yet her experience was also very different from that of her western coursemates, who had the easy excuse of being, and looking, foreign.

Nevertheless, it seemed to be exactly this self-awareness that pushed her to achieve such good progress in the end. Again and again her identity was challenged and many Chinese people proclaimed that she was not Chinese, because she could not speak Chinese well. She was sad and felt ashamed, determined to speak Mandarin well:

我觉得我是中国人，应该学好汉语……我跟妈妈说。妈妈说，我当然是中国人。你是黑头发，黄色皮肤的 (Translated: *I am Chinese, and I should learn to speak Mandarin well... I told mum. Mum said, of course I am Chinese – I have got black hair and yellow skin.*)

After being in China for three months, she was gradually able to overcome her fears and concerns, and started to seek out every opportunity to practise her Mandarin.

Conversely, as will be discussed in Section 8.4, Joy still spent the majority of her spare time with her Leeds coursemates speaking in English. This, according to Joy, was because they had been speaking English ever since they knew each other and it would be very odd if they suddenly changed to

Mandarin. Only when there were Koreans around, would they switch to Mandarin, since the Koreans' English was not good enough for them to have a proper conversation in English.

In other words, Joy seemed to have diverse needs. On the one hand, she wanted to improve her Mandarin so as to build up her Chinese identity. On the other hand, she also needed to maintain her British identity (at least to the extent of spending time with her British peers).

There was also another layer to Joy's identity – she was also Cantonese.. Joy described the first time, after having been in China for three months, that she was able to speak Cantonese, her L1, the language she used at home in the UK; it was when she met Mac, who studied in Beijing University<sup>45</sup>. When they were both speaking with each other in Cantonese (their L1), she felt Cantonese was very dear to her. Later on during her stay in China, her Cantonese friends, whom she had got to know in the UK but was back in China, came to visit her and some of them even happened to live in Beijing. She would go out with them once or twice a week. Now that she was back in the UK, she had even more Cantonese friends (most of them were from Hong Kong). With them she would speak Cantonese, even though most of them could speak English very well. The reason why Joy and her Cantonese friends

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<sup>45</sup> Mac was the only Leeds student who spent his year abroad in Beijing University while the rest of the Leeds students in Beijing went to Capital Normal University.

preferred speaking in Cantonese rather than English, was, according to Joy, that, after all, they were all Chinese.

Nonetheless, as far as her Mandarin learning was concerned and seeing that her Mandarin was deteriorating after her return to the UK, she immediately found two language partners through the language centre at Leeds University. This time it did not seem to matter so much to her, that she was asking Chinese partners to help her Chinese. What mattered to her now was maintaining her current level of Mandarin:

It's more difficult in Leeds as we are not in a Mandarin speaking environment. My level of Mandarin is deteriorating, because it's not used frequently. We have to make more individual effort to maintain the same level of Mandarin compared to in China.

To sum up the discussion in this section, Renate and Joy's different capacities to identify with the L2 group affected them differently, both in a direct way and in a more profound way. More specifically, as hypothesised in Chapter 2, the extent of their identification with the L2 group affected the extent to which they perceived themselves as being nativelike and the way that they behaved relative to a native speaker (Layer 4 and Layer 5, from their own perspectives). Moreover, it also affected the way native speakers treated them (Layer 4 and Layer 5, from their interlocutors' perspectives). In other words, they seemed to have different routes to different goals, especially in so far as accented speech was concerned. Joy, as mentioned in Section 8.3, tried to be more than just



like a native speaker and she managed to hide her Cantonese accent, while Renate tried to approach sounding nearly nativelike and did not pay so much attention in hiding her mother tongue accent. Their different routes to their different goals will become clearer later.

#### **8.4 Ideal-input questions**

As discussed in Chapter 3, an 'ideal' input is hypothesised as input meeting the following criteria:

- **Comprehensible:** A gradual unfolding of input, which is comprehensible within the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD: the distance between 'the actual development level' and the 'potential development level')
- **Authentic:** Functional language use in real life
- **Interactive:** Requiring certain reaction, namely, producing online output
- **Abundant:** Plenty of recurring similar situations
- **Rich:** various situations

In this section we will examine these criteria through answering the following three questions:

- *What kind of input was supplied to the nativelike learners?*
- *To what extent did the input match the 'ideal' input?*
- *What are the supposed consequences of the discrepancy between ideal input and real input?*

As with the previous section, we will first focus on Renate in examining each aspect of the input criteria and then move on to Joy. We will make the comparison between Renate and Joy in relation to each question at the end of the section.

#### **8.4.1 Renate**

Like most of the study abroad students, Renate, to a certain extent, was thrown into the sea of input. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, as far as comprehensibility is concerned, Renate seemed to manage to turn the surrounding incomprehensible input into comprehensible input within her zone of proximal development. In a similar way to Clea's learning English in the UK (see Chapter 1), Renate had some Chinese friends (her housemates in Taiwan) who were very supportive in her language learning. At the beginning of her stay, they slowed down their speech so as to adjust to her understanding. They also gave Renate very helpful corrective feedback, which she felt changed her learning beliefs in relation to producing language output (see Section 8.6). They were always there as Renate's live dictionary/textbook, and were a resource which Renate often used (see the later discussion).

In contrast to Clea's case (recalling the immense stress that Clea had when conducting transactions in her first year abroad), Renate's Chinese friends

took her to do daily shopping at the beginning of her stay and showed her around Taipei (the city where Renate did her study abroad programme)<sup>46</sup>. This was very helpful to Renate, although she still felt very shy at the beginning. However, as she stated in the questionnaire, “the better my Chinese got, the more confidently I made transactions”. Nevertheless, one needs to be cautious when interpreting the help that Renate’s housemates gave her in the beginning of her stay. As Renate mentioned, their English was poor and Renate’s command of Mandarin was very limited. In other words, their communication was quite difficult initially, according to Renate. However, it might be just the difficulties they had in communication that actually pushed both parties to ensure that Renate eventually was able to express herself in Mandarin. Putting it another way, on the one hand, English was not an option for Renate’s housemates, at least from the perspective that their English was not good enough to make speaking in English ‘a much easier job’ than in Mandarin. This was very different from the case mentioned by Louise in Chapter 5, in which she, like the majority of the Leeds students, was surrounded by many Chinese whose English was pretty good and who would try to practise English with them. On the other hand, even if Renate’s housemates wanted to improve their English by trying to speak English with her, as mentioned later, Renate refused to speak any languages other than

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<sup>46</sup> It seems to suggest that different cultural practices on receiving foreigners have an impact upon learners’ learning experiences. As a general observation, eastern cultures tend to receive foreigners ‘warmly’ by taking the initiative in welcoming foreigners, while this is not so commonly found in the western world.

Mandarin during her period in Taiwan. As a whole, the circumstances in which Renate found herself, together with her own personality, might possibly provide her with an 'ideal' environment for Mandarin learning.

It seems that it was not just Renate's friends who were helpful to her, but also the Chinese in public domains (cf. Clea's frustration in public domains, due to the native speakers' fast and non-modified speech). They would slow down their speech, on seeing that Renate was foreign. This suggests that in this regard Renate benefited from looking like a foreigner. Neither Clea nor Joy had that advantage (see the discussion later). The Chinese people in public domains also appeared to be able to understand Renate's speech, except for some older Chinese people who could not speak Mandarin but only Taiwanese (the effect of this will be discussed later).

In addition to using people's help, Renate adopted other means for extending her scope of comprehension, such as taking a notebook with her. Wherever she went, she would mark down any unknown or difficult words, so that she could check them later with her Chinese friends. (This was a technique also used by the nativelike learner Julie in Loup et al.'s 1994 study) In this very simple way, incomprehensible input became comprehensible.

Her opportunities for extending her comprehensibility arose not just from her

own private resources, but also from the communicative instruction she received in the classroom. When asked what she felt about the Mandarin classes in Taiwan, she made the following comments:

Small classes ... students know each other ... relaxed atmosphere, interesting topics ... opportunity to speak ... free discussions ... very helpful for my spoken Chinese.

She even attributed 30% of her language improvement to the Mandarin courses she took in Taiwan (see Table 8.1). This was in contrast to what she felt about the contribution of classes back in Leeds both before and after she went to Taiwan – she did not think highly of the classes in Leeds (see more discussion later).

**Table 8.1 Activity contribution to Mandarin improvement**

Activity	% role in improving your Mandarin
Mandarin courses that you took while there	30%
Other things that you did through the medium of Mandarin (e.g. other courses, sports, etc)	5%
Private study	15%
Using it with native speakers of Mandarin	40%
Using it with other non-native speakers	10%
Other (please specify, e.g. native speaker boy/girlfriend; internet chatting)	

Now, let us turn to the authentic aspect of the input Renate received. As a whole, it seems to have been made up of two resources – communicative

classroom input and real daily life input – in equal measure. Although Renate spent most of her working week taking Mandarin language courses<sup>47</sup> (14 hours per week at the beginning; 24 hours per week later on) and in private study, she also took a Taiwanese language course (4 hours per week), a Cantonese course (2 hours per week) and Taichi, through the medium of Mandarin. This was very different from the rest of the Leeds students, as none of them took additional language classes, except for Pete who attended a Spanish listening class one hour a week but dropped out after several weeks. Most of the Leeds students did not take any non-language classes through the medium of Mandarin either. Taking classes in which native speakers of Mandarin also participated as learners was very different from taking Mandarin classes, which were entirely populated by foreigners. Renate regarded her additional study activities as “a very good way of improving my Chinese and applying what I learned in the regular classes”.

Meanwhile, she managed to live with native speakers off campus throughout the whole period of her stay in Taiwan (all together 13 months, instead of 10 months for most of her Leeds coursemates, see Chapter 5) and, as indicated above, she appears to have maintained a very interactive relationship with them. In Taiwan, she had many more Chinese friends than Western ones and

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<sup>47</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Chinese language classes in Taiwan concentrated mainly on conversation (i.e. communicative teaching method), which seemed to be very different from those in Beijing and in Tianjin, as the latter two focused on grammar and vocabulary (i.e. traditional translation grammar method).

spent most of her time, out of class<sup>48</sup>, with her Chinese friends. Moreover, she seemed to be able to maximise the total quantity of nativelike input:

I only spoke Mandarin with the other foreigners. I just didn't see the point of speaking anything else ... Even if they spoke English or German to me, I would still reply with Mandarin.

This is very different from most of the Leeds students, who spent most of the time among themselves and spoke in their L1 (i.e. English). Thus, a problem commonly found among study abroad students (Wilkinson, 1998b) was not a problem for Renate.

As far as the interactive aspect of input was concerned, every activity (including language classes) that Renate undertook seemed to require some sort of her online interactive output, except for her private study and the physical activities in which she participated, such as Taichi during week days and surfing at weekends. Renate seemed to regard interaction both with native speakers outside of the classroom and with her learner peers inside the classroom as being very important. More specifically, she saw interaction as the best means of developing competence. For example, when asked whether learning grammar rules had improved her Mandarin, she answered:

Not really, the more time you spend in the country, the more you will improve without thinking in grammatical terms.

It was therefore not surprising to find that she seemed to feel

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<sup>48</sup> Renate mentioned that she had lots of classes during the week, from Monday to Friday. There was quite a lot of coursework as well. Therefore she usually went out at weekends only.

dissatisfied/frustrated by the non-conversational lessons that she received in Leeds before going to Taiwan, and the far fewer opportunities to speak that were available back in Leeds:

Big classes, most classes not speaking Chinese, so I feel I won't speak a lot of Chinese in class.

Now let us consider the extent to which her input can be viewed as being abundant and rich. Given the fact that Renate was in Taiwan for only 13 months all together, it is quite obvious that the total amount and variety of input that she received would be rather limited. However, there are two sources of input which appear to match the criterion of abundance: the daily routine conversations with housemates and the conversational topics introduced in her communicative classes in Taiwan. In the former, because she lived with native speakers and maintained an active relationship with them, she would have gained plenty of practice in engaging in daily routines. However, it is unclear how extensive her conversation with her housemates really was, since she spent quite a lot of time in private study. In terms of the conversational topics introduced and practised in class, which were embedded in "talking, debating, and even singing and acting"<sup>49</sup>, it is unclear to what extent she had opportunities to transfer her knowledge into the real world in Taiwan. As seen earlier, her out of class activities revolved around surfing and Taichi, along with some travel to other cities in Taiwan. How useful were the class topics for

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<sup>49</sup>This is taken from a note about the course in National Chengchi University, Taipei.  
[http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas\\_content/year\\_abroad/floats/national\\_chengchi\\_university\\_taipei.html](http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/eas/eas_content/year_abroad/floats/national_chengchi_university_taipei.html) (Accessed at 03/10/2005).



these specific activities? It is a consistent challenge for teachers to judge which situations to practise, since while a few are very common (e.g. greeting a friend, buying food), one soon moves into a much broader list of activities with their own linguistic demands, but which are not all that frequent (e.g. undertaking transactions in the bank). In short, it is probably inevitable that conversation topics practised in the classroom can only be one, fairly limited, source of practical learning. Table 8.2 summarises this review of Renate's real input.

**Table 8.2 Summary of Renate's real input**

	<b>Renate's Real Input</b>
<b>Comprehensible</b>	<i>Managing to turn incomprehensible into comprehensible</i>
<b>Authentic</b>	<i>Half authentic, half communicative classroom input</i>
<b>Interactive</b>	<i>Very interactive (except private study and surfing, Taich i)</i>
<b>Abundant</b>	<i>Yes, but only for routine conversations with housemates, conversational topics inside the classroom</i>
<b>Rich</b>	<i>Limited: mostly routine conversations and conversational practice in the classroom</i>

As discussed in Chapter 5, the input that Renate received was outstanding both in terms of quality and quantity, when compared with the rest of the Leeds students. On the other hand, we must recognise that given the time available, the variety and richness of input that she was able to receive, was limited. Table 8.2 suggests that, were there to be no problems in relation to the rest of her learning conditions, then Renate, as hypothesised in Chapter 2,

should be able to both understand and contribute to the daily routine conversations of the type used repeatedly in her daily life for one year. However, as far as the conversational topics covered inside the classroom are concerned, it would be only that subset also frequently used outside of the classroom, that she would be able to engage in competently. As for those which were covered in class but seldom used in a real life context, it is likely that Renate might be able to understand them, but not necessarily produce nativelike output. However, if we look at her response to the conversation topics used in the interview with the researcher, it seems that she had a pretty uniform capacity to deal with everything given to her. In other words, she seemed to have learned all these topics, or she had learned how to generalise from one topic to another. In fact, one would assume the latter case was possible: a native speaker can handle a conversation on a novel topic because of accumulated experience on others. So, at some point one tips over from specific to general.

Given the fact that she was only in the country for one year (i.e. there was limited exposure both in quantity and quality), it seems very unlikely that she would expect to, or be able to, pass herself off as a native speaker; nor would she perceive herself as being nativelike. This prediction seems to be right, as the native speaker judges rated her performance as high, but not perfect. Her mean score was 7.10 (full score =10, see Table 6.12).

On the other hand, as the rating scores of her global speaking command indicate, she did achieve a score of 9.5 (Judge 1) and 9 (Judge 3) in one speech segment (see Table 6.2) (the other scores for the same speech segment are 8, 8, 8.5, average score =8.6). In other words, she was at times producing language that neared the standard the judges would presumably associate with a native speaker. One possibility is that the content in that speech segment fell within the scope of the daily conversations in which she had had a lot of practice. A closer look at the speech segment reveals that it was a topic which required lots of confirmations and repetitions, such as “是啊! (yup!)” “他们听不懂 (*they cannot understand*)”, “真的听不懂 (*they really cannot understand*)”. The speed and fluency of her reaction and speech in that segment was very striking. This made the researcher quite often almost forget that Renate was a non-native speaker of Mandarin. Perhaps the reason for her adeptness was that her responses were idiomatic formulas that she had learned from her native speaker friends (see Chapter 2 for the discussion on the significance of formulaic sequences in achieving fluency). In any event, while most of her coursemates demonstrated strong L1 transfer in their Mandarin production, she seemed not to have that problem. As the literature indicates that L1 transfer in L2 production is the norm for adult learners, (see, e.g. N. Ellis 2005), the question is therefore how Renate did, or at least appear to, overcome that transfer. Answering this question and examining how Renate was actually able to arrive at the level of achievement that she did will

entail looking at the remaining learning conditions (see Sections 8.5 and 8.6).

#### **8.4.2 Joy**

As far as the issue of comprehensibility is concerned, Joy's input seemed to pass through two stages. The first stage was during her first two months in China, when she, along with the rest of her Leeds coursemates in Beijing, lived in the campus dormitory (foreign students only). The second stage was when she moved off campus and lived with a Korean and a French person. This is very different from Lily, who continued living with her western coursemates throughout the time in China, and Mac, who lived with an ethnic Chinese from Australia speaking English all the time.

During the first stage, she appeared to struggle to turn incomprehensible input into comprehensible. Like most of the study abroad students, Joy found the input provided by the local people (i.e. Beijingers) was too fast and was spoken with a local accent.

When I first arrived, everything was a struggle even down to the most simple thing such as buying a drink.

This, according to Joy, was very different from the classroom input she was used to back in the UK and made it very difficult for her to understand. Meanwhile, unlike Renate, she did not appear to have any L2 experts/native speakers to support her while she was surrounded by incomprehensible input

(see the later discussion on the interactive aspect of her input). She even tried to speak Cantonese<sup>50</sup> (her L1) to the Beijingers but they could not understand her. Because her command of Mandarin at that moment was very poor<sup>51</sup>, she hardly dared to guess Mandarin using her Cantonese knowledge. She was afraid that she might make mistakes and consequently be laughed at by her Leeds coursemates (cf. her different feelings towards her new Japanese and Korean classmates, see the discussion later). It seems that she solved the problem of how to turn the high level of incomprehensible input into comprehensible input in the way that many study abroad students do: she created a day to day environment that minimised her exposure to input. Firstly, as mentioned above, she lived with British people in a campus dormitory and still spoke English with them. Secondly, like the majority of Leeds students (see Chapter 5), throughout her stay in China Joy chose to spend most of the time with her Leeds coursemates speaking English.

Had this been the entire story of Joy's experience, it seems unlikely that her Mandarin would have reached the level it did. However, something changed, and the second part of her stay in China was markedly different from the first. Joy appeared gradually found a way to turn incomprehensible input into comprehensible input. There are four factors which seemed to underlie the

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<sup>50</sup> Cantonese is commonly spoken in the south of China only (i.e. within Guangdong and Guangxi provinces).

<sup>51</sup> When Joy first arrived in China, her Mandarin was so poor that she was unable to give her address to taxi drivers.

change.

Firstly, she won some support from Mandarin experts/native speakers. She had come to know some Chinese, and many Koreans<sup>52</sup>. Through language exchange, Chinese students in the same university in Beijing as Joy helped her with her Mandarin, while Joy helped them with their English. Meanwhile, because Joy's Korean housemate was in her fourth year of Mandarin study in China and had gained a very good command of Mandarin, she was able to help Joy with her Mandarin coursework and language usage problems.

Secondly, because neither her Korean housemate nor French housemate could speak English, Mandarin was the only language used inside the house.

Thirdly, help for turning incomprehensible input into comprehensible also seemed to come from the classroom. Where Renate found help within the actual content of the class (i.e. the activities), Joy received her help from the students. Unlike the rest of her Leeds coursemates, the language class she was in was made up of Korean and Japanese students only. In other words, she was the only Leeds student in her Mandarin language class. Because the Korean and Japanese students could hardly speak any English, once inside the classroom Joy had to speak Mandarin with her classmates. This was a

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<sup>52</sup> According to the Leeds students, as a whole the Korean students' Mandarin seemed to be much better than theirs.

very different situation from that of many other Leeds students, who would still speak English among themselves inside their class (which contained a mixture of Leeds students and Korean students). When asked what she felt when speaking Mandarin in that class, Joy's answer in the questionnaire was:

It was OK to make mistakes because all my classmates were Korean and Japanese it made the class atmosphere change. I was more willing to participate because it was the norm. Everyone had to participate, because we were made to.

Meanwhile, because of taking the same course in the same classroom, Joy got to know the Korean and Japanese students increasingly well. Although during breaks in class Joy still tended to seek out her Leeds coursemates and chat with them in English, she increasingly drew her Korean and Japanese friends into her Leeds' coursemates out-of-class activities. The interaction in Mandarin was rather interesting when her Leeds coursemates and her Korean / Japanese classmates were present together. While maintaining her old habit of speaking to her Leeds coursemates in English, she would then switch to Mandarin when addressing her Korean/Japanese classmates. Consequently, there was much code-switching going on. However, the act of code-switching itself seemed not to present a problem for Joy. As she commented, in fact it was very easy, as she had got used to switching between English and Cantonese at home ever since she was a child. Now it just changed to become switching between English and Mandarin! Furthermore, Joy believed that this was a good way to learn Mandarin, that is, she learned Mandarin very quickly

in this way, compared with the fast and accented speech addressed to her by the local people outside in the street. It is therefore understandable that Joy attributed 40% of her language improvement to the interaction she had with other non-native speakers (see Table 8.3).

**Table 8.3 Activity contribution to Joy's Mandarin improvement**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>% role in improving your Mandarin</b>
Mandarin courses that you took while there	0%
Other things that you did through the medium of Mandarin (e.g. other courses, sports, etc)	0%
Private study	20%
Using it with native speakers of Mandarin	30%
Using it with other non-native speakers	40%
Other (please specify, e.g. native speaker boy/girlfriend; internet chatting)	Socialising, shopping, everyday interactions 10%

Fourthly, with the increase in her command of Mandarin, Joy began to apply her Cantonese knowledge to understanding and speaking Mandarin (see Section 8.5).

Let us now consider the authenticity of Joy's input. As defined in Chapter 3, authenticity is viewed as the extent to which functional language is used in a real life context. A close look at the Mandarin input provided to Joy, reveals that it, no matter how limited it might have been (see the later discussion on the abundant and rich aspects of Joy's input), was very authentic indeed



except for the “subject matter” input provided by the teachers within the classroom. For example, after moving in with her Korean and French housemates, Joy needed to use Mandarin for daily routine interaction inside the house. Likewise, inside the classroom, Joy also needed to use Mandarin for communication with her Japanese and Korean classmates, and of course with her teachers. Outside of the classroom, in a socialising context, Joy still needed Mandarin to communicate with everyone except for her Leeds coursemates and a few Chinese who were Cantonese speakers.

However, apart from the aspect of functional use in real life considered above, one might consider adding another aspect to authenticity, that is nativelike accuracy. It is clear that the majority of Joy’s Mandarin input was from non-native speakers of Mandarin, such as her Korean and French housemates, and Korean and Japanese classmates. Since they were still in the process of acquiring Mandarin as adult L2 learners, the quality of the Mandarin input from them would inevitably have been different from that of native speakers. As mentioned above, according to Joy talking to them in a negotiating way was better than talking with the local native speakers whose speech was fast and accented. Nevertheless, as noted in chapter 2, input that has been ‘doctored’ to be more comprehensible is easily seen as inauthentic. Yet it seems to have been extremely beneficial to Joy. For a discussion of this issue see later in Chapter 9.

Meanwhile, as far as the classroom input is concerned, it seemed to be totally 'inauthentic' – the traditional grammar translation teaching method was adopted, as opposed to the communicative approach (cf. Renate in Taiwan).

Let us now consider the extent to which Joy's Mandarin input was interactive. As with the authentic part of Joy's Mandarin input, in general the Mandarin input that Joy received was very interactive. From the perspective of Joy spending a great amount of her spare time socialising (e.g. going to clubs, chatting) where her Korean and Japanese friends were quite often present, the interactive aspect of her Mandarin input might have been even greater than Renate's, who, as discussed above, often did for physical activities, such as surfing and Taichi. However, as far as the content of the classroom was concerned, the interactive aspect of Joy's input seemed less promising than Renate's. The teaching method used in Joy's classroom was traditional grammar translation. This arguably presented little interaction for students. Most of the Leeds students, accustomed to the communicative teaching method used back in the UK (see Chapter 5), complained about it. Moreover, many Leeds students were too embarrassed to participate in the classroom, due to the fact that the levels of their new classmates (i.e. the Koreans and Japanese who took the same course with them in Beijing) were much better than theirs. However, the situation with Joy seemed to be very different from that of the rest of the Leeds students in Beijing. As she commented above, she

was more willing to participate not only because there was no loss-of-face in front of her Leeds coursemates (they were not in that class), but also because in her class everyone was made to participate. In other words, Joy was actually much more interactive inside the classroom than she might have been in another class.

Joy maintained an active relationship with her Mandarin speaking Korean and French housemates. In this regard, it is safe to assume that her daily life routine in Mandarin inside the house was rather interactive. Moreover, as mentioned above, even when doing her coursework (i.e. her private study)<sup>53</sup>, Joy would ask help from her Korean housemate (who arguably would have known the answers, since she had done them before). This kind of help presumably is different from the help that Renate's monolingual Mandarin housemates were able to offer with her language questions, since what native speakers can normally rely on is their top-down knowledge as opposed to bottom-up knowledge. For instance, Renate's Chinese housemates might not be as consciously aware of the Chinese language structures as an advanced L2 learner such as Joy's Korean housemate might. This however is very hard to generalise given the fact that native speakers might be experts in the language structure consciously too. Thus, it remains unclear how differences in language support provided to learners affect their learning. This topic will be

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<sup>53</sup> It seems that the time Joy spent on doing her coursework/private study was very little compared with the time she spent in going out socialising/drinking. Moreover, most of her private study entailed writing Chinese characters repeatedly in order to memorise their written forms.

addressed in Sections 8.5 and 8.6.

Let us now consider the extent to which Joy's input can be viewed as abundant and rich. As with the majority of the Leeds students, Joy spent 10 months in China all together. This limited the total amount and variety of input that she was able to receive to an even greater extent than was the case for Renate, who spent 30% more time in the target language country than Joy did. Moreover, unlike Renate, who tried to maximise her input both in terms of quality and quantity, Joy's effort in maximising input seemed to be rather limited. As discussed above, she chose to spend most of her time with her Leeds coursemates speaking in English rather than in Mandarin. This was so even with other foreigners whose English was not good enough to hold a conversation in English. Nevertheless, this obviously had a negative impact on the abundant and rich aspect of her Mandarin input. In other words, her limited input (in terms of her limited stay in China) was further restricted by her choice of restricting her use of Mandarin.

However, the picture of Joy in this regard is complex, as mentioned previously in relation to her sense of identity. While choosing to spend most of her time with her Leeds coursemates, Joy did try to get as much nativelike input as possible, such as talking to taxi drivers, people in the street, people in restaurants, and so on. As discussed in Chapter 5, the majority of Leeds

students found it very difficult or embarrassing to talk to strangers. This further limited the amount and quality of input that they were able to receive even during their inevitable daily contact with the locals. However, Joy seemed less inhibited in this regard. Talking with strangers when the occasion arose was a golden opportunity for her to practise Mandarin. As Joy kept mentioning throughout the interview, "it is free of charge!" However, she admitted that most of the conversations on those occasions were just daily routines and very limited. She was bored of them by the end. With the improvement of her Mandarin, she was gradually able to extend her range of conversation topics with taxi drivers to include current affairs in China, the university entrance exam, a snow disaster and so on.

In general, there are three sources of daily routines that appeared to match the criterion of abundance: daily conversation routines among foreign housemates and foreign classmates, daily conversation routines with Mandarin speaking strangers, and socialising conversations with foreign friends.

In order to help discuss the supposed consequences of the discrepancy between ideal input and Joy's real input, Table 8.4 summarises this review of Joy's real input:

**Table 8.4 Summary of Joy's real input**

	<b>Joy's Real Input</b>
<b>Comprehensible</b>	<i>Two stages: firstly, failing to turn incomprehensible into comprehensible; then, gradually managing to turn incomprehensible into comprehensive</i>
<b>Authentic</b>	<i>Very authentic (except subject matter input provided in the classroom)</i>
<b>Interactive</b>	<i>Very interactive (except private study and 'subject matter' input provided in the classroom)</i>
<b>Abundant</b>	<i>Yes, but only daily conversation routines among foreign housemates and foreign classmates, daily conversation routines with Mandarin speaking strangers, and socialising conversations with foreign friends</i>
<b>Rich</b>	<i>Limited: mostly routine conversations and socialising conversations</i>

As discussed in Chapter 5, Joy was the one who attributed most of her Mandarin improvement to the interaction that she had with non-native speakers. Throughout the above discussion, it seems obvious that she did spend a great amount of time with them and the majority of her Mandarin input was actually from her Korean and Japanese friends. Meanwhile, one has to admit that relative to Renate, she had rather little input of Mandarin during the first part of her stay, since she spent most of her time speaking in English. Moreover, one also has to admit that Joy's Mandarin input was not from a native source (i.e. just from advanced adult L2 learners), while Renate's input (except for those inside her communicative class) was mostly from native speakers. However, leaving aside these two apparent 'deficiencies' in Joy's Mandarin input, there were no problems in relation to the rest of her learning

conditions. Joy, as hypothesised in Chapter 2, should have been able to both understand and contribute to daily routine conversations of the type used repeatedly in her daily life for one year. However, on account of the limited input from native speakers, and as far as being perceived as nativelike is concerned, it seems very unlikely that she would be perceived as nativelike. It would have been rather difficult for her to produce nativelike output fluently during the interview. The very fact is that during the interview not only was she able to speak fluently and accurately but also she was able to maintain a 'standard accent'<sup>54</sup> (except occasionally a slip of Cantonese accent in a couple of words).

As seen from the rating investigation in Chapter 6 Joy got a very high score on the judges' confidence in talking with her, which is consistent with her approaching nativelikeness. She received a full score (i.e. 10) from all five judges in one speech segment and from four judges in another speech segment. One judge even mentioned that her speaking of Mandarin was better than his, especially in terms of her pronunciation, since Joy's accent was perceived as 'standard' while the judge's Mandarin had a regional accent. Out of all the testing items for formulaic sequence comprehension ability, there was only one item (跟.....走得近- be close with somebody) that she could not really understand and for which she had to explicitly ask what it meant. After

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<sup>54</sup> 'Standard accent' refers to the type of accent which is used in TV/radio broadcasts. It is also widely promoted in schools either for native Chinese speakers or for foreigners who are learning Chinese.

paraphrasing the formulaic sequence, she seemed to grasp it immediately by providing the researcher with an appropriate answer to the question that contained the tested item. In fact, most of the participants (except for two) did not know this item (the reason why Joy was not able to understand this particular item will be discussed in Section 8.5). Also, the interview itself revealed that Joy actually seemed to perceive herself, if not nativelike (see Chapter 9 for further discussion on what is 'nativelike'), then as having mastered Mandarin at least very well:

I could almost speak and understand everything and get myself understood.

The question is therefore how Joy could, or at least appear to, reach nativelikeness. In order to answer this question and to examine how both Joy and Renate were actually able to arrive at the level of nativelikeness that they did, we need to look at the remaining learning conditions.

### **8.5 Attention-to-input questions**

In this section, the following two questions will be answered:

- What kind of attention did the nativelike learners apply to their input?
- How did their patterns of attention relate to the claims made by N. Ellis in regard to explicit conscious attention, and Wray in regard to needs-only-analysis?



N. Ellis argued (see Chapter 2) that the determiner of input becoming intake is the way in which adult L2 learners pay attention to input. More specifically, according to N. N. Ellis, adult L2 learners by default (unless explicitly conscious learning is involved) will apply their L1 tuned/biased attention to L2 input. The consequence, as N. Ellis argues, is the blocking/filtering of L2 input. This leads to certain areas of L2 becoming unlearnable, or at least being learned very slowly, if only implicit learning is involved. Here, in order to examine N. Ellis' claims in terms of the 'right' attention to input, two specific questions will be asked:

- Did the nativelike learners by default apply their L1 tuned/biased attention to L2 input?
- If yes, did this application block/filter out L2 input?
- If no, what kind of attention did the nativelike learners apply to their L2 input?

Meanwhile, according to Wray (see Chapter 2), part of the problem for adult L2 learners in becoming nativelike is the way that they process the input. Due to their adult intellectual tendency to break down things that are new or unknown to them, they break down the L2 input and take in and store individual words, while throwing away other important information (such as how the individual words occur together). The consequence of this attention to input is reflected in their attention to L2 output, in which adult L2 learners have to start with small

units and attempt to build them up. Both the attention to input and the attention to output consequently make L2 comprehension and production activities very hard and full of risks (i.e. short of nativelikeness). Thus we can ask:

- Did the nativelike learners tend to break down their L2 input for comprehension and intake?
- If yes, did this application block/filter out L2 input?
- If no, what kind of attention did the nativelike learners apply to their L2 input?

A very striking fact about our two nativelike learners is that both of them regarded speaking and understanding Mandarin as being actually easier than reading and writing it. The reason for this will be explained below.

As with the structure of the previous two sections, we will consider Renate first and then move to Joy, and after that draw a comparison between the two.

### **8.5.1 Renate**

As noted in Chapter 5, what is striking about Renate's attention to input is that she seemed to see no need to use pedagogic grammar knowledge in interpreting the input. She absolutely defied the importance of learning grammar and claimed that she still did not know how Mandarin grammar worked. She always did very poorly in grammar exams. She claimed that her

ignorance of explicit grammar knowledge applied to all other languages that she had learned, all successfully, including her L1 (i.e. German), French, Spanish, and English. Every time she started learning a language, everyone would initially try to teach the language through grammar, and she would just sit there, listening and falling asleep. She commented that it would have been a nightmare for her to learn languages if she had needed to remember where/how to put words together through an explicit knowledge of grammar – she would never be able to remember. In other words, the problem predicted by Wray (i.e. the challenges of learning encountered by adult L2 learners who have to build up individual words through applying their explicit grammar knowledge), seems to have been both realised by Renate and bypassed by Renate.

The kind of attention that Renate applied to input appears to have been holistic in nature. She stressed that all she needed in order to understand a language was to listen to the way native speakers spoke or to read the sentences within their contexts, such as reading an article in a newspaper – then:

I will automatically see the structure.

In other words, what she relied on seemed to be the 'pure' input itself. There was no need for the input to be filtered through taught grammatical knowledge or to be interpreted through any other language structures that she may have learned. It appeared to be simply the language usage itself that she required,

starting from very basic examples, such as “This is an apple”, “Let’s open the door”, to more complicated topics, such as discussion and debate. Therefore, living in the target language country, maintaining an active interaction with native speakers, and still conducting relaxing classroom communicative interaction with her peer L2 learners, was exactly what she needed (see above for her emphasis on living with native speakers and her high regard for a communicative teaching method in Taiwan).

While Renate viewed input as the vehicle for natural exposure to language structures, she also recognised the importance of understanding the input. For example, rote memorising complete phrases was regarded as being useless by her, for “memorising a phrase doesn’t mean you understand the phrase!” Meanwhile, she viewed memorising single words as being useful, “as vocabulary is the basis of a language and helps improve your understanding”. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, Renate would note down things that she could not understand and ask her native speaker friends about them later. Arguably, the act of taking notes seemed to give her three advantages. Firstly, she would be able to maintain the flow in conversations (especially with strangers, from whom she could not get the same support as from her friends), but still guess the meaning from the context. Secondly, checking later with helpful language experts (such as her Chinese housemates) would enable her to elaborate on the input, which probably helped reinforce the input and

transform it into intake. Thirdly, it reminded her where the problems were, so that she could target them in the future, thus paying more attention to the input.

In general, can we say that Renate maintained a very balanced attention to input? On the one hand, she was not too strict with the input, in that she would not try to understand every word of the input and also would not ask people to explain things that she could not understand. On the other hand, she would focus her attention on certain input, which she would then elaborate later. In other words, it was through the initial interaction (exposing herself to mass input), elaborating later on certain input, and practice, that she was able to see herself making progress – gaining one little victory after another. The question therefore is how Renate could manage to produce convincing output, which was both fluent and idiomatic and made one forget that she was non-native. In order to answer this question, we need to look at the next section for Renate's attention to output.

### **8.5.2 Joy**

On the surface according to her answers to the questionnaire, Joy's attention to input seems to be very similar to Renate's. For example, it did not matter to Joy if she did not understand every word of the input. However, while Renate would not always ask people to explain things she did not understand, Joy said that she would.

Meanwhile, as Joy mentioned throughout the interview (Mac suggested it as well), mastery of Cantonese as her L1 seemed to greatly facilitate her learning of Mandarin. It looks as if through the lens of Cantonese, Joy was able to understand Mandarin relatively easily (compare N. Ellis' the failure of input becoming intake due to L1 learned attention in Chapter 2). More specifically, although she did not know the grammar of Cantonese explicitly, she was able to apply her knowledge of Cantonese grammar to Mandarin grammar subconsciously. In terms of individual words, her knowledge of Cantonese enabled her to guess the meanings of the Mandarin words in the input, though she had to check in a dictionary for their pronunciation in order to speak them. Later, as she got used to the pronunciation, she was able to guess more and more words without checking them in a dictionary, by simply relying on the context and the sounds of the words. Meanwhile, as mentioned in the previous section, although she was making mistakes due to wrong guessing, she was not as afraid of doing so as she had been when she was in her first year at Leeds among her Leeds coursemates. Generally, the guessing of the words' meaning in input was a necessary step for Joy's Mandarin learning:

有时候要猜的。因为汉语有那么多词——根本不可能每一个词都明白或者学会，所以一定要猜猜 (translated: *One has to guess sometimes. Because there are so many words in Chinese – it is impossible that one can understand or has learned every one of them. Therefore, one must guess*).

No doubt, to a certain extent, everyone guesses unknown words. What distinguished Joy is that she seems to have guessed far more than 'normal'

(see the following section on how people reacted to her wrong guesses).

Through the discussion in this section, it becomes clearer that Renate and Joy indeed took different routes to their relatively different goals, although both of them were perceived as nativelike. While Renate seemed to manage a rather balanced attention to the input (not too 'strict' and not too 'loose'), Joy fastened her learning progress through the lens of her Chinese mother tongue Cantonese.

## **8.6 Attention-to-output questions**

In this section, the following two questions will be answered:

- *What kind of attention did the nativelike learners apply to their output?*
- *How did their patterns of attention relate to the claims made by N. Ellis in regard to explicit conscious attention, and Wray in regard to needs-only-analysis?*

Similar to the previous sections, we will address Renate first and then move to Joy, and make a comparison between the two at the end.

### **8.6.1 Renate**

According to her answers in the questionnaire, Renate would not plan what she was going to say before speaking. This partly explained why her speech was so fast. In other words, while, as Wray claims, most adult classroom

learners tend to build, with much effort, their speech through combining individual words and grammatical knowledge, Renate did not. Renate just said what was in her mind. The question is why she succeeded in sounding idiomatic, given that she did not plan her speech. That is, what model of language did she match hers with? Moreover, sometimes she would use words without being sure of what they meant. Did all this suggest that Renate was using, instead of normal adult classroom L2 learners' breaking-things-down strategy, the L1 learner strategy – needs-only- analysis? Recalling the case of Nora mentioned in Chapter 2, one of the factors contributing to Nora's success was her having sufficient confidence to pick up and use new forms, without even fully understanding them.

Furthermore, it did not bother her if she made mistakes. Nevertheless in general, she wanted her Mandarin to be perfect and always tried very hard to be correct when speaking. Her attitude of trying to be correct became stronger especially after one incident in Taiwan. She kept making the same mistake without being aware of it until one day her Chinese housemate told her openly. This changed her beliefs. Before the incident, the most important thing for her was to practise speaking and errors were not that important. After the incident, she felt that if students were permitted to make errors in Mandarin when they started learning, it would be difficult for them to speak correctly later on. Meanwhile, she tried to use new words as soon as she had learned them.



However, while she would try to say it another way if someone did not understand her, Renate did not bother trying if she knew she could not express an idea easily. In other words, this might well suggest that by avoiding the attempts of trying to express something beyond her current abilities in the target language (e.g. she had never met the situation in which someone comforts someone else in Mandarin) she was able to bypass the 'temptation' of language transfer, which would have required her to use her existing knowledge of other languages to construct something from scratch. The question is why she did not try to express an idea she knew that she could not express easily. One possibility is that she could not, because she did not know grammar explicitly. Because of not knowing grammar explicitly, she was not in a position to avail herself of the many choices adult L2 classroom learners usually have, which is to build up individual phrases through their explicitly taught grammar knowledge. In other words, not engaging with the grammar explicitly had the linguistic effect of preventing her being over-productive, and the knock on social effect of avoiding speaking when she had no resources for doing so. The joint effect was to hold her output within the bounds of what she already knew, plus a little, rather than plus a lot. She was not thinking 'there must be a way of expressing that idea so I'll have a go' but rather 'I don't know how to express that idea'. It would naturally make her more sensitive to when she *did* find herself in a new situation, since she would need to observe closely if she were to learn.

### 8.6.2 Joy

As mentioned in the previous section, because of her knowledge of Cantonese Joy was able to identify the meaning of the Mandarin words in input fairly easily. However, to actually speak them aloud seemed to be totally different for Joy. Naïvely, at the beginning of her Mandarin course, she thought that she could just change her Cantonese into Mandarin by altering Cantonese tones into the four basic Mandarin tones. Of course this would not work (see. e.g. Halliday, 2006 for the differences between Cantonese and Mandarin in general; Lee, Vakoch, & Wurm, 1996 for the differences between Cantonese and Mandarin tones). This seemed to cause her much embarrassment on first starting the course in Leeds. Her failure to simply transfer Cantonese into Mandarin in speaking made her wary of using much of her Cantonese knowledge consciously. During the early period of her stay in China, Joy tried to think of the grammar that she was taught in class, and then tried to find the relevant vocabulary to express herself. The whole process was very slow, she said. For instance, when Joy first arrived in China, her Mandarin was so poor, she was unable to give her address to taxi drivers. She wrote down the pinyin on a card<sup>55</sup> and tried to pronounce the address. However, the taxi driver still could not understand her, because she spoke too slowly:

他们觉得你有什么问题，小姐?! (Translated: *they must have been feeling very weird about me – what are you doing, Miss?!)*<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Joy could only speak Cantonese colloquially. She was illiterate in Cantonese before starting the Mandarin course in Leeds.

<sup>56</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 5, Joy looked ethnically Chinese, which would have created expectations. She may have been considered cognitively disabled or deaf, rather than just foreign.

As an alternative to the above-mentioned hard and slow process, Joy tried to use her Cantonese grammar as a framework, which she was able to do automatically (subconsciously) very soon, after a few trials. She would take the Cantonese grammatical framework and just fill up with the equivalent Mandarin sounds, which at first she needed to check in the dictionary. The whole process became much faster. Later on, as she got used to the pronunciation, she was able to implicitly rely on the context and sounds of the words, with imitation seemingly playing a big part. Because of this guessing and imitation through her knowledge of Cantonese, it was understandable that what Joy found hardest to master in spoken Mandarin, was thinking of the right words.

Inevitably she sometimes guessed wrongly, but given that she was in a non-threatening environment with her Japanese and Korean friends, the impact on her confidence, and on communication, was minimised. Her friends might say “no, no, no, it should be said in this way” or else they would navigate past her error and continue to understand her.

If Joy had cared less about the perfection of her Mandarin, would her Mandarin have become fossilised at some point, or have become mixed with Cantonese? The answer seems to be no, when we compare Joy with Mac – both Joy’s and Mac’s L1 was Cantonese. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Mac,

different from the rest of the Chinese participants who paid great attention to accuracy, seemed to be rather laid back and to have had a great tolerance of mistakes. Nevertheless, Mac's Mandarin achievement, as shown in the rating scores of his global speaking command (the second best among all the participant) and the scores of his formulaic sequence comprehension ability (the highest score in formulaic sequence rating), was evidently close to nativelikeness even though he had a Cantonese/southern accent in his Mandarin.

According to the interview, there were only a few occasions that certain Cantonese transfers were detected in Joy, such as “提升 (*improve*)” and “可惜 (*pity*)”. One of the reasons why Joy was able to achieve what she did, might be the other aspect of the way in which she paid attention to her output: pre-planning. In contrast to Renate, Joy planned what she was going to say before she said it. Although, generally, it did not bother her if she made mistakes, she would not use words if she was unsure as to what they meant. Note that only speaking the words that she knew the meaning of, was very different from her attention to input, where guessing played a big part in helping her understanding.

The discussion in this section shows us even more clearly that Renate and Joy indeed had taken different routes to being perceived as nativelike. Renate, not

engaging with the grammar explicitly, managed her output within the bounds of what she already knew and thus prevented herself being over-productive, Furthermore, it naturally made her more sensitive to new input. Joy, employing her Cantonese grammar subconsciously, quickened the speed of her output, which cancelled out the slow process of planning speech before speaking.

## **8.7 Summary**

This chapter has examined the extent to which two nativelike learners experienced the 'ideal' conditions identified in chapter 2. The discussion has revealed that although the conditions were not 'ideal' as a whole, yet they still did well in general. This indicates that the whole issue of 'ideal' conditions for reaching nativelikeness is clearly less straightforward than the literature suggested.

Chapter 5 showed that, in reality, most of the learners were unable to fulfil these five conditions. They were able to fulfil some of the conditions better than others. The greater attention in this chapter to the two most successful learners, Renate and Joy, has helped identify the finer grained aspects of how the conditions were or were not met. So, what are the three most important findings in this examination of Renate and Joy? What lies at the heart of their success?

Firstly, it seems to suggest that each person has their own obstacle course and they need to solve their own problems.

Secondly, the case of Renate, especially her refusal to engage with grammar which seemed to have a profound effect on how she approached interaction and her attitude to what she felt she 'ought' to be able to say, indicates to us that the importance of explicitly taught grammar might not be as useful as one might otherwise expect.

Thirdly, the cases of Joy and Mac, through having the L1 knowledge of Cantonese (a relatively close language to Mandarin – the target language), seems to suggest to us that a supportive L1 filter is possible if the L2 is pursued to certain degree (compare this to the unsuccessful case of Frank, whose L1 was Hakka – another relatively close language to Mandarin, but who had not pursued Mandarin learning to the extent in which Joy and Mac had).

## **Chapter 9 Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter draws together what has been covered in this thesis as a means of evaluating the Reaching Nativelikeness hypothesis proposed in chapter 2. Firstly, the research objectives will be recapped through a summary of the findings and implications. Based on the key findings, we will evaluate the extent to which they support the hypothesis. Secondly, we will address the limitations of the present study and make suggestions for further research. This process will begin by examining the assumptions behind the study. The discussion will be developed further in three areas: methodology, participants and analysis. Thirdly, we will conclude the whole thesis with a consideration of directions for future research.

### **9.1 Summary of the findings and implications**

#### **9.1.1 Recap of research objectives**

The whole project started with two main research questions (Chapter 1): *what are the main obstacles facing adults in learning L2 (MRQ1)?* and *how can adults overcome those obstacles and become nativelike (MRQ2)?*

In order to answer these questions, a preliminary investigation of a nativelike

learner was carried out to draw specific questions for a review of the literature in Chapter 2. This then led to the proposal of the Reaching-Nativelikeness Model. Within the model, five necessary conditions for overcoming barriers and reaching nativelikeness were hypothesised for carrying out further research, namely:

- Condition 1: An intention to reach nativelikeness (Intention)
- Condition 2: An adaptive capacity to identify with the L2 native group (L2-oriented identification)
- Condition 3: A guaranteed on-going supply of 'ideal' input (Ideal-input)
- Condition 4: An appropriate type of attention to the input (Attention-to-input)
- Condition 5: An appropriate type of attention to the output (Attention-to output)

### **9.1.2 Summary of the key findings and evaluation of what has been learnt**

As noted in Chapter 1, regardless of developments in some research areas, such as a greater understanding of fossilisation, ultimate attainment, and individual differences, the issue of how exactly some adult L2 learners are able to reach nativelikeness remains unclear. The present study has contributed to clarifying this issue by demonstrating the complexity involved in a person's learning process (i.e. the role of personal character and the environment that



one happens to be in).

The evaluation of the RN Model showed that those who achieved most in learning were, overall, those whose learning was closest to the ideals for the hypothesised criteria. Notably, success did not always breed success, and some learners who started well ahead of the group fell behind. Previous experience of living in the country, the overall amount of time spent there on the year abroad, and ethnicity all played a role in success, but ultimately the most successful were those who dedicated most hours to gaining experience in effective communication. More specifically, there are six key findings:

- The intention to learn did not seem paramount
- A fairly strong predicting power was found in the extent of the participants' identification with the L2 group
- A guaranteed supply of 'ideal' input had a good predicting power
- An 'appropriate' attention to input was revealed
- An 'appropriate' attention to output seemed to be part of the key to nativelikeness
- The notion of nativelikeness: A continuum of the impression one creates

### **9.1.2.1 The intention to learn did not seem paramount**

The findings in Chapters 5 and 6 seem to suggest that the participants' learning intentions did not have a strong power in predicting their likelihood of reaching nativelikeness. Nevertheless, their learning intentions appeared to be highly linked with their attention to output, as evident in the closer examination of Joy, Mac, Renate and Louise. Although we have seen that they all had different ambitions in detail, what they all shared was a commitment to meeting a goal that made sense to them as an individual, whether it be a very lofty ambition as for Joy (who wanted to be a top translator) or a more pragmatic one as for Mac (who aimed only to "be able to converse comfortably with Mandarin speakers about topics from economy, to politics, to environment, and anything else"). We have seen that these different ambitions were associated with different attitudes – Mac's more modest goals permitted him to have a laid back attitude towards his errors and to carry his strong Cantonese accent when speaking Mandarin, while Joy wanted her Mandarin to be perfect and strove even to hide/get rid of her Cantonese accent when speaking Mandarin. To a certain extent, the case of Mac appears to confirm the finding in the literature that 'satisfaction of communicative need' may be a major factor in causing learners to fossilise in their L2 interlanguage (Han, 2004a:34-35). However, one can argue that the fact Mac carried his Cantonese accent while Joy did not does not mean that Mac had actually fossilised in his Mandarin. It might simply be his personal choice.

Furthermore, the explanation of 'satisfaction of communicative need' seems to be too simplistic here. For example, as far as speaking Mandarin with an accent is concerned, Renate did not care about her foreign accent much. As long as her speech was understandable to others, it was fine for her. Although Renate's aim was to approximate the native speaker, trying to hide/get rid of her accent did not seem to be part of such an aim.

Moreover, as revealed in Chapter 5, in relation to her attitude towards becoming nativelike, Louise seemed to have 'realistic' expectations of what she could do and what she could not do (recall she found that she could not pronounce the Mandarin /r/ correctly). On the one hand, one might argue that possibly it was this attitude that stopped her moving forward. Her realisation of her struggles/limitations in relation to certain linguistic features might simply be a variation of 'satisfaction of communicative need' or 'satisfaction of what one can achieve'. On the other hand, no one can guarantee that everyone will be capable of pronouncing every sound (see, e.g. Aoyama, Flege, Guion, Akahane-Yamada, & Yamada, 2004 on the limits of training Japanese learners to pronounce English /r/ and /l/). Louise's 'realistic' attitude may have saved her a great deal of trouble in trying to gain very little or something unachievable. Furthermore, as seen in Chapter 5, there were many participants who seemed to have very 'big' ambitions, such as Faith and Pete's wishes for their 'super-nativeness'. Nevertheless, their wishes seem to be

rather 'unrealistic' in that, although it might not be a hindrance to their learning, yet it might well have lain beyond their grasp. As was shown in Table 6.11, Faith's Mandarin achievement was fairly low while Pete's was modest. In other words, their intention/goal for learning did not seem to act as an active 'incentive' for their learning progress. Therefore, future research may consider collecting from learners data such as their self-assessment of what is realistic/achievable as a language learning goal, alongside information about their wishes/motivation to become nativelike. Putting it in another way, the 'ideal' condition that a learner must have 'an intention to reach nativelikeness' may be better assessed through the two dimensions of wishes/motivation and self-assessment of a realistic goal.

#### **9.1.2.2 A fairly strong predicting power was found in the extent of the participants' identification with the L2 group**

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have shown that the 'ideal' condition of being able to identify with the L2 group in the RN Model seemed to have a rather strong power in predicting their likelihood in reaching nativelikeness. For example, certain learners (e.g. Frank, Jim, Paul, Tom) were furthest from meeting the ideal condition of 'having an adaptive/open capacity to identify with the L2 native group'. And as Chapters 6 and 7 showed, they were the least successful in reaching nativelikeness. In contrast, learners such as Joy and Renate, especially Joy, as examined in detail in Chapter 8, appeared to hit the

target of the 'ideal' condition, and they were also those perceived as closest to being nativelike.

These results seem to suggest that this 'ideal' condition in the RN Model is robust for predicting one's chance of reaching nativelikeness. On the other hand, one has to admit that the actual relation between the extent of identification with the L2 group and one's language achievement might not be quite as straightforward as the present project implies. After all, the subject numbers were too small to rule out the association being a coincidence, and in all events we cannot safely assume a one to one cause and effect relation. A more complex/dynamic relation between the possibility of reaching nativelikeness and meeting all the five 'ideal' conditions seems to be evident if we look at how the learners in question fulfilled the other 'ideal' conditions.

Before moving to the next hypothesised condition, the observations made in relation to the question of ethnicity in L2 learning are worthy of note. The detailed examination in Chapter 8, raised the question 'what is the impact on learners of having the potential to be taken for a native speaker if only the language does not let them down?'. Renate's appearance would always 'betray' her as very unlikely to be a native speaker of Mandarin. In contrast, Joy, being completely Chinese in appearance, was often taken to be a native speaker before she opened her mouth. Consequently, Joy found that, as an

ethnic Chinese, the stakes were higher, and this gave her own inhibitions. Yet she also had the chance to win the battle of being assumed natively like for just a little longer each time – something not available to Renate.

### **9.1.2.3 A guaranteed supply of ‘ideal’ input had a good predicting power**

As recalled, the ‘ideal’ condition of input supply in the RN Model is hypothesised as input meeting the following criteria:

- Comprehensible: A gradual unfolding of input, which is comprehensible within the learner’s ‘zone of proximal development (ZPD)’
- Authentic: Functional language use in real life
- Interactive: Requiring certain reaction, namely, producing online output
- Abundant: Plenty of recurring similar situations
- Rich: various situations

It seemed that the ‘ideal’ condition of input supply had a fairly strong power in predicting a learner’s likelihood of reaching nativelikeness. There are four special findings.

Firstly, as a whole, the amount of the ‘target’ language input received seemed to be correlated with the language achievement made. For example, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 8, learners such as Renate, Ann, Sarah, Louise, Pete and Joy managed to guarantee a supply of some sort of ‘ideal’ target

language input. Their language achievements accordingly were among the best of all the participants (see Table 6.11).

Secondly, the learners' ability to produce nativelike formulaic language seemed to be correlated with the extent of their integration with native speaker groups. This was evident especially in the case of Sarah, who was the most successful in developing a close relationship with the L2 group. As shown in Tables 6.10 and 6.11, Sarah's global Mandarin proficiency in the ranking was not at the top. However, as seen in Table 7.2, her command of formulaic sequences was even higher than Joy's. This, to a certain extent, confirms the findings in the literature that one's formulaic language achievement is highly correlated with one's integration with the local L2 group (Adolphs & Durow, 2004; Dörnyei et al., 2004; Wray, 2002).

Thirdly, the input from other *non*-native speakers seemed to be more beneficial than the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 predicted it should be. This was most evident in the case of Joy, whose Mandarin input was largely from non-native speakers such as her Korean/Japanese friends. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 8, the fact that Joy's L1 (Cantonese) was close to the target language leads one to hesitate in drawing strong conclusions about the causes of her success.

Fourthly, the case of Mac's input supply, which was very limited, seems to suggest that under certain circumstances a small amount of target language supply might be sufficient for high language achievement. However, there are two factors which seem to have complicated Mac's case. Firstly, as in the case of Joy, Mac's knowledge of Cantonese might have impacted greatly upon his acquisition of Mandarin, especially in terms of the role of attention to input/output. In other words, Mac's high Mandarin achievement might not be correlated with the fact that he was only relying on a small amount of target language input. Secondly, there may have been a beneficial interaction with Mac's rather 'laid-back'/open attitude towards accuracy. Krashen (1985) suggests that such an attitude places a learner in a better position for taking in and using even a relatively small amount of input.

#### **9.1.2.4 An 'appropriate' attention to input was revealed**

While it seems to be true, as Skehan (1998a) claims, that learners have a tendency to focus on meaning rather than linguistic form, the specific ways in which learners pay attention to input varies, even within a single proficiency level. Drawing together the discussion in Chapter 5 and Chapter 8, leads to two main findings.

Firstly, N. Ellis' claims that due to one's L1 learning experience L2 input will fail to become intake (see, e.g. N. Ellis, 2005, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2006e).



However, this claim did not seem to hold true in at least Renate's and Joy's cases. Rather, quite the opposite was observed in the case of Joy, for her L1 (Cantonese) seemed to help her in translating Mandarin input into intake. However, there is also the possibility that Joy's case does not mean that Cantonese did not block Mandarin, only that it did it less, or in different ways, from the native speakers of English. Renate's attention to input (see below) suggests that there is a possibility that one can bypass or at least minimise the influence of one's L1 as long as one can hold back the 'temptation' of 'over-analysing' the input (Wray, 2002).

Secondly, as is evident in Renate's case, a sensitive or 'ideal' attention to input seems to be a 'balanced' attention. A balanced attention appears to be one that is not too strict with the input, so not trying to understand every word of the input or asking people to explain incomprehensible things. Rather, it focuses on certain input, which can then be elaborated later. Furthermore, this balanced attention may be beneficial at any stage of L2 learning.

#### **9.1.2.5 An 'appropriate' attention to output seemed to be part of the key to nativelikeness**

Renate's language achievement seems to indicate the importance of an 'appropriate' attention to output (as well as input) in L2 learning. There are two reasons supporting this claim. Firstly, unlike Joy and Mac who also achieved

high Mandarin proficiency within a short period, Renate did not know any language/dialect close to the target language Mandarin beforehand. In other words, there was no 'short-cut' for Renate. Secondly, even though Renate tried to maximise the amount of native input during her year abroad, comparatively she might not have received as much input as other participants (e.g. Sarah, Ann), let alone quality of input (arguably Sarah received much more diverse interactive input than Renate did).

What is striking about Renate's attention to input, which was remarkably different from the others, was her refusal to engage with grammar explicitly. As argued in Chapter 8, not engaging with grammar explicitly had the linguistic effect of preventing her being over-productive, and the knock on social effect of avoiding speaking when she had no resources for doing so. The joint effect was to hold her output within the bounds of what she already knew, plus a little, rather than plus a lot. Furthermore, it seemed to impact upon her attention to input. It would naturally make her more sensitive to when she *did* find herself in a new situation, since she would need to observe closely if she were to learn. In other words, Renate's success, especially her fluency and formulaicity, seems to indicate a possibility that one can bypass the 'temptation' of being 'overproductive' in language output, a language barrier suggested by Wray (2002).

#### **9.1.2.6 The notion of nativelikeness: A continuum of the impression**

##### **one creates**

The whole thesis has demonstrated that the concept of nativelikeness is a continuum of the impression one creates, linguistically and culturally plus, physically, as the ethnic Chinese participants clearly discovered. There are just many things that can give someone away as a non-native, including one's accent (as in Renate's case), propensity to learner errors, and one's physical appearance. Moreover, even if a learner's language is indistinguishable from that of a native, as Su (2004) revealed, knowing what native speaker mothers say to their young children at bedtime is something that could easily elude many non-natives—for they have never been in that situation. They may also have missed cultural knowledge acquired by to their native peers, such as in relation to children's games and TV programmes. It is therefore not surprising to find that Hyltenstam (1988, 1992) was able to find non-nativeness within even 'near-native' speakers. What seems to matter is how long you can survive before someone notices that you are not native. In other words, this finding seems to confirm Piller's (2002) observation that 'passing [as a native speaker] is temporary, context-, audience- and medium-specific performance' (p. 179).

Before moving onto the next section, one thing seems worthwhile mentioning here. That is the case of Mac. As we know, Mac did well in his Mandarin

learning except his strong southern accent. However, rather surprisingly, his case in general did not seem to fit well with the five hypothesised conditions (see Chapter 5). In other words, the proposed criteria did not seem to deal with Mac's case as a whole. One of the possibilities for explaining this may be because of his Cantonese knowledge. Similar to Joy's case, reflecting in their 'special' attention to input and output (see Chapter 8), Mac's Cantonese knowledge may have had an overwhelmingly beneficial effect on his Mandarin learning. This seems to further suggest that a key to learning success may well lie in a 'balanced' attention (as with Renate) or a 'short-cut' attention (as with Joy and Mac) to input and output. That is, not engaging with the target language grammar explicitly.

## **9.2 Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research**

### **9.2.1 Assumptions**

It is an inevitable feature of any study using self-report that the findings are vulnerable to the participants' limited capacity to provide, through introspection, a true and full picture of what actually happened. Seliger (1983) points out that "it might be better to speak of good language learners as good speculators, rather than good guessers". At the most extreme end, learners may not have told the truth. A more likely real and consistent limitation, is that even when they truthfully reported what they believed, their belief did not entirely match what they were actually doing. As evident in the case of Joy and

Renate, especially Renate, personalities can also play a major role, in leading someone to play up, or play down, how much study they did, how much they prioritised one thing over another, or how much they cared about, say, not succeeding in communication. These limitations apply to any study that asks learners about their own learning, yet clearly there remains a valid role for this sort of approach because learners do provide a perspective on the process that cannot be accessed in any other way. Simply one must remain vigilant about making any direct association between the claim and the fact.

Having said that, it also behoves the researcher to minimise the impact of self-report by taking appropriate measures, such as triangulating by means of other approaches. In this research, triangulation was achieved by questionnaire, interview, and observation during interview. By combining the findings from the three different approaches, the claims made in this study are more robust than might otherwise be the case.

### **9.2.2 Methodological issues**

Each method used in the present investigation has both limitations and strengths. The initial case study, being qualitative in nature, enabled us to gain a rich insight into the learning process of one individual. However, due to its dense description and high context-dependence, it is difficult (if not impossible) to generalise to different contexts or different participants. In

contrast, the survey method used in the main study with the Leeds students enabled us to make comparison across different learners. Therefore it can be generalised cautiously to certain larger populations that share the key characteristics of being adult class-based learners in, first, the L1 environment and then in the L2 one. Of course, generalisations in relation to the finding of differences tend to result in claims like 'in most such populations, different people will respond differently to the same learning opportunities' – a frustrating conclusion, even if a plausible one.

Although the group study maintained certain aspects of qualitative methodology, using 20 learners meant that certain aspects of the learning process could not be explored further or more deeply. So much is probably part of the inevitable compromise of research of this nature (Skehan, 1998).

In research that aims to explore the process of language learning from different angles, ideally one would trace the language development of one set of participants longitudinally, rather than taking snapshots of different learners at different stages. The RN Model predicts that if someone met all the criteria, they would be successful. In other words, in theory if one found a learning situation that presented all those opportunities, one could follow a cohort and see whether all the learners did well, and if not why not. Therefore a strength of the present study is that it would actually enable such predictions to be made,

and such a study to be undertaken, even though it was not feasible to do it in this case due to the time limit of the project. However, future research could do so.

### **9.2.3 Participants**

To what extent were the participants in this study representative even of their own cohort? They were volunteers, with the motivation of getting some oral practice with a Mandarin native speaker. Although they were encouraged by their lecturer to participate, it was still up to them to decide whether they would take part or not. On comparing these participants with the entire cohort at Leeds, and indeed with similar learner populations, they would arguably be regarded as being the more motivated learners. This way of conducting research is inevitable, since we cannot force people to participate in this type of research (Dörnyei, 2003:75). However, it does mean that we cannot safely assume that these participants are representative of the whole population.

### **9.2.4 Analyses**

#### **9.2.4.1 Reconsideration of the use of monolingual Chinese judges**

As reported in Chapter 6, in order to gain an independent gauge of the Leeds students' ability to communicate with lay Chinese people, individuals representative of their target interlocutors were used to rate their global

speaking command. Based on the judges' confidence in conversing with the learners, the scores obtained enabled us to infer their ability in conversing with the lay Chinese people that they had encountered in China. Instead of using teacher-raters or trained raters, this method addressed the real agenda of the learner: their actual required routine conversational ability with real monolingual Chinese lay people when they were in China instead of with the normally bilingual teachers they would meet in a classroom. However, there appear to be four limitations here. Firstly, as found in Chapter 6, there seemed to be a problem with reliability across five judges. One might therefore want to ask whether five judges are enough to judge the learners' proficiency. In other words, would more judges have provided the researcher with more options? As discussed in Chapter 4 and also evident in the present project, judges (either trained or naïve) subconsciously will tend to apply their own criteria despite having been provided with rating criteria. As a consequence of this, more judges might provide the researcher with more options (i.e. various captures/focuses of different aspects of nativelikeness), but it could simply be an act of "quantifying the qualitative" (Mollet, 2008).

Secondly, one might want to ask whether the global judgement approach employed in this project was appropriate, or adequate. Perhaps, alongside the monolingual judges, teacher judges could have been included, giving a greater insight into what the learners' had achieved.



Thirdly, regarding playing speech segments to the judges, one might want to ask whether three segments were enough. Some of the segments did not seem to be good ones in retrospect, because clearly some led to very different judgements. In other words, some segments were not representative or caused particular problems because the judges did not know what to do about, for example, hesitations. Nevertheless, as mentioned, this seems to be an inevitable result of random selection, which was aimed at avoiding the researcher imposing her own judgements on the selection process.

Fourthly, would it have been better to use video, rather than audio, data of the interview and presenting that to the judges? Clearly video data could provide judges with information such as body language which is not available with audio data. However, as is evident in the case of the ethnic Chinese, video data might then have led the judges to be influenced by appearance. In other words, it was appropriate, for the reasons of fairness, to use audio data.

#### **9.2.4.2 As a whole**

Due to the limitations of time and space, and also the richness of the data collected, only certain aspects of the data have been analysed. Future analysis of the data from different perspectives may reveal a fuller and clear picture of learning obstacles and of how the learners managed to overcome them. However, it must be said that only a truly longitudinal study can fully address

this sort of question. In the same way, there are many further analyses that could be undertaken on the interview data, to examine in detail the learners' production and comprehension ability.

More specifically, when analysing the interview with the Leeds students, the focus was only on the targeted testing items, that is, we only looked at their comprehension ability. It seems a clearer picture would have been gained from looking in more detail at their production and comprehension ability throughout the interview. This is an opportunity for future work on what is a very rich data set.

#### **9.2.4.3 Psychological interpretation**

It is "the almost irresistible temptation of applied linguists to adopt somewhat simplistic psychological models" (Dörnyei, 2005:219), and that is a criticism that could no doubt be laid at the door of this study too, in relation to how individual difference variables have been associated with specific SLA processes. There is, one might argue, a fundamental contradiction inherent in trying to show generalised tendencies in relation to individual variation, and it is not a battle that could be fought in these pages. Nevertheless, it is clear that a balanced and complementary integration of linguistic and psychological approaches is a desirable goal for future research into SLA.

### 9.3 The last word

The in-depth case study with the French native-like learner was a rather satisfying investigation, which enabled the researcher to answer questions and explore issues further and further. However, due to the fact that it was a retrospective study by nature, the main resource that was relied on was the learner herself. The criticism that a learner is not a linguist (Seliger, 1983) seemed to become clearer throughout the investigation. Many times the learner was brought into areas which she had never been conscious of. Utterances, such as, "I've never thought about this", "I don't know why", "I just did" kept occurring. In a way, it casts doubt on the common assumption in SLA research that the conscious revelations of learners are in many ways equivalent to the unconscious workings of the learner's mind. This has led Seliger (1983) to suggest:

Such research should be examined for its hypothesis generating value rather than its hypothesis testing value. In addition, such research can be of greater value in areas of study concerned with affective factors than in those concerned with describing the internal processes of acquisition or communication.

However, on the other hand, experimental methods (e.g. brain scanning) have been criticised for their artificiality (i.e. the non-authentic interaction, and usually certain isolated linguistic components, such as word recognition) and also their 'imagined' possibilities of certain relations between the scanning objects and the targeted process (Green, 2005; Paradis, 2004, 2005).

Moreover, supposing that Wray is right in her argument:

the learning itself is subservient to the real agenda, which is to accommodate the immediate needs – all of them – of the individual, not only as a learner but as a functional entity in his or her own complex world" (Wray, 2002:213).

then the methods that will enable a researcher to fully explore the complex, real learning process of a human being, who is both an individual and also a social being, remain to be discovered.

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## **Appendices**



## Appendix 1.1 Your experiences in studying English

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research. I would like to assure you that all of the information that you give will be treated confidentially. This means that I will not use your name anywhere in the reporting of my findings, nor make your personal details available to anyone else.

You do not have to take part in this study if you don't want to, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me at the address I have provided.

Please sign below to confirm that you agree to my using the information that you provide in my PhD research.

Thank you,

Yanling Su

Centre for Language and Communication, Cardiff University

---

NAME (please print)..... Male / Female (please circle)

SIGNATURE .....

**Section1 - some questions about you and your language background.**

1. What is the name of the Cardiff University degree that were you enrolled on? (e.g. MA in applied linguistics )

.....

2. Is French your first language? Yes / No (please circle)

If not, please explain your situation:

.....

.....

.....

3. Do you know any other languages? Yes / No (please circle)

If Yes, please list them below.

Language	Level attained  e.g. GCSE, A-level including grade	On a scale of 1 to 5, how fluent would you judge yourself to be?  1 = hardly able to construct a simple sentence 5 = native like	Where/how did you learn this language?  e.g. from family members; at school; self-study; evening classes; living abroad, etc.
a)			
b)			
c)			
d)			
e)			

**Section 2 - some questions about your knowledge and learning of English before you came to the UK.**

4. How much English did you know before you started studying at Cardiff? Please give details. Please mention if any of it was learned outside of the UK.

.....

.....

.....

5. Before you came to study at Cardiff, to what extent did you practise your spoken English with native and non-native speakers in France?

Please state 'F', 'QO', 'S' or 'N' as below:

- F Frequently = more than 5 hours per week
- QO Quite Often = between 1 and 5 hours per week
- S Sometimes = less than 1 hour per week
- N Never

Native speakers teaching your course	.....
Other native speakers	.....
Other students of English in your year	.....
Other students of English in other year groups	.....
Other non-native speakers	.....

Comments:

.....

.....

.....

6. Before your came to study at Cardiff, how much time had you spent in any English speaking countries? Please say which countries.

.....

.....

.....

**Section 3 - some questions about your FIRST YEAR experience in the UK.**

7. At which University did you spend your study time in the UK?

8. How many months in total of your first year did you spend in a English-speaking environment?

9. How many hours per week did you spend in English language classes during your first year study in the UK?

10. How many hours per week did you spend studying other subjects through the medium of English during your first year study in the UK? Please say which subjects.

11. In your non-class time, was it easy to find opportunities to practise your English in your first year in the UK? (please circle)

Easy                  Fairly easy                  Not easy

12. Overall, how would you account for the improvement in your English over the first year you spent in the UK? Please give the approximate proportions (e.g. 30%), adding up to 100%

Activity	% role in improving your English
English courses that you took while there	
Other things that you did through the medium of English (e.g. Other courses, sports, etc)	
Private study	
Using it with native speakers of English	
Using it with other non-native speakers	
Other (please specify, e.g. native speaker boy/girlfriend; internet chatting)	



**Section 4 – finally, some questions regarding your perception of language learning.**

**What do you think about language learning?**

Below are beliefs that some people have about learning foreign languages. Please read each statement and then write the appropriate figure 1 to 5, according to whether you:

- 1 - strongly agree
- 2 - agree
- 3 - neither agree nor disagree
- 4 - disagree
- 5 - strongly disagree

1. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages .	
2. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.	-----
3. It is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.	-----
4. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.	-----
5. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	-----
6. It is best to learn English in a English-speaking country.	-----
7. I enjoy practising English with the British people I meet. .	-----
8. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	-----
9. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	-----
10. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary.	-----
11. It is important to repeat and practise a lot.	-----
12. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	-----
13. If students are permitted to make errors in English when they start learning, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	-----
14. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	-----
15. I would like to improve my English so that I can get to know British people better.	-----
16. It is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language.	-----
17. It is important to practise speaking and listening by using native recorded materials such as audio-cassettes or CDs.	-----
18. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	-----
19. I would like to have British friends.	-----
20. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	-----
21. In my view, the hardest thing to master in spoken English is (please circle):	
a) The tones                      b) Speaking fluently                      c) Thinking of the right words	
d) Knowing what is appropriate to say	
e) Keeping up with what people say back to you	
f) Other: .....	

**Note:** Of the previous 21 statements, are there any to which you think your response has changed as a result of spending time in a English-speaking environment? If so, please identify the statement number and what you would have responded before your time in the UK.

	Before coming:	One year in the Uk:	Now:

**How do you feel about language learning?**

1. How do/did you feel when speaking English in a class?

a) While it was your first year in the UK

b) How about now?

2. How did you feel when you had to conduct a transaction using English in your first year in the UK? e.g. buy something in a shop, reserve tickets, and make travel arrangements.

a) While it was your first year in the UK

b) How about now?

## Your preferred learning style

4. Does memorizing complete phrases improve your English? If so, how?

Your first year in the UK:

Now:

5. Does learning grammar rules improve your English? If so, how?

Your first year in the UK:

Now:

6. Does memorizing single words improve your English? If so, how?

Your first year in the UK:

Now:

7. Which of your language skills would you most like to improve? Please number the following 1-5 with 1 as the skill you would most like to improve:

	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Now
Fluency		
Accuracy		
Pronunciation		
Vocabulary		
Grammar		

8. Do these statements describe the way you learned in your first year in the UK? Please circle the appropriate response. Please mark those which have changed now.

- It doesn't matter if I don't understand every word ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- I try to use new words as soon as I have learned them ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- I plan what I am going to say before I speak ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- If someone doesn't understand me, I try to say it another way ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- I sometimes use words without being sure of what they mean ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- I always ask people to explain things I don't understand ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- Out of class I always try to practise my English when I can ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- It doesn't bother me if I make mistakes ..... Agree ..... Disagree
- If I know I can't express an idea easily, I don't bother trying ..... Agree ..... Disagree

English and you

Below are some statements from other learners. Please number the statements from 1 to 5. Number 1 should be the statement that most closely reflects your own beliefs, and 5 should be the statement that least reflects them, for your first year in the UK. Please mark those which have changed now

I think my accent in English is terrible, but my teacher says it's OK. I don't know why he says this - I think if you try to learn English, you should try to sound like an English person

*I want my English to be perfect and I always try very hard to be correct when I speak English. I hate making mistakes and I want to be corrected when I do*

I'm sure I make a lot of mistakes when I speak but I don't care - people understand me, mostly.

I think British English is the best - I only want to learn that

I feel strange when I speak English - like a different person. I feel like I'm acting. I even think my voice changes.

Motivation

Please complete this sentence: I want to speak English well enough to:

First year in the UK:

Now:

Would you like to speak English like a native speaker does? If so, please describe the kind of native speaker you want to sound like.

First year in the UK:

Now:

Is it useful to have a foreign accent when you speak English? Why?

First year in the UK: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_

What are the disadvantages of having a foreign accent when you speak English?

First year in the UK: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_

*\*\*\*Thank you for helping me with my research. If you would like me to update you on what I find out when I complete my analysis of the data, please give below details of where I can email or contact you in the future (e.g. permanent home address). Be assured that I will not record this contact information in my main database, use it for any other purpose, or pass it on to anyone.*

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 4.1 Your experiences in studying Mandarin

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research. I would like to assure you that all of the information that you give will be treated confidentially. This means that I will not use your name anywhere in the reporting of my findings, nor make your personal details available to anyone else.

You do not have to take part in this study if you don't want to, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you can contact me at the address I have provided.

Please sign below to confirm that you agree to my using the information that you provide in my PhD research.

Thank you,

Yanling Su

Centre for Language and Communication, Cardiff University

---

NAME (please print)..... Male / Female (please circle)

SIGNATURE .....

**Section1 - some questions about you and your language background.**

1. What is the name of the Leeds University degree that are you enrolled on? (e.g. Single Honours: Modern Chinese Studies)

.....

2. Is English your first language? Yes / No (please circle)

If not, please explain your situation:

.....  
.....  
.....

3. Do you know any other languages? Yes / No (please circle)

If Yes, please list them below.

Language	Level attained  e.g. GCSE, A-level including grade	On a scale of 1 to 5, how fluent would you judge yourself to be?  1 = hardly able to construct a simple sentence 5 = native like	Where/how did you learn this language?  e.g. from family members; at school; self-study; evening classes; living abroad, etc.
a)			
b)			
c)			
d)			
e)			

**Section 2 - some questions about your knowledge and learning of Mandarin before you went to China.**

4. How much Mandarin did you know before you started studying at Leeds? Please give details. Please mention if any of it was learned outside of the UK.

.....

.....

.....

5. During your first year of studying Mandarin at Leeds, to what extent did you practise your spoken Mandarin with native and non-native speakers in the UK?

Please state 'F', 'QO', 'S' or 'N' as below:

- F Frequently = more than 5 hours per week
- QO Quite Often = between 1 and 5 hours per week
- S Sometimes = less than 1 hour per week
- N Never

Native speakers teaching your course	
Other native speakers	
Other students of Mandarin in your year	
Other students of Mandarin in other year groups	
Other non-native speakers	

Comments:

.....

.....

.....

6. Before your study abroad on this course, how much time had you spent in any Mandarin-speaking countries? Please say which countries.

.....

.....

.....



**Section 3 - some questions about your experience in China or Taiwan.**

7. At which University did you spend your study time abroad?

.....

8. How many months in total did you spend in a Mandarin-speaking environment?

.....

9. How many hours per week did you spend in Mandarin language classes during your study abroad?

.....

10. How many hours per week did you spend studying other subjects through the medium of Mandarin? Please say which subjects.

.....

.....

.....

11. In your non-class time, was it easy to find opportunities to practise your Mandarin?  
(please circle)

Easy

Fairly easy

Not easy

12. Overall, how would you account for the improvement in your Mandarin over the time you spent abroad? Please give the approximate proportions (e.g. 30%), adding up to 100%

Activity	% role in improving your Mandarin
Mandarin courses that you took while there	
Other things that you did through the medium of Mandarin (e.g. Other courses, sports, etc)	
Private study	
Using it with native speakers of Mandarin	
Using it with other non-native speakers	
Other (please specify, e.g. native speaker boy/girlfriend; internet chatting)	

## Section 4 – finally, some questions regarding your perception of language learning.

### What do you think about language learning?

Below are beliefs that some people have about learning foreign languages. Please read each statement and then write the appropriate figure 1 to 5, according to whether you:

- 1 - strongly agree
- 2 - agree
- 3 - neither agree nor disagree
- 4 - disagree
- 5 - strongly disagree

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages .  |  |
| 2. I believe that I will learn to speak Mandarin very well.   |  |
| 3. It is important to speak Mandarin with excellent pronunciation.  |  |
| 4. It is necessary to know about Mandarin-speaking cultures in order to speak Mandarin.   |  |
| 5. You shouldn't say anything in Mandarin until you can say it correctly.   |  |
| 6. It is best to learn Mandarin in a Mandarin-speaking country.   |  |
| 7. I enjoy practising Mandarin with the Chinese people I meet. .  |  |
| 8. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in Mandarin.   |  |
| 9. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.   |  |
| 10. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary.  |  |
| 11. It is important to repeat and practise a lot.   |  |
| 12. I feel shy speaking Mandarin with other people.   |  |
| 13. If students are permitted to make errors in Mandarin when they start learning, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on. |  |
| 14. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.   |  |
| 15. I would like to improve my Mandarin so that I can get to know Chinese people better.  |  |
| 16. It is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language.  |  |
| 17. It is important to practise speaking and listening by using native recorded materials such as audio-cassettes or CDs.                     |  |
| 18. If I learn to speak Mandarin very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.  |  |
| 19. I would like to have Chinese friends.   |  |
| 20. It is easier to read and write Mandarin than to speak and understand it.  |  |
| 21. In my view, the hardest thing to master in spoken Mandarin is (please circle):  |  |
| a) The tones                      b) Speaking fluently                      c) Thinking of the right words                                    |  |
| d) Knowing what is appropriate to say   |  |
| e) Keeping up with what people say back to you  |  |
| f) Other: .....   |  |

**Note:** Of the previous 21 statements, are there any to which you think your response has changed as a result of spending time in a Mandarin-speaking environment? If so, please identify the statement number and what you would have responded before your time abroad.


### How do you feel about language learning?

1. How do/did you feel when speaking Mandarin in a language class?

a) While you were in China/Taiwan

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---

b) Now you are back in Leeds

---

---

---

2. How did you feel when you had to speak Mandarin in a class for another subject (e.g. a non-language class where there were also native speakers)?

---

---

---

3. How did you feel when you had to conduct a transaction using Mandarin? e.g. buy something in a shop, reserve tickets, and make travel arrangements.

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**Your preferred learning style**

4. Does memorizing complete phrases improve your Mandarin? If so, how?

.....

.....

5. Does learning grammar rules improve your Mandarin? If so, how?

.....

.....

6. Does memorizing single words improve your Mandarin? If so, how?

.....

.....

7. Which of your language skills would you most like to improve? Please number the following 1-5 with 1 as the skill you would most like to improve:

Fluency	
Accuracy	
Pronunciation	
Vocabulary	
Grammar	

8. Do these statements describe the way you learn? Please circle the appropriate response.

- It doesn't matter if I don't understand every word
  - I try to use new words as soon as I have learned them
  - I plan what I am going to say before I speak
  - If someone doesn't understand me, I try to say it another way
  - I sometimes use words without being sure of what they mean
  - I always ask people to explain things I don't understand
  - Out of class I always try to practise my Mandarin when I can
  - It doesn't bother me if I make mistakes
  - If I know I can't express an idea easily, I don't bother trying

..... Agree .....

..... Disagree .....

..... Agree .....

..... Disagree .....

..... Agree .....

..... Disagree .....

..... Agree .....

..... Disagree .....

..... Agree .....

..... Disagree .....

## Mandarin and you

Below are some statements from other learners. Please number the statements from 1 to 5. Number 1 should be the statement that most closely reflects your own beliefs, and 5 should be the statement that least reflects them.

I think my accent in Mandarin is terrible, but my teacher says it's OK. I don't know why he says this - I think if you try to learn Mandarin, you should try to sound like a Chinese person

*I want my Mandarin to be perfect and I always try very hard to be correct when I speak Mandarin. I hate making mistakes and I want to be corrected when I do*

I'm sure I make a lot of mistakes when I speak but I don't care - people understand me, mostly.

I think Peking Mandarin is the best - I only want to learn that

I feel strange when I speak Mandarin - like a different person. I feel like I'm acting. I even think my voice changes.

## Motivation

Please complete this sentence: I want to speak Mandarin well enough to:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Would you like to speak Mandarin like a native speaker does? If so, please describe the kind of native speaker you want to sound like.

.....

.....

.....

Is it useful to have a foreign accent when you speak Mandarin? Why?

.....

.....

.....

What are the disadvantages of having a foreign accent when you speak Mandarin?

.....

.....

.....

*\*\*\*Thank you for helping me with my research. If you would like me to update you on what I find out when I complete my analysis of the data, please give below details of where I can email or contact you in the future (e.g. permanent home address). Be assured that I will not record this contact information in my main database, use it for any other purpose, or pass it on to anyone.*

**Email:**

**Address:**

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Appendix 4.2 Interview Questions

### • FEELINGS ABOUT BEING BACK IN THE UK

- 回到英国，感觉怎么样 (*How does it feel to be back*)?
- 什么时候回来的 (*when did you come back*)?
- 你的父母和朋友肯定很高兴见到你回来喔：你去了那么久了，又那么远 (*your parents and friends must have been very happy when they saw you back, since you have been away for so long and so far away*)。

### • TRAVEL EXPERIENCES IN CHINA

- 在中国的时候，有没有到哪里走走啊 (*Did you **travel around** when you were in China? If yes, where did you go*)? （有没有到哪里**旅游**啊？）
- 你最喜欢哪个地方呢 (*what is your favourite place*)?
- 为什么呢 (*why*)?

### • ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHINESE TRAFFIC

- 你觉得中国的**交通**怎么样 (*how do you feel about Chinese **traffic***)?

### • FEELINGS ABOUT CHINESE WEATHER

- 中国的**气候**你适不适应 (***Are you used to the Chinese weather***)? （习不习惯）
- 你住的地方有**暖气**吗 (*Were there any **heating facilities** in the place you lived*)?
- 那有**空调**吗 (*Any **aircon***)?

### • FOOD

- 你一般是自己做饭呢，还是到外面吃 (*Did you usually do the cooking*

*yourself or eat out)?*

- 你一般是到**超市**去买菜呢, 还是到**市场**买菜(*Did you usually do the shopping in the **supermarkets** or in **open markets**?*)
- 在中国的时候, 你有没有发现有一些水果和蔬菜在中国有但在英国是没有的或很难买得到的 (*Have you found any fruits or veg in China which you can't find it here or which are hard to find here?*)
- 例如哪些呢 (*What are they then?*)

#### • TESTING FOR THREE SPECIAL CHINESE FRUIT VOCABULARIES:

- **榴莲** *durian*
- **山楂** *Chinese hawthorn*
- (冰) **糖葫芦** *Candied hawthorn*
- 有没有有试很多不同的**菜** (*Have you tried different dishes in China?*)
- 你知不知道中国有很多不同的**菜系** (*Do you know that there are many different **cuisines** in China?*)
- 例如 (*for examples*)?
- 有没有听说过中国的一句俗语: “民以食为天” (*Have you heard a Chinese saying “**people regard food as the prime need**”?*)
- 你觉得它指什么呢?
- 你有没有到过当地人家里吃饭啊 (*Have you ever been in Chinese family for a meal?*)
- 你有没有发现中国的**餐桌**(上的) 礼仪跟英国有什么不同 (*Have you found anything different from the British **table manners**?*)

#### • SPARE-TIME ACTIVITIES IN CHINA

- 平时**课外活动/课余时间**, 你干些什么呢 (*What did you do during your **spare-time** activities?*)
- 你平时用中文的机会多不多 (*Did you use your Mandarin a lot?*)



- **CHINESE FRIENDS**

- 你有没有认识很多中国人吗 (*Do you **know** many Chinese*)?
- 你跟你中国的朋友走得近吗 ( ***Are you close to** your Chinese friends*)?

- **FEELINGS IN GENERAL**

- 这次中国之行，你感觉最大的收获是什么呢 (*What was your biggest **achievement** in this one year staying in China*)?
- 假如，你有朋友学类似你这样的课程想要出中国学习汉语一年,你会建议他怎么办呢 (*Just imaginng, if you had a friend taking a similar course to yours learning Mandarin and about to go to China for one year studying abroad, what **suggestions** would you give them*)?

## Appendix 4.3 Informed consent sheet



Centre for Language and Communication Research

Cardiff University

### Informed Consent Form

Thank you for your agreeing to take part in this interview survey.

I am investigating how individual differences in learning style influence the experience during a year abroad.

This study is being conducted by me (Yanling Su, PhD student at Language and Communication Centre, Cardiff University) for my PhD project. For any questions or concerns, please contact me at the address provided in the contact card.

This sheet containing your personal details will remain detached from the interview and will not be shared with any person other than my supervisor Prof Alison Wray. You do not have to participate in this project if you do not want to. You may also withdraw from the project at any time.

Please provide your name and sign below to give your consent for me to include your answers in my project.

Name (please print)	Signature	Name (please print)	Signature

#### **Appendix 4.4 Oral instruction for the written questionnaire**

The written questionnaire was administered by the researcher and the oral instructions were given in English as below:

- The purpose of my study is to find out whether there are any relations between your personal learning styles and your learning outcome.
- My study with you has two parts. One is the questionnaire I'm doing with you now; the other is the interviews in Mandarin, which you have already signed up for.
- This questionnaire will take you about 15 to 20 minutes.

It has four sections. The first three sections: Section 1 on Page 2, Section 2 in Page 3, and Section 3 in Page 4, are about your language learning background and learning experiences. So, please, answer them as accurate as possible. As for Section 4, which is the last section, from Page 5 to Page 9, it's about your perception of language learning. It's your immediate reaction I'm interested in. So, please give your immediate answer to each question. You don't need to waste your time thinking about it. But, please don't be careless as it's important that they are your true feelings. Don't be scared of the number of pages of Section 4, because it's about your immediate reaction and you shall be able to answer them very quickly

#### **Appendix 4.5 Oral instruction for the interview**

今天我们就随便聊聊。主要是谈一下你在中国的经历。我主要是看一下你中文口语怎么样。我是来自南方的，所以我会有点南方口音，如果你有什么听不清楚的，尽管叫我重复好了 (translation: Today we'll just have a bit of a chat about your experiences in China. It's just to see how your spoken Mandarin is. I came from the south part of China, so I will have a bit southern accent. Please do feel free to ask me to repeat or clarify anything if you don't catch what I say)。

## Appendix 6.1 Sampling survey

### 语言背景调查

姓名: \_\_\_\_\_ 性别: \_\_\_\_\_ 年龄: \_\_\_\_\_ 来自省份: \_\_\_\_\_

1. 你有没有学过英语: 有 没有

2. 学历: \_\_\_\_\_

3. 除了普通话之外, 你会讲什么其他语言或地方话: \_\_\_\_\_

### Language background survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Province: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you ever learned English before: Yes / No

5. Education Level: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Except Mandarin, what other language(s) or dialect (s) can you speak: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 6.2 Instruction for rating investigation

我这个实验主要是想看一下外国人普通讲地怎么样。每次评分，你会听到一分钟的谈话。当然，你一听就知道：交谈的双方，一个是我（微笑），一个是外国人。我前阵子对他们在中国的经历用普通话进行了采访。你将听到的是那次采访的录音。

*(translation: The purpose of my investigation is to see how those foreigners' Mandarin are. After one-minute recorded conversation, you give it a mark. Of course, you will know once you start listening, that the conversation was conducted between me (smiling) and a foreigner. This is an interview conversation about their experience in China, which I conducted not long ago.)*

评分的标准是：假设这个外国人现在走进这个房间，你有多大的把握觉得他可以用普通话跟你交谈。评分是从 0 分到 10 分。0 分就是你对他一点把握都没有，觉得和他根本就完全无法用普通话交谈。10 分就是你对他有十足的把握，觉得他跟我们会讲普通话的中国人没有什么两样。你不要理会他们的口音——我们大家都会有各自的地方口音，对不？这都很正常的。所以，请不要把他们的口音算上去。

*(Translation: The criterion for ratings is, imaging that a foreigner enters this room, how much confidence will you have in him to chat with him in Mandarin?*

*The rating is based on a 10-point scale, from 0 point to 10 points. 0 point*

*means that you have no confidence in him to conduct the conversation with you now in Mandarin at all. 10 points means that you have full confidence in him that he can talk completely as a normal Chinese in Mandarin with you. You don't need to pay attention to their accents. It's very normal for every one of us to have our own local accent, isn't it? Therefore, please don't take into account their accents. )*

