# How do Chinese /Taiwanese University Students in the UK Improve Their English Proficiency? An Exploration of Language Learning Strategy Use and Social Identity Development

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Doctor of Education
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by
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# DECLARATION

**This thesis is my own work and no part of it has been submitted for a degree at this, or any other, university.**

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## ABSTRACT

Although there has been a great deal of research on second or foreign language learning in study abroad (SA) contexts, it can be noticed that the focuses are largely on either cognitive (psychological) or sociocultural (or social) perspectives. Moreover, few studies have investigated the experiences of Chinese students, or indeed any other cohort of overseas students at British universities; most of the studies have been conducted in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The present study attempts to explore the experiences of Chinese L2 sojourners living and studying abroad and how they go about improving their language proficiency, focusing on how their language learning strategies (LLSs) use and social identity affect their L2 learning and use as well as how they may influence one another. In order to investigate the relationships among their use of language learning strategies, their social identities, and L2 learning and use, a mixed methods research design is proposed, using a questionnaire (SILL), learning diaries, online (MSN) communication, and stimulated recall (face-to-face and e-) interviews. 62 SILL questionnaires were completed twice, and 14 (7 pre-sojourn and 7 during sojourn) interviews were conducted. 6 students kept diary entries for around 6 months. 11 participants took part in the MSN communication for around 10 months (how often and how long depend upon individuals) and the time of the conversations for each participant was around 90 to 110 hours in total. The result of SILL shows that there were significant changes of the mean scores of three categories of LLSs, namely memory, metacognitive, and social strategies, employed by the Chinese students after around eight months residence abroad in the UK. The qualitative data interpreted the change of the use of some LLSs.  Additionally, the qualitative data have also provided the evidence supporting their social identity reconstruction during study abroad. The change of their LLS use and social identity were examined, which indicates that whilst their development of social identity affected their choice of LLS use, the employment of LLSs influenced the reconstruction of social identity as well. Furthermore, both their LLS use and social identity affected their L2 learning and use. The study sheds new light on the relation between identity and LLSs, proposing that they are complementary and mutually reinforcing each other. It also implies the potential interrelations among several factors relevant to SLA, such as learner autonomy, agency, social identity and LLSs.

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# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **AFF** | Affective strategies |
| **AH** | At home |
| **CAT** | Communicative accommodation theory |
| **COG** | Cognitive strategies |
| **EFL** | English as Foreign Language |
| **ESL** | English as second Language |
| **IELTS** | International English Language Testing System |
| **INT** | Identity Negotiation Theory |
| **L2** | Second language |
| **LLS** | Language Learning Strategies |
| **MEM** | Memory strategies |
| **MET** | Metacognitive strategies |
| **SA** | Study abroad |
| **SCT** | Sociocultural theory |
| **SILL** | the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning |
| **SIT** | Social Identity Theory |
| **SLA** | Second Language Acquisition |
| **SOC** | Social strategies |
| **TL** | Target Language |
| **ZPD** | Zone of proximal development |

# CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Aim of the study

Although there has been a great deal of research on second or foreign language learning in study abroad contexts, it can be noticed that the focuses are largely on either cognitive (psychological) or sociocultural perspectives. Moreover, few studies have investigated the experiences of Chinese students, or indeed any other cohort of overseas students at British universities; most of the studies have been conducted in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The present study aims to explore the experiences of Chinese L2 sojourners living and studying abroad and how they go about improving their language proficiency, focusing on how their LLSs (language learning strategies) use and social identity affect their L2 learning and how they may influence one another. My particular focus is on how study abroad contexts (English-speaking environments) may have an impact on learning, informing, developing and framing learners' sense of identity and LLS use.

## 1.2 Research background

Learning is a complicated process and so is language learning. Unlike acquiring a first language (L1), outcomes of the second language (L2) learning enterprise do vary. As Rubin (1975) states, '[s]ome people are more successful (however this is defined) than others at learning a second language' (p.41). Thus, how to be a successful or good language learner, although this is defined, seems always at the heart of second language acquisition (SLA) research. Rubin's article (1975) *What the Good Language Learner Can Teach Us*, which was perhaps the earliest language learner strategy research, described approaches and techniques applied by successful learners. Other later studies (e.g. Stern, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978/1996; Reiss, 1981; Huang & Van Naersson, 1987), along a similar vein, listed techniques or strategies employed by good language learners (see Chapter 2 for the details). Thereafter, strategy use appeared to be one of the foci of SLA research. One of the most important reasons that numerous studies have explored the area of learning strategies is that language teaching and learning aim to enhance students' competence at handling a second or foreign language but the teacher's input does not seem to spontaneously lead to the learner's output. Therefore,

learning how to learn has been viewed a critical and necessary component of the language learning process (e.g. Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Weaver & Cohen, 1997). Moreover, it has commonly been assumed that less successful learners 'have few worthwhile learning strategies' (Porte, 1988:168). Thus, if the language learning strategies (LLSs) applied by successful learners can be identified and transferred to less successful learners, they will be encouraged to improve their language learning through noticing and learning from 'good' language learners' LLSs (e.g. Weaver & Cohen, 1997). A great number of studies on learners' LLS use have documented its significant contributions to learners' L2 development (e.g. McDonough, 1999; Zhang, 2001, 2003; Cohen & Macaro, 2007).

LLS research has been attempting to theorise, define, and categorise strategies as well as to explore the relations to other concepts relevant to SLA, such as motivation, autonomy, and language proficiency, through a variety of methods including quantitative and qualitative ones (Macaro, 2010). However, there have been some problems with LLS research. For instance, there is a lack of consensus on how to define the concept of LLS (see Chapter 2). Moreover, there are also debates on the taxonomies of LLSs (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, the limitation of traditional LLS research based on questionnaire measuring the frequency of LLS use has also been pointed out. Whilst the LLS research has already established that 'frequent use of a large repertoire of strategies is positively related to learning results, […] more research investigating the real picture, which is more complex' (Gu, 2007: Foreword), is needed. Therefore, what kind of research is likely to explore the reality of L2 learning?

There are a number of theories about SLA, centring on various issues or addressing it from different perspectives (e.g. psychological and sociocultural). The psychological (cognitive) and sociocultural (social) perspectives of SLA have traditionally been considered to be in tension. During the past two decades, the field of SLA has shifted from a mainly cognitive orientation to sociocultural approaches (Zuengler & Miller, 2006) but there is still a controversy whether these two perspectives are irreconcilable or complementary (Oxford & Schramm, 2007). Larsen-Freeman (2002) describes the current SLA field as being 'in a state of turmoil' (p.33), whereas Lantolf (1996) views it in an optimistic way as 'incredibly and happily diverse, creative, often contentious, and always full of controversy' (p.738). Firth and Wagner (1997) criticises the field of SLA for its overwhelming cognitive orientation in defining and investigating the learner and

learning. Block (2003) notes scholars' growing tendency to subscribe to the view that 'mental processes are as social as they are individual and external as they are internal' (p.93), which also points to a possible inadequacy in traditional cognitive theories.

Theoretically speaking, whilst in the cognitive perspective, (language) learning relates to changes in 'mental state' taking place when one's mind processes information, which, however, appears to provide inadequate understanding of learning owing to re the significance of social interaction affecting language learning when living, or working with others, from the sociocultural point of view it refers to belonging, participating and communicating. That is to say:

> Knowledge is not an entity in the head of an individual, which can be acquired, enriched, or changed, but rather an activity that cannot be considered separately from the context in which it takes place. Therefore, learners do not accumulate knowledge from the outside, but rather participate in activities that are distributed among the individuals, tools and artefacts of a community (Mason, 2007: 2).

Lave and Wenger (1991) highlight that 'participation in social practice' should not be ignored since it offers a notion that learning can occur and be examined in various social settings. Norton (1995:9) argues that there appear to be difficulties in conceptualising the relationship between the language learner and the social world since a 'comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the language learner and learning context' has not been developed yet. These all emphasise the significance of the social side of the field of SLA and they seem to claim that the inadequacy of overwhelming cognitivism has led to the difficulties in providing a whole picture of SLA so that the response has been to develop a socially oriented SLA. Moreover, it is commonly believed that cognitive and sociocultural perspectives are theoretically completely different; however, practically speaking, there appear to be some overlapping features between them since some behaviours are not only cognitive but also sociocultural. Therefore, it seems reasonable and would be wiser to take both cognitive and sociocultural sides into consideration when designing studies. Block (2003) holds a similar point of view and goes on further to challenge such attempts at 'separating the social and cognitive and the interactional and transactional' (p.89). Firth and Wagner (1997) maintain that the best predictive models of SLA consider both the interaction of social activity and psycholinguistic elements (i.e. cognitive perspective). However, it would be argued that it seems not simple to combine cognitive and sociocultural perspectives unless it can be shown that they are theoretically and

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practically complementary. It seems beyond the scope of the current study and the thesis.

**1.3 Sociocultural perspective of SLA and why to focus on social identity**

It has been noted that attention of SLA research has shifted from the *products* of language learning to the *processes* through which learning takes place (Oxford, 1990). In terms of the processes of language learning, cognitive theories view them as a complex skill which, like any other cognitive skills, involves mental processes such as problem solving, and that the analysis of these mental processes is essential to reach the way learners mentally represent language rules in order to make use of them in their L2 performance (Ellis, 1994). On the other hand, sociocultural theory (SCT) (see Chapter 2) argues that developmental processes take place through participation in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings (i.e. social practices) (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Human mental functioning (including language learning) is fundamentally a *mediated* process that is organized by cultural artefacts, activities, and concepts (Ratner, 2002). Participation, collaboration, and social interaction are core elements of the concepts of *zone of proximal development* (*ZPD*) and *scaffolding* (Vygotsky, 1978, see Chapter 2 for detail); 'it is in this developmental space that learning is dialogical' (Jackson, 2008: 17). Through engaging in dialogue in social interaction, one constantly constructs and reconstructs our expressions as well as our sense of self (identity) (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). This is also the process of language learning. Wenger (1998: 215) points out that 'because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity'. There seems no exception with language learning. Ochs (1996: 407) also argues that '[t]he acquisition of language use and the acquisition of social and cultural competence are not developmentally independent processes, nor is one process a developmental prerequisite of the other'. Norton and Toohey (2002) further explain the relation between identity and language learning:

> Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks it… Thus, language learners are not only learning a linguistic system; they are learning a diverse set of sociocultural practices…. (p.115)

Thus, to fully comprehend these 'intertwined' processes, it is essential to understand the sociocultural context where language learning is taking place. As Ting-Toomey (1993) contends, 'language infiltrates so intensely the social experience within a culture that neither language nor culture can be understood without knowledge of both' (p.93). The context of the current study is an SA (study abroad) setting where pervious research has suggested that learners' identities are likely to reconstruct (e.g. Jackson, 2008, 2010). Recently, there is more research investigating the relation between SLA and identity (e.g. Joseph, 2004; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). The discussion below provides the reason for focusing on social identity in the present study.

## 1.4 The context: Study abroad

Driven by the aspiration for new knowledge, enhancement of foreign languages, and a better life, millions of students leave home to study abroad. Generally speaking, learners are able to acquire or improve second languages (L2) more simply and quickly in a target language (TL) environment than in their own countries. However, it seems a myth that sojourners can directly benefit from exposure to the TL environment. It does not appear to be that simple to clearly address what causes the differences. This has drawn a great deal of researchers' attentions on and dedication to the relevant fields of SLA.

The origin of contemporary approaches to SA may be from the efforts of earlier researchers to understand factors predicting language ability and to interpret the interaction of psychology and social context in SLA (Kinginger, 2009). It has been assumed that informal, direct exposure to the TL with formal classroom learning creates the 'optimal environment for learning an additional language and culture' (Jackson, 2008:1). However, within the last decade or so, some interesting but occasionally contradictory findings about language learning for SA students, as well as the nature of the immersion experience itself (e.g. Freed, 1995; Freed *et al*., 2004) have emerged. In general, 'study abroad has been shown to impact learners psychologically, culturally and linguistically' (Adams, 2006:259). SA research indicates that the improvement of learners' second language has a high correlation with learning in SA contexts (Lennon, 1990; Collentine, 2004; Freed *et al*., 2004; Adams, 2006). For instance, compared to learners studying at their home countries, SA learners 'appear to speak with greater ease and confidence, realized by a greater abundance of speech, spoken at a faster rate, and

characterized, correspondingly, by fewer dysfluent-sounding silent and / or filler pause' (Freed, 1995:26).

Linguistically, SA research has often been implicated in the learning of oral communication proficiency and SA learners tend to make greater aural and oral proficiency gains than (at home) AH (at home) ones (e.g. Huebner, 1995a, 1995b; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). For example, research pointed out that only few learners who do not study overseas reach an advanced level, which is deemed as the minimal level of functional ability (e.g. Brecht & Robinson, 1995). Furthermore, the more significant benefits of SA programmes for the learner's oral-aural skills as opposed to their written and reading ones have been pointed out in several other studies (e.g. Dyson, 1988; Lapkin *et al*., 1995). In addition, SA learners report feelings more confident in reading than their AH immersion learner counterparts (Dewey, 2004). However, it has been argued that research tending to examine specific language skills (Coleman, 1995), such as learners' reading and aural skills, seems difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of 'how the various benefits in each domain qualitatively lead to an all-round more proficient learner' (Regan et al., 2009). Furthermore, a fair amount of research on SA and residence abroad for L2 learners has overwhelmingly been based on quantitative studies focusing on proficiency outcomes (e.g. Coleman, 1997, 1998, 2007; Freed, 1998; Huebner, 1998, Isabelli-Garcia, 2003). This sort of product- oriented research does not consider the social, political, and historical backgrounds of the learning environment and programme variables that may constitute SA (Coleman, 2006, cited in Jackson, 2008). Therefore, the present study does not examine the possible change of learners' language proficiency but focuses on that of their (learning) behaviours, which may be influenced by the context of residence abroad.

Amuzie and Winke (2009) argue that SA experiences result in the development of learner autonomy in language learning, which depends upon the learner's own efforts than the teacher's efforts. Learners' SA experiences tend to contribute to their growing sense of responsibility for improving their own English and the conviction that they can work out how to achieve that. Taking into account the relation between learners' LLS use and autonomy, their argument appears to indicate the relationship between LLS use and SA experience.

DuFon and Churchill (2006) point out that SA has the potential to be an ample and complex context for language learning since learners would linguistically benefit from the intense study in the host environment. Moreover, although the SA context itself is under the influence of host culture and variables associated with programme design, it would impact 'pre-departure individual differences' (such as pre study-abroad language proficiency) (p.1). In other words, SA and other variables interact in a complicated way; thus, researchers need to consider the relations among these variables when designing their research.

One of the interesting areas of SA research is language socialisation, in which the learning of language forms is viewed as embedded in much broader process of discovering learning styles and preferences and ultimately, becoming a particular type of person (Dufon & Churchill, 2006). This indicates that through socialisation learners may well be changing their view on themselves and developing a new identity. This also points out the potential relation between SA and identity change.

Beyond the realm of language learning, Cushner and Karim (2004:292) define students' study-abroad experiences as 'a significant transitional event that brings with it a considerable amount of accompanying stress, involving both confrontation and adaptation to unfamiliar physical and psychological experiences and changes', Murphy-Lejeune (2003:13) points out that the experience of adaptation and learning abroad is 'a maturing process'. Gu (2011) points out that SA researchers centring on the impact of cultural models tend to overlook the 'maturing process' that many international learners experience during study overseas: (1) maturation and human development and (2) intercultural adaptation (Gu *et al.*, 2010). These transitional experiences 'interactively influence the nature and process of their change and development in a different educational environment and a different culture and society over time' (Gu, 2011: 218). However, Gu's (2011) research (and also other acculturation research) did not clearly address how and why these transitional experiences occurred but only featured the difficulties the learners confronted and the changes and achievements of the learners. As she explains, '[i]t is the interaction of these learners with their particular living and studying environments that facilitates change' (Gu, 2011:229).

Jackson (2008:211) cautioned that it is naïve to presume that all learners will dramatically facilitate their L2 and intercultural communicative competence simply by

being in the situation. What actually facilitates the change of the learners is the interaction among them and the particular living and studying contexts. Thus, there are several questions that can help to understand the sojourning experience of L2 learners: What actually happens when learners study or live somewhere with different cultures? How could cultural knowledge and foreign language learning be enhanced whilst studying abroad? How would a sojourner's sense of self (identity) be affected? In answering these questions, it seems helpful to investigate the change based on not only cognitive but also sociocultural perspectives.

Pavlenko and Piller (2001) have observed that learners constantly make choices that affect their language and cultural learning. What is noteworthy is that environmental factors can play a role in their decision-making at any time. Thus, how SA contexts influence the learners' decision-making about either strategy use or identity reconstruction is the main inquiry of the current study. The context of the present research is a SA context focusing on the Chinese university students in the UK. There are several reasons.

First, the researcher is also a Chinese sojourner, who wishes to explore Chinese SA students' L2 learning experiences. Second, as mentioned earlier in the research problem, there are few studies on Chinese learners' L2 learning in the UK in the literature, compared to other SA countries and learners with other nationalities, while Chinese students are the largest group of international students in the UK (and the majority of international students in the West). Thus, the more teachers and policy makers can notice and understand Chinese learners' backgrounds, strengths and weaknesses of, and needs for learning in SA contexts, the better the higher educational institutes may be able to meet their demands and facilitate their successful learning and future life. Third, most of the studies on Chinese learners in SA contexts are based on either cognitive or sociocultural perspectives, which appear to be difficult to provide a full picture of SLA. Fourth, research on Chinese learners in the literature ranges across a number of fields, which calls for an adaptation of several perspectives (e.g. linguistic, psychological, social, cultural, personal and educational etc.).Thus, studies on them may well be able to provide better practical implications. As Jin and Cortazzi (2011) point out:

> Chinese education has interesting features which demand study to identify reasons for students' success and to draw implications for teaching and learning elsewhere: the significant traditional respect for education and learning, the willingness of parents and

students to invest a great deal of time and finance to support students' studies in secondary and tertiary education, the sense of optimism and confidence in the future combined with a belief in success through hard work in education that characterizes many Chinese students (p.3).

There is another reason to focus on Chinese learners, which is because Chinese learners can be anywhere, knowledge, insights, and implications learnt from them can be helpful for the teaching and learning of not only teachers and students in the UK or other western countries but also anyone anywhere.

**1.5 Chinese learners in the UK**

Since the Chinese economy has been developing and the British government's education policy tends to attract international students to the UK, the number of Chinese students studying in the UK has risen to the top of overseas applicants (*The Independent*, 2003, cited in Gu and Schweisfurth, 2006). China still sent the most students recently – around 51,000 (BBC NEWS, 2007) and the number of Chinese students arriving at British universities has risen by almost 15 per cent in a year. In total, around 75,000 Chinese students study in Britain (*The Telegraph*, 2011). However, few studies have investigated the experiences of Chinese students, or indeed any other cohort of overseas students at British universities; most of the studies have been conducted in the USA, Australia and New Zealand (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Recently, there appears to be a growing tendency of conducting research on Chinese learners in the UK.

Reviewing the existing literature, it can be noticed that inadequate language proficiency appears to be one of the major difficulties Chinese overseas students have encountered as well as to significantly affect their study and life (Li, 2000; Zhang, 2001; Ong, 2006). Li (2000) investigated the stress of Chinese students in the UK, pointing out that it was largely as a result of academic aspects, such as essay writing, literacy, and participating in discussions. This indicates that language issues tend to bother Chinese learners for a considerable period of time. However, this study did not show whether or how those issues were solved.

Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) investigated Chinese learners' experiences in the UK, arguing that in addition to culture, issues such as the identities and motivations of the

learners and the power relationships between them and their teachers were also important in the strategic adaptations made by Chinese students.

Gu et al. (2009) investigated the impact of UK educational experiences on Chinese returnees' careers and personal lives, arguing that their SA experiences are both transitional and transformational and impose identity change to a greater or lesser extent. The personal and professional identities of Chinese learners have been negotiated and reconstructed during studying overseas. The outcomes of SA do vary, which are influenced by a range of factors. As Coleman (2004) states:

> … biographical, affective, cognitive and circumstantial variables come into play, with students' previous language learning and aptitude impacted upon by their motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning style and strategies, as well as by unpredictable elements such as location, type of accommodation, and degree of contact with native speakers. (p. 583)

Gu (2011:221) summarises the transition and development of Chinese students' journey of study abroad:

- Chinese students come to the UK for language and cultural experiences, but, primarily, for academic accreditation.
- Academic achievement and personal independence are the most important achievements for most students.
- While some students may have fitted in better socially than others, most have managed to achieve in their academic studies.
- The most profound change lies in their success (or otherwise) in managing the influences which challenge existing identities.
- There is an important relationship between students' sense of belonging, identity and self-efficacy (the belief that they can achieve and succeed).
- They have experienced three major aspects of change: (1) interculturality: cross/intercultural experiences; (2) maturity: human growth and development; and (3) intellectual development.

These findings can help future research, including the current study, to examine if there are any similarities and differences.

**1.6 Statement of research problems**

It has been suggested that strategy use plays an essential role in language learners' learning success, resulting in various language learning achievements (e.g. Wenden, 1987, 1998, 2002; Ellis, 1994, 2004; Cohen, 1998; McDonough, 1999; Chamot, 2001; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Dornyei, 2005; Zhang, 2003). However, LLS research, which has primarily focused on the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of language learning, has attracted critiques from researchers who emphasise the significance of sociocultural contexts in language learning (Norton, 1995; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Atkinson, 2002; Block, 2003; Sealey & Carter, 2004; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Moreover, LLS research tends to address learners' strategy use as static and decontextualized behaviour (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Gao, 2006, 2008a). This leaves space for adopting sociocultural perspectives when conducting LLS research.

With regard to the relation between language use/ learning and identity, it has been argued that language use is 'inextricably bound with identity and a sense of belonging' (Jackson, 2010:49). However, there is a lack of consensus as to the relationship between language learning and identity. Whilst some researchers question it, for instance, Gass (1998) argues 'relevance has to be established theoretically insofar as [identity] affects [SLA] (p.86)', contemporary research tends to indicate that such an interrelationship exists (e.g. Norton, 2000; Day, 2002; Kanno, 2003; Kramsch, 2003; Miller, 2003; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Block, 2006). Thus, there seems a theoretical gap between identity and SLA. Practically, studies on identity are mainly qualitative based, which leads to the difficulty of generalisation. Moreover, it is difficult to find research on the relation between identity and LLSs in the literature. One of the reasons is that each of them has its own traditional inquiry, with its own research methods and different ontological perspectives. Since plenty of research has indicated the relation between LLS use and SLA (e.g. Zhang, 2001, 2003; McDonough, 1999; Cohen & Macaro, 2007), if the current study can provide evidence supporting the linking between LLS use and identity, it can also assist to reinforce the relation between identity and SLA.

**1.7 Research questions**

Research questions, which are basically on a cognitive view, do not appear to frame the exploration of how Chinese L2 sojourners deal with social and affective aspects of themselves as not only learning language but also 'whole' people living, working, relating to, and interacting with the members in the communities of the TL. Thus, it does not appear to be prudent to cut off their 'language learner' selves from the rest of their lives. Accordingly, my research questions are as following:

*What do Chinese SA sojourners do to improve their L2 English skills?*

*-how do they manage social and affective aspects of their lives?*

*-how is what they do affected or determined by their social identity?*

*-how is what they do affected or determined by their preconceived cognitive understanding of the L2 learning process?*

In answering the research questions, there are several objectives to achieve.

**Objectives**:

to attempt to triangulate the data from different methods (i.e. a questionnaire survey - SILL, diaries and interviews) to explore how or whether learners' LLS use and social identity change over time during the first eight months, and relationships amongst LLSs, social identity, and SLA

1. To explore the patterns of LLS use (especially social-affective ones) of Chinese university students in the UK through SILL

2. To investigate the differences of LLS use between pre-sojourn and the sojourn (four month later) by SILL

3. To explain any changes of LLS use through the information from diaries, interviews, and MSN communication.

4. To examine whether or how learners' social identities change over time, through information from diaries, MSN communication and interviews.

5. To explore whether or how LLS use affects (re)construction of social identity, through diaries and MSN communication

6. To examine whether or how social identity affects LLS use

**1.8 Significance of the study**

It can be noticed that traditional LLS research tends to be based on a cognitive view. Edwards (1985) also pointed out that educational research must not only investigate the cognitive aspects of learning but also explore the social and affective issues related to education. Thus, it does not appear to be prudent to cut off their 'language learner' selves from the rest of their lives.

Although there are a number of studies on SLA in SA contexts, it can be recognised that they are mainly based on solely either cognitive or sociocultural perspectives. However, there appear some missing elements when only choosing one of them to address the experience of L2 sojourners. For instance, does learner's (social) identity affect or determine their use of LLSs? Do LLSs help learners to develop or reconstruct their identities? It seems difficult to answer these questions according to either LLSs (cognitive) or social identity (sociocultural) theories.

The present study attempts to provide a way considering both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives and applying theories of both perspectives to address SLA more completely. It is hoped that through investigating learners' LLS use and social identity to explore what L2 sojourners actually do to improve their English while abroad can provide a more comprehensive picture of SLA than only based on any one of those theoretical perspectives.

**1.9 Organisation of the thesis**

Six chapters constitute this thesis. The first chapter has presented the aim of the research, research background, addressed the research problems, and pointed out the significance of the research. Chapter Two reviews the literature as to the theoretical framework and empirical research relevant to the current study, embracing LLSs, social identity, SCT, and agency. Chapter Three addresses the methodological considerations with regard to the research design, providing a general discussion about the three paradigms, evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each of them, and the justification for adopting a mixed-methods research design. Four methods used in this study, including questionnaire survey, interviewing, diary keeping, and online conversation are also discussed. Chapter Four provides the findings and discussion of quantitative (SILL) data of the current study. Chapter Five analyses the quantitative data from interviews, diaries, and MSN communication, attempting to examine how and why learners chose to employ certain (types of) LLSs and change of LLS use, as

well as how or whether that was affected by their social identities and on the other hand, how or whether their identities were affected by their preconceived cognitive understanding of the L2 learning process (e.g. patterns of LLSs use). Chapter six is composed of summary of the main findings, theoretical and practical implementation, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a literature review of several important issues related to the present study. There are a number of factors affecting SLA but the present study only focuses on several of them, which are, learning strategies, sociocultural theory, social identity, imagined self and community, and agency. While there is a section briefly addressing what sociocultural theory is about as well as the reason for focusing on social identity, apart from learning strategies, cognitive theories will not be described due to the scope of the present thesis. One of the reasons why LLSs and social identity are the foci is that the application of sociocultural approach for SLA appears to be worth considering. As Norton argues (1997:410) 'speech, speakers, and social relationships are inseparable', so theories of and research into SLA which do not take into full account the social aspect of language learning and use do not seem prudent. In doing so, it is hoped to have a broader view on and more vivid picture of L2 learning in study abroad contexts through evaluating previous research on those issues and to see the extent which they can benefit one another . Studies on those issues will be reviewed in following sections.

### 2.1 Learning strategies

Research has indicated that  language learners at all levels employ LLSs (e.g. Naiman et al., 1978; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) that assist students to learn languages more efficiently (e.g. Adams, 2006). As one of the foci of the present study it would be useful to have a review of LLSs in the literature.

MacIntyre (1994: 185) has claimed that 'One of the most fertile areas of research in language learning … is the topic of language learning strategies'. The last two decades have witnessed substantial development in research on strategies deployed by learners to learn or use a second language (Macaro, 2006). Although definition and terminology appear to be major (problematic) issues of LLSs, they are 'indicative of the way SLA research in general developed in the second half of the twentieth century' (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007:9). The primary motivation for research into LLSs comes from the desire to establish ways to assist language learners to learn more effectively. Generally,

researchers of LLSs tend to claim that learners with *strategic knowledge* of language learning, compared with those without, become 'more efficient, resourceful, and flexible, thus acquiring a language more easily' (Gao, 2006). The suggestion is that if one can develop, personalise, and use a wide repertoire of LLSs, s/he will be able to achieve language proficiency in a much facilitated manner (Tseng et al., 2006).

The birth of strategy research, as mentioned in Chapter 1, stems from the motive to identify the characteristics of 'good language learners' (GLL). Rubin (1975) defined strategies as 'the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge' (p.43), identifying a number of approaches deployed by good language learners:

I  Processes which may contribute directly to learning:
A  Clarification and verification
B  Monitoring
C  Memorization
D  Guessing/inductive inferencing
E  Deductive reasoning
F  Practice.

II Processes which may contribute indirectly to learning:
 A Creates opportunities for practice
 B  Production tasks related to communication.  (Rubin 1981: 124-125)

This list can be viewed as study skills learners apply to deal with their L2 learning. Likewise, Stern (1975) described ten strategies of the GLL including 'a personal learning style' (p.316), which was not based on empirical study but on his teaching experience and literature review. Based on these strategies, later GLL research (e.g. Naiman et al., 1978/1996) proposed a modified list of strategies of GLL and potential pedagogical implication. The GLL research has provided potential characteristics of a GLL and what may constitute strategies. However, the difficulty in distinguishing basic concepts such as style and strategy has led to no consensus on definition which remains to the present day (Griffiths, 2008).


**2.1.1 Definition**

In the SLA field, there appears to be disagreements on what constitutes a language learning strategy or even a strategy (e.g. Ellis, 1994; Cohen, 1995; Gu, 1996; Bremner, 1999; Dörnyei, 2005; Macaro, 2006; Tseng et al., 2006; Cohen, 2007). Macaro (2010) further points out that '[t]here is a lack of consensus as to […] whether strategies are learner-internal or learner-external, small or large, abstract or concrete, individual or

inextricably linked' (p.278). In the literature, strategies have been referred to as 'techniques', 'tactics', 'potentially conscious plans', 'consciously employed operations', learning skills, basic skills, functional skills', 'cognitive abilities', 'language processing strategies', and 'problem solving procedures' (Wenden, 1987: 7). It can be seen that although these designations have something in common, such as, skills and procedures, it is not easy to define the elusive term in phrases or a short sentence. Having narrowed the focus from 'strategy' to 'language learning strategy', Bialystok (1983:100) still argues that 'there is little consensus in the literature concerning either the definition or the identification of language learning strategies'. The difficulty in carrying out a definition of LLSs can be that the term embraces several perspectives, which makes it complicated and not easy to define.

Ellis (1994) claims '[d]efinitions of learning strategies have tended to be *ad hoc* and atheoretical' (p.533). Thus, it is not straightforward to distinguish strategies and other behaviours which are not strategic. The literature provides conflicting views as to the meaning of sometimes rather basic terms, such that the reader is not sure what the terms mean and how to use them to enhance comprehension of a L2/FL learning (Oxford & Cohen, 1992). The literature reveals a further problem with strategy definition that is the interchangeability of many of the terms used (Tarone, 1981/1983). As Macaro (2006:325) states, '[the definition] is arrived at through the use of equally undefined terms'. Oxford (1999) proposes a definition of LLSs, which refers to:

> Specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language (p.518).

It seems appropriate to consider linking another important notion, consciousness, to the definition of strategies. Some researchers believe that '[s]trategy use involves some degree of consciousness on the part of the learner' (Oxford & Cohen, 1992:9) and 'if strategies are unconsciously and automatically used, then explicit strategy training makes little or no sense' (p.12). Ellis (1994) also points out that if strategies become so automatic that the learners are no longer sensible of using them, they are no longer accessible for description through utterance by the learners and do not have value as strategies. Fox and Matthews (1991) point out that learning strategies are concerned with how learners use their brains consciously and purposefully to handle their learning and make it more effective. MacIntyre (1994) contends that the issue of intentionality is

central to the strategy concept. Cohen (1998:4) argues that 'consciousness is what distinguishes *strategies* from those processes which are not strategic'. Macaro (2006) maintains that strategies are conscious since language (or L2) learning processes, which comprise clusters of cognitive and metacognitive strategies interacting with one another, are conscious, although they may operate so rapidly that they appear to be subconscious. Therefore, consciousness is essential in not only strategies but also the whole language learning processes.

In contrast, other researchers tend to contend that strategies are not necessarily conscious. For instance, Dörnyei (2005) claims that

> Students tend to make several choices concerning their learning process that are not strategic in the strict sense, that is, which do not necessarily involve appropriate and purposeful behaviour to enhance the effectiveness of learning (p. 165).

In other words, since consciousness is also involved in other non-strategic behaviours, it should not be the key concept to distinguish strategic from non-strategic behaviours. This makes sense against Cohen's (1998) argument above but this does not oppose the notion that strategies are conscious. More recently, Macaro (2010) points out that '[t]here is, nevertheless, a general consensus that [language learning strategies] are what learners "do" with the linguistic resources available to them at various levels of consciousness'(p.278).

Apart from consciousness, Cohen (1998) also acknowledges that there should be additions to the definition of strategy to make it more comprehensive. He states that:

> Additions to this definition could include the split between language learning and language use strategies, and mention of the specific stage in processing – that is, strategies before, during, or after the performance of some language behaviour. Thus, *language learning* and *language use strategies* can be defined as those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language (Cohen (1998:4).

Cohen's definition of strategies has proposed another more explicit concept: *language learning strategies* and *language use strategies*. In general, cognitive theorists tend to attempt to distinguish between language learning and language use although there appear to be some unclear connections between them (Gass, 1998, 2000).

This addition is relevant to the present study because in analysing the qualitative data, whether the learners' perception of themselves as language learner or language user appears to be an indicator of their identity. Any possible change of their strategy use may imply the change of their identity (see Chapter 5). What may other additions be? It seems a great deal of attention and efforts have been drawn to LLS research but there appears to be no comprehensive definition. One of the reasons may be that a definition tends to be based on a generally cognitive perspective. Thus a better definition requires the addition of another perspective.

The reason for having a review and discussions on the definitions of strategy and LLS is due to the later discussions on the concepts of identity, motivation, interaction, internalisation, and imagined self and community. It can be noticed that sociocultural theorists tend to avoid the term 'strategy' but use some words with similar meaning to 'strategy', such as 'action', 'plan', and 'activity' to address the central processes of those concepts above. This might be because what 'strategy' implies, such as consciousness, cognition, and so on is not congruent with what sociocultural theory (SCT) maintains. What SCT is about will be discussed in a later section.

Griffiths (2008) reviews the debate of definition of LLS in the literature and combines the essential features, suggesting a definition of LLS:

> Activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning (p.87).

She further explains that the activities can be mental or physical and although they are chosen consciously, the choice can operate anywhere on a continuum from deliberate to automatic and LLSs aim to facilitate learning. From a cognitive view, this definition is very simple but powerful because it seems broad enough to allow the freedom to research areas within it, but explicit enough to exclude those characteristics and activities that are not LLSs, such as learning styles, skills, and communication strategies.

White (2008) points out that the term strategy 'characterises the relationship between intention and action, and is based on a view of learners as responsible agents who are aware of their needs, preferences, goals and problems' (p.9). This definition of strategy appears to view strategy at a macro level. The relation between intention and action, to some extent, is similar to the *L2 motivational Self system* (see later section in this chapter), if personal intention is viewed as conception of self. However, this definition

is still based on a cognitive perspective. It does not mention the relation between individuals and social networks in the context nor does it provide further descriptions and interpretations about learners' needs, preferences, and goals which are mediated by contextual conditions.

Gu (2005) argues that it is essential to construct an operational definition of what is being researched so that meaningful research can be conducted. This is one of the reasons why researchers keep attempting to propose an appropriate definition of LLS. On the other hand, Gu (2007: Foreword) claims that

> [LLS research should not be] dismissed simply because a central concept is not clearly defined. While Pluto was recently removed from the list of planets because astronomers voted for a new definition of 'planet', no one is dismissing astronomy because astronomers can't agree on what a planet is. Likewise, […] language learner strategy is a multidimensional and elusive moving target, not a straightforward construct to conceptualize and operationalize.

Indeed, and thus LLS is still one of the foci of SLA research and the current study. I am not going to propose my own definition of learning strategy in this thesis but to attempt to view LLSs from a broader angle (e.g. from another perspective).

## 2.1.2 Taxonomy

It should be noted that strategic behaviour is an important component of the concept of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) and the model of communicative language ability (Bachman, 1990) that are concerned mainly with communication strategies instead of general strategies.  It seems useful to distinguish LLS and communication strategies. In terms of classifications, learner strategies can be divided into LLSs and communication strategies (CSs) (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Although CSs can enable social interaction to proceed and, to some extent, serve a similar function as compensation strategies (i.e. compensation strategies for speaking are often called *communication strategies*, Cohen, 1998) that are included in some taxonomies of LLSs (e.g. Oxford, 1990), they are applied to solve short-term communicative problems. LLSs aim to provide long-term solutions for SLA. Therefore, CSs are often seen as related not to language learning but to language use (e.g. Gass, 2000). Due to the similarities between CSs and compensation strategies and the scope of the present study, the focus will only be on LLSs.

Opinions on how many LLSs can be employed by learners to enhance their L2 learning and how these LLSs should be classified appears to vary (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). A number of LLS classification systems have been proposed (e.g. Rubin, 1981; O'Malley et al., 1985a, 1985b; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, Oxford, 1990), based on different criteria (Oxford & Cohen, 1992). Some researchers (e.g. Tseng et al., 2006; Macaro, 2006) who challenged and provided some modifications about these classifications but did not propose a systematic taxonomy (i.e. categories and strategy items) are not listed here but will be discussed in this section.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) categorise learner strategies as metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies. The third category of their model is socio-affective strategies, which are used to control emotions and motivations for learning with others. Since socio-affective or social strategies are included in other LLS taxonomies, theories supporting these types of strategies appear to be needed. Oxford (1990) divides LLSs more specifically into two groups including six categories, which are direct strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, and indirect strategies: metacognitive, affective and social strategies (see Appendix A). However, there appear to be difficulties of classifying strategies into Oxford's six categories in some situations (Griffiths & Parr, 2001). It has been claimed that several strategy items could be contained in more than one group. For example, 'looking for opportunities to converse in English' might be regarded as metacognitive because it involves self-management. However, it also might be considered social since it involves interaction with others (Griffiths, 2007). More discussion on the classification of LLSs, especially comparisons of major strategy classification systems, can be seen in Hsiao and Oxford (2002). The tables below are comparisons between major strategy classification systems.

**Table 2.1: A Comparison of Two Major Strategy Classification Systems**

| O'Malley & Chamot (1990) O'Malley, Chamot , Stewner-Manzanares,(1985) Kupper & Russo O'Malley, Chamot , Stewner-Manzanares,(1985) Russo & Kupper | Oxford (1990) |
|---|---|
| **Metacognitive Strategies** | |
| Advance Organisers | Metacognitive Strategies |
| Directed Attention | Metacognitive Strategies |
| Selective Attention | Metacognitive Strategies |
| Self-Management | Metacognitive Strategies |
| Functional Planning | Metacognitive Strategies |
| Self-Monitoring | Metacognitive Strategies |
| Self-Evaluation | Metacognitive Strategies |
| Delayed-Production | Metacognitive Strategies |
| **Cognitive Strategies** | |
| Repetition | Cognitive Strategies |
| Resourcing | Cognitive Strategies |
| Translation | Cognitive Strategies |
| Grouping | Memory Strategies |
| Note Taking | Cognitive Strategies |
| Deduction | Cognitive Strategies |
| Recombination | Cognitive Strategies |
| Imagery | Memory Strategies |
| Auditory Representation | Memory Strategies |
| Keyword | Memory Strategies |
| Contextualisation | Memory Strategies |
| Elaboration | Memory Strategies |
| Transfer | Cognitive Strategies |
| Inferencing | Compensation Strategies |
| **Socio-affective Strategies** | |
| Cooperation | Social Strategies |
| Question for Clarification | Social Strategies |
| Self-Talk | Affective Strategies |

Hsiao & Oxford (2002: 371)

**Table 2.2: A Comparison of Rubin's and Oxford's Classification Systems**

| Rubin (1981) | Oxford (1990) |
|---|---|
| Direct strategy | |
| Clarification/Verification | Indirect Social Strategies |
| Monitoring | Indirect Metacognitive Strategies |
| Memorisation | Direct Memory Strategies |
| Guessing /Inductive Inferencing | Direct Compensation Strategies |
| Deductive Reasoning | Direct Cognitive Strategies |
| Practice | Direct Cognitive Strategies |
| Indirect Strategies | |

| Create Opportunities for Practice | Indirect Social Strategies |
| Production Tricks | Direct Compensation Strategies |

Oxford's (1990) direct and indirect LLSs stem from Rubin's (1981) direct/indirect dichotomy but differ in many ways. For instance, whilst Rubin's *clarification/verification* and *monitoring*, which were classified as two of the direct strategies, Oxford categorised them as indirect strategies (*asking questions for clarification/verification* i.e. social strategy; *monitoring* i.e. metacognitive strategy). *Production tricks* (one type of Rubin's indirect strategies) is included in Oxford's compensation strategies (among the direct strategies) (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). The main limitation of Rubin's (1981) classification lies in its overlapping of LLSs since it 'failed to produce mutually exclusive categories, i.e., some strategies appeared in more than a single grouping' (O'Malley et al, 1985a: 32).

With regard to the comparison between O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) and Oxford's (1990) systems, there are similarities and differences. The cognitive strategies of O'Malley and Chamot are similar to a combination of Oxford's memory and cognitive strategies. However, Oxford's strategy of *guessing from context* (inferencing), which she listed as a compensation strategy to make up for missing knowledge is a part of O'Malley and Chamot's cognitive category. In addition, Oxford separated memory strategies from cognitive strategies grouping into an independent category since memory strategies appear to have a special function different from cognitive strategies and 'can be powerful contributors to language learning' (Oxford, 1990: 40).

There are some limitations about Oxford's taxonomy. Dörnyei (2005) argues that compensation strategies refer to language use rather than learning strategies. These two processes should be divided because they have different applications and psycholinguistic expressions. Moreover, 'memory strategies constitute a subclass of cognitive strategies' (p.168), but memory and cognitive strategies are categorised as two independent groups of equal significance in Oxford's (1990) taxonomy. The first limitation can be an advantage for the present research since it can serve as an indicator of telling language *learners* and language *users* in terms of strategy use. As discussed earlier in this section, compensation strategies are similar to communication strategies particularly in speaking. In other words, Oxford's system appears to include both LLSs and CSs. If a learner tends to increase the employment of compensation strategies, s/he

is more like a language user. Thus, adopting Oxford's system (including the inventory, see Chapter 3) can be used to examine the possible change of not only language learning strategies but also language use strategies.

Every classification system reflects how the proposer views the nature of LLSs and SLA. For example, if a taxonomy subsumes separate, substantial categories for affective (emotion- and motivation-management) and social LLSs, the implicit theory suggests that these types of strategies are important and that learners' emotion and social interaction play key roles in L2 learning (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). Since the current study is also investigating social and affective aspects of learners (see Chapter 1) and for the reason discussed above that compensation strategies, to some extent, function as communication strategies, Oxford's classification system is adopted.

A number of researchers have pointed out the overlap between cognitive and metacognitive strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Phakiti, 2003) and between affective and metacognitive strategies (Macaro, 2006). More specifically, Hurd (2008: 221) questions whether *affective states* and strategies to deal with them should be distinguished from affective strategies because it appears to be appropriate to classify strategies according to their intended goal. For instance,

> Taking a break (a metacognitive strategy to deal with frustration, anger, disappointment), re-reading a section of text (a cognitive strategy to deal with anxiety caused by incomplete comprehension), planning and prioritising (a metacognitive strategy to combat anxiety caused by overload), rehearsal and repetition (a cognitive strategy to cope with nervousness about speaking aloud), deep breathing (an affective strategy to address the stress of spoken interaction) and many more.

Skehan (1991) concludes that in the categorizations of strategies although there is some consensus on the classification of learner strategies that have been elicited, there is a need to go beyond 'convenient classifications' (p. 287), even though these might be useful for strategy instruction, and make links between classification schemes and underlying theory. This is echoed by Macaro (2006), calling for a reduction of categories to cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies only, which is theoretically justifiable and sufficient. However, the question may be asked is what is to be gained by classifying strategies? It presumably needs to reflect underlying theoretical distinctions. Thus, convenience or appropriateness of the two -category system (Macaro, 2006) needs to be examined by future research.

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A number of researchers have argued that the construct of LLS appears to be under-theorised (Ellis, 1994; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Macaro, 2006). Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) argue that a strategy cannot be either cognitive or emotional or behavioural, and also wonder whether a strategy is a neurological process, a cognitive operation, or a behavioural act involving motor skills. Moreover, they question whether a strategy can contribute to both knowledge and language skills and consider that there is no theoretical explanation for how strategies may be related to skills. They conclude that a theoretical basis for the concept of LLSs tends to be still inadequate and that a scientifically sophisticated definition, a coherent neurological and biological account of behaviours, are needed, which Dörnyei and Skehan consider an enormous undertaking (Macaro & Erler, 2008).

Dörnyei (2005) also points out the difficulty in addressing the difference between 'engaging in an ordinary learning activity and a strategic learning activity' (p. 164), leading him to question whether LLSs do exist. Thus, there remain a number of unresolved issues and questions undermining the theoretical basis of LLS research. As Rees-Miller (1993) argues, unless these problems have been resolved, it is not useful for teachers to risk giving up valuable classroom time in order to train students to use LLSs. These problems are all related to the inadequacy of a well-built theory underlying the construct of LLSs, as well as to the lack of consensus regarding the unit of analysis for LLS research.

Macaro (2006: 332) argues that 'successful learning is no longer linked to the individual learner's frequency of strategy use, but to his or her orchestration (i.e. clustering and sequencing) of strategies available to him or her'. This challenges conventional LLS research based on measuring the frequency of learners' LLS use and also raises the issue about the priority of quantity and quality of LLS use. But this would not be a problem of the current study because it does not aim to determine whether a learner is successful or unsuccessful but to examine any possible change of LLS use from EFL to SA settings according to the frequency of LLS use. Furthermore, it does not appear to indicate that quantitative research on LLS is not worth conducting since it is not that simple to assess the quality of LLSs use. Thus, it would be helpful to measure the frequency of LLS use whilst also assessing the quality (e.g. the

orchestration) of LLS use as they may complement each other.  Macaro (2006) argues that

> without attempting to explain cognitive behaviour in all its complexity, as meticulously and scientifically as possible, and then attempting to ascertain its relationship with overt behaviour on the one hand and subconscious behaviour on the other, we will continue to offer only a superficial glimpse into L2 learning from the learner's perspective (p.333).

This is reasonable but still only addresses learning from a cognitive perspective. The relationships between LLSs and other components in this framework (L2 processes, motivation, and subconscious activities) do not appear to be easily interpreted well, for instance that between LLSs and motivation. Motivation has traditionally been characterised as an individual difference (ID) variable that is associated with learning success along with other ID variables such as personality, cognitive style and attitude. Recently research has better addressed it in relation to the linking between individual and the environment from a sociocultural perspective. The connection between LLS and motivation may well be better depicted and comprehended from (or with) a sociocultural perspective as well (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

In proposing a theoretical concept of autonomy, Oxford (2003) views learning strategies, context, agency, and motivation as essential components of 'a more systematic and comprehensive theoretical model' (p.76) of learner autonomy. LLSs can be conceptualised by four approaches (see Table 2.3)

**Table 2.3  Learning strategy from different theoretical perspectives**

| Perspective | Learning strategies are … |
|---|---|
| Technical | Tools that are 'given' by the teacher to the student through learner training (strategy instruction) |
| Psychological | Psychological features of the individual features that can change through practice and strategy instruction. Optimal strategy use relates to task, learning style, goals, etc. |
| Sociocultural I | Clearly implicit in sociocultural theory work (e.g. Vygotsky) |
| Sociocultural II | Learning strategies grow out of the communities of practice. In cognitive apprenticeships, learners gain strategies from expert practitioners. Also learners already have many strategies from their initial communities |

Adapted from Oxford (2003:77-79)

These approaches are not only based on a traditional cognitive perspective but also on a sociocultural one, which views LLS from a broader angle and a more comprehensive way.

In contrast to some linguists, L2 acquisition theories view linguistic knowledge as unique and separate from other knowledge systems. For instance, cognitive theory deems language learning to be directed by the same principles as other sorts of learning, although perhaps more complicated in nature (Ellis, 1994). LLSs are recognised as one of the crucial cognitive processes in SLA since LLS use can account for the ways the L2 knowledge system is developed and employed in communication (ibid.). However, in fact, LLSs are not only cognitive but also social/affective (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) and sociocultural (Donato & McCormick, 1994). This can be realised from the development of LLS research, which can be viewed as a sign of the primary shift of perspective in considering the processes of language learning. This was deemed fundamentally as a psychological phenomenon in the 1970s, but later studies extended it to include not only psychological but also social aspect of language learning.

## 2.1.3 Limitations of cognitive LLS research

Although LLS research has drawn a great deal of attention from researchers and made a major contribution to the SLA field, it appears to be challenged by scholars who 'adopt cognitive approaches to language learning research and those who endorse alternative research perspectives' (Gao, 2010). The majority of the criticisms refer to the conceptualisation of the construct of LLS and the methodological approaches in LLS research (Dörnyei, 2005; Macaro, 2006; Macaro & Erler, 2008). Sociocultural theorists and advocates 'call for a more holistic perspective on learners' LLS use [although they tend to use other terms instead of strategies] through shifting the focus from the learner to the learners-in-the-context' (Gao, 2010: 16).

Although a number of SLA (especially cognitive) theorists (e.g. Ellis, 1985; Krashen, 1981; Stern, 1983) realise that situations of language learning occur not in homogeneous but in complicated and heterogeneous communities, such 'heterogeneity has generally been framed uncritically' (Norton, 2000:5). One of the premises which theories of the good language learner are based on is that language learners can select the circumstances in which they will communicate with those in the TL community.

Norton (2000) argues that 'Second language theorists have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities second language learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom' (p.5). She also questions the presumption that language learners can be unproblematically characterised as motivated or unmotivated, with clear-cut target identities, since motivation and identity are socially constructed, often in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in the individual.

As mentioned earlier, it seems problematic that LLSs are defined as being both cognitive and behavioural. Moreover, a number of researchers question the dominance of questionnaire as strategy measurement instruments, arguing that several well-known strategy questionnaires can be methodologically and theoretically flawed because the frequency of individual learners' LLS use measured by these questionnaires cannot be cumulative in representing LLS as a psychological trait (Dornyei, 2005; Dornyei & Skehan, 2003). It remains questionable whether these questionnaires 'measure what they purport to measure' and 'do so consistently' (Ellis, 2004:527). It also remains debatable whether simple strategy questionnaires can measure the reality of learners' LLS use in particular contexts (Gao, 2004).

Phakiti (2003) points out the problem that learners' strategic behaviour is dynamic and in order to have a proper understanding of their LLS use in relation to many of their individual characteristics, one has to situate their LLS use in specific settings and identify what particular goals or aims they use LLSs for (also see Macaro, 2006). Phakiti (2003: 681) also claims that learners' self-reported strategy use 'should be seen as [their] stable long-term knowledge of their strategy use'.


Tseng et al. (2006) also argue that when investigating language learners' strategic learning, commonly used self-report survey instruments 'are based on the assumption that strategy use and strategic learning are related to an underlying trait because items ask respondents to generalize their actions across situations rather than referencing singular and specific learning events' (p.82). This raises an issue that, similar to other psychological concepts, strategic learning and strategy use could have 'state' and 'trait' differences (Hong & O'Neil, 2001). LLSs as a *trait* may refer to their relative stable knowledge of strategy use across occasions, while *states* of their strategy use represent

their actual deployment of LLSs in different learning settings or contexts (Wenden, 1998). LLS research tends to portray a de-contextualized and consistent picture of LLS use (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Phakiti 2003; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Macaro, 2006). This indicates that it is worth exploring how individual learners develop appropriate LLSs according to various learning tasks in certain learning situations over time, whilst it appears to doubt what LLS research generally presumes that successful language learning is at least to some extent related to the frequency of learners' strategy use. Presumably also *learning* is not always the only task in hand, if they are actively communicating as well.

Moreover, it is not only the quantity but also the quality of strategy use that is worth examining. In terms of the quality of strategy use, Macaro (2001) argued that 'although it is the range and combinations of all strategies that ineffective learners lack, it is the metacognitive … strategies which seem to be the strategy types most lacking in the arsenal of less successful learners'(p.269). It has been pointed out that good language learners can determine what to do to enhance language learning in a particular circumstance (Grenfall & Harris, 1999) and consistently evaluate their strategy use, whilst less successful learners keep employing ineffective strategies (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999). However, what cannot be known is why some learners can combine strategies efficiently because of metacognition but some cannot.  One of the reasons might be due to 'the very nature of the research questions themselves' since 'the research question "why do certain learners behave in certain ways" has rarely been asked' (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007: 23) .

Despite a number of influential publications on LLSs (e.g. Rubin, 1975; Rubin & Wenden, 1987; Skehan, 1989; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Cohen, 1998), issues with definition appear to remain problematic. Thus, conceptual ambiguities and theoretical inconsistencies have led researchers to consider using *self-regulation* to replace the term *strategy* (Dornyei & Skehan, 2003).

## 2.2 Self regulation

The term self-regulated learning (SRL) began to be well-known in the 1980's because it emphasized the emerging autonomy and responsibility of students to manage their own

learning. As a general term, it subsumed research on cognitive strategies, metacognition, and motivation in one coherent construct that emphasized the interplay among these forces.

Tseng et al. (2006) attempted to propose and operationalise a new concept in LLS research, self-regulatory capacity and self-regulation, to replace the construct LLS and strategic learning so that cognitive and metacognitive mechanisms underlying the behavioural aspects of learners' strategy use can be captured and addressed. Chamot and Rubin (1994) argue that 'the good language learner cannot be described in terms of a single set of strategies but rather through the ability to understand and develop a personal set of effective strategies' (p. 372). In other words, the essential aspect of empowering learners is to set into motion the self-regulatory process rather than to offer the instruction of a set of strategies. The latter is undoubtedly a necessary component of the 'learning to learn' process but it will only be effective if it is supported by an adequate foundation of self regulatory capacity in the learners. This seems reasonable. However, how to assess the self regulatory capacity needs to be concerned.

Tseng et al. (2006) proposed an inventory, the 'Self- Regulating Capacity in Vocabulary Learning' scale (SRCvoc), to assess language learner self-regulation in a situated manner. The items of SRCvoc, instead of being operationalised as specific behavioural descriptions, were designed in a way that they would tap into general trends and inclinations (p.95), and the theoretical basis of the proposed construct was provided by Dornyei's (2001) framework of self-regulation. The SRCvoc attempts to assess the self-regulation capacity of learners but it does not provide a solution about how to improve if the capacity is assessed as low. For instance, if one strongly agrees with 'Once the novelty of learning vocabulary is gone, I easily become impatient with it', what should s/he do to become more patient? In other words, what are the strategies? The concept of self-regulation, which embraces several interrelated factors, including strategy use, seems unable to replace the need for a strategy concept and to solve the problem with definition.

Gao (2006) criticised that other competing concepts with similar connotations in the field should have been considered by the advocators of self regulation, for instance metacognition (Wenden, 1998, 2002) and strategic competence. Wenden (1998)

considers metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies as two separate and distinct components of the broader notion of metacognition:

> Metacognitive knowledge refers to information learners acquire about their learning, while metacognitive strategies are general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate, guide their learning, i.e. planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The deployment of these three strategies in learning is referred to as self regulation in cognitive psychology and as self-direction in adult education and in the literature on learner autonomy in FL (foreign language)/SL (second language) learning. (Wenden, 1998: 519)

On the other hand, given the role that strategy has in the self-regulated learning framework (Zimmerman, 2001; Sperling et al., 2004), the developments in LLS research can meaningfully complement the advanced construct of self-regulation in research on learners' strategic learning. At least, such research indicates what constitutes a learner's self regulatory mechanism and how it operates within the self-regulated learning framework. The main reason for not choosing the concept of self regulation but LLSs is concerned that self regulation does not provide solutions of how to make improvement if the self regulatory capacity is low. This relates to the measurement of it, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

## 2.3 The social turn in SLA

Block (2003) declares the 'social turn' in SLA research has arrived, which is usually realised as a shift from an approach primarily psycholinguistic (or cognitive) based to a broader approach embracing a sociocultural perspective of language learning (Atkinson, 2002; Block, 2003; Morgan, 2007; Ellis, 1994; Lantolf &Thorne, 2006; Littlewood, 2004; Sealey & Carter, 2004; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Zuengler &Miller, 2006). Conventional SLA research, which is oriented to cognitive theories of language learning are being challenged by the claim that language learning takes place not only in individual learners' minds but also in society. Terms like *community of practice* (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; also Wenger, 1998, 2000) gradually appear in research to portray social networks in which language learners situate themselves.

The socio-cultural turn appears to be a significant and important development in LLS research (e.g. Donato & McCormick, 1994; Wenden, 1998; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Gao, 2006).Based on a sociocultural perspective, LLS use is not only the result of one's cognitive choices but also of the mediation of particular

learning communities (Donato & McCormick, 1994). This may provide an alternative for examining the connection between learners' actual strategy use and its underlying processes, including their metacognitive knowledge, in particular contexts. Therefore, it would be helpful to consider the other (sociocultural) side of SLA and to understand how LLS research is addressed compared to cognitive approaches. In contrast to cognitive perspective, a perspective on learning that is epistemologically more socially and culturally oriented is more likely to explore situated strategy use (Park & Raymond, 2004).

## 2.4 Sociocultural theory (SCT)

### 2.4.1 Clarification

Prior to the introduction of SCT, it would be useful to clarify what sociocultural theory actually means. The term 'sociocultural', sometimes hyphenated as 'socio-cultural', easily leads readers to refer to social and cultural contexts of human activity; however, it originates from Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology, providing a framework through which cognition can be examined without isolating it from social context. Lantolf (2004) notes:

> …despite the label 'sociocultural' the theory is not a theory of the social or of the cultural aspects of human existence. … it is, rather, …a theory of mind … that recognize the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking' (p.30-31).

Human mental functioning and daily life activities are highly related to each other. 'Participation in culturally organized practices, life-long involvement in a variety of institutions, and humans' ubiquitous use of tools and artefacts (including language) strongly and qualitatively impact cognitive development and functioning' (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:1). More particularly, it is language development and use that plays a central role in Vygotsky's theory of mind and that is what SCT is actually about. After dealing with terminology of SCT, for the purpose of the current study, how SCT relates to SLA and LLS will be discussed.

### 2.4.2 SCT, SLA, and LLS

Vygotsky's maintains that cognitive development and higher order psychological functions (e.g. language) are socially and culturally determined. He concentrated on

discourse and interaction between genuine interlocutors (e.g. pairs, small groups) in certain sociocultural and historical contexts as well as language acquisition and cognition of learners.

What should not be ignored in SCT is the most well-known concept of Vygotsky's theory, the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). Based on his observation that schooling greatly improved some children's mental development, he argued that there is a ZPD, which is the gap between what a learner has already mastered (the actual level of development) and what the learner can achieve (potential development). If learners can receive guidance and scaffolding from the teacher and support from other more experienced and knowledgeable peers, they can come through the ZPD and achieve the higher level. One of the weaknesses with Vygotsky's SCT, especially ZPD, is that whether there are always more knowledgeable people (teachers or peers) for the learner to interact with, as well as how the learner can actually access them, is not addressed. However, some researchers (e.g. Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Ohta, 2001) have pointed out that learners are capable of collaboratively constructing knowledge of an L2 when there is no expert knower involved. Thus, learners can learn the L2 and make improvement within the interaction. How does interaction assist learners to enhance their L2 learning?

SCT maintains that social interaction is crucial to an individual's cognitive growth and development. It has been argued that SCT can provide an explanatory framework for comprehending and refining our notions of how learners become competent members of a language learning community (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Moreover, it has also been pointed out how participation in this community is characterized by the learner's ability to develop, reflect upon, and refine their own LLSs (Lave & Wenger, 1991). LLSs can be addressed by SCT through two ways: Activity theory, and mediation.

Activity theory is inspired by Vygotsky's concern that the focus of investigation on human psychological functioning should extend beyond the individual. Thus, it is activity not the individual that is worth examining (Leontiev, 1981). Activity is defined according to sociocultural contexts where collaborative interaction, inter-subjectivity, and assisted performance take place. In construing the linking between Activity theory and LLSs, Donato and McCormick (1994) point out that Activity theory provides a framework for situating LLS use within the context of an individual's language learning

activity. Moreover, activity theory assists to define strategies more comprehensively than can be achieved with discrete-item lists and static categories based on a cognitive perspective since activity theory can provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the composition of strategies (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). This may offer an alternative way to consider how to deal with the unsolved problem of definition of LLSs.

Leontiev (1978) maintains that activity encompasses a subject, an object, actions, and operations. Zinchenko (1985, cited in Lantolf, 2000:7, original italics) perceives human activity as *tool-mediated, goal –directed action*, which integrates socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation and provides the basic element of analysis in the sociocultural framework. This helps researchers to interpret learners' learning behaviour at a micro-level in terms of their goals, roles and means (e.g. LLSs) in particular contexts (Donato & McCormick, 1994). Donato and McCormick (1994) argue that examination of LLSs requires discussion of all three levels of activity: object-oriented learning activity (why the learner is using a certain strategy), goal-directed actions (how the learner is going about this task), and the operational composition of these actions under particular circumstances (how the situation shapes, automatizes or de-automatizes strategic actions). They explain the components of activity by taking the classroom as an example.

> A student (a subject) is engaged in an activity, for example, learning a new language. An object, in the sense of a goal, is held by the student and motivates his or her activity giving it a specific direction. In the case of our language learner, the object could range from full participation in a new culture to receiving a passing grade required for graduation.
>
> To achieve the objective, actions are taken by the student, and these actions are always goal-directed. Language learning strategies in this model are, therefore, actions motivated by specific objectives and are instrumental to fulfilling specific goals. Different actions or strategies may be taken to achieve the same goal, such as guessing meaning from context, reading foreign language newspapers, or using a bilingual dictionary to improve reading comprehension. Conversely, different goals may be fulfilled by the same action. For example, a student may think that a daily review of grammar rules can result, at the same time, in improved reading comprehension, speaking proficiency, or accuracy in essay writing. (Donato & McCormick, 1994: 454)

Activity theory emphasises that specific goal-directed actions, mediated by appropriate means, assist individuals to achieve their goals under particular spatial and temporal circumstances (Lantolf, 2000:8). Thus, on the one hand, SCT offers frameworks that assist to understand the complexity of human behaviour by examining social contexts where such behaviour occurs (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Lantolf & Appel, 1994;

Mitchell & Myles, 1998). On the other hand, they also gain insight into the reality that the same activity can mean different things to individual learners since they pursue different goals (see the examples above). Thus, it is necessary to know the object and goal of a learner when examining his or her LLS use. In an SA context, to achieve the requirements of academic studies is always one of the important objects of learners. Among achievement in academic studies, participation in social practice and improvement of L2, which is more important, depends upon the learners and this will affect their LLS use.

From a sociocultural view, the role of agency in learners' strategy use is emphasised through its theorization of 'activity' (Gao, 2010). Human activities, including learners' learning activities, are comprehended at three levels of abstraction: the level of activity, which refers to human behaviour in a general sense and is closely associated with motives, the level of action, which is goal-oriented and inseparable from a conscious goal, and the level of conditions, under which a goal-oriented action is carried out (Lantolf, 2000).

The way SCT interprets learners' strategy use is based on the concept that the 'human mind' is mediated (Lantolf, 2000:1). The concept of mediation can potentially be used to demonstrate the link between learners' strategic knowledge and their actual strategy use at a macro-level (Gao, 2010). Donato and McCormick (1994) argue that the development of LLSs is mainly a by-product of mediation and socialisation into a community of language learning practice. This view differs from much of the research on LLSs that emphasises the identification of strategy types (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993), variables affecting the choice of strategy use (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), or investigations into their teachability and learnability (e.g. Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Oxford et al., 1990). Moreover, they also question that 'strategies are perhaps the product of one's cognitive style, personality, or hemispheric preference' (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991: 199). SCT implies acceptance that all forms of strategic activity have a cultural-historical, in other words, sociocultural origin. In terms of SA contexts, how learners' strategic behaviours may be influenced (or mediated) by the new environment with different sociocultural background is one of the aims of the present study.

The notion of mediation emphasises the significance of context in shaping language learners' strategy use. There are three types of contextual resources that potentially mediate learners' language learning and strategy use, including learning discourses ('discursive resources'), artefacts and material conditions with their associated cultural practices ('material resources'), and social agents ('social resources') (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Palfreyman, 2006). Discourse refers to 'all utterances or texts which have meaning and which have some effects on the real world' (Mills, 2004). Gao (2010) explains how contextual learning discourse reflects the dominant values, attitudes and beliefs attached to learning a foreign language and says what this means: the concept of *discourse* can cause changes in language learners' discourses about values, attitudes and beliefs in the learning process and, in turn , their strategy use. At the micro-level, learners' discourses enable them to organise and control mental processes, such as selective attention to the environment, planning, articulating steps in the process of solving a problem and so on. In other words, discourses activate learners' strategy use. At the macro-level, discourses about learning a language reflect the values that learners attach to the TL and goals that they attempt to achieve through strategy use , while learners' motives or goals are crucial in determining their strategy use (Gillette, 1994; Oxford, 2003).

## 2.5 Sociocultural LLS research

SCT advocates maintain that learners' strategy use is not only a cognitive choice of individuals but also an emergent phenomenon 'directly connected to the practices of cultural groups' (Donato & McCormick, 1994: 453). From this viewpoint, learners' strategy use can also assist to subvert the imposed learning context to create alternative learning opportunities, rather than only enhancing their cognitive and metacognitive learning processes (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003). Consequently, the emergence of learners' strategy use can be considered closely related to a process of contextual mediation and learners' exercise of agency (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Toohey & Norton, 2003; Thorne, 2005; Gao, 2008b; Gao & Benson, 2008). Therefore, sociocultural LLS research attempts to achieve a balanced theorization of agency and context associated with their explanatory roles in understanding learners' strategy use (Gao, 2010).

Sociocultural LLS studies question the connection between language learners' learning outcomes and their strategy use (Gillette, 1994; Parks & Raymond, 2004). Parks and Raymond (2004) challenge the correlation research on LLS use and other individual factors, such as motivation, since such research tends to view these variables as comparatively stable across contexts. They argue that these studies often describe strategy use as 'largely [pertaining] to individual will and knowledge' (ibid: 375). If choice is a defining feature of learners' strategic learning behaviour (Cohen, 1998), it is considered to the extent which the choice is determined by learners or is mediated by the particular social contexts in which learners are involved. Moreover, they argue that it is needed to have a shift in the conceptualization of language learners, learning, context and LLS (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003). Furthermore, considering the three contextual (mediation) sources, namely discursive resources, social agents as well as material conditions and cultural artefacts can enhance our comprehension of the developmental process of learners' LLS use (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Palfreyman, 2003, 2006).

Contemporary research on LLS tends to indicate a shift from addressing learners' LLS use to the processes underlying it (Tseng et al., 2006). If learners' strategic behaviour is theorised as learners' effort to 'open up access within power structures and cultural alternatives' for learning (Oxford 2003: 79), research adopting qualitative and multi-method approaches, can reveal the dynamic interaction between language learners' agency and social structure, which will deepen the understanding of learners' strategic learning as shaped by interaction (Gao, 2006 ).

## 2.6 Sociocultural empirical LLS research

Although it is considered 'robust' in exploring the developmental process of learners' LLS use, it can be realised that sociocultural LLS research, has not been widely conducted yet (Donato & McCormick, 1994:462). Donato and McCormick attempted to link learners' shifting strategy use over time with a new mode of assessment- portfolio assessment. Donato and McCormick (1994) found that their French learners developed their goals in learning and 'identifying a goal is the first step' […] in the genesis of strategic action'. Moreover, resulting from the learners' goal setting and self-assessment, they also became more skilful in adopting specific strategies to achieve particular learning goals. They also found that all the participants increased the frequency of

strategy use as recorded in their portfolios. They argue that sociocultural LLS research provides a robust framework that can be adopted in explaining learners' strategy development. The current study can apply this thinking to moving from an AH to SA context and consider using some computer-assisted methods to investigate learners' LLS use.

Based on a longitudinal study on Chinese students in an English for Academic purposes (EAP) course in a North American university, Parks and Raymond (2004) regarded learners' LLS use as a 'complex, socially situated phenomenon, bound up with […] personal identity'(p.374). They investigated how the learners' interaction with native speakers had mediated their LLS use in three areas: reading textbooks, attendance at lectures and participation in group work. For instance, one participant learnt to apply note-taking strategies from her Canadian classmates so that she could enhance her understanding and memory of textbook materials. Parks and Raymond (2004) further explain that learners' 'desire to speak and interact with native speakers may not be entirely dependent on the will of the [individuals], on the mere knowledge that social interaction is a good learning strategy', but also on the need to 'reposition themselves' through their interlocutors, namely Canadian students in the learning context' (p.374).

Different from other LLS research, both Donato and McCormick (1994) and Parks and Raymond (2004) conducted longitudinal qualitative research to explore language learners' sociocultural background and developmental processes of LLS use. The longitudinal nature of these inquiries assists researchers to investigate how individual learners select appropriate LLSs in response to contextual changes across time in order to understand their dynamic LLS use. This kind of research aims to reveal insights into learners' situated LLS use, but there are a number of criticisms of sociocultural LLS research that need to be addressed.

Adopting a longitudinal qualitative and ethnographic research approach, Gao (2010) investigated how mainland Chinese undergraduates' strategic learning behaviours were mediated by the contextual conditions from mainland China to an English medium university in Hong Kong. The result indicates the interaction between learners' agency and the context underlying the participants' strategy use. Although the findings show learners' strategy use was mediated by contextual realities, the significance of learner

agency in their strategy use in L2 learning and a new understanding of learner agency are also pointed out. As he states:

> […] the inquiry sees learners' strategy use as a constrained choice resulting from an ongoing interaction process between agency and context. It has demonstrated how contextual realities and processes mediated the participants' strategy use and how the participants adopted strategic efforts in response to these realities and processes, revealing their agency underlying their strategy use. (Gao, 2010: 161)

## 2.7 Limitations of SCT and sociocultural LLS research

Although SCT provides interpretations of most of those issues cognitive theories assume as key concepts in SLA from a different point of view, there appear to be some key issues SCT has not addressed yet. Ellis (2008) challenges SCT through asking several questions that seem difficult for SCT to answer at present:

> For example, what explanation does SCT afford for the fact that most learners fail to achieve native-speaker ability in an L2? What explanation is there for the age differences apparent in the ultimate level of attainment of an L2? How would SCT account for the role played by linguistic context in explaining the patterns of variability evident in L2 production? Why is it that certain types of tasks promote fluency while others lead to greater complexity of language use? Would SCT acknowledge a role for input frequency in L2 acquisition and if so what would this role be? (p.554)

He perceives that any theory of SLA should provide answers to those questions to be entirely convincing.

Norton (2000) points out the inadequacy of theoretical aspects of LLSs, arguing:

> theories of the good language learner have been developed on the premise that language learners can choose under what conditions they will contact with members of the target language community and that the language learner's access to the target language community is a function of the learner's motivation….Second language theorists have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities second language learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom (p.5).

However, her argument also applies to the problems with SCT. Regarding the ZPD, 'inequitable relations of power' (op cit.) still limit the scaffolding from the teacher in the classroom (e.g. Mehan, 1979; Puro & Bloome,1987; Barnes, 1992) even though the learners know the knowledge gap and are willing to obtain the valuable knowledge and skills. The unequal relations of power appear to still stand outside the classroom. SCT does not provide a solution for this although the significance of relations of power has been emphasised. What can be found in SCT is through interaction (or negotiation). However, interaction can involve so many issues. How to appropriately interact and

negotiate and what actually occurs in these two processes appear to be not well explained in SCT but addressed more clearly in cognitive theories (e.g. CSs, negotiation strategies, compensation strategies-one type of LLSs). The lack of interactional opportunities referred to by Norton can be explained at least as well in SCT as in cognitive accounts – the former pointing to lack of collaborative scaffolding, the latter to lack of input or attention directed to correctness of forms.

In terms of the compatibility of cognitive theories and SCT, Ellis (2008) claims that 'it is almost certainly not possible to merge a cognitive or linguistic view of L2 acquisition with a sociocultural one' (p.554). However, Foster and Ohta (2005) claim that 'a fuller picture emerges of the potential of interactive language learning and that our combined analysis illuminates more in the data than either approach would do on its own' (p.423). Although this seems to imply the possibility of and benefit from combining those two approaches, it is necessary to provide a more detailed method to accomplish it.

Although sociocultural LLS research is likely to feature learners' emerging strategy use according to contextual mediation, it has also been challenged. One criticism is that sociocultural LLS researchers appear to be unable to differentiate findings or research inquiries from the empirical research data (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). Methodologically, Mitchell and Myles (1998) argue that sociocultural research tends to fail to establish cause-effect relationships between the evidence and the claims. They point out that the problems with sociocultural approach are associated with interpretative naturalistic research. For instance, Donato and McCormick (1994) are unable to elucidate whether the portfolio assessment, which required their students to describe how they learnt, only records development in the participants' strategy use or whether it also enhances such development. The mediation role of portfolio assessment (Donato & McCormick, 1994) is thus questionable. Palfreyman (2003) provided a possible solution, suggesting that researchers have a broader research concern going beyond simply depicting LLSs. Accordingly the present inquiry not only examined learners' learning contexts and language learning experiences, but also explored social mediation and strategy development. Furthermore, it developed LLS research regarding its methodological design through adopting a multi-method research design so that the data could be considered and analysed to generate robust research claims.

Another limitation of conducting LLS research based on a sociocultural perspective is how to achieve a balance in assessing learner agency and learning context. Wenden (1998, 2002) acknowledges that sociocultural research can facilitate our understanding of language learning, but she also questions that sociocultural theorists overwhelmingly centre on the deterministic role of the learning context in learners' LLS use. She argues that although sociocultural LLS researchers recognise the significance of contextual mediation on learners' strategy use, they tend to overlook how other variables, such as learners' beliefs, knowledge or metacognitive knowledge influence their choice of strategy use. Wenden (1998) comments on research such as Gillette (1994) and Coughlan and Duff (1994), arguing that:

> In these studies the knowledge /beliefs embedded in the setting or which emerge through the interaction that takes place in it is over-looked as source of insight on learners' motives, goals and operations. The review, on the role of metacognitive knowledge in the self-regulation of learning, highlights this variable that appears to be ignored and underdeveloped in sociocultural theory (Wenden, 1998:530).

Conversely, Palfreyman (2003:244) points out that, if overemphasising agency as part of learners' personal assets', there is also a danger of reinforcing the 'cognitive individual' and separating learners from contexts, thus providing an impoverished view of learners.

From the literature reviewed and discussion about LLS research, it appears to be prudent to consider not only cognitive/psycholinguistic but also sociocultural approach when researching the nature of LLS use, and SLA in SA contexts.

**Table 2.4 Simplified contrasts between cognitive and sociocultural LLS research**

| | Cognitive psychological approaches | Sociocultural perspectives (a political and critical version) |
|---|---|---|
| Context | An immediate material learning setting and an important variable modifying learners' cognition and metacognition | Fundamental to language learning, a combination of material conditions, sociocultural discourses, sociocultural networks and the alignments and arrangements of various contextual elements |
| Learners | Autonomous actors processing language-related information and skill | Social beings that have a range of socially constructed elements in their identities and their relationship to learning, such as class, ethnicity and |

| | | gender. They also have a dynamic, reflexive and constantly changing relationship with the social context of learning |
|---|---|---|
| Language learning | Cognitive and metacognitive activities in individual learners' brains | Both a kind of action and a form of belonging |
| LLSs | Cognitive and metacognitive procedures that enhance the mental processing of language | Learner actions to subvert the contextual conditions for alternative learning opportunities, apart from their role in enhancing the cognitive/ metacognitive processes |

Source: Gao (2010:18), based on Michell & Myles (1998), Oxford (2003), Palfreyman (2006) and Wenger (1998)

## 2.8 Identity

Garfinkel (1967, cited in Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998) states that social life is a continuous display of people's local understanding of what is going on and its conversation analytic crystallization is that people accomplish such local understanding by elegantly exploiting the features of ordinary talk. There appear to be several notions that can interpret these features in conversation. How to combine these various explanatory notions of defining the individual in interaction with others seems not new in psychology. One of those notions deemed as explanatory constructs of interpersonal (or intergroup) relations (e.g. Hogg, 2003) is 'identity' or particularly 'social identity'. Identity is something that is developed and used in conversation: something that is 'part and parcel of the routines of everyday life, brought off in the fine detail of everyday interaction' (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998:1). Wenger (1998) also states: identity is 'something we constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives' (p.154). The key concept involved in the identification process (construction of identity) is categorisation that is how the relations between one and others in a certain context can be comprehended by oneself (MacIntyre *et al.*, 2009). The process, which identity results from, has been indicated to correlate to emotion, cognition, and behaviour and to differ according to situations (Ashmore *et al.*, 2004).

Identity is not a new concept in the SLA field (McNamara, 1997) but has recently been dominated by poststructuralist approaches (e.g. Norton, 2000; Toohey, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Poststructuralist approaches contain several important concepts: identity, investment, imagined communities and participation (social practice). In

poststructuralist theory, identity and language are mutually constitutive (Norton, 2000). McNamara (1997) emphasises that social identity is partially dependent on 'the particular intergroup setting in which one finds oneself' (p.564) and the (social) identity may change as a result of contact with others and the desire or willingness to open up to new environments and ideas. This is in harmony with Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) conceptualisation that identity is dynamic and evolving over time and space. From a poststructuralist view, it is through interaction with others in a certain cultural group that we acquire and develop our identities since culture plays a primary role in shaping our view of ourselves.

In terms of the relation between identity and language learning, while language learning is traditionally deemed as 'an internal, biological process of linguistic system-building' (Jackson, 2008:34), it is viewed, from a sociocultural point of view, as 'the jointly constructed process of transforming socially formed knowledge and skills into individual abilities' (Hall, 2002:66). SCT speculates that it is 'our history of lived experiences in our communicative environments' (ibid: 66) that figures how we learn languages. Therefore, we are learning not only the language itself but also the culture and history of the TL as well as developing our identity when we learn a language. Or at least we are in some kind of negotiation with it.

There are a number of types of identities, such as cultural identity, ethnic identity, social identity, age identity, sexual orientation identity and so forth (Ting-Toomey, 2005) but for the purpose of the present research, social (and cultural) identity will be the focus.

### 2.8.1 Social identity theory

One of the reasons for the complexity of SLA is because second language learning involves 'the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being' (Williams, 1994:77). Thus, the efforts to 'create people with L2 competency inevitably involve the issue of social identity and the development of an L2 self' (Yashima, 2009:144).

It has been argued that the relationship between the language learner and the social world has not been conceptualised well since 'a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context' (Norton, 2000:4) has

not been developed yet. For Norton, the term identity is used to reference how one understands the relationship between himself or herself and the world, and how the relationship is constructed and developed over time and space. Furthermore, the motivational concept of 'investment' is used to address the 'socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it' (Norton, 2000: 10). According to Norton, an investment in the TL is an investment in the learner's own identity since when investing in a language the learners will improve their comprehension of the cultural, their identity and the desire for the future.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was originally developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 in order to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. Different social contexts may prompt an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his or her personal, family or national 'level of self' (Turner *et al.*, 1987). Apart from the 'level of self', an individual has multiple 'social identities'. Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002).

Social identity can be conceptualised as consisting, in part, of cultural, ethnic, or social group membership affiliations (Tajfel, 1981, 1982) as well as the 'emotional significance' of that membership. According to SIT, individuals tend to join groups providing them a positive social identity and tend to perceive 'in-group members' in a more favourable light (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

While some scholars view identity from a psychological perspective (e.g. Higgins, 1998; Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006), others emphasise the importance of not losing the sight of the social dimension that is implied by the term 'identity' (e.g. Lamb, 2009:229). By and large, identity appears to include both.

The notion of (social) identity seems not simple but has been applied to interpret language-related phenomena, for example, L2 learning motivation (e.g. Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Ushioda, 2009; Lamb, 2007, 2009). Dörnyei (2009) claims that 'for some language learners the initial motivation to learn a language does not come from internally or externally generated self images but rather from successful engagement with the actual language learning process (e.g. because they discover that they are good at it )' (p.29). Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposes 'L2 Motivational Self

System', which is a new approach to conceptualising L2 motivation within a 'self' framework as well as connecting the two concepts –motivation and identity. It consists of three components: *Ideal L2 Self*, *Ought-to L2 Self*, and *L2 Learning Experience*. Dörnyei (2009:29) explains that, 'if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the *ideal L2 self* is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves'. The *ought- to self* means that 'the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess in order to meet expectations and avoid possible negative outcomes' (p.29). The L2 learning experience 'concerns situated, "executive" motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success)' (p.29).

Although this system has conceptualised L2 motivation through the notion of *Self*, what is of great interest is how to achieve or activate the ideal self. Dörnyei (2009) proposes three ways to make the ideal L2 self plausible: (1) activating the ideal L2 self: keeping the vision alive; (2) developing an action plan: operationalising the vision; and (3) considering failure: counterbalancing the vision. In terms of (1), 'classroom activities such as warmers and icebreakers as well as various communicative tasks … and engaging in cultural activities' (p.37) are suggested. Regarding (2), he argues that 'future self-guides are only effective if they are accompanied by a set of concrete action plans' and 'the ideal self needs to come as part of a 'package' consisting of an imagery component and a repertoire of appropriate plans, scripts and self-regulatory strategies' (p.37). Therefore, the ways of developing ideal self (identity) are associated with 'activities', 'action plans' and 'strategies', which are, to some extent, similar to LLSs (e.g. 'looking for opportunities to converse in English' -metacognitive ones). However, SCT and social theorists tend to overlook this part, which might result from viewing SLA from a different paradigm. Therefore, this thesis suggests that it would be useful to adopt cognitivism (e.g. LLSs) to assist learners to achieve their ideal selves. This can also provide a better interpretation on theories of identity and motivation and further portray a more vivid picture of SLA.

With regard to the distinction between ideal self and ought-to self, Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) argue that it is the level of internalisation of ought-to self that determines ideal self. Likewise, Kim (2009) accounts for ideal self and ought-to self based on SCT, arguing that 'ought-to self reflects the inter-psychological plane, and the

ideal self reflects the intra-psychological plane' (p.290) in the development of the L2 self and the transition from the inter- to intra-psychological plane is internalisation. However, what are interaction and internalisation? Do cognitivism and SCT account for them differently?

It can be noticed that most SLA research on interaction based on a cognitive perspective tends to relate interaction to input. Interaction, accordingly, offers learners opportunities to receive input although input can be non-interactive (e.g. texts learners read and listen to). Gass (1998) points out one of the limitations of research on interaction, arguing:

> The goal of my work (and the work of others within the input/interaction framework . . .) has never been to understand language use per se . . . but rather to understand what types of interaction might bring about what types of changes in linguistic knowledge (p. 84).

In other words, the focus of research on input/interaction, from a cognitive view, is not on language use but on language learning. What Gass does not mention is that critiques of the input-output model from SCT researchers focus on the assumption that acquisition is something that takes place inside the learner's head as well as the view that interaction merely provides input.

From a sociocultural view, there appears no need for distinguishing between input and output since SLA is viewed as an inherently social practice taking place within interaction when learners are assisted to produce linguistic forms and functions that they are incapable of performing themselves. Internalisation occurs, consequently, as learners transform from assisted (other- regulation) to self- regulation. This entails the concepts of zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding. SCT researchers reject input and interaction models which fail to characterise the rich nature of the interactions in which learners participate. SCT views (language) learning as dialogically based. In other words, interaction refers to conversation or discourse. Thus, what actually occurs in the interaction is revealed through conversation or discourse. Liddicoat (1997) points out the limitations of research on interaction, noting:

> What is missing . . . [in] the study of interaction in L2 contexts is interaction between people who have a preexisting relationship, who are interacting for the purpose of engaging in that relationship, and who are engaged in interaction in which their options for participating are not constrained by institutional roles (p. 314).

In terms of internalisation, whilst Ohta (2001:11) defines internalisation as 'the movement of language from environment to brain', Lantolf (2006) views it as 'the

process through which members of communities of practice appropriate the symbolic artefacts [i.e. language] used in communicative activity and convert them into psychological artefacts that mediate their mental activity' (p.90). Therefore, internalisation is related to not only the enhancement of control over L2 forms and functions but also the capacity of utilising the L2 to regulate thought (Ellis, 2008). It will be beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss internalisation and interaction in detail. But interaction and internalisation, which are important processes in the development of social identity, are not simple processes but appear to be addressed from both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives although the term internalisation is mainly used by SCT researchers.

From a sociocultural perspective, it has been maintained that learning an L2 provides learners new tools to mediate their interaction with the world as well as with their own psychological functioning (i.e. how they conceptualise themselves) (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In other words, L2 learning mediates interaction and identity. This views the relations among interaction, identity and SLA from an opposite orientation to that interaction mediates identity and L2 learning and also implies the potential connection between LLSs and identity since LLS use is a critical part of SLA so LLS use may affect learners' identity. Vygotsky (1986) perceives that identity is evolving in a linear way throughout the maturation process and shaped through the internalisation of its sociocultural environment. As he puts it: 'the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual' (p.36). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) also state:

> While variationist and sociopsychological approaches view identities as relatively stable and independent of language, social constructionists conceptualize identities as an interactional accomplishment, produced and negotiated in discourse (p.13).

Thus, whilst identities are being produced and negotiated in discourse, ought-to L2 self may well be shifted to ideal L2 self, which lies in social interaction depending upon the contexts. In terms of the current study, how an English-speaking environment may mediate learners' identities and strategic learning behaviours is the focus.

### 2.8.2 Identity Negotiation Theory

The focus of the identity negotiation theory (INT) is that identity or reflective self-image, which is constructed, experienced, and communicated by the individuals within a culture and in a particular interaction situation, is deemed as the 'explanatory

mechanism for the intercultural communication process' (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The role of language in INT seems implicit. Jackson (2008) argues that INT does not address the impact of language on intercultural encounters. Nevertheless, Ting-Toomey (1999) provides a connection between language, culture, and identity within the context of intercultural relations. For instance, an individual's cultural and ethnic identities are normally articulated through language since it shapes our 'cultured and gendered expectations and perceptions' (p. 95). The reason to have a discussion about these theories and concepts is that they can explain the development of learners' identities through negotiating (social interaction) with other members in a TL environment through which their strategy use may be mediated or may enhance the process of negotiation and identity reconstruction further facilitating L2 learning and use.

In terms of the concept of negotiation, it is defined as:

> a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others' desired self-images (p.217).

As sociocultural theorists, such as Wenger (1998), and Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), point out, identity is a dynamic process of negotiating the self, and issues of power and belonging are the key concepts.

Another theory based on social psychological perspective, which is communication accommodation theory (CAT), can also be related to the process of the formation and transformation of identities of newcomers. The theory proposes a notion of 'convergence' through which 'individuals adapt their communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g. languages, accents, speech rates), paralinguistic (e.g. pauses, utterance length), and nonverbal features (smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become familiar to their interlocutors's behaviour' (Bourhis *et al*., 2007:37). Accordingly, it is through these convergence strategies that one's identity may well be reconstructed. This raises interesting questions about the connection between strategy use and identity. Does one's identity affect or determine one's strategy use or does one's strategy use influence or decide the development of one's identity? Or both? If so, which comes first?

Identity and strategy use have traditionally been deemed as incompatible and to address two different worlds of SLA. However, from the review and discussion above, there

seems a link between them which can fill the plainly missing part of SLA. There are several reasons why there has been a great deal of research on SLA. Firstly, it appears to be essential to learn an L2 nowadays in the context of globalisation. Second, learners generally do not feel it easy to achieve an advanced level of proficiency of an L2. Although numerous theories have been proposed to address L2 learning experience, there appear to be some missing patches needed to weave the whole picture of SLA, which is difficult to accomplish only through either social or cognitive approaches. This is what my research aims to examine.

With regard to identity and study abroad, (Gu, 2011) suggests that it seems important to adopt a holistic and developmental lens to view and interpret sojourners' experiences while studying abroad. One of the reasons is that change at the deepest level is related to their perceptions of self, which is, identity change.  She further explains:

> Given the distinctive intercultural environment in which they live and study, the process of their identity change has been interwoven with the growth in their maturity (i.e. human development) and interculturality (p.226).

The experience of travelling across cultural and social boundaries presents individuals with opportunities to broaden and develop their intercultural awareness and intra-/interpersonal competence. In this process, 'identity is constructed in transactions […] across the boundary' (Jenkins, 2004: 22). Jenkins asserts that during these transactions, 'a balance is struck between (internal) group identification and (external) categorisation by others' (p.22). To achieve this balance, the social actor is constantly engaged in a process of identity negotiations: regarding how they perceive themselves and how they would like to be perceived by others each time they cross the boundary.


### 2.8.3 Identity and SLA

With regard to the relation between identity and language learning, while language learning is traditionally deemed as 'an internal, biological process of linguistic system-building' (Jackson, 2008:34), it is viewed, from a sociocultural point of view, as 'the jointly constructed process of transforming socially formed knowledge and skills into individual abilities' (Hall, 2002:66). It has been speculated that it is 'our history of lived experiences in our communicative environments' (ibid: 66) that shapes the way we learn languages. Therefore, we are learning not only the language itself but also the

culture and history of the TL as well as reconstructing our identity when learning a language.

Although Gass (1998) argues 'relevance has to be established theoretically insofar as [identity] affects [SLA] (p.86)', recent studies tend to indicate that such an interrelationship exists (e.g. Day, 2002; Kanno, 2003; Kramsch, 2003; Miller, 2003; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Block, 2006). At least, identity provides an opportunity to view and understand SLA from a different angle. As Block (2007) states:

> It was, importantly, part of a general push to open up SLA beyond its roots in linguistics and cognitive psychology. As a result of this pressure to open up SLA, it became easy for some applied linguists to see links between theorisations of identity in social theory and sociology and the learning of languages (p.864).

There is another concept which may well be the connection between identity and SLA as well as identity and LLS, which is imagination.

### 2.8.4 Imagination

Wenger (1998) suggests that direct involvement with community practices and investment in tangible and concrete relationships, which is *engagement,* provides opportunities for identity (re)construction. Imagination can bring out a sense of belonging to communities that are not immediately tangible and accessible, which is *imagined communities* (Anderson, 1991). Norton (2001) has used the notion of *imagined communities* to address how learners' sense of belonging to TL communities that are not immediately accessible may affect their identity construction and L2 learning. Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) point out that 'the dream or image of a desired future is the content of the ideal self' (p.632). Learners who envision an ideal self are more likely to imagine themselves using the language in a certain social context or TL community (Yashima, 2009). Imagination can be 'a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves' (Wenger, 1998: 176). Research has investigated how imagining of future participation in imagined communities may affect the (re)construction of learners' identities (Norton, 2001; Kinginger, 2004; Murphey et al., 2004) and their language learning trajectories (Kanno, 2003; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Murray, 2008).

Murray's (2011) study shows that imagination can affect several issues, such as goal setting, learning strategies, and monitoring and assessment. He points out that

imagination mediated the process of goal setting in two ways. Firstly, it provides learners a vision of possible self to move toward. Secondly, envisioning this self involved in an imagined TL environment assisted them to identify intermediate goals, or the steps needed to realize their future self, which in turn resulted in the emergence of learning plan (Taylor, et al, 1998). Imagination was an integral aspect of how the learners worked with the content, i.e. their learning strategies and activities. For instance, using imagination to visualize the language being used in the imagined TL community helped the learner to memorise the expressions and to identify the situations to use them in daily life. Imagination was also an essential aspect of strategies required to monitor and self-assess the learners' learning process and performance through retrospectively visualizing themselves and gaining insights into their identities to evaluate the change of engagement.

Due to the significance of participation within the community in learning process, Wenger (1998) extends the concept of participation, including non-participation in shaping identities. He notes:

> We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but also by what we are not. (p.164)

The same as participation, non-participation should include both the physical and imagined kinds. In a SA context, non-participation in social interaction in the TL environment means the learners are unlikely to achieve an ideal L2 self due to lack of mediation from social practice on their strategy use and identity reconstruction although they may well be keeping their present identity or have negative identities against ought-to L2 self . Imagined non-participation means that without envisioning future L2 self engaging in the TL community, the learners will not have an ideal L2 self, which results in no goal to achieve and no plans and actions to follow.

In terms of SA contexts, both imagined communities and community of practice appear to exist since sojourners are exposed to the TL environment and can access to and interact with the members of TL community as well as imagine the engagement in the not immediately accessible communities (e.g. group of academic or research elites). As Wenger (1998: 217) states, 'the combination of engagement and imagination results in a *reflective* practice'. Achieve this imagined self in the imagined community, depends upon how learners set goals, make use of a variety of methods (i.e. strategies), and

evaluate their learning process through engagement and imagine to help him/herself to complete it.

## 2.8.5 Limitations of identity research

There have been some critiques of contemporary notions of self and identity. Pavlenko (2002) criticises social psychological approaches to L2 motivation, arguing that the viewpoint of 'homogeneous and monolingual cultures, or in-groups and out-groups, and of individuals who move from one group to another' (p.279) is biased since the complexity of the modern globalised multilingual world is ignored due to the fact that the majority of the residents are not only bilingual or multilingual but also multiple ethnic, socially and culturally diverse. Along similar lines, Coetzee-Van Rooy (2006) proposes a concept of 'simplex' view of identity, arguing that learning an L2 somehow causes loss of L1 and construction of a new 'simple' identity as natives of the TL. This simplex view misrepresents the complex sociolinguistic realities of language learning, language use and cultural identity in postcolonial world English contexts. The solution she provides is to re-examine the integrative concept.  Another limitation of the concept of self (identity) is that it is restricted by the age of the learner. Zentner and Renald (2007) point out that constant ideal-self representations do not emerge by adolescence, and neither can younger children consider multiple perspectives on the self, most notably the ought self projected by significant others. Thus, the self approach may be inappropriate for pre-secondary students but not the case of the present study since it focuses on higher educational (undergraduate and postgraduate) students.

## 2.9 Context

It tends to be assumed, from a sociocultural view, that context or real-world situations are 'fundamental, not ancillary, to learning' (Zuengler & Miller, 2006:37), while in cognitive theories, context tends to be viewed as a variable modifying the internal acquisition process occurring in individual minds (Block, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Sealey & Carter, 2004; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Thorne, 2005). Therefore, the term 'context' needs further elaboration and can be defined in several ways. For instance, 'context' may be used to refer to aspects of the immediate physical setting of learners' language learning, for example the classroom. It can also be defined in terms of less tangible forms, namely cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) or social capital (Putman, 2000), underscoring the benefits that individuals can have by possessing certain

skills/knowledge or having privileged access to certain social networks (Norton, 2000; Palfreyman, 2006). It may also refer to social relations or the structure underlying the social alignments and arrangements of other contextual elements (Layder, 1990).

Researchers based on this sociocultural perspective also view learners as social agents in active pursuit of language –related competence and non-linguistic objectives (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000). Moreover, they conceptualize language learning not only as individual metacognitive and cognitive activities but also as social acts that are meaningfully related to learners' identity formation (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2003; Thorne, 2005; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Thus, language learning in the CoP 'combines personal transformation with the evolution of social structures' through learners participating in those communities (Wenger, 2000:227). It is also 'both a kind of action and a form of belonging' for learners (Wenger, 1998:4). These sorts of paradigm shifts and theoretical reconceptulizations also assist researchers to capture learners' dynamic strategy use in LLS research.

## 2.10 Structure and agency in LLS research

In order to address the theoretical difficulty of LLS, Gao (2010) attempts to refine two concepts, which are agency and structure, and to use them to provide a more comprehensive view on sociocultural LLS research, which is needed in examining learners' situated LLS use in particular contexts. He perceives that the term 'structure' stands for 'the tangible contextual elements that are indicative of the social relations underlying their alignments and arrangements' (p.25). The term is also used with 'contextual conditions', 'contextual realities' or 'context' to refer to contextual resources that constitute learning contexts and mediate learners' language learning and strategy use, for instance, materials (artefacts), discourses and social networks (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Palfreyman, 2006).

The other concept, agency, refers to one's self-consciousness, reflexivity, intentionality, cognition, emotionality etc. (Carter & New, 2004; Sealy & Carter, 2004). Ahearn (2001: 112) defines the term 'agency' as 'the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act'. This capacity is viewed as 'something that a person can achieve… only in transaction with a particular situation' (Biesta & Tedder, 2006:19), which can only be comprehended retrospectively. Gao (2010) argues that '[l]earners' strategy use cannot be properly

explained without addressing the issue of agency, which is revealed in their use of power' (e.g. Giddens, 1984) (p.75). The notion of power is broader than metacognitive knowledge and self-regulatory capacity. What language learners need are capacities to protect 'the right to speak' and 'the power to impose reception' to their linguistic competence (Norton, 2000:8). The capacities held by learners can have a proper understanding of contextual conditions and critically identifying contextual elements for possible reconfiguration, which refers to 'sociocultural capacity' (Gao, 2010:26). He further explains that

> It also involves learners' micro-political competence in manipulating contextual conditions and social processes within particular contexts to create a facilitative learning environment, negotiate access to language competences and pursue self-assertion in the CoP where language learning takes place (p.26).

What is more, learners' intent, determination, motives, and beliefs in learning are included in the power of social agents. Through language learners' agency, their learning process is generally goal-oriented, intentionally invoked and effortful, or strategic. That is to say, it is agency that gives 'the element of choice' (Cohen, 1998:4) to learners' strategy use as a special characteristic. Thus, in contrast, learners' self-reported strategy use may be problematic if it is treated as a means of psychometric measurement (LoCastro, 1994; Dornyei, 2005; Tseng et al, 2006). However, there are chances to investigate the interaction between their self- reported LLS use and agency (or contextual conditions).

Gao's (2010) framework also indicates that language learners tend to be able to seek or create facilitative learning settings as well as to critically examine the contextual mediation of their learning. It also considers how or to what extent learners' LLS use, usually as constrained choice, remains the learners' choice.

Along a similar line, Flowerdew and Miller (2008)'s study indicates that individual agency, in the form of the degrees of 'investment' made in learners' language learning, and the application of "creative discursive agency" (Collins, 1993), that is, how individuals are capable to initiate or make the most of opportunities for the creative development of their discursive practices, is not, to a large extent, a result of the official school curriculum but can be viewed as prominent in the development of the learners. The present study aims to explore what learners do to facilitate their L2 learning,

focusing on not only what happens in the classroom but also (mainly) on their social interaction outside the classroom in an English-speaking environment.

Furthermore, Flowerdew and Miller (2008) suggest that in order to 'tilt the balance in favour of agency over structure and to encourage more "investment" on the part of learners'(p.201), more attention is needed to create opportunities for "creative discursive agency" in and outside the classroom. It is through human agency that language learners attempt to negotiate from a certain identity situation, and to be able to reframe their relationship with their interlocutors and declare alternatives. Thus, they can construct more powerful identities and in this manner facilitate their L2 learning. In the case of study abroad, it is also worth exploring the creative discursive agency, which refers to the interaction among learners and other members in the community of the TL since it is agency that underlies the learners' dynamic strategic behaviour because they constantly transform their strategy use to achieve their goals according to contextual changes.


## 2.11 Agency, identity, and LLS

More recently, in Murray et al's (2011) book *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning,* a number of authors attempt to explore the relations among identity, motivation, autonomy and language learning. These issues are closely related but underrepresented in the literature yet. Most of the authors relate L2 learning to motivation, apart from Gao and Zhang , and Huang, who address the roles of agency and metacognition, as well as agency and identity, in L2 learning, respectively.  This sheds new light on the relations among agency, identity and LLS. Gao (2010) explored the relations among strategic behaviour (strategy use), individual agency, and social context. He addressed how contextual realities and processes mediated the learners' strategy use and how the learners adopted strategic efforts in response to these realities and processes, revealing their agency underlying their strategy use. Huang (2011) investigated the development of identity and autonomy of Chinese learners in an EFL context in mainland China, proposing the relationships among identity, agency and autonomy as in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 A simplified relationship among identity, agency and autonomy (adapted from Huang, 2011:242).

Furthermore, her findings suggest that there seems a potential interaction among these factors, which is demonstrated in Figure2.2.
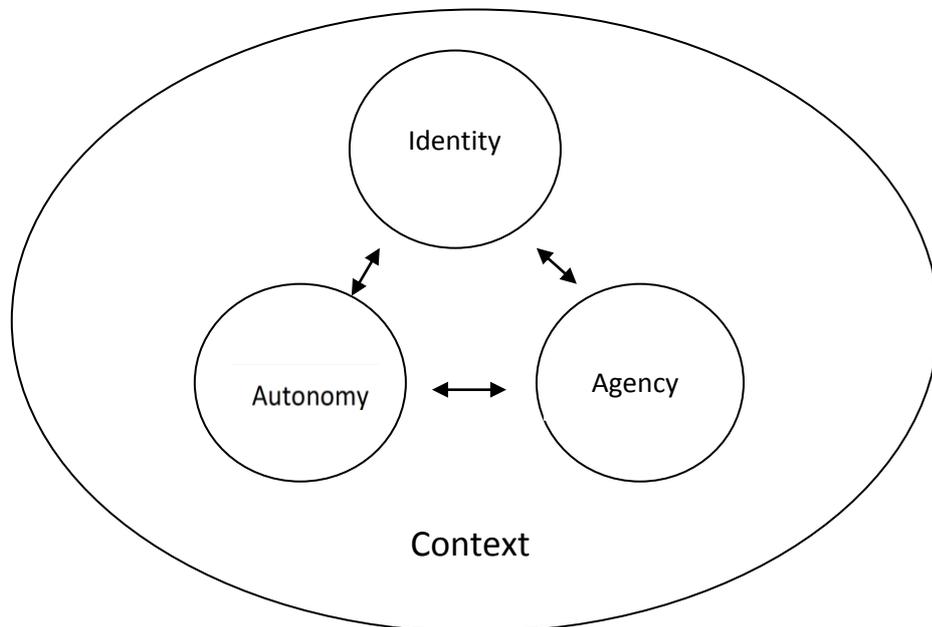


Figure 2. 2 (Diagrammatical): Relationships among identity, agency and autonomy (adapted from Huang, 2011:242)

This lends support for the proposal by Benson (2007) that 'agency can perhaps be viewed as a point of origin for the development of autonomy, while identity change might be viewed as one of its more important outcomes' (p.30). Huang (2011) points out that it might also be reasonable to suggest that 'self-identity conceptualization and construction might be both an origin and an outcome of autonomy in learning English' (p.243). Gao's study (2010) gains insights into the relations among strategic behaviour (strategy use), individual agency, and social context. It addresses how contextual realities and processes mediated the learners' strategy use and how the learners adopted strategic efforts in response to these realities and processes, revealing their agency underlying their strategy use. Thus, what is not clearly addressed is the relationship between strategy use and identity, which is rarely found in the literature and is one of the aims of the present study.

## 2.12 Summary

This chapter has reviewed and discussed several key issues relevant to the present study, such as LLSs (including definition, taxonomy and empirical studies), SCT, social identity (social identity theory and identity negotiation theory), agency, and imagined self and community. These concepts and theories can provide a foundation for exploring SA learners' L2 learning experience as well as for examining the interrelations among them. Moreover, it has explained how cognitive theories address LLSs and SLA and how these issues are characterised by SCT, which leads to concern of the present research design.

# CHAPTER THREE METHDOLOGY

## 3.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the methodological issues associated with the present research topic and questions. First of all, it provides a general discussion of the three paradigms, namely two traditional paradigms- positivism (quantitative), constructivism or interpretivism (qualitative), and a new paradigm- mixed- methods (quantitative and qualitative), evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each of them. Secondly, it reviews relevant studies related to language learning strategies (LLSs) and social identity focusing on the methodology, which provides a justification for the selection of a mixed methods research design. The rationale of adopting a mixed methods research design is based upon the premise that a broad range of sources of data will be able to provide a fuller picture of LLS use and social identity in the SLA field since they may complement and benefit one another. Thirdly, it discusses the methods used in the present study such as questionnaire, interviews, diaries, and online communication. Fourthly, information on the participants is provided and the processes of data collection and analysis are described. Ethical considerations related to the research are also addressed. It also includes a brief report of the pilot study employing those (quantitative and qualitative) methods which were used in the main study.

## 3.1 Methodological framework

It can be noticed in the literature that while research on language learning strategies (LLSs) appears to adopt both quantitative and qualitative paradigms, research on social identity tends to be largely based on qualitative approaches. My research aims to investigate how Chinese L2 learners studying overseas go about improving their language proficiency, which involves a number of variables. However, I mainly focus on the relationships among their use of LLSs, their social identities, and L2 learning. One of the reasons why LLSs and social identity are the focus is that the application of sociocultural approach for SLA is worth considering. As Norton argues (1997:410), 'speech, speakers, and social relationships are inseparable', theories of and research into SLA which do not take into full account the social aspect of language learning and use

do not seem prudent. Therefore, in order to investigate cognitive and sociocultural sides of SLA, several research questions are proposed, as presented in chapter one introduction.

These research questions, which are basically based on a cognitive view, do not appear to frame the exploration of how Chinese L2 sojourners deal with social and affective aspects of themselves as not only learning language but also 'whole' people living, working, relating to, and interacting with the members in the communities of the TL. Edwards (1985) also pointed out that educational research must not only investigate the cognitive aspects of learning but also explore the social and affective issues related to education. Thus, it does not appear to be prudent to cut off their 'language learner' selves from the rest of their lives. Accordingly, my research questions are as follows:

*What do Chinese SA sojourners do to improve their L2 English skills?*

*-how do they manage social and affective aspects of their lives?*

*-how is what they do affected or determined by their social identity?*

*-how is what they do affected or determined by their preconceived cognitive understanding of the L2 learning process?*

In answering the research questions, there are several objectives to achieve.
In order to answer these questions, I will now consider what research paradigm would be appropriate.

## 3.2 Research paradigms

Mark Twain once observed that 'It were not best that we should all think alike; it is difference of opinion that makes horse races'. Views do differ from time to time: that seems no exception in terms of research paradigms and methodologies. Teddlie and Tashakkori, (2009) argue that researchers can generally be categorised into three groups according to methodology:

1. Quantitatively oriented social and behavioural scientists (QUANs) primarily working within the postpositivist/positivist paradigm and principally interested in numerical data and analyses
2. Qualitatively oriented social and behavioural scientists (QUALs) primarily working within the constructivist paradigm and principally interested in narrative data and analyses
3. Mixed methodologists scientists working primarily within the pragmatist paradigm and interested in both narrative and numerical data and their analyses. (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009: 4)

These three methodological approaches (or *paradigms*) significantly affect how the reality of the issues being explored can be reached throughout the social and behavioural sciences. Paradigms may be defined as the worldviews or belief systems that guide researchers (Guba & Linclon, 1994) and address models of research that reflect a general agreement on the nature of the world and how to investigate it (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). There appears to be a general consensus on what research methods are appropriate and acceptable for collecting data, and what are not, within each paradigm.

Quantitative purists perceive that the approach of natural sciences can be applied to social ones since the social world has been presumed to exist in the same way as the natural one (e.g. Yates, 2004; Evans & King, 2006). Therefore, society can be examined through no different objective way as the natural world. That is, time- and context-free generalisations (Nagel, 1986) are desirable and possible, and 'real causes of social scientific outcomes can be determined reliably and validly' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2010: 14). However, whilst statistics can generalise patterns, the reason why participants have behaved or thought in certain ways will not be explained. Furthermore, the objectivity and scientific claims of positivist approaches have also been challenged (Edwards & Usher, 2000; Cohen et al., 2007) on issues about how the choices of the researchers are made, such as what to investigate, what questions are to be asked and ignored, and how to collect, collate, explain, and categorise the data.

In terms of the qualitative paradigm, it attempts to address how and why choices are made by participants in social situations within the process of interaction. For the constructivist, there appears no objective reality existing outside of the participants' interpretations but different versions of events. What the researchers in this paradigm desire is to understand and portray the participants' perceptions and comprehensions of a particular situation or event (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). In Mason's (2002) words, 'there is more emphasis on 'holistic' forms of analysis and explanation in this sense, than on charting surface patterns, trends and correlations'. Therefore, more naturalistic forms of data collection (e.g. informal interviews and observations), which are designed to obtain detailed information and tend to be small scale, are favoured although there appear to be difficulties in generalising from research in this paradigm.

It has been claimed that mixed methods research is the third research paradigm in educational research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). Bergman (2008) states that mixed method research design is 'one of the fastest growing areas in research methodology today' (p.11).Creswell et al. (2003) point out that a mixed methods study involves 'the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research' (p.212).The main reason for using mixed methods is that either a quantitative or qualitative method has its own inherent limitations but would be greatly strengthened through being combined with the unique qualities of the other. As Greene and Caracelli (1997) claim, '[t]he underlying rationale for mixed method inquiry is to understand more fully, to generate deeper and broader insights, [and] to develop important knowledge claims that respect a wider range of interests and perspectives (p.7). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:18) argue that mixed methods research 'is likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses' of quantitative and qualitative research. However, 'using multiple and diverse methods is a good idea, but is not automatically good science' (Greene & Caracelli, 1997: 5). A good research design needs to address the intertwined political, philosophical, and technical levels of decision making (Greene & Caracelli, 1997).

With respect to the current study, both quantitative and qualitative aspects are involved since it aims to explore the difference of LLS use in SA and AH contexts (i.e. generalisation of patterns) and how and why the difference occurs as well as the relations between social identity and LLS use (i.e. description and interpretation of perception and comprehension). Therefore, a mixed methods design is adopted.

### 3.3 Research on LLS

Although LLSs have been considered to be one of the most interesting areas in SLA for over two decades (e.g. Wenden & Rubin, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford, 1990; MacIntyre, 1994; Cohen 1998, 2002; Macaro, 2001; Lan & Oxford, 2003), there appear to be some theoretical and practical problems. Theoretically, as discussed in chapter two, there appears to be no coherent agreement on what the exact defining criteria for LLSs are.  For example, debates have been on whether LLSs should be considered either observable behaviours or inner mental processes, or both (e.g.

Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 1994) and conscious or unconscious (or subconscious) (e.g. Cohen, 1998). Thus, observation appears to be a restricted research tool to investigate LLSs since mental processes seem unlikely to be captured (Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al. 1978; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Cohen, 1998). Therefore, other methods that can obtain insights into learners' mental processes, such as self-report questionnaires, diaries, and retrospective interviews have been employed.

Whilst theoretical research on LLSs keeps progressing, for instance, one of the recent definitions of LLSs is 'being a specific plan, action, behaviour, step, or technique that individual learners use, with some degree of consciousness, to improve their progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language' (Oxford & Schramm, 2007:47-48), more attention appears to have been drawn to the practical perspective (i.e. how to assist learners to learn more efficiently and self-directedly).  However, theoretical problems also lead to methodological ones. This refers to the difficulty in defining what LLSs are, as described above, which is associated with determining which learning behaviours constitute strategies and which do not. This, consequently, leads to the complexity of measurement (Cohen & Macaro, 2007) since 'only a few [LLSs] (such as using a dictionary) can be observed directly: most can only be inferred from language learner behaviour' (Griffiths, 2003: 369). Thus, this also indicates that researchers should make use of other methods to explore LLS use, such as those mentioned above.

In assessing language learners' strategic learning, commonly used self-report survey instruments 'are based on the assumption that strategy use and strategic learning are related to an underlying *trait* because items ask respondents to generalise their actions across situations rather than referencing singular and specific learning events' (Tseng *et al.*, 2006: 82). This view points to one of the limitations of self-report survey instruments.

 Regarding the difficulty in distinguishing learners' strategic from nonstrategic behaviours, Tseng *et al.* (2006) argue that LLSs can only be defined in relation to particular learners' intentions and creative efforts. This indicates a need for a shift in research, 'from focusing on the *product*-the actual techniques employed- to the self-regulatory *process* itself and the specific learner capacity underlying it' (p.81, italic added). However, the difficulty is how to measure the process. For instance, Tseng *et al.*

(2006) propose a Self –Regulating Capacity in Vocabulary Learning Scale (SRCVOC), embracing 20 items (e.g. *When I feel stressed about vocabulary learning, I know how to reduce this stress*) for respondents to reflect on by selecting among *strongly agree, agree, partly agree, slightly disagree, disagree and strongly disagree*.  However, if a respondent chooses the first two options, the following question appears to be *how do you reduce the stress?* If the choice is *partly agree* or *slightly disagree*, the reason is worth knowing. If the choice is *disagree* or *strongly disagree*, what is interesting is what the respondent is going to do. Thus, the notion of self-regulating capacity (or self regulation) offers a consideration about the learning process but does not provide an explicit answer to how to deal with the obstacle in a certain learning circumstance. The answers seem to be sought through exploring learners' LLS use.

It can be noticed that attention of research into LLSs, over the last thirty years, has been directed towards 'developing and refining tools to investigate the mental processes of learners in understanding, remembering, and using a new language…' (White, Schramm, & Chamot, 2007:93). In terms of LLS, definition and terminology tend to be major issues.  However, they do not appear to be solved easily but are 'indicative of the way second language acquisition (SLA) research in general developed in the second half of the twentieth century' (Grenfell & Macaro, 2008:9).  Retrospectively, the development of LLS research can be viewed as a sign of a primary shift of perspective in considering the processes of language learning which was deemed a psychological phenomenon in the 1970s. Later studies extended to include not only psychological but also social aspects of language learning, concerning the *epistemological* core of LLS research. The focus of SLA has broadened beyond conventional classroom settings to encompass a variety of learning environments, such as formal and informal contexts for learning, study abroad, and self-access learning. The boundaries and methodological tools of LLS research have also extended, especially in the field of study abroad (SA) (Paige *et al*, 2004; Cohen *et al*, 2005).

**Limitation of research on LLS research**

Traditional LLS research tends to ignore sociocultural aspects. From a sociocultural perspective, learners' strategy use is not only the result of their individual cognitive choices but also of the mediation of particular learning communities (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gao, 2003). This viewpoint appears to suggest an alternative for

examining the connection between learners' actual strategy use and its underlying processes, including their metacognitive knowledge, in particular contexts. From a sociocultural viewpoint, if learners' strategic behaviour is theorised as learners' effort to 'open up access within power structures and cultural alternatives' for learning (Oxford, 2003: 79), Gao (2007) points out that 'research using qualitative and multi-method approaches can reveal the dynamic interaction between language learners' agency and social structure and this will deepen our understanding of learners' strategic learning as shaped by interaction' (p.619). Gao (2003) also points out one of the limitations of research on LLS. He examined changes in Chinese students' vocabulary learning strategy use after arrival for further study in the UK based on a qualitative inquiry. He suggests that although the research on changes in learners' strategy use is a worthwhile field for further investigation, further corroboration through other research methods (e.g. a questionnaire survey with wider distribution) is required. These all suggest that a broader range of methods of investigation should be considered to provide a full picture of learners' LLS use.

## 3.4 Research on identity and language learning

It can be noticed that most of the research on identity and language learning has been qualitative, based on using diaries (e.g. Norton, 2000), narratives (e.g. Polanyi, 1995), autobiographies (e.g. Pavlenko, 2003), interviews (almost all of the studies mentioned above) and questionnaires (Pomerantz, 2001). Ethnographic approaches (McKay & Wong, 1996; Lam, 2000) have also been used. Moreover, most of the studies are case studies. This may be one of the reasons why the relationship between identity and language learning appears to be difficult to identify since the results do not seem to be easily generalised.

### Limitations of research on identity and language learning

One of the limitations of research on learner's identity and L2 learning is that most of the studies are qualitative and based on case studies. Although a great deal of detailed information can be obtained, the results seem difficult to generalise from.

There appear to be only a few studies investigating the relationship between social identity and L2 learning since studies have focused on a variety of subject positions and related them to L2 learning; thus, the results of these studies tend to be context dependent.

The present study attempts to examine the relationship between learners' social identity and L2 learning through connecting to their LLS use that was investigated by analysing the quantitative (SILL) and qualitative (interviews, diaries, online communication) data. These four methods will be discussed in coming sections.

## 3.5 Instruments

### 3.5.1Questionnaire survey

It seems evident that questionnaire surveys have been frequently utilised in investigating a broad range of issues in educational and SLA research (Nunan, 1992), for example, LLSs (e.g. Bialystok, 1981; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Oxford, 1990).  The most important reason perhaps is that questionnaires are an inexpensive way to obtain data from a potentially great number of respondents in a short period of time (Gillham, 2008). It seems that they are the only reasonable way to achieve a number of respondents large enough to allow statistical analysis of the results. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative data can be obtained with a well-constructed questionnaire which are suitable for not only statistical analysis but also qualitative analysis (Nunan, 1992; Dörnyei, 2003).

### 3.5.1.1 Well-known strategy inventories

There are a number of strategy taxonomies and inventories proposed, among which three major ones are to be discussed and evaluated. Other inventories (e.g. Chamot & O'Malley 1994; Chamot et al. 1999; Rubin & Thompson, 1994; Weaver & Cohen, 1997) have been developed to assess LLS use for particular contextualised tasks rather than general use in any circumstances.  Among the three strategy inventories, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) are two of the most influential taxonomies and inventories in the SLA field.  O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identify 26 strategy items, grouped into three categories, metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies. The *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL) (see Appendix B), which is based on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of LLSs, includes six categories:  (1) 'Remembering more effectively' (memory strategies); (2) 'Using your mental processes' (cognitive strategies); (3) 'Compensating for missing knowledge' (compensation strategies); (4) 'Organising and evaluating your learning' (metacognitive strategies); (5) 'Managing your emotions' (Affective strategies); and (6) 'Learning with others' (social strategies). It consists of 50 items, involving five-point rating scales '1- *never or almost*

*never true of me*, 2- *usually not true of me*, 3- *somewhat true of me*, 4- *usually true of me*, 5- *always or almost always true of me* ', which makes the items cumulative.

It can be seen that some categories occur in both inventories, such as cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. As discussed earlier in Chapter two, there are also debates on the overlapping between memory and cognitive strategies, affective and metacognitive strategies, and so forth. However, in general, 'the SILL appears to have a wider focus and includes strategies associated with the social and affective aspects of language learning and use' (Gao, 2010:12) since there are only three items in the socio-affective category of O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) inventory.

What Cohen et al. (2006) propose is a skill-specific taxonomy, which contains six skill categories, namely listening, vocabulary, reading, writing, speaking and translation, including 90 items in total. However, this is like a checklist rather than an inventory because it asks learners to reflect on how useful they perceive particular strategies and whether they are interested in using new strategies. Furthermore, it seems difficult to statistically analyse the efficacy of the LLS use because it has three options: *1. I use this strategy and find it useful; 2. I have tried this strategy, but welcome learning more about it. 3. I have never tried this strategy* but the numbers of the options are not interval categories.

Based on the discussion above, the SILL was adopted as the instrument to acquire the information of learners' LLS use.

In terms of the field of SLA, SILL has been most often used in research on learning strategies. Apart from the general limitations of questionnaires, it has some specific limitations. SILL aims to capture the frequencies of those specific strategic behaviours based on the scores, and allows the researcher to compute the mean scores of each category and overall. However, it appears to be not only the quantity but also the quality of LLS use that affects learning and the latter can be more important than the former (e.g. Ehrman *et al.*, 2003). For instance, one can only use a certain strategy that is appropriate to his/her situation (learning context) and individual difference (personality, learning style) to assist learning efficiently. On the other hand, a number of strategies can be employed by a learner ineffectively since 'less able learners often use strategies in a random, unconnected, and uncontrolled manner' (Ehrman *et al*., 2003: 315). Therefore, what SILL cannot provide is information about the quality of LLS use.

However, the weaknesses of SILL do not appear to indicate that quantitative research on LLS is not worth conducting since it is not that simple to assess the quality of LLSs use. Thus, it would be helpful to measure the frequency of LLS use whilst also assessing the quality of LLS use as they may complement each other. In the present study, SILL aims to gather information about the patterns of the learner's LLS use based on the frequencies measured, which can be compared with the information revealed in diaries, online (MSN) communication, and interviews to provide a fuller picture of the LLS use of the participants.

### 3.5.2 Diaries

It has been argued that one of the most powerful ways to learn, reflect and make sense of our lives is through diary (journal) keeping since reflection is a crucial element of learning and offers multiple ways to reflect meaningfully through journaling (Stevens & Cooper, 2009).

Alaszewski (2006) notes a diary is 'a document created by an individual who has maintained a regular, personal and contemporaneous record' (p.1). A diary can range from filling certain formats, a set of responses to specific questions, to a completely unstructured document. What is noteworthy is that the diaries used in research usually refer to 'solicited diaries' only, that is, accounts produced specifically at the researcher's request, by an informant or informants (Bell, 1999).

There are a number of assumptions underlying using diaries as a research tool (Burgess, 1994). Firstly, one is the best person to record one's own thoughts, feelings, and reflections that may otherwise be rather complicated to capture or are difficult to observe (Wang, 1999; Toms & Duff, 2002).Secondly, diaries can 'construct pictures of social reality from the actor's perspective' (Corti, 1993), which provides opportunities for easily determining the motivations or minor details and holistic picture that may be missed when employing other methods of data collection, such as surveys. From this perspective the research subject will also offer a deeper insight into the forces or factors that influence their behavioural patterns etc. (e.g. LLS use). Thirdly, diaries, which are qualitative, can be gathered from different people and analysed to see the differences and similarities among them (i.e. this data can be quantified, for instance, the same issues mentioned in the diaries of different people can be counted). Finally, a diary may provide a great deal of information which may be unlikely to be accessible to others (including the researcher), especially when the author is unable to be with the

subjects frequently. Solicited diaries provide opportunities to capture the autobiographical aspect of private diaries in a more systematic and controlled way, which is difficult or impossible to access by other methods (Gibson, 1995; Bolger et al., 2003), since diaries let 'people be heard on their own terms' (Bell, 1999: 266).

On the other hand, various constraints on the diary method exist. For example, firstly, for learners who do not have a habit of keeping a diary, it seems not easy to start since writing a diary is generally a time consuming activity (Rieman, 1993; Wang, 1999). A solution to the problem would be to provide convenient and user-friendly diary sheets with pre-printed dates and times as well as several key questions, such as When? Where? What? Who? (Dörnyei, 2007) or to allow the informant to keep an audio (or video) diary (Gibson, 1995). Whilst diaries are traditionally kept manually, they can be kept electronically nowadays. Therefore, the diary keeper can select either (or even both) keeping a diary manually or electronically according to personal convenience and preference. Moreover, a practical and realistic way suggested is to attempt to make use of 'rewards as an incentive to boost compliance' (Dörnyei, 2007:159), such as small gifts or money. The method used in the pilot was to pick up those new students who are coming to the UK at the local bus or train station by the researcher.

Secondly, how much the participants are willing to reveal in diaries affects how valid the research can be. Although right of privacy is assured, it still remains problematic. However, the more learners can understand how they will benefit from diary keeping, the more willing they will be to keep the diary. For learners, a learning diary provides an opportunity for self-analysis because it offers them a chance to reflect on their difficulties and achievements. Furthermore, if the researcher (or teacher) can give feedback on the diaries (with the agreement of the learner), this provides opportunities to interact with learners on an individual basis, which in turn appears to have a positive effect on their behaviours and motivation. Moreover, not only writing but also (re)reading diary entries allows the diary keeper to document thinking, to track changes, and to gain fresh perspectives and insights over past events (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). These interpretations can be utilised with those suggestions mentioned above to encourage the diary keeper.

In the present study, diaries are utilised to gather detailed perceptions, experiences, and reflections to examine any change of learners' identity as well as to complement what the questionnaire survey (SILL) is unable to provide or explain.

### 3.5.3 Interviews

Interviews have been largely employed to examine LLSs either as the main tool of data collection in qualitative research or the complementary to other methods (Porte, 1988). There are several forms of interviewing: *survey* interviewing, *qualitative* interviewing, *in-depth* interviewing, *life story* interviewing, and *focus group* interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Interviews can be structured, semi- structured and unstructured, where structured interviews are based on the prepared questions, and unstructured ones allows the interview questions to emerge within the interview conversation (Cohen, 1998).

However, there appear to be some limitations to employing interviews. Firstly, interview data in LLS research studies are retrospective, generally requiring memories from previous learning experiences, which may lead to inaccurate reports. Secondly, the interviewer needs efficient interviewing skills to complete the interview and obtain useful information. Thirdly, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee can influence the quality of the interview and sometimes the relationship may bias the data.

Until recently, survey research was conducted through face-to-face or telephone interviews or by way of mailed questionnaires (Singleton & Straits, 2001). The traditional distinction between an interview survey and a mail survey has been challenged by development of computer-assisted interviewing and Internet–based surveys. Therefore, it is necessary to be familiar with this kind of interviewing.

### 3.5.3.1 Online interview and interactions (MSN)

It was traditionally assumed that all interviews would be conducted face-to-face or, in the case of those who were a lengthy journey away, perhaps by telephone, both of which are well-established methods of interviewing. However, research is sometimes not a 'straight march' from designing to execution (Sandelands, 1993: 378) but with unanticipated problems. Therefore, any methods that can assist to make research less problematic should be worth considering. Nowadays, since 'few areas of research, teaching or scholarship remain untouched by developments in information technology'

(Lee, 2000:115) and advances in Internet technology have provided innovative approaches to online research in social sciences (Jankowski & van Selm, 2005), it appears to be reasonable to take online interviewing into account. In addition, the Internet, despite the absence of physical interaction, provides a number of opportunities to explore the world beyond the viewpoint of individuals and groups (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), which also indicates the potential of conducting online interviews.

On the other hand, there appear to be difficulties in conducting online interviews. For instance, whilst the response times in asynchronous interviews may be extremely slow, it seems not easy to judge when and whether the participants have completed answering a question in synchronous online interviews (e.g. MSN). As James and Busher (2009) argue, online interviews 'should not be perceived as an 'easy option'' (p. 40), but need to be chosen only when researchers can justify the appropriateness of the method for their specific research topics.

In terms of the credibility of the data obtained from online interviews, several questions might be asked, such as *how can researchers be sure that participants are who they claim to be?*, as well as *how can they be sure that email messages are written by the person associated with a given email address?*. James and Busher (2009) suggest that 'it is the way in which participants' stories are constructed and the consistency with which they present themselves that provides the strongest reassurance to researchers of the trustworthiness of their accounts whether in online research or face-to-face research' (p. 67). This seems reasonable but to what extent this can be judged remains problematic.

However, this was not a major problem in my research since I knew who the participants were. Furthermore, I personally met the majority of them after they had come to the UK around Leicester, Loughborough, and Nottingham. Thus, in this case the information is not totally based on an online virtual world, although this still does not mean it is also accurate and complete.

Online interviewing has advantages not only for participants distant from the researcher but also for those nearby since sometimes it still may not be that easy to arrange a face-to-face interview even though the participant is living just upstairs or next door to the

researcher. Apart from the convenience of space and time, there is another reason to conduct online interviews in the present study that is related to the (social) identity of the participants.

### 3.5.3.1.1 Interviewing and social identity

As discussed in section 2.1.3, social identity is partially dependent on 'the particular intergroup setting in which one finds oneself' (McNamara,1997:564) and the (social) identity may change as a result of contacting with others and the desire or willingness to open up to new environments and ideas. Therefore, if the way of contacting others online is different from that of offline, does how the identity of the learner is constructed and developed differ? There are several reasons that make the online environment different.

Firstly, there is no access to nonverbal cues, such as gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions (assuming one is not using Skype or some other audio-visual online technology) (Cooper, 2009) through which it is claimed that more than ninety percent of the emotional meaning of a message is conveyed (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2008). Secondly, there are a variety of ways that identities can be negotiated, reproduced, and indexed (Wilson & Peterson, 2002) either online or offline. Individuals tend to engage in various presentations of self, and did so prior to the emergence of the virtual world on the Internet (Kendall, 1999). In the real world the presentation of self is reliant on not only what one intends to express, such as gestures and tones of voice, but also how that is perceived by others in social interaction (Matthews, 2006).

Moreover, whilst various types of identities can be presented in distinct Internet environments (Kennedy, 2006), relatively consistent performances of the identities of Internet users appear to be presented in the same online circumstance (Hine, 2000:119). Thus, one of the ways to authenticate whether the Internet user is the same person is to examine the consistency of the online performances in the same situation. This raises questions about how online identities are constructed and the extent to which 'real' physical selves can be revealed. The distance between body and performance online indicates that it is difficult for researchers to authenticate what participants say about themselves (Mann & Stewart, 2000) since '[t]hrough disembodiment and anonymity participants take on many new identities that may have little connection to their offline

selves' (James & Busher, 2009:75). However, it has also been argued that 'the ability for participants to mask their identity may lead them to be more active in voicing or disclosing their opinions' (James & Busher, 2009:75). If so, on the other hand, being more active in voicing and disclosing their opinions would reveal more information about themselves (their identities).

A way used by a number of researchers (e.g. Correll, 1995; James, 2007) to attempt to explore the establishment of participants' identity is to combine both online and offline contexts to triangulate the findings and increase authenticity (James & Busher, 2009). In addition, online interactions are significantly influenced and shaped by offline situations and relationships (Xie, 2007). However, Cooper (2009) argues that the suggestion of combining online and face-to-face interviewing is 'at odds with the idea …of employing online interviewing in order to contact people in distant locations' (p.252). This claim is reasonable but online interviewing is not only for people who are too far to interview face-to-face but also for those who may be unavailable to meet physically in a certain period of time as well as for the purpose of communicating through written texts in order to obtain more information about the participants' identities as previously discussed.

Another reason for taking online interviewing into consideration is that when participants are exchanging messages online, they can often feel less anxious than in a face-to-face interview and are more likely to express their real thinking, beliefs, and also identities as this creates an informal interviewing atmosphere and a disembodied online interaction can also encourage people to disclose. Kanayama's (2003) online study shows that the participants' disclosure (not masking their identities) was really important to establish relationships online. In presenting the self online, the lack of physical presence, as well as outwards of movement, posture and emotional expression appear to be crucial as participants may feel free from perceptions of age, gender, and background that usually restrict their communication with others.

### 3.6 Participants

The participants were Chinese speakers (from mainland China or Taiwan), who were coming to study in universities in the UK before the autumn semester started in 2010. The information about new coming (Chinese and Taiwanese) students can be found on

two websites (*British Chinese Society*- www.britishchinese.org.uk and *Hello UK*-www.hellouk .org) where Chinese and Taiwanese students usually provide their personal information (e.g. name, sex, course, e-mail address, and mobile number) in order to know one another more conveniently (e.g. there are normally pre-departure gatherings arranged in several locations in Taiwan before the autumn semester starts each year). It appears to be useful to have participants from various backgrounds (e.g. majors), at different level of language proficiency, males and females, and living in different types of accommodation (e.g. university halls or private shared house).  This is to attempt to minimise the danger of bias in sampling. However, it was also based on the willingness of the participants to join the research.  In order to establish relationships with them, I had posted on the two websites mentioned above, saying I would pick up those who were willing to engage in my research from train and bus station when they came to Leicester. I found this was a very good way to know and make friends with new students because if they do not know you, normally they do not tend to join your research.

They were asked through emails whether they were willing to complete the questionnaire (SILL). Sixty seven students completed the SILL and eleven of them participated in the pilot study. Participants for diary keeping and interviews were selected from those who had completed SILL according to their answers (e.g. the lowest or highest scores in each category of LLSs or each item of LLSs). Six students agreed to keep diary entries, seven were interviewed twice (pre- and during- sojourn), and eleven began to contact the researcher.
Five of the sixty seven respondents of SILL were unable to join the second data collection for some reason. The six diary keepers were all interviewed whilst two of the seven interviewees were absent in online communication since they did not chat online. Five of sixty seven students who had completed SILL during first data collection did not complete SILL again for some reasons. None of them had joined the interview, diary keeping, and MSN communication. The tables below provide information on the participants in the study.

**Table 3.1: Descriptions of Participants of the Questionnaire**

|  |  | Number | % |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |

| Nationality | Chinese | 28 | 45.2 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Taiwanese | 34 | 54.8 |
| Sex | Female | 47 | 75.8 |
| | Male | 15 | 24.2 |
| Age | 18-24 | 24 | 38.7 |
| | 25-30 | 26 | 41.9 |
| | 31- | 12 | 19.4 |
| IELTS | 5.5 | 7 | 11.3 |
| | 6.0 | 20 | 32.3 |
| | 6.5 | 22 | 35.5 |
| | 7.0 | 11 | 17.7 |
| | 7.5 | 1 | 1.6 |
| | 8.0 | 1 | 1.6 |
| Subject area | Arts, Humanities & Law | 13 | 20.9 |
| | Medicine, Biological Sciences and Psychology | 4 | 6.5 |
| | Science & Engineering | 5 | 8.1 |
| | Social Science | 40 | 64.5 |

**Table 3.2  Personal information of the participants**

| NO | Language proficiency (IELTS) | Course | Age | Sex |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *1* | 6.5 | PhD in History of Art | 27 | F |
| *2** | 6.5 | MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL | 34 | F |
| *3** | 6.5 | PhD in Molecular Biology and Biotechnology | 30 | M |
| *4** | 6.5 | MA in Law | 34 | F |
| *5** | 7.5 | PhD in Museum Studies | 39 | F |
| *6** | 6.0 | MBA | 28 | M |
| *7** | 6.0 | MSc in Marketing | 26 | M |

| 8 | 6.5 | MSc in Mass Communication | 22 | F |
|---|-----|---------------------------|----|---|
| 9 | 7.0 | MSc in International Business | 21 | F |
| 10 | 6.0 | MSc Landscape Architecture | 27 | F |
| 11 | 6.0 | MSc in Design for Industry | 30 | M |
| 12 | 8.0 | PhD in Chemical Engineering | 35 | M |
| 13 | 7.0 | MA in International Relations | 23 | F |

Note: *italic* marks the interviewees, **\*** indicates the diary keepers, and **bold** points out the participant is absent in MSN communication (No.6, 7). The participants took part in both pilot and main study are <u>thick underlined</u>.

## 3.7 Data collection

Since social identity and the use of LLSs of the learners studying abroad may change over time, it appears to be helpful to obtain information of the learners at three stages-pre-sojourn, during- sojourn and post-sojourn. However, learners' information after sojourn tends to be difficult to obtain since it is too late to collect (normally after September).

The first data collection of SILL (for the main study) had been from the fifth of August to the end of September when the pilot study was being conducted. At that time, the participants were still in Taiwan and China preparing to study in the UK. They were coming to the UK on different dates since some of them were required to join a pre-sessional language course depending on their IELTS scores. (Face-to-face or e-) interviews were held based on the convenience of both the researcher and participants but normally within a week after they did the questionnaire. MSN communication started after I had sent emails to ask the learners for their willingness to join my research and was continuous until the completion of data collection in June 2011. I still keep in touch with some of them. The second (during sojourn) data collection (SILL, face-to-face and e-interviews) began in mid of May 2011, which was around eight months after first data collection, and completed at the beginning of June 2011.

With respect to qualitative data collection, a guideline for diary keeping was provided to assist them to reveal as much relevant information relevant to my research as possible. Six students were asked to keep diary entries at least twice a week for around six months, which were collected by the researcher every other week. Furthermore, seven participants were interviewed twice about their LLS use based on SILL scores, discussing some points in the SILL they had completed and in the diaries they had kept. Apart from their LLS use, they were also required to answer a number of questions about some interesting events in their diaries to gain insights into the relationship between their social identity and L2 learning through a stimulated recall method. MSN communications embraced almost everything that happened in their studying and living lives, aiming to discover some information that learners normally do not tend to reveal in formal conversations such as interviews. The online conversations between the researcher and the participants, which were in either Chinese or English and sometimes mixed, were saved in the researcher's laptop and used as a complementary data source. Eleven participants took part in the MSN communication for around 10 months (how often and how long depend upon individuals) and the time of the conversations of each participant was around 90 to 110 hours in total.

**Table 3.3 Procedure of data collection (P indicates the pilot study)**

| Data collection | 2010 | | | | | | | 2011 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Methods (number of participants) | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun |
| Questionnaire (SILL) (67, 62) | P | | | | | | | | | | |
| Diaries (6) | | P | | | | | | | | | |
| Interviews (7) | | P | | | | | | | | | |
| MSN (11) | P | P | | | | | | | | | |

**Figure 3.1 Participants in different methods in the pilot and main study.**

Main study

1' SILL:67

2' SILL:62

MSN : 11

INT:7

DIARY:6

Pilot: Q (11), MSN (9), I (6), D (5)

•
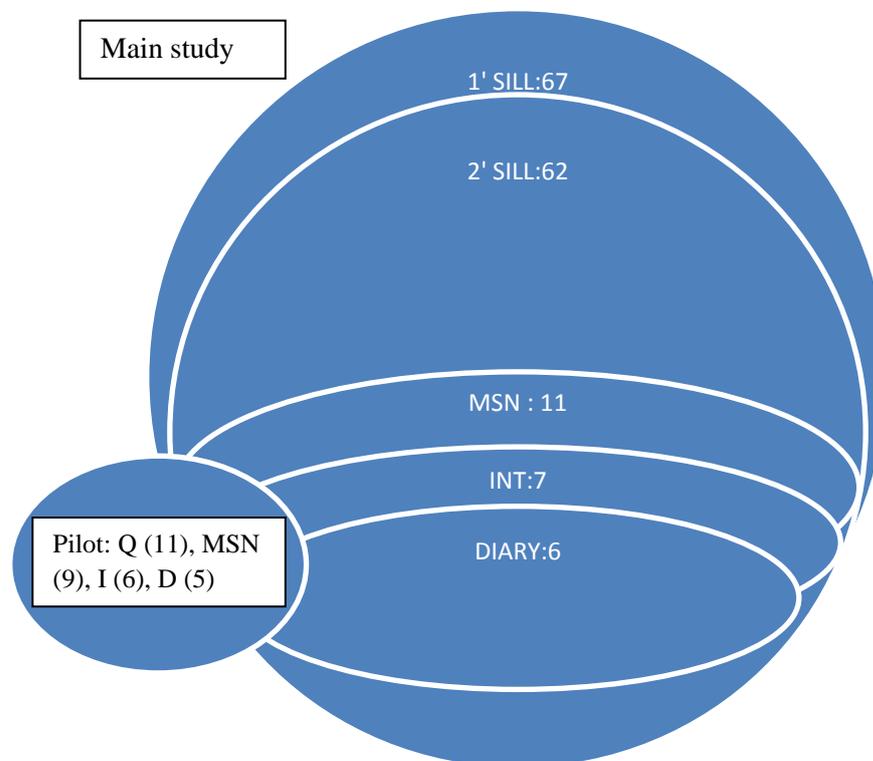
## 3.8 Data analysis

### 3.8.1 Quantitative data

In terms of data analysis, SPSS was used to compute the mean scores, standard deviations, and so on and analyse the results of SILL. *Paired-samples (or matched) t-tests* were applied to the results of SILL of pre-sojourn and during sojourn to examine the differences (if there are any) of strategy use.

The t-test (comparing two means) and ANOVA (comparing several means) are commonly used statistical methods to compare group means. There are two main types of t-tests: independent-samples t-tests (for comparing the results of groups independent of each other) and paired-samples t-tests (Dörnyei, 2007). A paired t-test is usually used to examine the change in outcomes of the same group before and after treatment is applied since time series data are highly likely to be statistically dependent because they

are generally correlated. T-tests (and also ANOVA) require certain assumptions to be made of the data-population normality and the homogeneity of variance (or confidence intervals). I will now explain these assumptions with regard to my research design.

The sampling distribution should be normal, which means, in the dependent t-test, the sampling of distribution of the *differences* between scores should be normal, not the scores themselves (Field, 2009). There are several methods of assessing normality, for example, **Kolmogorov- Smirnov** goodness- of-fit test, but these formal kinds of tests often suffer from low power (i.e. they cannot always accurately determine whether the data are normally distributed or not) (Wilcox, 2003) since they are too sensitive to large samples (Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, whilst we should do our best to look for normality visually and numerically, it should also be noticed that these statistical tests are not always correct. However, as Tabachnick & Fidell argue (2001:74), the impact of any deviations from normality diminishes and with large datasets (generally over 100 participants) examining the visual appearance of the distribution is usually sufficient. Visual inspection had been applied to the data of the main study firstly. Since around 70 % of Chinese students in the UK are females, the normality of the data of males and females were (visually and statistically) tested separately as well.

### 3.8.2 Qualitative data

How and why learners choose to employ certain (types of) LLSs and change of LLS use as well as how or whether that is affected by their (development or change of) social identities were explored by (face-to-face or e-) interviews. On the other hand, how or whether the (re)construct of their social identities were affected by their preconceived cognitive understanding of the L2 learning process (e.g. patterns of LLSs use) was examined through information obtained from interviews, diaries, and MSN communication. Based on the mixed methods design with quantitative and qualitative data, the current research aimed to get insights into L2 learners' possible change of LLS use and social identity and the relationships among their LLS use, social identity, and L2 using and learning.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese (Mandarin) and audio recorded. The conversations were translated into English. The qualitative data from interviews, diaries and MSN chatting were coded according to certain strategy items in SILL, such as those whose mean scores changed dramatically (> 20 %) or against the overall change

of the mean score of the category. Additionally, all the qualitative data were analysed in order to track the evidence of the possible development or reconstruction of learners' social identity. The changes of LLS use and social identity were compared to seek the relationships among them and language using and learning. This does not prioritise SILL data over the qualitative data and turn them into less important because unless why and how the changes of both LLS use and social identity occurred are described and interpreted, the relationships cannot be addressed.

### 3.9 Ethical considerations

Regarding ethical issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality and consequences for the interviewee, they should be taken into account with any qualitative interview (Sudman & Bradburn, 1983; Oppenheim, 1992). There is no difference in conducting quantitative data collection. There are several basic ethical principles of data collection. By and large, research subjects should be informed about the purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) and what is the most important is that no harm should come to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research, and their right to privacy should be completely respected (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Dörnyei, 2007; Duff, 2008). 'It is the researcher's moral and professional (and in some contexts legal) obligation to maintain the level of confidentiality that was promised to the respondents at the onset' (Dörnyei, 2010:81). All of these principles were followed when conducting either online or offline research.

As for the students participating in the present research, an *Information/Informed Consent Form* (See Appendix C) was provided to them before the data collection procedure started. They understood that the interview would be recorded and the recording of conversation would be transcribed for the purposes of analysis and some of the transcripts of the interview may be used in research documents and may be published in scientific journals. They were also informed of the anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provided, and the right to withdraw from the participation without prejudice or penalty or even providing reasons, at any stage of the research.

## 3.10 Report of pilot study
### 3.10.1 Objectives

1. To assess how SILL works on the use of LLSs (especially social-affective ones) of Chinese university students in the UK
2. To investigate the extent to which the participants engage in diary keeping
3. To examine how the information from the diaries can complement the data from SILL
4. To find out how much information about the learner's social identity can be revealed from the diaries and interviews
5. To explore how much the information from MSN communication can support the other data
6. To evaluate how the interview works (e.g. comprehension of the questions, how long and how often is suitable, face-to-face or e-interview)
7. To develop good relationships with the participants and encourage them to engage in the research

### 3.10.2 Participants

There were eleven Taiwanese students who completed the SILL, aged from 25 to 39. All of them were postgraduates. Two of them were PhD students and nine were doing their masters. Apart from two male participants, the rest were all females. They were studying a variety of subjects, ranging from natural to social sciences. Most of them were living in university accommodation, except two who were staying in a private shared house.

The interviews conducted (either face-to-face or online) after SILL were to explore the reasons why the participants tended to have these patterns of LLS use. Diaries were also used as a complementary document in stimulated recall. Six of the respondents to the SILL were invited to have an interview. Five of the respondents were in agreement with keeping a diary. Nine of the respondents were communicating online with the researcher through MSN. Five of the participants in the pilot study also participated in the main study. All of the five students engaged in the questionnaire, interviews, diary keeping, and MSN online chatting in the main study. The information of all the participants in the pilot is provided in the table below.

**Table 3.4 Personal information of the participants completing SILL in pilot study**

| | Language proficiency (IELTS) | Course | Age | Sex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *A | 6.5 | <u>PhD in History of Art</u> | 27 | F |
| *B | 6.5 | <u>MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL</u> | 34 | F |
| C | 6.0 | MBA | 30 | F |
| D | 6.5 | MA in Mass Communication | 25 | F |
| *E | 6.5 | <u>MA in Law</u> | 34 | F |
| *F | 7.5 | <u>PhD in Museum Studies</u> | 39 | F |
| **G** | 7.0 | MA in International Childhood Studies | 32 | F |
| H | 6.0 | MA in Mass Communication | 27 | F |
| *I | 6.0 | <u>MBA</u> | 28 | M |
| J | 6.0 | MA in Marketing | 29 | F |
| **K** | 6.0 | MSc in Math | 30 | M |

Note: *italic* marks the interviewees, **\*** indicates the diary keepers, and **bold** points out the participant is absent in MSN communication (G, and K). The participants took part in both pilot and main study are <u>thick underlined</u>.

## 3.10.3 Summary of the results of SILL

According to the results of SILL, mean scores of the six categories of LLSs were calculated (Table 4.2) and the most and least frequently used LLSs were found out (Table 4.3, 4.4).

**Table 3.5 Average scores of six categories**

| Part | What Strategies Are Covered | Average on This Part |
|---|---|---|
| A. | Remembering more effectively | 3.2 |
| B. | Using all your mental processes | 3.6 |
| C. | Compensating for missing knowledge | 3.7 |
| D. | Organizing and evaluating your learning | 3.1 |
| E. | Managing your emotions | 3.1 |
| F. | Learning with others | 3.0 |
| OVERALL AVERAGE | | 3.3 |

**Table 3.6 The most frequently used strategy items**

| No/Part | Statement of the strategy | Mean Score |
|---|---|---|
| 28/C | If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. | 4.6 |
| 31/D | I pay attention when someone is speaking English. | 4.0 |
| 20/B | I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand. | 3.8 |
| 38/D | I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English. | 3.8 |
| 44/E | If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. | 3.8 |
| | | |

**Table 3.7 The least frequently used strategy items**

| No/Part | Statement of the strategy | Mean Score |
|---|---|---|
| 7/A | I physically act out new English words. | 1.8 |
| 42/E | I write down my feelings in a language learning diary. | 1.8 |
| 34/D | I look for people I can talk to in English. | 2.4 |
| 43/E | I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English. | 2.4 |
| 15/B | I read for pleasure in English. | 2.6 |
| 36/D | I have clear goals for improving my English skills. | 2.6 |

### 3.10.4 Findings of the pilot and implications for the main study

This section evaluates the progress of the pilot in meeting each of the seven objectives in section 4.1.1. Not the results of the pilot but only procedural methodological matters will be discussed since this is the purpose of a pilot.

### 3.10.4.1 SILL

In terms of SILL, it is easy to be aware of the learner's patterns of LLS use from the results, especially on which type(s) of LLSs are used. One of the disadvantages the participants found was that it was difficult for them to understand what some of the

statements actually mean. For instance, several participants asked me what 'I start conversations in English' actually means. They were not sure about whether the emphasis of the statement is 'start' or 'in English'. Some participants were wondering when, where, what, how to read in terms of the statement 'I read for pleasure in English'.

Another problematic issue is the Likert scale which compounds the difficulty in that respondents are required to note the strength of choice (e.g. *somewhat true of me* versus *usually true of me* ) to statement. For instance, a participant asked to respond to a statement 'I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.' felt it difficult to select the appropriate option if (s)he used to do so, but does not anymore, or if (s)he has done so only once or twice. Furthermore, doing this with or without subtitles may affect the choice of the Likert scale. There are also some other statements they could not clearly understand but they could not remember after they had completed the questionnaire.

For the main study, it was decided to attach a note to explain some statements of the strategy items which were previously deemed confusing by the participants in the pilot when administrating the questionnaire. Furthermore, the participants were asked to contact the researcher when encountering any difficulties in completing the questionnaire.

### 3.10.4.2 Diaries

Regarding the engagement of the participants in diary keeping, while some learners provided abundant information about either their learning or living in the new environment, some diary entries appeared to be superficial and irrelevant to my research. It could be the carelessness to the guidelines of diary keeping that led to the loss of focus on describing something they felt important about their use and learning of English. It might be the time spent on the diary that was affected and restricted by other important events and activities such as submission of assignments, examinations, and trips. On the other hand, some information is very relevant and useful to the study. For instance, as a learner noted, 'I started going to the church last Sunday in order to know more local people and some part of their leisure life'. Another student wrote 'I try to make friends with natives because I want to have conversations with them to improve my English'.

Social identity is an issue that does not appear to be that simple to investigate but it was actually revealed in diaries. As a learner stated, '…as a Chinese speaker, I feel we are weaker at listening and speaking than European students since English is closer to their mother tongues than to Chinese. So, I need to spend more time to improve my listening and speaking otherwise it will be difficult to discuss with them in class'. Another student argued 'there are quite a lot of Chinese (Taiwanese) students in my course and they like to discuss in Chinese even in the class, which is not good. Thus, I try to avoid being in the same group with them when discussing. Outside of the class it seems strange to speak English if they know you are a Chinese' (MSN 7).

To sum up, diaries are a good source of offering personal detailed information but when and how long to ask the learners to keep the diary needs to be carefully considered. It was determined to only ask the students to keep a diary twice a week for four months as well as to conduct an interview once or twice a month in order to reduce the burden on the participants. This was adjusted according to participants' feedback when collecting data during the main study.

### 3.10.4.3 Interviews and online communication

In terms of the communication through MSN (for an example see Appendix D), what is important is that the participants felt more comfortable to talk about issues about their living and learning than to do that in the formal interview although they had been informed that some parts of the conversations may be used as research data. On the other hand, some of the participants acknowledged that they were not good at typing, which  affects how much they can say online since in a certain period of time (normally not long), they had to reply by typing in either English or Chinese. However, by and large, their typing speed was not too slow to continue the conversation. Thus, in the main study, the conversations on MSN took longer than the pilot to allow the participants to express what they were thinking. However, it is not that simple to provide an exact period of time within which the conversation should be finished. If the conversation is relevant to the research and provides some useful information, it does not need to last for a long time. But if there is nothing related to the present study, it may be helpful to keep the conversation going for five or ten minutes.

With regard to the interviews, one of the difficulties was that the students found that sometimes it was hard to arrange a time to attend an interview since some of them mentioned that the language course they were doing made them stressed because of the assignments they needed to do, which they felt not easy. A way to improve this during the qualitative data collection time (interview) was to find out a time when they are not busy with examinations and essays. E-interviewing was also a good method to consider since the researcher and the participant only need to stay in their rooms and find an available time for both of them. The e-interviewing includes not only emails and messages exchanged online but also audio-visual assisted communication through Skype or MSN.  For those away from the researcher or when it is difficult to arrange an available time, e-interviewing appears to be a good choice. However, although interviewing through emails allows relatively longer response time, one problem found was that some participants felt it difficult to know what the question really means. For example, in answering one of the interview questions- *How do you communicate with your classmates (outside o f the classroom)*?, one student said 'talking about the weather and shopping'. This could be the problem of the statement of the question. Therefore, when interviewing through email, it was determined to inform the participants in advance that if they were unable to clearly understand any of the questions they should email the researcher for clarification prior to providing answers.

In terms of how often and how long the interview should last, it seems that when noticing something strange or interesting in the diaries (which were collected once a week for four weeks), the researcher should attempt to arrange an interview either online or offline to examine the reasons. It has also been found that MSN communications serve a similar function to face-to-face interviewing, in some cases even better, such as some interviewees feel too nervous to answer a question properly. However, one limitation was that it seemed time-consuming since sometimes there was nothing relevant and useful to the study after chatting for an hour. Therefore, how this method can make greatest contribution to the main study was considered.

### 3.10.4.4 Summary

Briefly, SILL appeared to be a good instrument to examine the tendency of LLS use of the learners, particularly what type(s) of LLSs they employed most and least frequently. However, it was helpful to explain some confusing statements of the strategy items before the participants determined how often they employed those LLSs. Keeping a diary was not a habit of most students, especially a language learning diary. Therefore, whilst rich information especially that which questionnaires and interviews could not provide was revealed in diaries, the period of time and frequency of diary keeping was regulated as previously discussed and suggested. Communicating online through MSN offers an informal environment that provides opportunities for learners to talk about their beliefs, thoughts, and experiences which sometimes are difficult to gain in formal interviews. The major limitation was the unanticipated time spent on obtaining useful information.  On the other hand, time was controlled when conducting interviews, but this also restricted the time for the interviewee to think about how to answer the questions. Thus, interviewing through emails as well as combining offline and online had been considered.

# CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:
## PILOT STUDY AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the findings and discussion of quantitative (SILL) data of the current study. Regarding the results of the main study, firstly, the most often and least often used LLSs pre- and during- sojourn are listed according to the mean scores of SILL. Secondly, the differences of the LLS use of each strategy category were examined by paired t test to see if any of them were significant. Thirdly, in order to understand which LLSs contributed to the overall mean scores of each strategy category, all the mean scores of each strategy item pre-and during- sojourn are presented and visually examined. Lastly, the results of present and previous research have also been compared and discussed.

### 4.1 Findings and discussion of quantitative data: Questionnaire –SILL

This section shows the results of the questionnaire-SILL conducted pre-sojourn (67 respondents) and during sojourn (around 8 months after the learners came to the UK). Average scores of six categories of LLSs, the most frequently and the least frequently used LLSs are presented in the following tables.

### 4.1.1 Pre-sojourn

The average scores of six categories are shown in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1 Average scores of six categories pre-sojourn**

| Part | What Strategies Are Covered | Average on This Part |
|------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| A. | Remembering more effectively | 3.35 |
| B. | Using all your mental processes | 3.57 |
| C. | Compensating for missing knowledge | 3.93 |
| D. | Organizing and evaluating your learning | 3.11 |
| E. | Managing your emotions | 2.67 |
| F. | Learning with others | 2.85 |

| OVERALL AVERAGE | 3.35 |
|---|---|

As the result shows, apart from affective (E) and social strategies (F), the averages scores of the other four categories of LLSs were over 3.00. Cognitive (B) and compensation(C) LLSs were over 3.5. According to Oxford's (1990) illustration *Key to Understanding Your Averages* in SILL, respondents' scores can be divided into five levels: 1.0 to 1.4, 1.5 to 2.4, 2.5 to 3.4, 3.5 to 4.4, 4.5 to 5.0, which are regarded as *never or almost never used*, *generally not used*; *sometimes used*, *usually used,* and *always or almost always used*, relatively. Thus, cognitive (B) and compensation(C) LLSs with average scores between 3.5and 4.4 are defined as *usually used* with *high* frequency. The other four types of LLSs with mean scores 2.5 to 3.4 are *sometimes used* with *medium* frequency. The overall average of six categories of LLSs was 3.35, which is also *sometimes used* with *medium* frequency. The overall average is in line with some previous studies (e.g. Klassen, 1994; Yang, 1994; Bremner, 1999) conducted in Chinese learners' home country (China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong). In addition, the present study also found that compensation strategies were the most frequently used strategies in EFL contexts, which is inconsistent with what earlier research (e.g. Yang, 1994; Klassen, 1994; Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Goh & Foong, 1997; Rong, 1999) suggested. Furthermore, affective strategies were reported the least often employed in this study, which is similar to the results of Hong-Nam and Leavell's (2006) study.

The table below shows several most frequently used strategy items with mean scores over 4.00 since there is no strategy item with mean score over 4.5 which is defined as *always or almost always used* and there are 24 out of 50 strategies with mean score 3.5 to 4.4 (*usually used*).

**Table 4.2 The most frequently used strategy items pre-sojourn**

| No/Part | Statement of the strategy | Mean Score |
|---|---|---|
| COM/25 | When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures. | 4.43 |
| COM/29 | If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. | 4.27 |
| MEM/8 | I review English lessons often. | 4.19 |
| COG/12 | I practice the sounds of English. | 4.10 |

There are two compensation strategies, one memory strategy, and one cognitive strategy on the list. The top two most often used strategies were COM/25- *When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures* (M=4.43) and COM/29-*If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thi*ng (M=4.27). It can be noticed that there was an item of memory strategies in the list, which have been commonly deemed favourite strategies of Chinese learners. The cognitive strategy COG/12- *I practice the sounds of English* has been reported as the most commonly used one among all cognitive strategies in an EFL context (Oxford, 1990).

The table below shows five strategy items used the least frequently by the Chinese learners with mean scores 1.5-2.4 (*generally not used*). There is no strategy item with mean score less than 1.5.

**Table 4.3 The least frequently used strategy items pre-sojourn**

| No/Part | Statement of the strategy | Mean Score |
|---------|---------------------------|------------|
| AFF/43 | I write down my feelings in a language learning diary. | 1.75 |
| MEM/7 | I physically act out new English words. | 1.87 |
| SOC/48 | I ask for help from English speakers. | 1.93 |
| MEM/6 | I use flashcards to remember new English words. | 2.38 |
| AFF/41 | I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. | 2.40 |

As shown above, the first least often used strategy was an affective one *'I write down my feelings in a language learning diary',* with mean score 1.75. The second was *'I physically act out new English words',* which belongs to memory strategies, with mean score 1.87. The third least often used strategy item *'I ask for help from English speakers'* was a social strategy with mean score 1.93. The fourth least often used strategy item was *'I use flashcards to remember new English words'* whose mean score was 2.38. The fifth was an also affective strategy *'I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English'* and its mean score was 2.4.

It can be noticed that in the list there are two affective and two memory strategies, and one social strategy item. This result echoes Hong-Nam and Leavell's (2006) study, revealing that the least favoured strategies by Chinese learners were affective strategies and memory strategies. However, it seems unanticipated that these two memory strategies were on the list since memory strategies are commonly deemed favoured by Chinese learners (e.g. Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; Huang & van Naerssen, 1987) since one of the reasons is that repetition and memory-based strategies appear to be essential in enhancing comprehension owing to crucial role of effort and perseverance in learning of Confucianism (Biggs, 1996; Marton et al., 1996). However, these two strategies mentioned above were not applied often in EFL contexts. It seems reasonable that the popularities of the learners' use of all the memory strategies in SILL vary but perhaps there are some specific reasons for being unwilling to use certain strategy items, which cannot be known from SILL.

The next section provides results of SILL conducted while participants were studying overseas.

### 4.1.2 During sojourn

After around eight months after they had arrived in the UK, the questionnaire was administrated to them again to obtain the information of their LLS use. However, five participants who completed the questionnaire pre-sojourn were unable or unwilling to fill it out again for some reasons. The results of the rest of the participants are shown in following tables.

**Table 4.4 Average scores of six categories during sojourn**

| Part | What Strategies Are Covered | Average on This Part |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A. | Remembering more effectively | 2.93 |
| B. | Using all your mental processes | 3.49 |
| C. | Compensating for missing knowledge | 3.62 |
| D. | Organizing and evaluating your learning | 3.34 |
| E. | Managing your emotions | 2.98 |
| F. | Learning with others | 3.49 |

| OVERALL AVERAGE | 3.31 |
|---|---|

In general, the overall average of six categories (3.31) is nearly the same as that of pre-sojourn (3.35). Through visualising pre- and during- sojourn mean scores of each category, the mean score of memory strategies decreased (from 3.35 to 2.93) and that of social strategies increased considerably (from 2.85 to 3.49). The mean scores of the other four types of strategies changed slightly. Significances of these differences were examined by using a paired t test and results are presented in later sections.

Half of the six categories of LLSs, which were cognitive, compensation, and social strategies, were *usually used*, with averages scores 3.49, 3.62, and 3.49 respectively. The other half of the six categories, which were memory, metacognitive, and affective strategies, were, *sometimes used* (M=2.93, 3.34, and 2.98 respectively). While the most frequently used LLSs were compensation LLSs (M=3.62), the least frequently used LLSs were memory LLSs (M=2.93).

The table below presents seven the most frequently used strategy items, three of which are with mean scores over 4.00. There is no strategy item with a mean score over 4.5 (*always or almost always used)* and there are 21 out of 50 strategies with mean scores of 3.5 to 4.4 (*usually used*).

**Table 4.5 The most frequently used strategy items during sojourn**

| No/Part | Statement of the strategy | Mean Score |
|---|---|---|
| COM/29 | If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. | 4.39 |
| SOC/45 | If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. | 4.02 |
| MET/32 | I pay attention when someone is speaking English | 4.00 |
| COG/14 | I start conversations in English. | 3.90 |
| COG/11 | I try to talk like native English speakers. | 3.84 |
| COG/23 | I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English. | 3.84 |

| SOC/49 | I ask questions in English. | 3.83 |
|---|---|---|

According to the mean score of each strategy item, the first most often used strategy item was *'If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.'*, which belongs to compensation strategies and was *usually used* with *high* frequency (4.39). As mentioned previously, this strategy was also employed very frequently (with a mean score 4.27) by the Chinese learners prior to coming to the UK (see Table 4.6). The second was a social strategy *'If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again'*, and was *usually used* with *high* frequency (4.02). The third was *'I pay attention when someone is speaking English',* which fits in metacognitive strategies and was *usually used* with *high* frequency (4.00).

The fourth was *'I start conversations in English',* which belongs to the cognitive strategies and was *usually used* with *high* frequency (3.90). The fifth was *'I try to talk like native English speakers',* which belongs to cognitive was *usually used* with *high* frequency (3.84). The sixth was *'I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English'*, which belongs to cognitive strategies and was *usually used* with *high* frequency (3.84). The seventh was *'I ask questions in English'*, which belongs to social strategies and was *usually used* with *high* frequency (3.83).

In brief, first, there were three cognitive strategies and two social strategies. Second, there were no memory and affective strategies. The result appears to indicate that after around 8 months staying in the UK, the participants did not tend to use memory and affective LLSs often.

The table below presents a number of strategies employed the least frequently by the Chinese learners after they had been in a study abroad context for around eight months, among which there are three strategy items with mean scores 1.5-2.4 (*generally not used*). There is no strategy item with a mean score of less than 1.5.

**Table 4.6 The least frequently used strategy items**

| No/Part | Statement of the strategy | Mean |
|---|---|---|

|  |  | Score |
|---|---|---|
| AFF/43 | I write down my feelings in a language learning diary. | 2.06 |
| MEM/06 | I use flashcards to remember new English words. | 2.08 |
| AFF/40 | I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake. | 2.35 |
| MEM/07 | I physically act out new English words. | 2.52 |
| MEM/05 | I use rhymes to remember new English words. | 2.56 |
| MET/34 | I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English. | 2.60 |

As can be seen, the top two least often used strategies AFF/43 -*'I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.'* and MEM/06 -*'I use flashcards to remember new English words.'* were also in the list of the least often used strategies by the learners when they were in their home country. The fourth *'I physically act out new English words.'* was the second least often used strategy before the sojourn to the UK. The sixth was a different type of strategy -metacognitive strategy. In brief, the top five least often used strategies during the sojourn included two affective and three memory strategies. This revealed the tendency of a lack of use of these two types of LLSs after the Chinese learners had been living and studying overseas.

Although there has been a growing acknowledged viewpoint of the essential role of emotion in successful language learning (e.g. Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Griffiths, 2004), a number of studies indicate that affective strategies are the least often employed by learners (Oxford, 1990; Wharton, 2000; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). One of the reasons is perhaps that those who demand the strategies most are most inclined to neglect them. As Oxford (1993:177) states, '[…] some of the best learners use affective and social strategies to control their emotional state, to keep themselves motivated and on-task, and to get help when they need it', whereas the others do not realise the importance of such strategies, especially affective strategies are 'woefully underused' (Oxford, 1990:143) since they are 'not familiar with paying attention to their own feelings and social relationships as part of the L2 learning process'(Oxford, 1993: 179).

Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) suggested that although the learners attempted to relax when they were uncertain about speaking English, their fears of making a mistake often prevented them from attempting to do so. In more group oriented societies emphasizing face and outside appearance, the affective factors may become more of a challenge for students. They may fear losing 'face' and therefore do not use any affective and risk taking strategies.

In contrast, Wu's (2008) study revealed that social and affective LLSs were more preferred than metacognitive and cognitive LLSs among Chinese L2 learners in Hong Kong. One of the reasons is that collaborating with peers seems a good method of encouraging the learner through which the learner can know more about his or her English standard as compared to others.

The next section presents the results of a paired sample t-test carried out to examine whether there were significant differences between pre- sojourn and during sojourn LLS use.

## 4.2 Paired Samples T-Test

In order to understand whether there were any differences in LLS use in two different English teaching and learning environments, the SILL results of Chinese learners in the EFL context and the study abroad context, the questionnaire SILL was administered to the participants twice: prior to coming to the UK and after 8 months after they had arrived in the UK. The results were analysed by a Paired Sample T-Test to examine whether there was a significant difference in the mean scores of six categories of LLSs between pre and during sojourn. The output of this test is shown in tables below, according to six categories of LLSs: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. The value of $p < .01$ was used to determine the statistical significance of the results, meaning that there is less than 1 chance out of 100 for the result to have occurred randomly (Green & Oxford, 1995).

The hypotheses of the paired t test are:

Null: There is no significant difference between the means of the two variables.

Alternate: There is a significant difference between the means of the two variables.

They will be tested by a paired t test. In order to understand the tables easily, it will be better to explain several statistical terms occurring in the following tables.

Correlation is a measure of the relation between two or more variables, which can range from -1.00 to +1.00. The value of +1.00 represents a perfect _**positive**_ **correlation** whilst a value of-1.00 represents a perfect _**negative**_ **correlation** . A value of 0.00 represents a lack of correlation. A perfect correlation of ± 1 occurs only when the data points all lie exactly on a straight line. In general, a correlation greater than 0.8 would be described as _strong_, whereas that less than 0.5 would be described as _weak_. This test is based on the difference between the two variables. Under '_Paired Differences_' (see the bottom table in table 4.11), there are the descriptive statistics for the difference between the two variables. At the right of the Paired Differences, there are the T value, degrees of freedom, and significance (p value).

T-value is associated with the size of the difference between the two conditions in the data. The larger the t-value is, the larger the difference. The t-value is generally not a very useful result to report but the p-value, which indicates the significance of the difference, is an important result in a (paired) t-test. The p-value shows the probability that the difference in the data has resulted from sampling error. Therefore, the lower the value, the more significant the results are. It has been commonly accepted that any p-value less than 0.05 means a strong effect and any value below 0.01 indicates a very strong effect.

The degrees of freedom (_df_) of a set of data relates to the number of values in the data. For instance, in a paired t-test, _df_ is the number of samples minus one. When the number of samples increases, the possibility of influence of sampling error decreases. When calculating the p-value, the degrees of freedom value take this into account.

### 4.2.1 Memory strategies

The statistical analysis of paired data was performed on the differences between the pairs, and in the present study the mean difference (pre-sojourn – during sojourn) between the scores of memory strategies was 0.556. The standard deviation (_SD_) of the difference was 0.529.

In the tables below, the mean score of memories strategies decreased from 3.48 (*SD*.404) to 2.92 (*SD*. 498) after the learners came to the UK for around eight months. The *p* value was less than 0.01, which indicates the difference was significant.

**Table 4.7**

The first table shows the descriptive statistics of pre- and during-sojourn.

**Paired Samples Statistics**

|  |  | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 1 | Pre-sojourn | 3.4844 | 62 | .40356 | .05125 |
|  | During-sojourn | 2.9283 | 62 | .49776 | .06322 |

During- sojourn mean score is lower than pre-sojourn one.

The table below shows the correlation between the two variables.

**Paired Samples Correlations**

|  |  | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 1 | Pre- sojourn & During sojourn | 62 | .326 | .010 |

The result shows that there is a weak positive correlation between mean scores of pre- and during- sojourn since the correlation is less than 0.5.

**Paired Samples Test**

|  |  | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
|  |  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Lower | Upper | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Pair 1 | Pre – sojourn During -sojourn | .55604 | .52867 | .06714 | .42178 | .69030 | 8.282 | 61 | .000 |

For memory strategies, the t value is 8.282. There are 61 degrees of freedom. The significance is .000. Thus, the result shows that there is a significant difference between pre- and during- sojourn scores.

In order to know how big or important the difference is, *Effect Size* was also considered and calculated. The *effect size* is the standardised mean difference between the two groups. In other words: effect size = (Mean of experimental group) - (Mean of control group)/ Standard Deviation. There are more details about effect size mentioned in Chapter 3. Thus, it is (2.9283-3.4844)/ 0 .52867= - 1.05. McGraw and Wong (1992) have proposed a 'Common Language Effect Size' (CLES) statistic, claiming that is readily comprehensible by even non-statisticians. This is the probability that a score sampled at random from one distribution will be greater than a score sampled from another. Accordingly, -1.05 can be translated to a CLES of 0.77, meaning that in 77 out of 100 mean scores of memory LLSs among pre- and during-sojourn Chinese learners, the latter will be lower than the former. This can complement the significance of difference seen through the p value. Therefore, the result indicates that Chinese learners tended to use memory LLSs less frequently while they were studying abroad than they had in their home country.

The result seems to reveal a general tendency of memory LLS used by Chinese learners to be reduced in English-speaking environment. Gu (2005) contended that Chinese learners and other foreign language learners with similar cultural and educational backgrounds have a tendency to favour rote memorization strategies in an EFL setting. Gu and Johnson (1996) and Wang (2006) pointed out that students in a TL environment are prone to learn new words incidentally, meaning that intentional memorisation appears to be applied less often. This can be one of the reasons why the Chinese learners tended to use memory LLSs less often in a TL environment that in an EFL setting. Adams (2006) provided another possible reason that the Chinese students with an examination-oriented educational background may become demotivated on memorising English in SA contexts because vocabulary can be acquired not only from textbooks or word lists but through daily life.

### 4.2.2 Cognitive strategies

In the tables below, the mean scores of cognitive strategies of pre and after the learners came to the UK for around eight months were 3.477 (*SD* .418) and 3.487 (*SD* .527) respectively. The Sig (2-tailed) was 0.820, indicating there was no significant difference between them.

**Table 4.8**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

|  |  | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 2 | Pre-sojourn | 3.4773 | 62 | .41757 | .05303 |
|  | During-sojourn | 3.4873 | 62 | .52688 | .06691 |

During- sojourn mean score is nearly the same as that of pre-sojourn.

**Paired Samples Correlations**

|  |  | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 2 | Pre-sojourn & During-sojourn | 62 | .754 | .000 |

It can be seen that the correlation is greater than 0.5 and very close to but a little less than 0.8, which means that there is a (strong) positive correlation between mean scores of pre- and during- sojourn.

**Paired Samples Test**

|  |  | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|  |  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Lower | Upper | t | df | |
| Pair 2 | Pre -sojourn During-sojourn | -.01007 | .34669 | .04403 | -.09811 | .07797 | -.229 | 61 | .820 |

The t value is -.229. There are 61 degrees of freedom. The significance is .820. The significance value is greater than .05, which indicates that there is no significant difference between pre- and during- sojourn scores. The effect size is 0.03 that refers to a CLES of 0.50, meaning that in 50 out of 100 mean scores of cognitive LLSs among

pre- and during-sojourn Chinese learners, the latter will be higher than the former. This indicates that it seems difficult to distinguish the difference between the mean scores pre- and during-sojourn, which complements what the p value indicates. Dörnyei (2005:168) argued that 'memory strategies constitute a subclass of cognitive strategies'), whilst memory and cognitive strategies are categorised as two independent groups of equal significance in Oxford's (1990) taxonomy. This is echoed by Purpura (1999). For instance, Oxford (1990) defines 'practise the sounds of English' as a cognitive strategy, but it can be involved in both cognitive and memory strategies since it might be difficult to separate the former, which are related to 'deep processing', and the latter, which are associated with 'shallow processing' (Schmitt, 2000), such as mnemonic devices: imagery, rhyming and keywords (Oxford, 2004 cited in Dörnyei, 2005:168).

It can be noticed that some strategy activities belonging to SILL's memory strategies are more like cognitive strategies, referring to a 'deeper' level of strategies, such as 'I physically act out new English words', 'I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word', and 'I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used'. Therefore, it seems worth considering cognitive and memory LLSs together when interpreting the data since it may affect the investigation into the actual frequency of the use of these two strategies.

### 4.2.3 Compensation strategies

The mean scores of cognitive strategies of the learners before and after coming to the UK for around eight months were very close 3.67(*SD*.411) and 3.62 (*SD*.534) respectively. There was no significant difference between them (see Tables below).

### Table 4.9

The first table shows the descriptive statistics of the test.

**Paired Samples Statistics**

|  |  | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 3 | Pre-sojourn | 3.6698 | 62 | .41147 | .05226 |
|  | During-sojourn | 3.6156 | 62 | .53442 | .06787 |

During- sojourn mean score is close to but a little lower than pre-sojourn one.

**Paired Samples Correlations**

|  |  | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 3 | Pre-sojourn & During-sojourn | 62 | .713 | .000 |

It shows that the correlation is greater than 0.5 and very close to but a little less than 0.8, which means that there is a positive correlation between mean scores of pre- and during- sojourn.

**Paired Samples Test**

|  |  | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
|  |  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Lower | Upper | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Pair 3 | Pre - sojourn During-sojourn | .05425 | .37599 | .04775 | -.04124 | .14973 | 1.136 | 61 | .260 |

The t value is 1.136. There are 61 degrees of freedom. The significance is .260. The effect size is -0.144, which can be translated to a CLES of 0.54, meaning that in 54 out of 100 mean scores of compensation LLSs among pre- and during-sojourn Chinese learners, the latter will be lower than the former. Thus, the result indicates that there is no significant difference between pre- and during- sojourn scores, which means that the Chinese learners were not inclined to change the use of compensation LLSs while study overseas in the UK. Although the tendency of compensation LLS use appeared to be consistent in EFL and SA contexts, this strategy category was favoured by the students. This coincides what earlier studies (e.g. Yang, 1994; Klassen, 1994; Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Goh & Foong, 1997, Rong, 1999) found as mentioned previously (see 4.2.1.1).

Bremner (1999) attempted to relate the popularity of compensation strategy use to the learning process. However, the reason could be that learners with lower proficiency may lack sufficient confidence or adequate language knowledge to make informed

guesses. Therefore, compensation strategies might be more appropriate for learners with higher levels of proficiency. Nevertheless, this cannot be known from the current study.

## 4.2.4 Metacognitive strategies

The first table shows that the mean score of pre- sojourn was 3.15 (*SD*.592) and that of during sojourn was 3.34 (*SD*.613). Although the mean score only reduced 0.19, the *p* value was less than 0.01, which indicates that is significant (see the last table below). The effect size is 0.425, which equals a CLES of 0.51, meaning that in 51 out of 100 mean scores of metacognitive LLSs among pre- and during-sojourn Chinese learners, the latter will be higher than the former, which indicates the difference is not significant. Accordingly, it appears to be difficult to claim that the learners tended to use metacognitive strategies more frequently than they did in their home country after they had been in the UK for eight months.

**Table 4.10**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

|  |  | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 4 | Pre-sojourn | 3.1510 | 62 | .59240 | .07524 |
|  | During-sojourn | 3.3423 | 62 | .61332 | .07789 |

During- sojourn mean score is greater than pre-sojourn one.

**Paired Samples Correlations**

|  |  | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 4 | Pre-sojourn & During-sojourn | 62 | .722 | .000 |

The correlation is greater than 0.5 but a little less than 0.8 although it is very close to, which means that there is a positive correlation between mean scores of pre- and during- sojourn.

**Paired Samples Test**

|  | Paired Differences | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |

| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 4 | Pre - sojourn During-sojourn | -.19133 | .44971 | .05711 | -.30553 | -.07712 | -3.350 | 61 | .001 |

## 4.2 .5 Affective strategies

The mean scores of pre and during sojourn of affective strategies were 2.96 (*SD*.497) and 2.98 (*SD*.547) respectively. The *p* value was 0.59, which indicates that there was no significant difference between them. The learners were not prone to use their affective strategies either more frequently or less frequently since they came to the UK.

**Table 4.11**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

| | | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 5 | Pre-sojourn | 2.9615 | 62 | .49652 | .06306 |
| | During-sojourn | 2.9812 | 62 | .54664 | .06942 |

During- sojourn mean score is very close to but a little bit greater than pre-sojourn one.

**Paired Samples Correlations**

| | | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 5 | Pre-sojourn & During-sojourn | 62 | .853 | .000 |

The correlation is greater than 0.8, which means that there is a strong positive correlation between mean scores of pre- and during- sojourn.

**Paired Samples Test**

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Lower | Upper | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Pair 5 | Pre - sojourn During-sojourn | -.01973 | .28714 | .03647 | -.09265 | .05319 | -.541 | 61 | .590 |

The t value is -.541. There are 61 degrees of freedom. The significance is .590, which is much greater than .05, there is no significant difference. The effect size is 0.069, which can be translated to a CLES of 0.52, meaning that in 52 out of 100 mean scores of affective LLSs among pre- and during-sojourn Chinese learners, the latter will be higher than the former. Thus, the result indicates that there was no significant difference of the use of affective LLSs by the Chinese learners between in an EFL environment and in an English-speaking environment.

Macaro (2006:328) maintains that 'metacognitive strategies subsume affective strategies… because the latter require knowledge of oneself as a learner through recurrent monitoring of one's learning'. The relationship between affective control, metacognitive self-knowledge and learner self-regulation can support this view. This seems worth considering when interpreting the data.

### 4.2.6 Social strategies

The mean scores of social strategies before and after the learners came to the UK were 3.00 (*SD*.577) and 3.66 (*SD*.751) (see the top table). The bottom table shows that the t value is -9.248 and degrees of freedom were 61. The *p* value was less than 0.01, indicating that the increase was significant. The effect size is 1.175, which refers to a CLES of 0.80, meaning that in 80 out of 100 mean scores of social LLSs among pre- and during-sojourn Chinese learners, the latter will be higher than the former. According to the result, the Chinese learners tended to use social strategies more often after they had studied overseas in the UK for a certain period of time.

**Table 4.12**

**Paired Samples Statistics**

|  |  | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 6 | Pre-sojourn | 3.0044 | 62 | .57705 | .07328 |
|  | During-sojourn | 3.6585 | 62 | .75139 | .09543 |

During- sojourn mean score is greater than pre-sojourn one.

**Paired Samples Correlations**

| | | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 6 | Pre-sojourn & During-sojourn | 62 | .677 | .000 |

The correlation is greater than 0.5 but less than 0.8, which means that there is a positive correlation between mean scores of pre- and during- sojourn.

**Paired Samples Test**

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | Sig. |
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Lower | Upper | t | df | (2-tailed) |
| Pair 6 | Pre –sojourn During-sojourn | -.65419 | .55697 | .07074 | -.79564 | -.51275 | -9.248 | 61 | .000 |

### 4.2.7 Summary of the paired t test

Although the results of the paired t test indicate whether there was a significant difference between pre- and during- sojourn mean scores of each of the six strategy categories, what cannot be understood are which strategy item(s) contribute to the change of the mean score of the category and the difference of the mean score of each strategy item pre- and during sojourn. In order to answer these questions, pre- and during- sojourn averages of all the strategy items were visually examined. The reason paired t test was not applied to all the fifty strategy items was that repeating the paired t test for too many times will cause to an error that randomly identifies differences as significant. The results are presented in following tables.

The table below shows the mean scores of indirect strategies, including memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies used by learners pre- and during- sojourn.

**Table 4.13: Averages of direct strategies used by learners pre- and during- sojourn**

| Category | No | Strategy item | Mean score | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Pre | During | Change |

|  |  |  |  |  | **D-P/P**<br>**(%)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **MEM** | 1 | I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English. | 3.49 | 3.56 | +2.01 |
|  | 2 | I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them. | 3.97 | 3.42 | -13.9 |
|  | 3 | I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word. | 3.89 | 3.15 | -19.0 |
|  | 4 | I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used. | 3.33 | 2.98 | -10.5 |
|  | 5 | I use rhymes to remember new English words. | **3.55** | **2.56** | **-27.9** |
|  | 6 | I use flashcards to remember new English words. | 2.38 | 2.08 | -12.6 |
|  | 7 | I physically act out new English words. | **1.87** | **2.52** | **+34.8** |
|  | 8 | I review English lessons often. | **4.19** | **2.66** | **-36.5** |
|  | 9 | I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign. | 3.48 | 3.08 | -11.5 |
| **COG** | 10 | I say or write new English words several times. | 3.89 | 3.42 | -12.1 |
|  | 11 | I try to talk like native English speakers. | 3.65 | 3.81 | +4.4 |
|  | 12 | I practice the sounds of English. | 4.10 | 3.84 | -6.3 |
|  | 13 | I use the English words I know in different ways. | 3.39 | 3.29 | -2.9 |
|  | 14 | I start conversations in English. | 3.44 | 3.57 | +3.8 |
|  | 15 | I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English. | 3.58 | 3.90 | +8.9 |
|  | 16 | I read for pleasure in English. | 3.06 | 3.26 | +6.5 |
|  | 17 | I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English. | 3.55 | 3.58 | +0.8 |
|  | 18 | I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read | 3.58 | 3.32 | -7.3 |

| | | carefully. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 19 | I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English. | 3.81 | 3.11 | -18.4 |
| | 20 | I try to find patterns in English. | 3.49 | 3.05 | -12.6 |
| | 21 | I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand. | 3.67 | 3.53 | -3.8 |
| | 22 | I try not to translate word-for-word. | 3.71 | 3.62 | -2.4 |
| | 23 | I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English. | 3.12 | 3.11 | -0.3 |
| **COM** | 24 | To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses. | 3.98 | 3.84 | -3.5 |
| | 25 | When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures. | 4.43 | 3.69 | -16.7 |
| | 26 | I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English. | 3.61 | 3.24 | -10.2 |
| | 27 | I read English without looking up every new word. | 3.78 | 3.45 | -8.7 |
| | 28 | I try to guess what the other person will say next in English. | 3.51 | 3.30 | -6.0 |
| | 29 | If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. | 4.27 | 4.39 | +2.8 |

**Note: MEM= Memory strategies, COG=Cognitive strategies, COM=Compensation strategies**
**Bold indicates the change is over 20%**

In terms of the mean scores of the nine memory strategies, seven of them decreased, one (MEM/1) slightly increased from 3.49 to 3.56 (+2.0%), and one (MEM/7) obviously boosted from 1.87 to 2.52 (+34.8%). Among those seven decreased items, MEM/8- *I review English lessons often* reduced most dramatically from 4.19 to 2.66 (-36.5%).The second was MEM/5- *I use rhymes to remember new English words* dropped from 3.55 to 2.56 (-27.9%). The decreasing ranges of the rest were all within 20%. The tendency of the change was in agreement with the result of paired t-test that indicates a significant decrease of the use of memory strategies. The reason why the Chinese

learners tended to use that strategy- (MEM/7-*I physically act out new English words)* more often whilst employing the others less frequently after they had studied and lived abroad for a period of time cannot be known from the quantitative data of SILL. This will be explored from the quantitative data (see Chapter Five section 5.1.3.1).

With regard to cognitive strategies, mean scores of nine strategies decreased while that of five rose (COG/11, 14, 15, 16, 17). Among those nine decreased items, one strategy COG/23- *I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English* whose mean score decreased very slightly from 3.12 to 3.11 (-0.3%), which was almost the same. The mean scores of the rest of cognitive strategies changed within 20%, among which the mean score of COG/ 19- *I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English* reduced the greatest from 3.81 to 3.11 (-18.4%). The interpretations of the use of these strategies are presented in section 5.1.3.2.

Among the six compensation strategies, mean scores of five of them decreased and only one strategy COM/29- *I try to guess what the other person will say next in English* faintly increased from 4.27 to 4.39 (+2.8%). However there was no overall significant change of this strategy category according to paired t test (see Table 4.9 in section 4.2.3). Among the five decreased strategies, only COM/25-*When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures* reduced obviously (-16.7%). The implication of these strategies will be discussed in section 5.1.3.3.

The table below presents the averages of metacognitive, affective and social strategies, which are categorised as indirect strategies.

**Table 4.14: Averages of indirect strategies used by learners pre- and during- sojourn**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **30** | I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English. | 3.25 | 3.63 | +11.7 |
| | **31** | I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me better. | 3.55 | 3.48 | -1.8 |
| **MET** | **32** | I pay attention when someone is speaking English. | 3.54 | 4.00 | +13.0 |
| | **33** | I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. | 3.29 | 3.79 | +15.2 |

| | 34 | I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English. | 2.83 | 2.60 | -8.1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 35 | I look for people I can talk to in English. | 2.78 | 3.29 | +18.3 |
| | 36 | I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. | **2.63** | **3.33** | **+26.6** |
| | 37 | I have to clear goals for improving my English skills. | 2.90 | 2.98 | +2.8 |
| | 38 | I think about my progress in learning English. | 3.22 | 3.18 | -1.2 |
| **AFF** | 39 | I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English. | 3.00 | 3.44 | +14.7 |
| | 40 | I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake. | 3.37 | 3.63 | +7.7 |
| | 41 | I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. | 2.40 | 2.35 | -2.1 |
| | 42 | I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English. | 2.65 | 3.05 | +15.1 |
| | 43 | I write down my feelings in a language learning diary. | 1.75 | 2.06 | +17.7 |
| | 44 | I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English. | 2.85 | 2.81 | -1.4 |
| **SOC** | 45 | If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. | **3.14** | **4.02** | **+28.0** |
| | 46 | I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk. | 2.74 | 3.03 | +10.6 |
| | 47 | I practice English with other students. | **2.87** | **3.47** | **+20.9** |
| | 48 | I ask for help from English speakers. | **1.93** | **3.34** | **+73.1** |
| | 49 | I ask questions in English. | **2.99** | **3.82** | **+27.8** |
| | 50 | I try to learn about the culture of English speakers. | 3.43 | 3.77 | +9.9 |

**Note: MET= Metacognitive strategies, AFF=Affective strategies, SOC=Social strategies**
**Bold indicates the change is over 20%**

Regarding metacognitive strategies, whilst mean scores of six strategy items raised, the other three declined (MET/31, 34, and 38), which makes the overall mean score increase. Mean scores of several of them increased obviously, such as MET/36, 35, 33, and 32.

Only one strategy MET/ 36- *I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English,* whose mean score changed over 20%, increasing from 2.63 to 3.33 (+26.6%). The strategy MET/ 35-*I look for people I can talk to in English*) rose from 2.78 to 3.29 (+18.3%, which changed the second greatest.

Visualising all the items of metacognitive strategies appears to solve the previous problem that p value and effect size did not agree with each other. However, the quantitative data cannot provide the reason why strategy MET/31- *I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me better*, 34 -*I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English*, and 38- *I think about my progress in learning English*, were employed less frequently by the Chinese learners while abroad and this needs other qualitative data to complement (see section 5.1.3.4).

As to affective strategies, four mean scores (AFF/39, 40, 42, 43) of them went up while two of them (AFF/41, 44) reduced. It can be noticed that although visual inspection on the percentage of change of all the strategies in this category indicates a tendency of increasing, there was no significant overall change of the mean score according to the paired t- test (see Table 4.11 in section 4.2.5). This might be because the percentage was calculated through this formula: (During-sojourn - Pre-sojourn)/ Pre-sojourn. When the mean score of Pre-sojourn was lower, it made the percentage of change more. Additionally, although the mean score of AFF/43- *I write down my feelings in a language learning diary* increased from 1.75 to 2.06 (17.7%), it was still a *generally not used* strategy with *low* frequency. There are discussions about some of these strategies in section 5.1.3.5.

With respect to social strategies, Chinese learners' usage of all the items increased while studying and living overseas. The use of three strategies (SOC/45, 47, 48, and 49) boosted considerably (>20%), especially SOC/48- *I ask for help from English speakers*, which shifted from *generally not used* (M=1.93) to *sometimes used* (M=3.34), with 73.1 % increase. Some of these strategies will be explained in section 5.1.3.6.

## 4.3 Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed Chinese learners' LLS use before and after they came to the UK.  Firstly, the most often and least often used LLSs pre- and during-sojourn were listed according to the mean scores of SILL. Secondly, the differences of the LLS use of each strategy category were examined by a paired t test to see if there were any of them were significant. The results show that the learners tended to reduce the memory LLS use and increase the social LLS use in an English-speaking environment. There was also slight increase of metacognitive LLS use during studying overseas. Thirdly, in order to understand which LLSs contributed to the overall mean scores of each strategy category, all the mean scores of each strategy item pre-and during- sojourn were presented and visually examined. Last but not least, it has also compared and discussed the results of current and earlier research.

The next chapter will present the findings and discussion of the qualitative data, which will attempt to investigate why and in what way the changes identified here took place.

# CHAPTER FIVE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

# QUALITATIVE DATA

## 5.0 Introduction

This chapter features the findings of the qualitative data of learners' LLS use and social identity and discusses them through comparison with previous research. How and why learners chose to employ certain (types of) LLSs and change of LLS use, as well as how or whether that was affected by their social identities while abroad, were explored by (face-to-face or e-) interviews. On the other hand, how or whether their identities were affected by their preconceived cognitive understanding of the L2 learning process (e.g. patterns of LLSs use) was examined through information obtained from interviews, diaries, and MSN communication, which were also used to complement the quantitative data from SILL. The interview questions had two parts. The first part is about LLS use, according to the results of SILL and the second part is about identity. Six participants who completed the SILL were asked to keep a learning diary twice a week for at least three months. Eleven students who filled out the SILL agreed to keep in touch through MSN online chatting. Their diaries and online conversations revealed some useful information which could not be obtained from interviews.  The findings are presented in following sections.

## 5.1 Language learning strategy use

### 5.1.1 Participants' explanations about several most often used strategies (see Table 4.2 and 4.5 in Chapter 4)

This section presents participants' descriptions and explanations about several frequently used strategies either pre- or during sojourn. Not all of the most often used strategies on the list are to be discussed here since some strategies are interpreted in later section (5.1.3) in order to examine the difference of strategy use between pre- and during sojourn as well as  the relation between LLS use and social identity.

The strategy COM/29 -'*If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing*' was favoured by the Chinese learners in either an EFL or an SA context (M=4.27, 4.39, pre- and during- sojourn respectively). One of the reasons for preferring to use it was, as one participant stated:

> If this happens in writing, I can stop and look the word up in [electronic] dictionary, finding out the most suitable word for the text. I think it is perhaps the easiest and best way to solve the problem when talking with someone since you need to make the conversation continue and this situation occurs very often in communication with classmates in class or with anyone who does not use the same mother tongue as you in daily life (INT 2).

With regard to MET/32- '*I pay attention when someone is speaking English*' (M= 3.54 to 4.00, +13.0%), several students mentioned that it seems reasonable to pay attention otherwise it is impolite. However, a student pointed out that

> [T]his strategy item may mean that I still pay attention when someone is not speaking English to me since I want to learn from the conversation. For instance, when I am on the bus or train, I always try to pay attention to the conversations around me. This is a very good chance to learn some local words and real daily dialogues. However, if you don't pay attention, the conversations are just like noises and you will not learn anything from them (INT 4).

Therefore, this is a strategy to find opportunities to practise and improve listening skills. Several learners noticed that they tended to apply the strategy more often in the UK than in their home country since there are more opportunities to hear and pay attention when someone is speaking English in the TL environment.

In terms of COG/14- '*I start conversations in English*' (M=3.90, during sojourn), after the explanation of it prior to the conduct of the questionnaire, the participants knew that the emphasis of the strategy item is on *start*. Several participants pointed out that this was a way to have more opportunities to practise speaking and listening to English and also to understand other people's thinking. Furthermore, it also showed their confidence in using English since they are not always answering questions from other people but looking for topics to talk with them. This is also a way to show their friendliness, which gives them chances to make friends.

Regarding COG/11 '*I try to talk like native English speakers.*'(M=3.84, during sojourn), this leads to the question: How do native English speakers talk? Some participants claimed that they attempted to use this strategy, but when they were asked whether or to what extent they knew how native English speakers talk, most of them acknowledged that they just tried to mimic the accent or intonation they thought native English speakers had. However, how accurate their knowledge about this was cannot be assured. This is interesting since native English speakers from different parts of the world or the UK appear to speak differently (with different accents, intonations, and slang). Thus, what kind of native speakers do the learners want to speak like? For example, British or

American accent? More specifically, which part of Britain or America? Thus, the learners appeared to attempt to speak like what they perceived as native-like speech.

One of the diary keepers wrote about her dream of speaking like a native speaker. She stated that:

> I want to speak like a native speaker, which is my dream. However, I don't know when this dream will come true and to what extent my English is similar to native speakers at the moment. I was thinking about how to make this dream come true in a certain period of time (D4, Chinese translated)

This indicates that the learner had been attempting to evaluate and plan her learning although it cannot be known from the statement how she was going to complete it. On the other hand, one diary keeper acknowledged that 'no matter how hard I have tried, I don't think I can speak like a native speaker' (D5).

Language is a central feature of human identity. When someone is speaking, listeners immediately make guesses about gender, education level, age, profession, and place of origin. Beyond this individual matter, a language is a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity (Spolsky, 1999: 181). Therefore, if one speaks like a native speaker, it seems possible that s/he will be viewed as a native.

On the other hand, one learner had a different view:

> I have tried to speak English with a British accent since if I can speak very good British English I will be a British…But basically even though some international students speak English very fluently with a British accent, they are still identified as foreigners…language is not the only thing although it is important….(D 4)

This is a dream of many English learners but perhaps not many of them (only two informants in the present study) have realised the possibility of making this dream come true, and the reality of second language learning. Theoretically and empirically speaking, it appears to be not possible for adult L2 learners to achieve native-like speaking skill (e.g. Singleton, 2004).

In terms of COG/23 *'I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English'* (M=3.84, during sojourn), a number of participants mentioned that they used this strategy more often in the UK than in their home country since they heard and read much more in the UK. Several participants contended that it is obvious that most of the information here [in the UK] is received in English so it seems easy to make summaries

in English since sometimes translating takes time and some words are hard to translate. On the other hand, one participant acknowledged that

> I usually take notes and make summaries in Chinese because I can freely note down my thinking immediately without thinking about grammar and vocabulary that interrupts my thinking. And then I can translate it into English if needed (INT 6).

These opinions revealed the advantage and weakness of using this strategy. There is another understanding of this strategy: making summaries of English input but not necessarily making the summary in English, which had not been noticed before the administration of the SILL and even interviews. In order to check their understanding of this strategy, I asked the interviewees apart from interviewee 6 and 7 through MSN communication. All of them perceived this strategy as what interviewee 6 explained above. Additionally, in comparing these two explanations of this strategy, I found that the comprehension of interviewee 6 and other participants of online chatting appear to show a more positive attitude of practising and using English than the other explanation, which is also an indicator of the identity change. However, making summaries aims to help learners to remember and re-think about the information received so the easier way for the learner to make summaries seems better. Thus, it depends upon the focus of this strategy use for the learner.

With regard to SOC/49- *'I ask questions in English'*(M=3.83, during sojourn), it seemed a little confusing for some participants since apart from talking to Chinese speakers, it was highly likely to ask a question in English in the UK.  A participant provided her opinion on this strategy, stating that

> For me, this strategy is similar to COG/14 -*'I start conversations in English'*, which focuses on *start*. When utilising this strategy, firstly, I show what I know and what I don't know. Secondly, I need to organise how to ask a question in a proper and correct way in English. (INT 5)

Although this strategy was popular among the Chinese learners in an SA context, another learner noted in her diary that

If I've got a question but I am not sure I can ask it without any errors, I tend to keep it in mind and try to find the answer myself first since people may laugh at my English. I don't want to lose my face in public (D 2). This provides one of the reasons why this strategy was sometimes not applied by some students. In addition, this strategy seems associated with other three affective strategies: AFF/39- *I try to relax whenever I feel*

*afraid of using English*, AFF/40- *I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake,* and AFF/42- *I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.* This indicates that there appear to be connections among some strategies and learners' social identity. These strategies can be orchestrated by learners to operate more efficiently. There are more discussion about this in section 5.1.3.5 and 5.1.3.6.

**5.1.2 Participants' explanations about several least often used strategies** (see Table 4.3 and 4.6 in Chapter 4)

The strategy used least frequently was AFF/43- '*I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.*' (M= 1.75, 2.06, pre- and during-sojourn respectively). The first and maybe the most important reason is perhaps that very few learners have the habit of keeping a diary, especially a learning diary.  This does not seem to differ in SA and AH contexts.  This was echoed by interviewees. For instance, 'Who keeps or wants to keep a diary these days? Apart from being compulsory to do it when I was in secondary school, I have never done it anymore '. (INT 3)

Second, if it is a learning diary, students do not tend to write something about their feelings, normally only some important, interesting, or memorable events related to their learning. But some students tend to share their feelings with good friends, especially Chinese ones since it seems much easier to freely express in L1. As one mentioned in the MSN conversation:

> I have to share my feelings with my friends in Mandarin (Chinese) if I need, no matter happy or sad emotions. For example, I don't think I can talk a good joke in English, neither can I feel happy or laugh when listening to English jokes. I have tried to understand why the audience are laughing so loudly in talk shows but quite often I feel very hard to realise the point they are laughing at. But I think most of the time I can know the sad stories they talk about. It might be because of the cultural differences in particular about humour.  (MSN 6)

In terms of the second least frequently used strategy item MEM/06 '*I use flashcards to remember new English words.*'(M=2.38, 2.08, pre- and during-sojourn respectively) several interview participants argued that they had not used this strategy for a long time. For instance, one said that 'it is a kind of strategy for beginners to memorise vocabulary' (INT1, 4). 'Last time I used it was when I was in a language school since at that time I only focused on language learning and had enough time to do this'(INT 3). 'A more convenient and less time-consuming way is to save those new words in a word file in my laptop and review it regularly. It appears to take time and cost paper to make

flashcards and also need space to store them if you have many new words to memorise every day and week (INT 2). What is noteworthy is that some students thought flashcards meant word lists whilst some tended to distinguish them from each other. If *flashcards* in SILL also means *word lists* or *word files*, as a student mentioned above, the use of this strategy might have been more frequent than the result of current study. This is another limitation of SILL unless updated to allow for use of laptops, iPods, and mobile phones etc.

Regarding the third least often employed strategy item- AFF/40- '*I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake*' (M=2.35, during-sojourn), one interviewee mentioned that

> I would try to speak less or use short or simple sentences when I am not sure if the grammar or vocabulary of sentences I am saying are correct or not, just because I don't want to let people feel I am not familiar with grammar rules and vocabulary' (INT 2).

One interviewee and one MSN chatter also had similar comments on this:

> I think it is a kind of losing face if I speak with many errors in the sentences since I am not a beginner or intermediate learner (INT 6).

> I tend to avoid talking when I am not in a good mood because sometimes I even said *he* when I was describing a lady or girl and used *she* when illustrating a gentleman or boy, and the listener smiled or laughed, which really makes me embarrassed when I realised the stupid mistakes I had made (MSN 3).

This reflects how the learners perceive themselves affected their strategy use. If the learners engage in more social practice through which they may find that making mistakes in speaking occurs very often and people see that as normal so that they are likely to be willing to speak.

Another interviewee pointed out

> Frankly, I really envy those people who can speak loudly and smoothly when making mistakes since I don't think I can do that. I still mind how people look at me and am afraid of laughter and teasing may be because of our culture according to which we should not show what we are bad or not good at (INT 5).

As mentioned previously, this strategy can be associated with several strategies, such as AFF/39- *I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English,* AFF/42- *I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English,* and COG/14 -*I start conversations in English.*

The employment of these strategies can be in a combination and the sequence depends

upon the situation. There appear to be relationships among the use of this strategy and other two strategies: COG/14- *I start conversations in English* and COG/11- *I try to talk like native English speakers,* which were discussed in previous section 5.1.1. In addition, the use of the strategy COG/14 can be related to social strategies, for example, SOC/48- *I ask for help from English speakers* and SOC/49- *I ask questions in English.* Usage of these strategies seems affected by the language proficiency of the user- the higher the language proficiency is, the more easily these strategies can be applied. However, there appear to be other factors affecting the use of these strategies, for example learner's identity, which will be discussed in the later section 5.1.3.6.

To turn to the strategy MEM/07- '*I physically act out new English words.*', which was the least often used by participants pre-sojourn and still not often used after a period of time they had arrived in the UK, with a mean from 1.87 to 2.52 (+34.8%), some participants argued that 'it is a strategy for beginners or children' (INT 3) and 'I rarely use it only when I cannot find another word to replace the word I want to use' (MSN 3). In terms of the increase of the use of this strategy whilst studying overseas, most of the participants had not realised that before they were interviewed. One participant, after a while recalling her use of this strategy, commented that:

> I think it might be because that when I was in China, I didn't have many opportunities to speak English. But after I came here, I talk in English quite often. One day I couldn't find 吹風機 (hairdryer) when I was looking for one in the supermarket, I didn't know the right word so I asked the staff where to find *this machine*, with my hand above my head, making the blowing sound. It was a little funny and embarrassing but helpful' (INT 5)

Her experience provided one of the reasons why this strategy was deployed more often in an English-speaking environment, indicating that some strategies are contextualised. Another participant pointed out the uncertainty of this strategy, arguing that 'I wonder whether the purpose of using this strategy is either to make people understand the meaning of the word or to make me easier to memorise it' (INT 1). More specifically, this strategy looks very similar to another compensation strategy COM/25- *When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures*. This also indicates one weakness of SILL or general questionnaire surveys that participants may be unable to entirely understand all the statements of the strategy items, which results in the incredibility of the answers. There were some strategy items in SILL with statements that respondents may get confused about. Based on the findings of the pilot study, notes about these strategies had been provided before learners completed the SILL for the

main study. However, whilst some strategies seemed clear for some learners to understand, there appeared to be other participants who felt unclear about them.

In terms of the strategy MEM/5- '*I use rhymes to remember new English words*' (M=2.56, during- sojourn), it seems not that easy to use since rhymes cannot be suitably applied to the new words. One also commented that 'I feel that this kind of strategy is for learners to memorise words without understanding the meanings, which would be appropriate for beginners' (INT 3). In contrast, one participant provided her experience of English learning, arguing that

> I think using rhymes to remember [new] words is a good way of memorising them for a very long period of time as well as distinguishing similar words. I can still remember those words the teacher taught me to memorise through using rhymes in secondary school. I think I will never forget them [the words]. I have also tried to use rhymes myself to remember new words, which does help once I can find the rhymes. It takes time to find the appropriate rhymes and sometimes I just cannot find it. (INT 5)

It can be seen (see Table 4.13 in Chapter 4) that learners were inclined to apply this strategy less often after they came to the UK, with a mean from 3.55 to 2.56 (27.9%). The decline of this strategy use could be explained from the opinion of interviewee 3 mentioned above that in EFL contexts learners may tend to memorise a great deal of vocabulary without really understanding the meaning of each word. However, in an English-speaking environment with ample input and opportunities to use the vocabulary, this strategy seems less useful.

## 5.1.3 Change of strategy use

In terms of the change of strategy use, the results of SILL in chapter 4 show that the LLS use of memory strategies decreased (M=3.35 to 2.93) and that of social strategies increased (M=2.85 to 3.49) after the learners came to the UK, living and studying for around eight months. In order to know how and why the change happened, the interviews were conducted.

### 5.1.3.1 Memory strategies

The result of the paired t -test indicates the decrease of the use of the category of memory strategies was significant (see Table 4.7). Several participants mentioned that when they were in China (and Taiwan) they needed to pass language tests, such as

IELTS or TOFEL to apply for their further studies. Thus, using memory strategies to help them to remember vocabulary and further enhance their language skills was a broadly utilised method for the learners, which is also commonly deemed as useful. However, after they had come to study abroad in the UK, where English is the TL, they tended to perceive that vocabulary learning can occur in a variety of ways since they were exposed to the authentic language materials, such as dialogues and written texts. Thus, the ways they used in China or Taiwan, for example memorising words on a list, appeared to be inappropriate and unnecessary. As a participant pointed out in the interview,

> If I can hear or see a word very often, for example once or several times a day, I don't need to do anything to pick it up. That is the same if I see a word in reading texts for several times. Through this natural learning, I can know how to use the word accurately and appropriately much more easily than memorising it from a list. (INT 6)

Another participant agreed with this point of view but argued that

> For those words which frequently occur in my learning or daily life here, of course I can learn them without any difficulty. But for those words I cannot hear or see often, I still need some memory strategies to help me to keep them in mind. By and large, I feel use memory LLSs less often than I did in Taiwan, but I don't stop using them. (INT 2)

Their explanations provided one of the reasons why they tended to use memory LLSs less often after they had lived and studied abroad for eight months.

Taking each strategy item into consideration, among those seven decreased items in memory strategies, MEM/8- *I review English lessons often* reduced most dramatically from a mean of 4.19 to 2.66 (-36.5% ). One of the interviewees remarked that

> Before applying for the programme of one- year masters, I attended a number of English courses in China to prepare the exams. At that time, I reviewed the lesson taught before next lesson started and before the exams so I reviewed [English lessons] very often. But, in here, every lesson is taught in English and there is no English lesson apart from the pre-sessional course or the language courses of other languages, such as Spanish, French, if you want to attend them yourself' (INT 6).

His point of view provides a reason why this strategy was deployed less frequently in the UK. The SA context mediated the learner's LLS use.

Among all the social strategies, only the use of MEM/07- '*I physically act out new English words*' obviously increased after a period of time they had arrived in the UK with mean from 1.87 to 2.52 (+34.8%). As discussed earlier (in section 5.1.2), some learners felt confused about this strategy and COM/25-*When I can't think of a word during*

*a conversation in English, I use gestures* (M= 4.43 to 3.69, -16.7%). The increase of the use of MEM/07 against the overall decrease of this category might be due to learners' difficulty in distinguishing these two strategies since the mean score of COM/25 apparently declined. Moreover, one participant's (INT 5) interpretation (see 5.1.2) of this strategy provided the evidence that she misunderstood the purpose of using this strategy as a compensation strategy COM/25. Compensation strategies, as discussed in Chapter 2, function as communication strategies. Thus, the increase of the employment of MEM/07 in an SA context seems another indicator of identity change from *learner* to *user*.

### 5.1.3.2 Cognitive strategies

With respect to cognitive strategies, as shown in Chapter 4, mean scores of nine strategies decreased while that of five rose (COG/11, 14, 15, 16, 17) , resulting in no significant overall change in the category.  However, there was only one strategy (COG/23- *I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.*) whose mean score changed slightly from 3.12 to 3.11 (-0.3%). The mean scores of the rest of the cognitive strategies  changed within 20%, among which the mean score of COG/ 19- *I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English* reduced the greatest from 3.81 to 3.11 (-18.4%).

In terms of those five strategies whose mean scores went up, COG/11 and COG/14 have been discussed (see section 5.1.1). Since the increase of the mean of COG/17- *I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English* was very small (M=3.55 to 3.58, +0.8%), I focused on the other two strategies-COG/15 and COG/16.

Regarding COG/15- *I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English*, one diary keeper stated:

> I have a TV in my room here [in the UK]…I cannot understand the whole conversation (each word) but most of the time I know what the topic is about… (D 2, 30 September, 2010)

> …I ask myself: 'Why can't I watch TV in English just like I did that in Chinese?' I try to be an Englishman…the first thing I do when I come back to my room is to switch on the TV…I go to the cinema with friends on Wednesdays as there is a 2 for 1 offer…I enjoy watching movies in cinema since I feel I am an English that is the real life….. I think this is a good way to improve my English, especially listening, and it works…I didn't do this in Taiwan … (D 2, 27 November 2010)

Her diary revealed that the intention of changing her identity to be an Englishman resulted in the change of her LLS use, which consequently enhanced her listening and the formation of her new identity.

In interpreting the use of COG/16- *I read for pleasure in English*, one student's diary provides useful information:

> When I took bus or went to McDonald's, I sometimes collected free newspaper. At the beginning, I felt a little difficult and impatient to read the text but just had a quick look at the photos and pictures and the notes below…But when I found some interesting headings, I tried to read the text to understand more about the whole story… (D1, 23 September 2010)

> I feel comfortable with reading newspaper and magazines [in English]…it is a good way to know what is happening in the society….I also enjoy reading the entertainment news and horoscopes …I think if I can read English newspaper as Chinese one, to some extent, I am like a British…now when I get on the bus, I always look for newspaper ... (D 1, 14 December, 2010).

It can be noticed that the student had not felt like reading the text in the newspaper before she found that it was not that difficult to read through and get the gist of the news. By doing this, the development of her identity moved forwards to an ideal L2 self -closer to that of a native speaker: "to some extent, I am like a British". Another student shared his experience of reading English poems:

> I have longed for Shakespeare's sonnets and other poets' but most of them I read in Taiwan are Chinese version. I bought a second-hand book, here within which there are collected poems, and I enjoy reading it. I love the beautiful writing and romantic atmosphere of the poetry. I hope I can write a poem in English with a goose quill… just like an English poet, which is my dream… (MSN9).

His use of this strategy was motivated by his dream- writing English poems like an English poet (his ideal L2 self) and that also assisted him to make this dream come true. Comparing the two participants' experiences, it can be found that the relation between LLS use and social identity appear to be complementary and mutually reinforcing, which means that LLS use assists the development (or reconstruction) of social identity (e.g. D 1), leading to the influence on the choice of LLS use (e.g. MSN 9), which results in the development of social identity again. And it can start from identity change as MSN 9.

Regarding those three strategies that apparently decreased, information from the participants may help us to interpret the change of the use. Firstly, COG/12- *I practice the sounds of English*. It has been argued that this strategy is used the most frequently

among all the cognitive strategies (Oxford, 1990). One learner commented on the decrease of this strategy in SA contexts:

> The way I practised the sounds of English in China was to listen to the radio and watch TV programmes and films in English. In order to make sure I got the right pronunciation, sometimes I looked those unfamiliar words up in the dictionary, including web- or electric- one. And then I tried to repeatedly practise the sound to mimic the pronunciation since I don't know when I am going to hear the sound again….I use English everyday here, listening to and speaking English very often…..if I say something people cannot understand, I will notice whether my pronunciation is right…..(INT 7 )

It can be seen that the learner perceived this strategy as intentionally repeating the sounds of English words or sentences, which seems different from actually using the language in authentic situations. This perhaps can explain the decline of this strategy during study overseas.

With regard to COG/19- *I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English* and COG/22- *I try not to translate word-for-word*, these two strategies appear to be associated with the first language. Several learners mentioned that these strategies seem deployed often by learners at a lower level of proficiency because they still rely on their mother tongue. As one learner claimed, 'Without relying on your mother tongue means you have already moved beyond this [lower] level' (INT 2). However, it cannot be known whether the Chinese learners' proficiency had improved dramatically after a certain period of time (around eight months) they had been staying abroad.  There might be other reasons for not preferring to use these strategies.

Some students provided their opinion on COG/19, for instance one claimed that

> …normally it is a good way to know the meaning when comparing to L1 but some words are not that easy to find an equivalent word in L1.(INT 4)

Furthermore, another student pointed out:

> […] you might misunderstand the actual meaning of the word since sometimes the meanings in L1 and L2 are slightly different…. maybe it would be better to understand new English words from the context and know how  to use them in real situations…I mean [to] use English to learn English… I tend to do it by this way here [in the UK] (INT 1).

This viewpoint was echoed by another student:

> I was a little angry when I saw Chinese letters or other languages written by someone on the book I borrowed from the library. That affects my mood… sometimes it was funny when seeing the explanation to a simple English word in Chinese… I tell myself 'Never do that'… I am in England.  (INT 7)

This appears to indicate that living and studying in an English environment resulted in a change of learners' identities to be a person who live in the same way as the English, which affected their choice of strategy use and the way of learning and using the language.

### 5.1.3.3 Compensation strategies

In terms of the six compensation strategies, as shown in Chapter 4, mean scores of five items decreased and only one (COM/28) increased despite no overall change in the category. However, two (COM/25) out of five decreased obviously from 4.43 to 3.69 (-16.7%) and that one (COM/28- *I try to guess what the other person will say next in English*) increased greatly from 3.51 to 4.39 (25.1%).

One student pointed out that

> […] according to my English learning experience, I can only guess what the speaker is going to say when I have already achieved a certain proficiency level. Before that, I even couldn't get what the speaker has already said and have no idea of what will occur next. This means my English has improved a lot, right? (INT 7)

This seems reasonable since after the learners had been studying overseas for a certain period of time, they had overcome the obstacles in listening and speaking and would be more likely to guess or know what the interlocutor will say next. If there are already several options to choose when guessing, the learner will more easily to understand the speech of the other person.

COM/25- *When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.* For some learners, this strategy is very similar to MEM/7- *I physically act out new English words*. Some learners admitted that they got confused about the use of these two strategies during the pilot. Basically, they appear to be, to some extent, doing the same thing. While COM/25 focuses on facilitating the conversation, MEM/7 aims to assist the learner to remember new words. However, in some cases, as interviewee 1 suggested, 'I find a new word during a conversation and use gestures to help the listener to understand. At the same, the gesture enhances my memorisation of the word'. This appears to point out the interrelationships among some strategies.

To turn to the most popular strategy COM/29- *If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing*, which was favoured by the Chinese learners either in an EFL or SA context. There was a slight increase of this strategy use (M=4.27

to 4.39, +2.8%) after studying in the UK for around eight months. As mentioned earlier in section 5.1.1, the main reason why this strategy was the top most often used one was that it seems normal, especially for L2 users and learners, to forget or not know an English word when talking, but need to make the conversation continue. In this case, this strategy seems very helpful. One interviewee provided his opinion on the possible reason for the slight increase of this strategy use:

> When I was in Taiwan I didn't have many opportunities to speak English… I could only practise with my classmates in the course for preparing speaking- an hour per week. At that time I didn't speak fluently and I used this strategy very often since lots of words were slippery on my mind or I just didn't know the right word…..In here, I have much more opportunities to speak English, may be 20 hours per week, and I have picked up a great number of new words through speaking English but sometimes I still don't know the accurate word and I use the strategy… (INT 3).

In brief, he thought that ample opportunities for speaking and acquiring new words made the small increase otherwise the mean score would have reduced.

### 5.1.3.4 Metacognitive strategies

As to metacognitive strategies, mean scores of several of them increased obviously, such as MET/36, 35, 33, 32 (see Table 4.14), among which only the mean score of strategy MET/ 36- *I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English* changed over 20%, increasing from 2.63 to 3.33 (+26.6%). In terms of the obvious increase of this strategy use, one interviewee provided one of the explanations:

> I haven't realised the increase of this strategy use before the interview …Thinking about it carefully, I did use it more often than I did in Taiwan. Although it is not necessary to be here to access reading materials, I have attempted to read what I can find about my subject, especially for the topics of the essays. …I did this occasionally in Taiwan… Now I read much more quickly than before [in Taiwan]… since I came here the home page of my browser has been BBC news so the first thing I do when turning on my laptop is to have a quick look at the latest news …I am used to it, [and] to some extent, I cannot stop doing it now…the only way to get used to reading is to read I think (INT 5).

Accordingly, she used this strategy for academic purposes and personal preferences firstly, which gradually assisted her to get accustomed to reading, facilitating the transformation of her identity from a language *learner* to a langue *user*. This also enhanced her English learning. This strategy use can connect to COG/16- *I read for pleasure in English,* as previously mentioned (see section 5.1.3.2), which presented the relation between LLS use and social identity-they mutually strengthen each other.

MET/33- *I try to find out how to be a better learner of English* boosted from 3.29 to 3.79 (+15.2%), that of all of the other strategies increased, one (MET/ 35-*I look for people I can talk to in English*) of which rose from 2.78 to 3.29 (+18.3%). At first glance, these two strategies do not appear to be associated with each other. However, the descriptions from the students revealed some interesting correlations. When being asked for opinions about use of the strategy MET/33- *I try to find out how to be a better learner of English*, two participants mentioned that they were attempting very hard to seek for the answer when they were in their home country. The main reason was that they thought their English had not improved a lot, especially listening and speaking, after having been studying for so many years. However, after they came to the UK, studying and living in an English–speaking environment, they felt that there were so many practical ways to learn and use the language because of the richness of the authentic language input. Thus, they did not worry about how to be a better English learner but whether or not or how persistently they would like to put it into practice. For instance, the strategy MET/ 35-*I look for people I can talk to in English.* As one learner argued,

> I did try to find someone to talk in English but it's hard to have a native speaker to practise in China. Sometimes I practised English with my classmates [who are non-natives] but I didn't know if we were speaking properly or not. So I gradually reduced the frequency of doing this. (INT 7)

But the situation changed since he studied abroad. He contended that

> Here [in England], I have so many chances to speak English apart from talking with the Chinese. Although some people I talk to are not natives, they spoke more fluently than I do. So, I still benefit from them. …However, the thing is that I have to prepare the presentations in the lecture, writing assignments, and reviewing lessons for the exams. They are more important to me at the moment. I can always find someone to talk in English here so I think it would be better to finish the academic stuff first. (INT 7)

This seems to reflect how the majority of the Chinese learners organised their studying life here that explains the change and the frequency of the deployment of these two strategies. Although the learners looked for people to speak English with more often than they did in EFL contexts, the strategy was still only '*sometimes used*' (M<3.5).

With regard to MET/34 - *I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English* (M=2.83 to 2.60, -8.1%), several participants mentioned that they tended to use this strategy when they were still in their home country but they appeared to not use it after they came to the UK. They thought they were in the TL environment and exposed to

abundant resources with a great number of opportunities to learn and use the TL. (INT 1,2,3,6, MSN 3, 7, 8, 10). This seems to indicate the learners tended to abandon systematic focused study, and become more integrated into their everyday lives. This appears to be important from an identity perspective as it means that they think of themselves less as language learners and more as emergent users.

### 5.1.3.5 Affective strategies

With respect to affective strategies (no overall change), four mean scores (AFF/39, 40, 42, 43) increased whilst the other two (AFF/41, 44) declined (see Table 4.14 in Chapter 4). It can be noticed that although the mean score of AFF/43- *I write down my feelings in a language learning diary* increased from 1.75 to 2.06 (+17.7%), it was still a *generally not used* strategy with *low* frequency. How the qualitative data can interpret the quantitative results are presented as following.

In terms of the strategy AFF/39- *I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English*, it seems that in SA contexts learners tended to feel afraid of using the TL less often apart from several special circumstances. As a student pointed out in her diary,

> I don't feel nervous when speaking English except some situations, such as performing a presentation, asking questions and giving my opinion in class, and having a discussion with my tutor. …I usually breathe deeply when I feel nervous but the anxiety might result from the uncertainty of what will happen next. For example, I was wondering whether my classmates would laugh because my presentation is not well-prepared or my question is not smart and whether my tutor would be unhappy or angry due to a lack of good comprehension about what we are talking about…..my use of English is only a part of it [feeling nervous or afraid of speaking]. (D 4)

Her diary revealed that the fear of using the TL is not always from insufficient language proficiency but sometimes depends upon who the interlocutor is and the relationship between them. This appears to be associated with another concept, identity.

As to the strategy AFF/40- *I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake*, several learners mentioned this. As discussed previously (section 5.1.2), several learners explained why they did not tend to use this strategy, which was mainly due to the insufficient language proficiency. On the other hand, regarding the increase of this strategy use (M=3.37 to 3.63, +7.7%) after arrival in an SA context, the main reason they provided was that they had to make the conversation continue. They needed to express themselves even with errors, which seemed essential in an English-speaking environment. Furthermore, it seems natives would think that it is normal for

international students or L2 users to make mistakes and sometimes that does not matter since they can still understand. Thus, it would be better to say something with mistakes than saying nothing because of being afraid of making a mistake. As one student mentioned in her diary,

> When I was in China, I was very careful about the vocabulary and grammar when speaking English because that is one of the requirements of the all language tests… But I have thought about a question: between saying an accurate sentence after spending a longer time and saying a sentence with errors immediately, which is better? I think the latter would be better in most situations (D 4, 17 December 2010).

What another diary keeper revealed in his diary tends to support this point of view:

> Today I went to the church … David asked me what I normally did on Sundays in Taiwan. I told him sometimes I went to watch baseball matches. We have a professional baseball league in Taiwan. He asked me which team I support and other issues about the professional sports system in Taiwan. I said I feel difficult to explain this in English since I am not familiar with some words involved in this topic. But he encouraged me, saying 'Don't worry about that. Just tell me something. I think your English is good'. So, I tried my best, using a word or phrase with the same meaning, using gestures, creating new words, and so on…He laughed and I laughed. We enjoyed the conversation. …I enjoyed the way I used English very much… I feel I can speak English in any situation. I am like an English speaker (D 6, 27 Nov 2010).

This indicates that if a learner's identity transforms from a language *learner* to a language *user*, it seems easier for the learner to utilise this strategy and keeping a conversation going does not appear to primarily depend on language proficiency. In other words, the change of identity results in the change of strategy use. It can be seen that the diary keeper used several LLSs during the conversation, such as compensation LLSs COM/29- *us[ing] a word or phrase that means the same thing*.COM/25-'*us[ing] gestures'* and COM/26-'*creat[ing] new words'* and also the affective LLS AFF/40- *I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake* to complete the conversation. Reviewing the whole process, a native speaker encouraged the learner to use English and he thought about changing his identity (from a language *learner* to a language *user*) and then encouraged himself by using the strategy AFF/40 and other strategies mentioned above to accomplish the topic of the conversation. By doing this, his change of identity was confirmed. There had been other LLSs employed by the student before the native speaker encouraged him, such as COG/14- *I start conversations in English*, SOC/49- *I ask questions in English*, MET/35- *I look for people I can talk to in English* (this was why he went to the church) and maybe MET/33- *I try to find out how to be a better learner of English* etc. Therefore, changes

of LLS use and identity appeared to be connected and intertwined, resulting in the change of language use and learning.

Regarding AFF/42- *I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English*, this strategy seems associated with the strategy AFF/39 - *I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English* and should be applied before the latter because normally one has to *notice* firstly and then react. Interestingly, some students had not perceived this as a strategy prior to completing the questionnaire. As they argued surprisingly, 'Is this a strategy? I didn't realise.' (INT5) and 'from my knowledge, strategy should be something related to activities…. notice does not appear to be an activity' (INT 2). In contrast, one student found a way to use this strategy easily in his diary:

> I had a presentation this afternoon. I felt a bit nervous when I started to speak… I told myself I have spent lots of time on preparing this presentation which has been well-organised so I should let the tutor and my classmates know that…I attempted to forget how good my English is, making mistakes when speaking, and losing face since I was performing a presentation the information from which is more important than how accurately I used the language. This helped me to relax…I found I spoke quite fluently and expressed what I wanted to… I had some suggestions none of which was about the language… (D 7, 29 November 2010).

His experience also sheds some light on how change of a learner's identity can affect his or her LLS use.

As shown in Chapter 4 (see section 5.1.2), the strategy AFF/43- *I write down my feelings in a language learning diary* was the top most least often used strategy item in either EFL or SA contexts. The possible reasons have been discussed previously in section of the least often used strategy. However, the part of the diary presented above has provided useful information for the present study.

### 5.1.3.6 Social strategies

Regarding social strategies, Chinese learners' usage of all the items increased while studying and living overseas. The use of four strategies (SOC/45, 47, 48, 49) was boosted obviously, especially SOC/48- *I ask for help from English speakers*, which shifted from *generally not used* (M=1.93) to *sometimes used* (M=3.34, +73.1%). The deployment of this strategy means that when encountering obstacles the learner was willing and able to ask questions to English speakers and, to some extent, they believed

that they could receive (useful) information from them (i.e. they could understand what English speakers would say). One student pointed out that:

> One of the most impressive things here [in England] is that people always try to help me in a polite and gentle way when I get lost. People in China sometimes refuse to help me since they are in a hurry or just don't feel like spending time explaining... So you do not need to worry about getting lost too much here if you can speak English... (MSN 10)

Another student also provided his experience of asking for help in the library:

> I am not good at computer and software... I asked the staff how to use SPSS to analyse my data...she clearly explained by operating an example...I think if I can address my problem clearly it will always be solved with the help from them....(D 4)

These two students above provided their experiences of using this strategy in either academic or daily life, which emphasises the importance of language use and being a language user.

In terms of SOC/45 -'*If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again*' (M=3.14 to 4.02, pre- and during-sojourn, respectively, +28%), the participants argued that the way they used this strategy appeared to be different between in the UK and in their home country as well as between with native speakers and non-native speakers. One student mentioned that

> [W]hen talking with non-native speakers, if I didn't understand something in English, I would ask them to slow down or say it again without hesitation since I thought that might be because that they did not speak properly, for example with grammar errors or strong accents. However, if I was speaking with native speakers, I would think that was my problem with listening and sometimes I felt a little bit embarrassed to ask them to slow down since that was the natural way they used the language. And sometimes they said it again but with the same or similar speed, I still could not understand it (MSN 4).

On the other hand, another student stated that

> When I was in Taiwan, I did not tend to ask the other person to slow down or say it again since that means my English is worse than that person's. ...in England I feel free to ask them to repeat or slow down since I am not a native speaker and they normally think that foreigners are not that good at English and need some help in particular the language (MSN 10).

Another student agreed with this opinion, maintaining that 'it is quite common to ask the other person to repeat since I heard so many 'sorry' 'pardon?', 'say it again' even between natives. So don't need to think about too much just ask if you didn't get it'. (MSN 9) That is reasonable and practical because 'if you do not understand what the other person is saying, how can the conversation be continued?'(MSN 3) This appears to explain the increase of this strategy use in the UK.

Norton's (2001) study indicates that there appears to be a connection between this strategy use and identity, referring to the concept of *imagined community*. There were two participants in her study, whilst one felt uncomfortable speaking English with natives, the other felt uncomfortable talking with those who are from the same country and speak English fluently.

She further explains that

> The central point is that a learner's imagined community invited an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the TL must be understood within this context. [Both of them] were highly invested in the TL, but for different historical reasons and with different consequences for their engagement with speakers of the TL. [Both of them] believed that they had a legitimate claim to old-timer status in their imagined communities, but had learnt, at the same time, that they could not take this status for granted. It was the ambivalence that led to their discomfort in the company of experienced participants in their imagined communities. Whilst both of them could speak English in the company of friends, they were both silenced in different ways by different kinds of old-timer (p.166-167).

This appears to explain why the Chinese students had different opinions on the use of this strategy when talking with native and non-native speakers, and also the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and social identity.

In terms of SOC/47-I *practice English with other students*, some learners provided their opinions. For instance, Interviewee 1 claimed that

> [W]hen I was in Taiwan preparing for IELTS, I did practice once a week with my classmates in the class. At the time, we were forced by the teacher to speak English and we wanted to make use of the chance as well. But now [in the UK], it's not like practice but actually use the language to communicate with other students here. If this is still practice of course I use the strategy more often than before.

The other students tended to perceive *use* as *practice* and to apply this strategy more often while study abroad. There was something interesting in one student's diary:

> I had a dream last night in which I was having an argument with one of my classmates from Chinese mainland about whether Taiwan is an independent country or not…. I was a quite surprised when I woke up this morning since the argument was all in English (D 3, 5 January 2011).

People tend to use the language they are good at (or very familiar with) when making an argument since immediate responses are needed. Thus, it seems like the student had been used to speaking English so that she even spoke English to a Chinese student. This appears to be an indicator of identity change-from a language *learner* to a language *user*.

With regard to the strategy item SOC/49-*'I ask questions in English'*, as discussed previously (see section 5.1.1), being afraid of making mistakes was the main reason that kept learners from using it. On the contrary, what one learner mentioned in her diary seems to explain the increase of this strategy use in SA contexts:

> …every time attending a seminar or a conference I really envy those who can ask a good question in English. That seems more important here [in the UK] since all the presentations are in English and questions should be asked in English… I have a feeling that if I do not ask a question or communicate with the speaker, there seems no contribution from me to the presentation…I will never belong to this academic community or become a real researcher if I am only a listener I think…if I want to ask a good question I need to do some reading about the topic beforehand and think about what to ask and how to ask … (D 4)

She addressed how her identity transformed from a listener to an interlocutor in an English-speaking environment through strategy use: preparing and asking questions. More specifically, her identity change facilitated the use of this strategy (and other strategies to assist the performance of it), which reinforced the new identity (being a researcher and an academic elite). Her strategy use was mediated by the contextual condition, which was a seminar room with academic atmosphere. However, this was resulted from her identity reconstruction (i.e. being a member of the academic community), which was also mediated by the particular context.

In terms of SOC/46-*I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk*, one participant provided her point of view:

> According to my experience, if I ask native speakers to correct my English, they would not do it if I make several mistakes in one or two sentences. If there are only few errors they would be more willing to correct. The reasons are that if there are many errors sometimes they cannot remember all the errors or they tend to ignore some of them. And they need to find a good timing to stop my talking. The interruptions will make the conversation not smooth and less interesting at times. It takes time and patience as well. Thus, it seems not that easy to find someone to correct me apart from my good friends.  (INT 5)

This indicates that although asking English speakers to correct errors is a way to learn and improve the language, the use of this strategy appears to be based on the relationship between the user and interlocutor. Therefore, building social networks (e.g. using social strategies) with native speakers appears to be associated with this strategy use, which indicates that combination of different types of strategies sometimes is needed.  In addition, the level of the strategy user, to some extent, determines the efficiency of this strategy.

With regard to overall social strategies, the result of SILL shows an increase of the use of this strategy category after eight months living and studying in the UK. The reasons why the learners tended to be more willing to apply this strategy were illustrated by the participants in the interviews, which are presented in following sections.

One student pointed out that

> Before I came to the UK, I had heard about the teaching and learning styles here are quite different from that in China. Here in the UK, the tutor prefers students to ask questions and discuss in class, emphasising the communication between students and the teacher. In addition, out of the class, you still need to socialise with other students and local people if you want to learn the culture and make friends. (INT 4)

The student realised the difference of teaching and learning styles between in the UK and their home country and also the way to get used to the environment in the UK.

Another student contended that

> One of my British classmates suggested me to go out and not to be shy to talk with people in English and make friends. He knew that many Chinese students preferred studying hard at home to obtain good marks in all subjects to making use of the opportunities to personally use, practise, and learn the language in daily life here. That seemed strange and incomprehensible to him since he thought it should be available to do those things while studying hard if time can be managed well. This is also a kind of learning. However, for me, I cannot always manage my time well and sometimes there are also unanticipated things happening, for example friends visiting and inviting, being under the weather or in a bad mood. Thus, unless I finish all my academic stuff first, I would not like to do other things if unnecessary. But I start to think about his suggestion and how to have a better time management … (INT 3)

Although this interviewee did not totally agree with his native classmate but he began thinking about whether there was a better way to deal with academic studies and learning English. His thinking had been influenced the interaction with peers. As Parks and Raymond (2004) pointed out, peers play a significant role in mediation, shaping the efforts of L2 learning. On the other hand, another participant argued that

> I used to think that concentrating on academic stuff without doing other things was essential and useful. However, after I started socialising and communicating with classmates and friends out of the class, I felt my English had improved especially in listening and speaking. One of the methods I used was to ask English speakers to correct my errors, if I am familiar with them. And I don't think my studies are behind my classmate but feel I can complete the stuff [i.e. essays, presentation preparation] more efficiently. .. I tried to start as early as possible… I asked my English friends to have a look at my writing … (INT 2)

This participant changed his thinking and learning behaviour through engaging in the social practice with native speakers. This was also mediated by peers.

Parks and Raymond (2004: 387) point out that strategy use is 'a more complex, socially-situated phenomenon' than it often appears to be in the learning strategy literature. They further point out that learners' use or non-use of strategies is also mediated by issues of personal and social identity implicated.   In order to understand the relationship between learners' choice of strategy use and their identity, the information about the learners' identity is presented in following sections.

## 5.2 Reconstruction of identity

This section presents the evidence of qualitative data from several sources (i.e. interviews, diaries, and MSN communication) supporting the reconstruction of learners' identity.  The change is divided into two parts: academic studies (challenges) and social and affective aspects. There is also some information about the learners' identity reconstruction which has been presented and discussed with their change of strategy use in previous sections.

Identity is not only related to who we think we are but also who or how we are viewed or heard by others.  How the Chinese learners' identities changed during study abroad are presented and analysed in following section.

## 5.2.1 Academic studies (challenges)

Many international students come across difficulties in adapting to the different educational systems in the UK on first arrival, especially Asian students or others with similar educational backgrounds. One of the difficulties is the academic writing. A student frankly acknowledged the failure of her first essay in the diary:

> …I was shock when I saw the mark of my first writing essay, 38%, which was a fail. According to the feedback from the tutor, there are two main problems with my writing. Firstly, my writing was based on one or two sources…. That is very limited. Secondly, I just followed what the author says but did not have' my own voice'. And I didn't paraphrase the sentences well. These were all true. But it's very hard for me, for example, to have my own academic voice since I haven't got enough knowledge in this area. So how can I challenge the authors if they are big names? (D 3, 26 November 2010)

In order to improve it, she had a consultation with one of the academic staff in Student Development Zone. The suggestions were:

> Firstly, I need to do a good search about the issues of the topic. Secondly, I shall try to read as much as possible. Thirdly, all the books or articles should be compared and contrasted. Don't follow only one's opinion (D 3, 29 November 2010).

The participant realised that several core aspects (e.g. attitudes towards plagiarism) of the UK system were non-negotiable (Zhou et al., 2011:246). Two months later, she was very excited when getting the mark of her next essay, which was a merit 63%. As she noted,

> I didn't expect to get a merit, but I knew I would definitely pass it… I think I know how to write a good academic essay now… I also have a sense of accomplishment when completing an essay and printing it out… (D3, 19 February, 2011).

Learners' awareness, change, adaptation, improvement and 'rebirth' experience in their studying life can also be seen in their enlightened understanding of the notion of plagiarism over time. Gu and Brooks (2008) point out that it appears to be difficult in learning to write using unfamiliar academic discourses since that requires, at the deepest level, the learners to understand the concept of cultural appropriation of utilising the literature  (i.e. how to avoid plagiarism) to develop their own written argumentation. This learning process 'spans a developmental continuum involving the learners overcoming emotional tensions which arise from changes in their cognition, sense of identity and socio-cultural values' (Gu, 2011: 223).

On the other hand, taking the diary keeper mentioned above into account, she employed several strategies to deal with her difficulty in writing a good essay. She firstly used a social strategy SOC/48- *I ask for help from English speakers*. Secondly, she applied a metacognitive strategy MET 36 *I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.* There appeared to be other strategies deployed by her, for instance, affective strategy AFF/43- *I write down my feelings in a language learning diary* and so forth. Therefore, the learner's strategy use also enhanced the changes of her cognition, sense of identity and socio-cultural values.

One online communication participant (MSN 5) also provided his experience of developing the academic writing skill. Like most of the students, he was suffering from academic writing at the beginning but later on he found that writing was more worth doing than memorising texts for the exams:

> I don't like academic writing at all …  I can't just say what I want to say but need to refer to what have been said in the literature…I have to read a lot first…also I need to write in a formal way…(MSN 5,15 Oct 2010)

…unless I can write essays which can obtain good marks, it is not convincing for me to tell other people or even myself that I am doing my masters well in England. I don't think I am qualified to be a member of the community of graduates studying abroad without passing the essays... (25 Oct 2010).

I've read several great articles recently…I had a chat with one of my classmates, who is from Ireland, about the assessment systems of the masters programme here… He thought writing is more interesting since you can choose the topic, find what to read, and organise what you want to say…I started thinking about this issue…I also discussed this with my tutor…now I think it'd be better to do something original with my own idea rather than reciting what the books say for passing the exams…once my writing is published, that belongs to me and if people want to use it, they have to cite it… (16 Feb 2011)

The participant's perception of academic writing changed after he had been doing his masters in the UK, which was resulted from the interaction between classmates and the tutor, along with his extensive reading. This change implies the reconstruction of his identity, which was from a reader, text memoriser, and exam taker to a writer, independent thinker-(having his own ideas), and academic researcher. This transformation can be explained by Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) *L2 Motivational Self System,* which constitutes of three components: the *ideal L2 self*, the *ought-to L2 self*, and the *L2 learning experience* (see Chapter 2). The person who 'can write essays which can obtain good marks' is her ought-to L2 self, whilst the person whose 'writing is published' is her ideal L2 self. The way of transforming from his previous self to the *ought-to L2 self* was through strategy use that will be applied in the process of becoming the *ideal L2 self.*

He also changed his learning attitude to be more positive and motivated in class and out of class, arguing that

'I forced myself to ask questions in class since it is deemed a positive learning behaviour through which the lecturer can communicate with the student immediately. In order to do this, I needed to prepare the lesson beforehand and think about what I didn't understand. After the illustration of the lecturer, if I still don't understand clearly, I would ask him/her confidently since that is not because of my carelessness in class. And I also have time to think about how to ask the questions'.

He also attempted to have a better time management and study more efficiently, saying that

'I have tried to organise my time more scientifically since I only have 11 months studying here, including holidays. I paid lots of money and quitted my job in order to do the masters abroad so I have to make it worth doing'.

'My parents are waiting for me in China, so if I cannot finish the programme and get the degree, I don't know how to explain to them. Therefore, I have to do my best'.

'I attempted to study more efficiently in order to do and finish all my studies during week days since I planned to go travelling and socialising at weekends. I really benefited from this since I saved my time and also got good marks as well as made my life here more vivid '.

This appears to explain the increase of metacognitive LLS use according to the result of paired sample t test although the increase was not a great deal. Moreover, this seems to indicate that the change or reconstruction of identity, which was related to the change of learners' learning attitude, affected use of LLSs. On the other hand, utilising LLSs, for example metacognitive LLSs, appears to assist learners to achieve the goals of their learning and develop an ideal self.

### 5.2.2 Social and affective aspects (frustrations and adaptations) of studying and living life

In order to answer the research question-*how do they manage social and affective aspects of their lives?,* this section provides information from several sources such as interview, diaries, and MSN chatting. A diary keeper pointed out the importance of the fluency of English, arguing that

'I noticed that if I did not speak fluently, people would not pay attention to or take serious my opinions even though they were very good ones sometimes. So, language proficiency is very important'. (D3, Chinese translated)

One student talked about one of the main difficulties in developing a relationship with native speakers: the lack of adequate language proficiency. As he said,

I would like to have a British girlfriend but most of the British girls thought we (Chinese or other foreigners) could not speak English well enough to communicate freely with them as to unlikely to give them a feeling of love. There appear to be very rare cases that a Chinese man has a British girl friend or wife. Most of the cases are Chinese girls have British boy friends. I think girls perceive the role of language and communication in the relationship as more important than boys do. (MSN 3)

He also pointed out that females were more sensitive to language proficiency than males were. Another student talked about her experience of chatting with native speakers and also emphasised the importance of language proficiency. She argued that:

I found that it is not that easy to have a long conversation with native speakers even I have tried so hard. Our conversations always seem superficial, being unable to look at some things in-depth, such as political, economic, or entertainment news. I don't think I can

have a boyfriend without being able to talk about these issues with me (MSN 9, 5 October 2010).

She did not seem to agree that and check expression here Chinese girls tend to have native boyfriends more easily than do Chinese boys have native girlfriends. However, what made the conversations superficial was not language proficiency but the unfamiliarity with the topics they talked about due to the inadequate knowledge about the host social and cultural issues. Around four months later, she had a boyfriend she met in an activity called 'Global Cafe' held by the church once a week. As she stated:

> I didn't expect this [having a native boyfriend] since I thought there were many things preventing me from having a native boyfriend, such as communication problems due to language proficiency, different life styles and values etc… I think language is not a big problem once we can communicate with each other…. I can talk about so many issues with him now that may be because I've obtained much more information about what are happening in the society… once we have different opinions we negotiate with each other… I like the way I use English now [in a relationship]- we always speak gently and politely…I think my English has improved although I didn't intend to have a relationship to achieve this… (MSN 9, 24 February 2011).

Norton (2000) points out that in a TL environment, the learners tend to have inequitable relations of power so that they 'struggle for access to social networks that will give them the opportunities to practice their English in safe and supportive environments' (p. 113). Furthermore, it is normally the language learners who have responsibility for making comprehensible communication between themselves and the native speakers (ibid). In the case above, she went to the activity to seek for opportunities to practise English, through which the social encounters facilitated her agency thinking and the shift to her new identity: an English user in a cross-cultural relationship.

Another student agreed with this and further suggested a place where the importance of language proficiency did not tend to be considered as an important premise of making friends. As he described,

> In normal circumstances, I think it seems not that easy to have a close relationship with the British, such as having a boy or girl friend. However, I found a very good opportunity which is to go to the church and its activities. Having the same religion, they tend to easily accept a foreigner with lower language proficiency (MSN 2)

In an environment with abundant English resources, this participant found a new strategy to broaden his social resources and have more opportunities to use and learn the L2. As Palfreyman (2006) points out, ample language resources (material conditions) empower learners to adopt a variety of new strategies. Csizer and Dornyei (2005) and

Dornyei (2005) argue that those who are less proficient or confident in their oral skills are more nervous and reluctant to speak English with someone who is more fluent. In addition, their view of the language and its role in their lives tend to be restricted as well. This will be more significant in the case of non-native speakers talking with native speakers. Thus, if learners can be more open-minded and try not to be afraid of being nervous (e.g. using some affective LLSs), they will be more likely to engage in social practice through which they may well be mediated and developing new identities about L2 learning and use.

On the other hand, Chinese females did not tend to have problems of language proficiency when having a relationship with British males but to find advantages of learning and improving it. One student argued that

> I have a British boyfriend, hoping to improve my English. However, I still find we have different opinions on cultures and values. For example, while he likes drinking and dancing in pub or night club, which he thinks are normal social activities, I prefer to stay at home, surfing on the internet, watching TV and films. (MSN6, 13 Oct, 2010)

> […] when going out with him to the pub or elsewhere, he introduced his (native) friends, through which I have many opportunities to communicate with them in English. Due to this, my communication skills and language proficiency have made a great progress. Through listening to their conversations, I've learned a great deal of daily vocabulary, including strong [swearing] words, which seems difficult to learn in class or from textbooks. (MSN 6, 19 December 2010)

> However, there appeared to be other problems, such as difference in opinions about food, relationship, marriage, and life.

> Besides, our opinions on marriage and family also differ. For him, the most important thing for being together was happiness. Whether getting married or not does not matter, which was something in the future. But I did not think so.

The learner realised that the comprehensive adoption of Western values and approaches (assimilation) was not the preferred solution for her.Therefore, in order to make use of the advantages to improve language proficiency, development of identity appeared to be involved. However, the problem was that a choice seemed needed to be made between enhancing the L2 and change (or sometimes loss) of their original identity. A participant provided her experience of and opinion on this, stating that:

> So sometimes I thought, in the case of enhancing my English skills as a precondition to have a British boyfriend, I needed to change in many ways to accommodate myself to him. I do not know whether it is worthwhile or not in the end, because I still want to keep Chinese values and orientation, but they tend to be contradictive quite often. I think in terms of a

short period of time, for example, a year or two, perhaps I can try. However, I know some of my friends, they cannot even tolerate for a month. (MSN 1)

Another participant had similar point of view, arguing that

Emotionally speaking, I still hope to have a Chinese boyfriend, or someone whose mother tongue is Chinese, although we do not tend to speak English when we are together, I think there are other opportunities to use English, for example, in schools with other students or teachers, or with some locals outside the class, such as church, etc. after all, the opportunities here are more than that of our home country since we are in a society where English is the first language. (MSN 11)

Whilst she pointed out the disadvantages of having a relationship with someone who has the same mother tongue, she still preferred not to have a relationship with a native English speaker. She also stressed that the disadvantages tended to be minor during studying and living abroad due to the exposure to the TL environment. This is reasonable since it cannot be assumed that every sojourner will wish to become a 'full-fledged member' of the host culture (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

However, Jackson (2008:212) suggests that it should be realised that the love and appreciation of one culture does not have to come at the expense of another. In other words, more fully embracing their 'Chineseness' does not mean that they have to reject English norms of behaviour or values that appealed to them. While some participants did not tend to accept this (MSN 11), some did (e.g. MSN1 and MSN 9).

One learner talked about how to seek emotional support while studying abroad, maintaining at the beginning of the sojourn:

In my opinion, the best person who can provide me emotional support must be a Chinese. That is because we Chinese have the same or similar experiences in certain situations we can share the feelings of dealing with the problems. And also we speak the same language. Other people may be willing to help me when I encounter difficulties but in terms of affective support, their assistance appears to be shallow (MSN 5, 15 October, 2010).

I didn't understand some parts of the lecture this afternoon… I asked the classmate sitting next to me after the class about that… She is from the U.S… She invited me to have dinner together and explained that for me after that…Jennie was so nice (MSN 5, 14 November, 2010).

I felt sad and depressed since I didn't do well in the exam this morning… Jennie consoled me and encouraged me not to think about it since there were still two exams… She is my best friend here because she can understand my feelings … (MSN 5, 14 January 2011).

From the extract of online communication above, it can be realised that although language plays an important role in communication, the most important thing is what

can be received from the interlocutor, which is based on the social interaction. Her thinking about who can provide emotional support has changed. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005:182) argue that the establishment of trusting international friendship requires 'both the willingness to reveal something about yourself and the willingness to pay attention to the other person's feedback'. In terms of the present case, the participant's 'willingness to reveal something' originated from her good social interaction with her classmate, which began with the use of a social strategy SOC/49- *I ask questions in English*.

It is important to note that the learners do not always react in the same way because of a complex range of internal (e.g. personality attributes, degree of investment in personal expansion) and external (e.g. host receptivity, access to new CoP) factors.

A Chinese proverb goes 'All the saints are lonely.' It sounds sad but reflects a philosophy that those important things need to be completed alone since other people cannot understand except oneself. Study-abroad is sometimes a lonely journey, in particular those doing programmes which are more than one year. A PhD student states that:

> PhD is such a long and lonely journey since it takes time and people don't know what I am actually doing since they are not familiar with my subject. Sometimes I feel my supervisor does not clearly know some areas of my research…. most of the time I have to work myself. ….Loneliness is a good thing because it is difficult to read, think about, and write something in a group, and the thesis can only be completed on your own. You must be alone. I think I have learnt how to overcome and enjoy loneliness during these days…. (D 4)

Not only academic studies but also social life is boring and lonely for some students. Gu's (2011) study shows that the majority of learners' personal life during study abroad tends to be featured with a feeling of being 'a guest [and] not belonging [to the environment]'(p.225). As Oberg (1960, cited in Furnham, 2004:17) put it, it is 'a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation in regard to friends, status, profession and possessions', and 'feelings of importance due to not being able to cope with the new environment'. However, how to deal with the new environment?

One learner's diary revealed that

> I think no matter how long I stay here the natives will still treat me as a foreigner, an L2 user. The reason is that even I feel comfortable to join conversations with natives and understand the humour they create but I am still not as close as the relationship among the natives (D 6).

The label 'foreigner' refers to people in the host culture, resulted from an individual's broad categorisation of people (Ting-Toomey, 1999). This student's opinion was based on his own experience but may be not always the case since native speakers' views on L2 language user appear to differ. Kinginger (2004: 221) observed in her study of L2 sojourners, not all L2 learners have the same access to the 'social networks' that afford opportunities for language development in the host culture: 'Access to language is shaped not only by learners' own intentions, but also by those of the others with whom they interact- people who may view learners as embodiments of identities shaped by gender, race, and social class'.

Research (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Bourhis et al., 2007) indicates that a variety of strategies are applied by the learners to strengthen bonds across cultures and feel a part of the community (e.g. self-disclosure, appropriation/ bending of others' voice, convergence). These language convergences, according to CAT, are deemed to lead to 'harmonious relational outcomes' and a broadening of one's identity (Bourhis et al., 2007). More specifically, Ward et al. (2001) encouraged learners to set goals that were socio-emotional in nature (e.g. to make friends from other cultures). While building relationships across cultures, learners will enhance their cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication skills and will also undergo personal change. Thus, learners can consider employing these strategies suggested above to help to establish cross-cultural relations and to engage in the TL community.

Ting-Toomey (2005: 221) hypothesises that 'the more help the newcomers receive during the initial cultural adaptation stages, the more positive are their perceptions of their new environment'. What is important is that the learners should step forward firstly to ask for help if encountering difficulties and this hypothesis is likely to be true. Consequently, this will encourage the learners to seek assistance and support without hesitation, facilitating their adaptation in the new setting. It seems that several strategies can be applied by the learners in this situation, as discussed previously, such as COG/14- *I start conversations in English* (in section 5.1.1), AFF/ 40- I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake (in section 5.1.2), SOC/48- *I ask for help from English speakers,* and SOC/49- *I ask questions in English* (see section 5.1.3.6). This implies that learners' strategy use affects the development of their identities.

The use of language to (re)construct identity has been explored in the field of education (Toohey, 2000). However, it appears to be prudent to adopt a holistic and developmental lens to explore Chinese learners' experiences during study abroad in higher education. This is because, as Gu (2011) states

> …change at the deepest level is related to their perceptions of self, that is, identity change. Given the distinctive intercultural environment in which they live and study, the process of their identity change has been interwoven with the growth in their maturity (i.e. human development) and interculturality' (p.226).

Thus, information from a variety of sources would provide insights into the deepest level of the learners. One student noticed that his personal independence has developed, as he argued:

> I think I have become mature or stronger. This is because I have been dealing with so many difficulties and frustrations while doing my PhD here. There are problems in my academic and daily life. I attempted to cope with everything on my own firstly. If the problem still cannot be solved I know where and how to ask for help. I feel confident in overcoming all the obstacles I will encounter in the future. (MSN 3)

He further described how he dealt with the difficulties during study abroad, emphasising that:

> The first thing you need is to use the language. If you can handle the language well, lots of information from a variety of sources you can obtain. That doesn't mean you need to speak very good English but you must express yourself and communicate with others freely. Don't be afraid of making mistakes and hesitating to ask for help. I did benefit a lot from using the language.

It can be noticed that language use and the development of personal independence tend to be connected with each other. Thus, how to handle the language (e.g. using cognitive or other types of LLSs) will affect the process of approaching personal independence.

As stated earlier, a diary keeper (D 3) mentioned that she dreamt of arguing with one of the Chinese classmates in English, which can be seen as an indicator of identity change-from language learner to user. This identity change occurred after she had been staying in the UK for around six months. One may argue that at that time her language proficiency had improved that led to her sub/unconscious speaking English with a Chinese speaker. This claim seems reasonable but whether or the extent to which her language proficiency had improved is difficult to measure.

Findings from diaries indicate that the personality (or identity) of some participants changed when living and studying abroad.  One student stated that

I felt I became to like chatting with others and more open to accept opinions from others since I came here. Every day I learnt something about not only English but also the culture and how to express my opinions.

'I think I am a little different from who I was in China since I did not tend to talk with people when waiting for the bus or train. I feel it is a friendly behaviour to talk with a stranger here but sometimes it is not in China'. (D 4)

He pointed out some changes of his behaviours in his daily life in the UK, particularly the way to communicate and socialise.

One participant provided his experience of doing a part time job through which his English had improved quite a lot. He stated that:

I think my English proficiency has improved a lot, in some ways I think it is because I worked in restaurants. I have worked in several restaurants and takeaways in the restaurant. When being a waiter in the restaurant I had to memorize the menu, otherwise I couldn't take orders quickly, and sometimes was even not sure what they were going to order. Through this, I got familiar with the English names of lots of dishes, and this also helped my daily life. I think this kind of learning opportunities are very difficult to obtain in China. Taking drink orders was rather complex, especially the bartender part, many of the guests only said an abbreviation; it caused me big problems at the beginning so that I often brought the wine list for them to point out for me. However, after several months of practice, I solved the problem. Now when eating out, I can easily order the food and drinks I want. (MSN 1)

He also learnt how to make a joke and have more chances to get tips. He stated that

In addition, through chatting with customers, I had learnt a lot, for instance, the ways of joking. When I was working in a takeaway shop, the main job I did was delivery. While I gave the meal to and took money from the customers, I tried to say some greetings and to have a brief communication to let them feel I treated them friendly and sincerely so that I had more chances to get tips and they would like to order from us next time. I don't think this can be learnt in China. (MSN 1)

These statements above revealed the information about their identity that was related to either L2 use and learning or the choice of life styles in the UK. In addition, through using the TL in real circumstances in daily life, for example in restaurants or other kinds of shops, it can be realised that this kind of learning appears to be more practical and useful than the ways utilised in their home country. In other words, the learners' L2 use (and learning) and identities were mediated by the context.

One student noticed that his attitude has changed:

I think my greatest difference since I studied here [at the university in the UK] is that I have realised there appears to be no correct or best answers in the field of social sciences. Every

opinion should be appreciated if that has been carefully thought about. …Sometimes I feel my point of view is very different from others' but seems useful and valuable for some people. And I also become more open-minded to accept others' opinions. (MSN 9)

This is in a similar line with Jackson (2008), who indicates that learners tend to become more open (receptive to cultural differences), flexible, empathetic, positive, and resilient (e.g. rebounding more quickly after critical incidents) during study abroad. Kim (2001) points out that this degree of openness requires 'a formation in our basic and stable psychological orientation that is less self-centred and judgemental and more altruistic and accepting of those who are alien to us' (p.231).

### 5.2.3 Future aspiration

With respect to the future of the learners, one student addressed his ideal self like this:

First, I can get the degree with good marks. Second, I can speak very good English, which means I can communicate with native speakers freely and confidently. And then, I can find a good job, meaning well-paid, not exhausting, and with good reputation in the society (INT 5).

This is in accord with Gao's (2010) study. One of his interviewees (Mengshi) maintained that English is more important than other things, such as academic results because 'English is necessary for everything' (p.147). In other words, the 'linguistic capital' of English (Bourdieu, 1991), meaning that fluency in the language is essential to obtain access to 'symbolic and material resources' in their community (e.g. higher social status, and a more lucrative job) is perceived as the most important reason for learning English, which affects the learners' learning behaviour.

It can be realised that in order to achieve an ideal self or develop a new language learner identity, strategies appear to play an important role, for instance, metacognitive strategies (e.g. planning and organising all the activities, including academic and the others), memory and cognitive strategies (e.g. intentionally learning vocabulary or grammar), and social and affective (e.g. building social networks and controlling the emotion). Furthermore, there appear to be relationships among all these strategies.

Taking the case mentioned above into account, the possibility to achieve his ideal self will increase if he can firstly use metacognitive strategies to have a good schedule to manage all his activities and time, through which he can have a balance between academic studies and leisure time, including socialisation and his own cognitive language learning.

There are two examples about learners' future desires. One MSN communication participant described his attendance of a seminar, admiring how the speaker conducted and presented her work as well as the way she communicated with other researchers and students there:

> I attended a seminar this afternoon… I was impressed that she [the speaker] spoke very fluently and beautifully. I mean the way she used the language…. She introduced why she started being interested in this topic, describing her study and research life when she was a PhD student, for example, the ups and downs and how many times she had thought about giving up…she also mentioned how she got through the emotional depression when she broke up with her boyfriend at the final stage of her thesis… that is a great story…I also like the way she answered questions and the atmosphere there… I hope I can know more about this field and discuss with her and also want to be researcher…I had attended a number of seminars and conferences and this one was my favourite (MSN 4).

The participant's identity changed by engaging in social practice through attending a seminar. His identity was mediated by the contextual condition (the speech). His experience was similar to D4 (see 5.1.3.6) - being influenced by a seminar and reconstructed new identity (a researcher). This new identity affected their strategy use in order to achieve the imagined future self. Another student provided her experience of having a lecture and tutorial with her tutor:

> The tutor looks serious… he likes asking questions during the lecture, which makes me nervous … I don't prefer this kind of teaching … (D2, 9 October 2010)

> I like the way we communicate during the tutorial… he is knowledgeable and always patient and polite and considering my opinion, which is quite different from the way my tutor in China supervised me… sometimes she got very angry about my progress and writing, shouting at me…I want to be a university lecturer here but I don't know if my language proficiency is good enough.. I should make use of opportunities here to practise my English…I also need to study hard … (D 2, 3 December 2010).

The way her supervisor discussed with her during the tutorial provided her a good example of how to supervise a student, resulting in the reconstruction of her identity-being lecturer in the UK, which motivated her to improve her social practice and study hard.

Apart from influenced by mediation factors in academic area, another student provided his thinking about staying in the UK affected by another factor:

> I think I will find a job in Taiwan after I finish my study since it seems hard to get a job here. (D6, 29 September 2010)

> I like to go travelling… I've seen lovely scenery and buildings during the trip. They look so cosy. I like to speak with the local people although some of them speak with strong accents…they are very friendly… I hope I can live here. Originally, I didn't want to stay

here once I graduate but now I start thinking about looking for a job and I can my own beautiful house… In order to achieve this, I need to have a good time management and study hard to get good marks, improve my English proficiency and social practice, and find a job. Meanwhile, I can still have time to go travelling (D 6, 3 Jan 2011).

The student revealed that the formation of his new identity was enhanced by his aspiration for living in England to enjoy the beautiful scenery and buildings, which was mediated by the contextual condition (material resources). That also affected his choice of LLS use (e.g. having a good schedule, studying efficiently, improving L2 proficiency and social practice).

The information provided by the participants above indicates the role of imagination played in learners' L2 learning by addressing how they envisioned their future English-speaking selves involving in imagined TL communities. Their goal settings to achieve the imagined selves were mediated by imagination, which consequently resulted in the emergence of learning plans (Taylor et al, 1998). Because some future selves may be deemed as long-term developmental goals consisted of short-term goals, they are not only a set of goals (Pizzolato, 2006) but also '"self states" that people experience as reality' (Dörnyei, 2009: 16).

## 5.3 Summary

Since participation in social practices and reconstruction of social identities are continuous and dynamic, there are always opportunities to learn and use the TL. As Wenger (1998) pointed out, all lived experiences are sources of learning. However, the extent to which one can take advantage of these opportunities, as this chapter has presented, depends upon strategy use and reconstruction of identity.

The findings of the current study can be summarised as following:

1. The participants' explanations provide details of why and how some strategies were favoured whilst some were used less frequently by the Chinese learners during study abroad. For instance, after they had come to study abroad in an English-speaking environment, they tended to perceive that vocabulary can be acquired in a variety of ways because of the ample authentic language resources. Thus, they reduced the employment of memory LLSs. In terms of social LLSs, they applied these social LLSs more often than before their arrival in the UK. Some participants mentioned that they

used the strategy SOC/45 -*If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again,* quite frequently since they had more opportunities to be involved in social interaction.

2. The reason why the use of a number of strategies changed after the learners came to the UK for around eight months were addressed. Although the decrease or increase of the use of some strategies were not noticed by the learners, the majority of the changes of the use of these strategies were interpreted through the information from interviews, diaries and MSN online conversations.

3. Several strategies grouped into several different strategy categories were commonly employed together by the Chinese learners either to improve the L2 competence or to deal with difficulties in their studying or living life in the UK. For instance, COG/14- *I start conversations in English*, AFF/ 40- I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake, SOC/48- *I ask for help from English speakers,* and SOC/49- *I ask questions in English*. LLSs could be applied in a variety of combinations according to different situations. For example, one of the diary keepers (D6) went to the church, and used these strategies together: COM/29- *us[ing] a word or phrase that means the same thing*.COM/25-'*us[ing] gestures'* and COM/26-'*creat[ing] new words'* and also the affective LLS AFF/40- *I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake,* to complete the conversation about sports with a native speaker.

4. The present study attempted to explore the relationship between learners' preconceived (meta)cognitive understanding of the L2 learning process (e.g. patterns of LLS use) and the development of their identities. The qualitative data show evidence supporting that learners' strategy use affected the development of their identities and their identity reconstruction also influenced the choice of their LLS use and how these occurred.

5. The data show that the ample English resources mediated the learners' strategy use and also empowered them to employ some new strategies (e.g. going to the church) (Palfreyman, 2006). Moreover, the difficulty in dealing with the academic studies and improving English also mediated the participants' strategy use. In the context of the

current study, the lectures were taught in English and presentations and essays were required to be performed and written in English, which mediated the students' strategy use. In terms of learners' identity reconstruction, for some it was directly mediated by the contextual condition (e.g. from a SA student to a resident because of the beautiful scenery and polite people) and for others it was affected by strategy use (e.g. using social LLSs to facilitate learners' engagement in social practice through which their identities were reconstructed).

6. Identity reconstruction also affected learners' strategy use. For example, one of the diary keepers (D 4) mentioned that her identity transformed from a listener to an interlocutor in an English medium seminar, which facilitated her strategy use (i.e. preparing and asking questions and other strategies to help the performance of it), consequently reinforcing her new identity (interlocutor with a researcher).

7. The relation between identity and LLS can be demonstrated as complementary and mutually reinforcing as in figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 The relation between identity and LLS
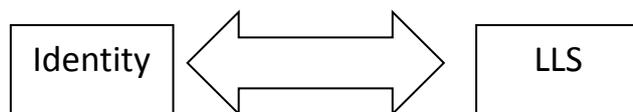
# CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

## 6.0 Introduction

The present study has explored the experiences of Chinese L2 sojourners living and studying abroad and how they went about improving their language proficiency, focusing on how their language learning strategies use, and social identity affected their L2 learning and how they influenced one another. This chapter comprises five sections. Firstly, it summarises the main findings with regard to research questions. Secondly, it discusses the contribution of this study in comparison with the previous literature. Thirdly, it provides theoretical and practical implications. Finally, it offers recommendations for future research on Chinese (or international) students who plan to study abroad. Three research questions and five sub-questions were set up to guide the research. How the questions and objectives were answered and achieved, based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, are presented in the following section.

## 6.1 Summary of the research

This section revisits the research questions and examines how they have been answered based on the findings of the study.

*What do Chinese SA sojourners do to improve their L2 English skills?*

*-How is what they do affected or determined by their preconceived cognitive understanding of the L2 learning process?*

In order to answer this question more explicitly, three specific questions were proposed. The findings with regard to these questions are summarised as following:

*1. What are the patterns of LLS use of Chinese university students in the UK?*

According to the result of SILL (see Table 4.4 in 4.1.2), the overall average of six categories is *sometimes used* (M=3.31). Half of the six categories of LLSs, which were cognitive, compensation, and social strategies, were *usually used*, with averages scores 3.49, 3.62, and 3.49 respectively. The other half of the six categories, which were memory, metacognitive, and affective strategies, were, *sometimes used* (M=2.93, 3.34, and 2.98 respectively). Whilst the most frequently used LLS was compensation LLSs (M=3.62), the least frequently used LLS was memory LLSs (M=2.93). This is a little

different from Oxford (1990), who found cognitive strategies were the most frequently used LLSs among learners, but that was in an EFL context.

Regarding each strategy item, the Chinese learners studying in the UK tended to employ three strategies very frequently: COM/29- *If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing*; SOC/45- *If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again*; and MET/32- *I pay attention when someone is speaking English*. It can be noticed that these three strategies appear to be often used in a communication circumstance, particularly appropriate for SA contexts since there are ample genuine language resources and opportunities to use and learn the L2. As discussed in Chapter 5, there are more explicit explanations about the use of these strategies, for instance, participants tended to apply SOC/45 differently when speaking with native speakers and non-native speakers because of their insufficient language proficiency and self confidence etc.

2.      *Is there any difference of LLS use between pre-sojourn and during sojourn (around eight month later)?*

Visual inspection on pre- and during- sojourn mean scores of each category found that the mean score of memory strategies decreased (from 3.35 to 2.93) while that of social strategies increased considerably (from 2.85 to 3.49). The mean scores of the other four types of strategies changed slightly. The result of the paired t- test shows that there was a significant change of the mean score of three categories – memory, metacognitive, and social strategies. Although the mean score of metacognitive strategies only increased from 3.15 to 3.34, the change was significant according to the paired t- test (see section 4.2.4).

In terms of the change of each strategy item, there were 8 strategies whose mean scores changed over 20% between prior to and during the sojourn in the UK (see Table 4.13 and 4.14). They were three memory strategies (MEM/5- *I use rhymes to remember new English words, **-27.9%*** ; MEM/7- *I physically act out new English words, **+34.8%***; and MEM/8- *I review English lessons often, **-36.5%*** ), one metacognitive strategy (MET/36- *I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English, **+26.6%*** ), and four social strategies (SOC/45- *If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other*

*person to slow down or say it again, +28.0%* ; SOC/47- *I practice English with other students, +20.9%* ; SOC/48- *I ask for help from English speakers, +73.1%* ; and SOC/49- *I ask questions in English, +27.8%*). These changes were in line with the overall change of these three categories apart from MEM/7, which might be due to the misunderstanding of thinking about using this strategy as a compensation strategy, as mentioned earlier (see 5.1.2). The reasons for the changes mentioned above are what the next question asked.

3.      *If yes, why and how does the change occur?*

This research question was explored qualitatively based on information from diaries, interviews, and MSN online communication. According to the findings in Chapter 5, there were two main reasons. Firstly, studying and living in different contexts, which were an EFL context and an English-speaking context, led to the change of strategy use. More specifically, the latter setting is supplied with abundant language input and ample opportunities for the learners to practise and learn the language, whilst the former is not. Thus, the learners tended to apply different strategies in a different way. Secondly, what the learners expected to achieve (the ideal self) in an SA context affected their choice of strategy use. There are several examples, as discussed in Chapter five (see 5.1.3), about learners' identity change, which resulted in the change of their strategy use, and consequently led to different achievements in their academic studies (e.g. essay writing) and L2 learning and use.

*-How do they manage social and affective aspects of their lives?*

This question seems worth investigating through qualitative data analysis but the quantitative data of the SILL, particularly the two parts of social and affective strategies, appear to provide some information about it. In terms of social strategy use, the result indicates that Chinese students tended to employ social strategies more frequently after arrival in the UK than in their home country, which means that they were able to deal with the difficulties in social interaction in the TL language environment. Regarding affective strategy use, although there was no significant overall change of this type of strategy according to the paired t-test, as discussed in Chapter 4, there were three

strategy items AFF/39- *I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English*; AFF/42- *I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English*; AFF/43- *I write down my feelings in a language learning diary*, whose mean scores increased obviously (+14.7%, +15.1%, +17.7% respectively). However, the one that increased the most was still a *generally not used* strategy with *low* frequency (M=2.06). The participants interviewed also confirmed this since few students have a habit of keeping a diary. As interviewee 5 stated, 'Who keeps or wants to keep a diary these days? Apart from being compulsory to do it when I was in secondary school, I have never done it anymore '. The increase of this strategy use might be due to their participation in diary keeping for the current study, however. This would of course remove any significance from the finding, so it would be worth knowing if this really is the case or not.

Apart from learners' use of social and affective strategies, they also developed new identities while they were involved in social interaction and seeking emotional support in an English-speaking environment. These new identities also affected their strategy use, which subsequently influenced the formation of their new identities. For instance, one of the participants in MSN communication (MSN 5) did not think she could have a very close friend who is not a Chinese speaker. However, after she asked for help from the classmate sitting next to her and she was invited to have dinner together, they became good friends and provided emotional support for each other (see 5.2.2). The socio-emotional support derived from people around the learner assisted to ease her stress and put her experiences in perspective. This facilitated her further explorations and personal development (identity reconstruction).


*-How is what they do affected or determined by their social identity?*
*Do learners' social identities affect their LLS use? If yes, how?*


There are a number of examples presented in Chapter 5 about how learners' social identities affected their LLS use. For instance, one diary keeper mentioned that the intention of changing her identity to be an English resulted in the change of LLS use COG/15- *I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English*), consequently enhancing her listening and the formation of her new identity. Another example is that one MSN communicator's use of the strategy COG/16- *I read*

*for pleasure in English* to read English poems for pleasure was motivated by his dream (i.e. ideal L2 self) - writing English poems 'like an English poet' (his ideal L2 self) and that also assisted him to make this dream come true.

*Does LLS use affect (re)construction of social identity? If yes, how?*

The findings of the qualitative data indicate that learners' strategy use can have an impact on their identity reconstruction. For example, as discussed in section 5.1.3.4, Interviewee 5 used the strategy MET/ 36- *I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English* for academic purposes and personal preferences firstly, which helped her to get used to reading, enhancing the transformation of her identity from a language *learner* to a langue *user*. There is another example (see 5.1.3.5) about the use of the affective strategy AFF/40- *I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake*.

The diary keeper's experience indicates that if a learner's identity transforms from a language *learner* to a language *user*, it seems easier for the learner to apply this strategy and keeping a conversation does not appear to primarily depend on language proficiency. In other words, the change of identity results in the change of strategy use. Taking the whole process into account, a native speaker encouraged the learner to use English and he considered changing his identity (from a language *learner* to a language *user*) and then encouraged himself by using the strategy AFF/40- *I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake* and other strategies mentioned above to accomplish the topic of the conversation. By doing this, his change of identity was confirmed. There had been other LLSs employed by the student before the native speaker encouraged him, such as COG/14- *I start conversations in English*, SOC/49- *I ask questions in English*, MET/35- *I look for people I can talk to in English* (this was why he went to church) and maybe MET/33- *I try to find out how to be a better learner of English* etc. Therefore, changes of LLS use and identity appeared to be connected and intertwined, resulting in the change of language use and learning. Oxford (1990) maintains that direct and indirect strategies and all the six strategy categories function as a mutual reinforcing network within which different types of strategies support and facilitate each others' effects in order to improve L2 learning. Comprehension of the interdependency of strategy use in a certain circumstance can assist the learner to orchestrate strategies effectively.

As Anderson (2008) points out, being metacognitively aware of strategy use allows good language learners to integrate the use of various strategies in a positive way.

## 6.2 Contribution of the research

There are several contributions made by this study, which are presented in the following. Oxford and Schramm (2007) argue that proponents of psychological and sociocultural perspectives have not 'systematically, constructively discussed their differences in specific areas of mutual interest' (p.66), such as LLS and SA since they generally emphasised the differences and neglected the potential synergies. The first contribution of this research is its attempt to address the experience of L2 sojourners from two sides of the SLA field, namely cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. Whilst LLS is the focus of cognitive perspective, the research aims to investigate learners' social identity from a sociocultural perspective. Unlike traditional quantitative based LLS research, which only focuses on distinguishing differences among groups or conditions, this study also investigated why and how the change of learners' strategy use happened and the relations among learners' strategy use, development (or reconstruction) of their social identity, and L2 learning and use. The findings indicate that learners' identity reconstruction influenced the choice of their LLS use and their strategy use also affected the development of their identities. In brief, LLS use and social identity appear to be complementary and mutually reinforcing, which means that LLS use assists the development (or reconstruction) of social identity (e.g. D 1), leading to the influence on the choice of LLS use (e.g. MSN 9), which results in the development of social identity again. And it can start from identity change as the example the participant MSN 9 provided (see 5.1.3.2).

Huang (2011) investigated the development of identity and autonomy of Chinese learners in an EFL context in mainland China, proposing the relationships among identity, agency and autonomy as in Figure below.

Figure 6.1 A simplified relationship among identity, agency and autonomy (adapted from Huang, 2011:242)

Moreover, according to her findings, she points out that the there seems a potential interaction among these factors, which is demonstrated in the figure below.
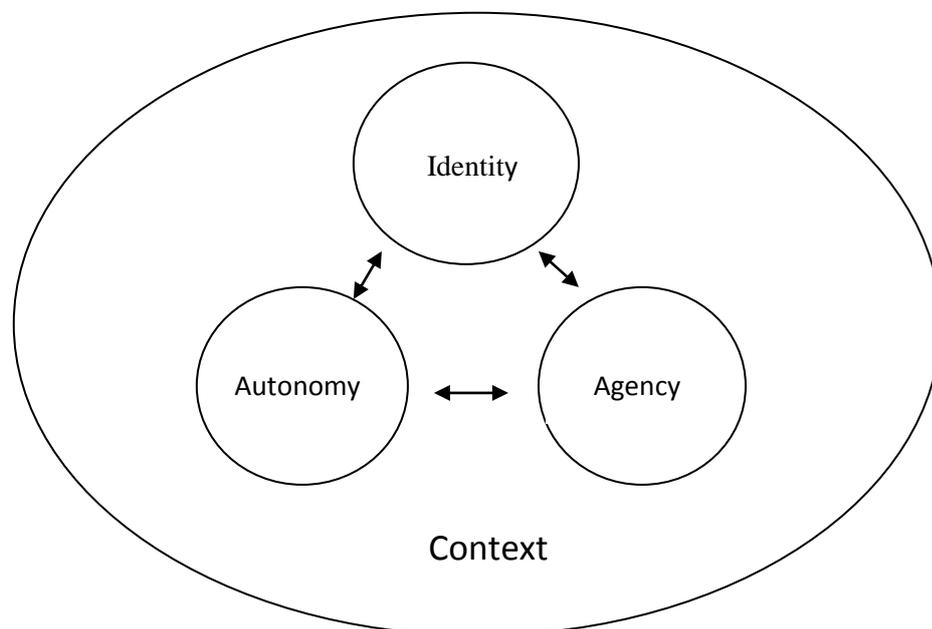


Figure 6.2 (Diagrammatical): Relationships among identity, agency and autonomy (adapted from Huang, 2011:242)

This supports for the proposal by Benson (2007) that 'agency can perhaps be viewed as a point of origin for the development of autonomy, while identity change might be viewed as one of its more important outcomes' (p.30). Huang (2011) further explains that it might also be reasonable to suggest that 'self-identity conceptualization and construction might be both an origin and an outcome of autonomy in learning English' (p.243). Gao's study (2010) offers insights into the relations among strategic behaviour (strategy use), individual agency, and social context. It addresses how contextual realities and processes mediated the learners' strategy use and how the learners adopted strategic efforts in response to these realities and processes, revealing their agency

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underlying their strategy use. Thus, what is not clearly addressed is the relationship between strategy use and identity.

The results of the present study have provided direct evidence supporting the relationship between learners' identity and strategy use in an SA context. This helps to provide a fuller picture among these important factors in SLA field.
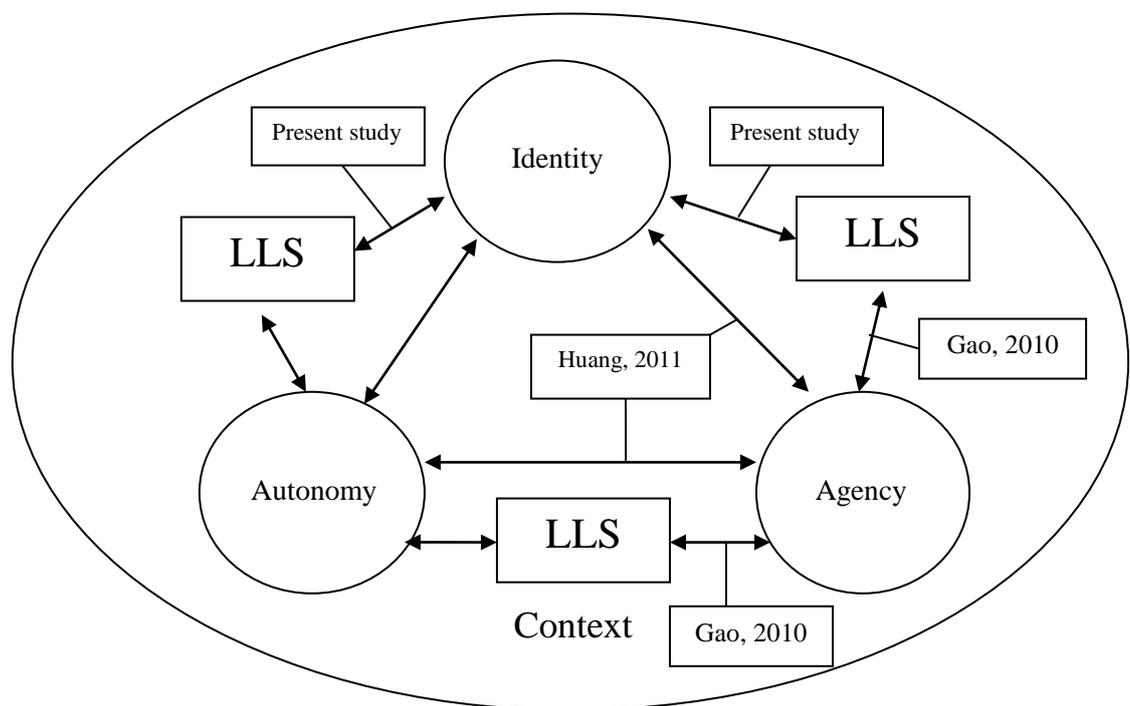


Figure 6.3 The relationships among LLS, identity, agency and autonomy

As shown in figure 6.3, Gao (2010) interprets the relation between agency and strategy use and Huang (2011) addresses the linking among identity, agency and autonomy. The relation between learner autonomy and LLS use has been one of the areas in SLA attracting recent attention (e.g. Oxford, 1990; Benson & Voller, 1997; Oxford, 2003, 2008; Palfreyman, 2003; Phakiti, 2003; Tseng et al., 2006). The use of learning strategies is to help students to consciously take control of how they learn so that they can be efficient, motivated, and independent language learners (Chamot et al., 1999). In other words, the aim of LLS use is to assist learners to achieve learner autonomy.

The second contribution of this research is based on its design and method of triangulation. This study adopts a mixed-methods design, gathering information from multiple sources, such as questionnaires, interviews, diaries, and online chatting. Findings were corroborated across data sets, reducing the impact of potential biases that can exist in study using only one method.

Moreover, the research suggested that MSN online communication seems a very good method of obtaining qualitative data, particularly information about their identity and some personal issues, which is difficult to attain from interviews and diaries. Furthermore, MSN online communication provides a more rapid and convenient way of accessing the participants than interviews would and is suitable for asking some more questions in detail which are not thought about by the researcher during interviews.

Another contribution of this study is related to its context. In the UK, Chinese students are the largest population of the overseas students. Thus, the findings may well be able to apply to a great number of Chinese SA learners and those who are going to study overseas.

## 6.3 Implications

Implications derived from the findings related to the research questions are divided into two parts: theoretical and practical (pedagogical) implications.

### 6.3.1 Theoretical implications

This study examines the conceptual frameworks of LLSs and social identity through exploring Chinese learners' language learning experiences during residence abroad, based on cognitive and sociocultural perspectives respectively, which are traditionally seen as incompatible. The findings indicate that LLSs are involved in the concepts of social interaction and negotiation which are key processes of identity reconstruction. The study suggests that compared to sociocultural perspectives, adopting theories of LLSs to account for the processes of interaction and negotiation (of difference) in the host speech community can more efficiently interpret how one's identity is shaped and developed. Moreover, theories of identity (e.g. Identity Negotiation Theory) can also assist to explain the choice and change of LLS use. Based on this, LLSs and social

identity can inform each other when addressing and interpreting what L2 sojourners actually do to improve their English skills from both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. The relation between LLS and social identity appears to provide a possible connection between cognitive and sociocultural perspective. Moreover, as mentioned above (see 6.2), the findings imply the potential linking among the factors related to LLSs and identity, such as motivation, metacognition, and autonomy, although they are not the focus of the current study. Additionally, adopting a sociocultural perspective can provide a broad view on what a learning strategy is (i.e. the definition), which can offer a more comprehensive foundation to examine learners' strategic behaviours.

The findings of the study  addressed the relation between LLS use and social identity, which are in accord with Dörnyei's  (2009) opinion that 'the ideal self needs to come as part of a "package" consisting of an imagery component and a repertoire of appropriate plans, scripts, and self-regulatory strategies'(p.37). As discussed in Chapter 2, the notion of 'self-regulatory strategies' embraces LLSs, which are an important part of it. The study provides evidence supporting the notion that it was through making use of LLSs that the learners' identities shifted from present self to ought-to self and ideal self.

### 6.3.2 Practical implications

### 6.3.2.1 Implication for sojourners

According to the theoretical implications, LLSs and social identity can inform each other when addressing the experiences of L2 sojourners. Thus, practically, the study suggests that if sojourners can raise their awareness of the 'culture shock' in the TL environment as well as their possible identity reconstruction during stays abroad, they will be more able to cope with the obstacles encountered and more likely to have good outcomes.

Additionally, it would be helpful if the learners can be familiar with a wide repertoire of LLSs, which can be prepared before the sojourn they can enhance learners to maximise their language and cultural learning during the sojourn (e.g. Cohen et al, 2005). This can assist the learners to deal with the difficulties during residence abroad through which the reconstruction of their identities can be facilitated and reinforced. Moreover, the findings provide several useful combinations of strategy use (see Chapter 5), for

example COM/29- *us[ing] a word or phrase that means the same thing*, COM/25-'*us[ing] gestures*' and COM/26-'*creat[ing] new words*' and also the affective LLS AFF/40- *I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.* These strategies can be applied together to help to keep the conversation continue and enhance the social interaction and subsequently foster L2 learning. There are other strategies that can be employed together depending upon learners' orchestrating (i.e. through clustering and sequencing) them for certain purposes and situations.

Moreover, sojourners should prevent themselves from having 'fluent fool syndrome' (Bennett, 1997), whereby one may know the grammar and vocabulary of the L2 without understanding of sociopragmatic norms and behaviours in the host culture, and feel that it is difficult to communicate appropriately and efficiently with interlocutors of the L2. Thus, they should attend a pre-departure discussion on intercultural communication centring on such issues as culture shock and cross-cultural adjustment, the acculturation process, language- and cultural-learning strategies, expectations and goal-setting, identity development and change and so forth. Given relevant information about the country and the universities (or other educational institutions) learners plan to study in beforehand, they would be better prepared and less anxious and confused when setting out on their studies and socialisation in the host speech environment.

There are also implications for learners during their sojourn. First, socio-emotional support and debriefing sessions are helpful to stimulate reflection and facilitate sustained intercultural contact. Through sharing experiences with peers and a sympathetic, supportive facilitator, learners suffering from culture shock and identity confusion may find the sameness among each other and discuss strategies together to assist them to solve the problems and do their best during the sojourn. Second, it is helpful for learners to keep a diary or e- journal. Through recording their thoughts and feelings and reflecting on their experiences, they can deepen their awareness of their progress in the L2, academic studies, and personal change, which can enhance more realistic goal-setting and ideal L2 self and further language learning.

### 6.3.2.2 Implication for pedagogy

There are some implications for pedagogy. Firstly, the findings of learners' pre-sojourn LLS use indicate the potential implication in EFL contexts. Among the six categories of LLSs, only two categories, cognitive and compensation strategies, were *usually* used, while the other four categories were all *sometimes used* (see Chapter 4). Some of the reasons for the pattern of LLS use of Chinese learners (especially at tertiary level) in an EFL context were provided and discussed (see Chapter 5). Accordingly, what LLSs are likely to be needed by the learners as well as how and why to employ them have also been indicated. Learners can benefit from being aware of the significance of LLS use in L2 learning as well as being familiar with an extensive repertoire of LLSs, which can assist learners to know what LLSs are likely to help enhance their L2 learning. In order to achieve this, it will be helpful to integrate LLS use into pre-departure syllabi in L2 learning and teaching. Furthermore, without abundant authentic language input, it is necessary to develop learning and teaching materials appropriate for Chinese learners in EFL context (Takac, 2008). In addition, the concept of identity (e.g. ought-to L2 self and ideal L2 self) is worth understanding, since that may well be able to help the learners to have desired future selves, consequently facilitating their L2 learning.

In terms of SA contexts, this research has provided the experiences of a certain number of Chinese university students in the UK, regarding their LLS use when encountering obstacles and their identity reconstruction in an English-speaking environment. The institutions of higher education can gather experiences of previous (international) students in terms of what difficulties they encountered and how they dealt with them, providing the newcomers information, which can minimise the culture shock and the time and efforts needed to adjust to the new host speech community as well as enhance learners' personal growth and identity expansion. Moreover, the educational institutions can take these experiences into account and provide well-designed SA programmes (e.g. appropriate workload, internationalised curricula). The multiple identities expressed by the learners indicate that a variety of learners' interests needs to be considered when designing the programmes.

In addition, what (home or receiving) educational institutions can offer are country specific information (e.g. history, religion, customs, food, education etc.), intercultural communication courses, social activities, and L2 learning courses as well as a variety of SA programmes (e.g. year- or semester- length exchanges, internships, short-term

language courses). What is important is that the courses should include a part focusing on the development of planning and self-evaluation, helping learners to set up their goals (or identities) and understand their progress towards that .Furthermore, there should be experienced tutors and staff members who provide assistance and support for academic studies and socio-affective aspects of sojourners' daily lives, especially raising awareness of and giving advice on LLS use and identity development. It is hoped that these implications can help sojourns to realise their future desires.

## 6.4 Limitations

Although this study adopts a mixed-methods design, attempting to make use of both quantitative and qualitative measures, it did not examine whether male and female students apply strategies differently as well as have different experiences of identity reconstruction when living and studying in the UK, although the sampling included both males and females. There appears to be a tendency for more females than males to study abroad. In terms of the current study, 75.8% of the participants were female (see Chapter 3). Quantitative research shows that males and females behaving in 'strikingly different ways' (Dörnyei, 2005: 59). In terms of (second) language learning, however, assumptions regarding females' more frequent use of certain types of strategies (e.g. social and affective strategies) have not reached a consensus. Whilst some researchers argue that women tend to use social (e.g. Green & Oxford, 1995; Jimenez Catalan, 2003) and affective strategies (e.g. Young & Oxford, 1997), others contend that there is no difference in LLS use between males and females 'by any measure' (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995: 81). Apart from LLS use, there are also debates on the difference of other issues related to language learning between men and women, such as motivation, personality types, and the engagement in social practices. Future research may need to consider investigating the difference of the experiences of the sojourners of each sex. There was no investigation on these issues between Chinese and Taiwanese students although previous research pointed out that they tended to use some types of strategies differently (e.g. Yang, 1994). There appears to be little literature about the difference of identity reconstruction in SA contexts between Taiwanese and Chinese. Moreover, this study did not examine whether learners' strategy use and identity reconstruction differ owing to different accommodation styles since that may impact on their social interaction. In addition, it did not explore whether the learners' language proficiency

affect their LLS use and identity development.  The main reason for not conducting these investigations was due to the scope of the current study and thesis.

Another limitation is that the study was not specifically designed to examine the L2 self system and the role of imagination in the development of identity in SA contexts, although some data can lend support to these two issues. Furthermore, the data presented in 5.2 aimed to examine the change of the learners' social identity but those whose identity change was difficult to trace were not presented. Additionally, some participants whose identities shifted in a negative way against the direction towards L2 ideal self, were not discussed as well. For example, those who did not like the UK and hoped to go back as soon as possible were unlikely to develop an ideal L2 self in English, although they were the minority. They might be good opportunities for investigating why they behaved in this way.

## 6.5 Suggestions for future research

The study investigated how, why and to what extent overseas educational experiences may contribute to learners' strategic language learning and development of identity. Several key issues have been highlighted, which need further research. The findings indicate that it is worth conducting joint research on LLS, identity, and SA across psychological and sociocultural perspectives since there are interrelations among them and they can benefit from one another. Furthermore, the relations among these issues and several concepts, such as motivation, autonomy, and agency are worth exploring.

In terms of LLS, nearly 40 years of research has indicated that good language learning does not appear to be facilitated through merely expanding strategy repertoires and increasing the frequency of strategy use. The reality seems more complicated. Future research may need to explore how strategies can be orchestrated (i.e. clustered and sequenced) to be efficient for particular individuals, targets and circumstances. Moreover, as the present study sheds light on the relation between LLSs and identity, future research can attempt to explore how LLSs connect to other concepts, such as motivation, metacognition, and autonomy, which are related to a similar but broader concept of self-regulation.

With regard to learners' social identity, this study tracked the change of participants' identity for around eight months, which may be not long enough to examine some

learners' identity change. Furthermore, since the pre-sojourn data was collected during just a very short period of time before they came to the UK, their identities may have changed and unlike learners in an EFL context in general. It is suggested that a longitudinal research starting a longer period time (e.g. six months or a year) before their sojourn is perhaps useful. In addition, although all the interviewees, diary keepers and MSN chatters in this study did not have any sojourning experience (not including travelling), future research needs to know whether participants have studied abroad before since even a sojourn of a short period of time (e.g. five weeks) can have an impact on learners' identity construction (Jackson, 2008).

Since the study focused on tertiary level learners' SA experiences, future research can investigate learners at different levels, such as adults learners attending short-term sojourning programmes or those are at secondary schools, which can provide more information about learners' strategic behaviours and social identities at various levels and examine whether or not there is any difference between learners at higher level like undergraduates and postgraduates.

It is hoped that this study can draw greater attention to learners' strategy use and social identity for learning English, and also to the interrelations among other relevant issues, such as autonomy, agency, metacognition, and motivation. It will provide a more comprehensive understanding of SLA when those important factors can be examined and addressed in a way of integration rather than focusing on only one factor.

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# Appendix A

## Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies Classification

**DIRECT STRATEGIES**                    **INDIRECT STRATEGIES**

**I. Memory strategies**
- A. Creating mental linkages
- B. Applying images and sounds
- C. Reviewing well
- D. Employing action

**I. Metacognitive strategies**
- A. Centering your learning
- B. Arranging and planning your learning
- C. Evaluating your learning

**II. Cognitive strategies**
- A. Practising
- B. Receiving and sending messages
- C. Analyzing and Reasoning
- D. Creating structure for input and output

**II. Affective strategies**
- A. Lowering your anxiety
- B. Encouraging yourself
- C. Taking your emotional temperature

**III. Compensation strategies**
- A. Guessing intelligently
- B. Overcoming imitations and in speaking and writing

**III. Social strategies**
- A. Asking questions
- B. Cooperating with others
- C. Empathizing with others

# Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
## Version for Speakers of Other Language Learning English

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)
(c) R. Oxford, 1990
Directions

This form of the STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) is for students of English as a good second or foreign language. You will find statements about learning English. Please read each statement. On the separate Worksheet, write the response (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) that tells HOW TRUE YOU THE STATEMENTS IS.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE OF ME means that the statement is very rarely true of you
USUALLY NOT TRUE OF ME means that the statements is true less than half the time
SOMEWHAT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you about half the time
USUALLY TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true more than half the time
ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you almost always.

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Put your answer on the separate Worksheet. Please make no marks on the items. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, let the teacher know immediately.
(Version 7.0 [EFL/ESL] R. L. Oxford, 1990)

STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

EXAMPLE

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Read the item, and choose a response (1 through 5 as above), and write it in the space after the item.

I actively seek out opportunities to talk with native speakers of English. …

You have just completed the example item. Answer the rest of the items of the Worksheet.

**Strategy Inventory for Language Learning**
Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)
(c) R. Oxford, 1990

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

(Write answers on Worksheets)


## Part A
1.   I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
2.   I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3.   I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.
4.   I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.
5.   I use rhymes to remember new English words.
6.   I use flashcards to remember new English words.
7.   I physically act out new English words.
8.   I review English lessons often.
9.   I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.


## STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING
### Part B
10.  I say or write new English words several times.
11.  I try to talk like native English speakers.
12.  I practice the sounds of English/
13.  I use the English words I know in different ways.
14.  I start conversations in English.
15.  I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.
16.  I read for pleasure in English.
17.  I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
18.  I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

(Write answers on Worksheets)

19.  I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.
20.  I try to find patterns in English.
21.  I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.
22.  I try not to translate word-for-word.
23.  I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.


## Part C
24.  To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
25.  When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
26.  I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
27.  I read English without looking up every new word.
28.  I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
29.  If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

<div align="center">Part D</div>

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me better.
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.

<div align="center">STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING</div>

34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
37. I have to clear goals for improving my English skills.
38. I think about my progress in learning English.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me
(Write answers on Worksheets)

<div align="center">Part E</div>

39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

<div align="center">Part F</div>

45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
47. I practice English with other students.
48. I ask for help from English speakers.
49. I ask questions in English.
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

<div align="center">STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING</div>

**Your Name ……………………………….. Date ……………………**

<div align="center">Worksheet for Answer and Scoring
The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)
(c) R. Oxford, 1990</div>

1. The blanks (………) are numbered for each item on the SILL.
2. Write your response to each item (that is, write 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) in each of the blanks.
3. Add up each column. Put the result on the line marked SUM.
4. Divide by the number under SUM to get the average for each column. Round this average off to the nearest tenth, as in 3.4.
5. Figure out your overall average. To do this, add up all the SUMS for the different parts of the SILL. Then divide by 50.

6. When you have finished, your teacher will give you the Profile of Results. Copy your averages (for each part and for the whole SILL) from the Worksheet to the Profile.

## STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

SILL Worksheet (continued)
Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)
(c) R. Oxford, 1990

| Part A | Part B | Par C | Part D | Part E | Part F | Whole SILL |
|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|------------|
| 1…… | 10…… | 24…… | 30…… | 39…… | 45…… | SUM Part A….. |
| 2…… | 11…… | 25…… | 31…… | 40…… | 46……. | SUM Part B….. |
| 3…… | 12…… | 26…… | 32…... | 41…… | 47……. | SUM Part C….. |
| 4…… | 13…… | 27…… | 33…… | 42…… | 48…… | SUM Part D….. |
| 5…… | 14…… | 28…… | 34…… | 43…… | 49…… | SUM Part E….. |
| 6…… | 15…… | 29……. | 35…… | 44…… | 50…… | SUM Part F….. |
| 7…… | 16…… | | 36…… | | | |
| 8…… | 17…… | | 37……. | | | |
| 9…… | 18…… | | 38…… | | | |
| | 19…… | | | | | |
| | 20…… | | | | | |
| | 21…... | | | | | |
| | 22…... | | | | | |
| | 23……. | | | | | |
| SUM…. | SUM…. | SUM…. | SUM…. | SUM…. | SUM….. | SUM…. |
| ÷9=…. | ÷14=…. | ÷6=…. | ÷9=…. | ÷6=…. | ÷6=…. | ÷50=…. (OVERALL AVERAGE) |

## STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Your Name ………………………………. Date ……………………

Profile of Results on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
Version 7.0
(C) R. Oxford, 1990

You will receive this Profile after you have completed the Worksheet. This Profile will show your SILL results. These results will tell you the kinds of strategies you use in learning English. There are no right or wrong answers.

To complete this profile, transfer your averages for each part of the SILL, and you overall average for the whole SILL. These averages are found on the Worksheet.

| Part | What Strategies Are Covered | Your Average on This Part |
|------|------------------------------|---------------------------|

| A. | Remembering more effectively | |
|---|---|---|
| B. | Using all your mental processes | |
| C. | Compensating for missing knowledge | |
| D. | Organizing and evaluating your learning | |
| E. | Managing your emotions | |
| F. | Learning with others | |
| YOUR OVERALL AVERAGE | | |

**Please could you provide your personal information?**
**Age:**
**Gender:**
**IELTS (or other English qualification):**
**Subject (The course you are doing):**
**Type of Accommodation (university hall, host family, house shared with Chinese, UK, or non-Chinese students)**

STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

SILL Worksheet (continued)
Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)
(c) R. Oxford, 1990

Key to Understand Your Averages

| High | Always or almost always used | 4.5 to 5.0 |
|---|---|---|
| High | Usually used | 3.5 to 4.4 |
| Medium | Sometimes used | 2.5 to 3.4 |
| Low | Generally not used | 1.5 to 2.4 |
| | Never or almost never used | 1.0 to 1.4 |

**What These Averages Mean to You**

**The overall average tells how often you use strategies for learning English. Each part of the SILL represents a group of learning strategies. The averages for each part of the SILL show which groups of strategies you use the most for learning English.**

**The best use of strategies depends on your age, personality, and purpose for learning. If you have a very low average on one or more parts of the SILL, there may be some new strategies in these groups that you might want to use. Ask your teacher about these.**

# Appendix C

## Information/Informed Consent Form

Although there has been a great deal of research on second or foreign language learning in study abroad contexts, it can be noticed that the focuses are largely on either cognitive (psychological) or sociocultural perspective. Moreover, few studies have investigated the experiences of Chinese students, or indeed any other cohort of overseas students at British universities; most of the studies have been conducted in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The present study attempts to explore the experiences of Chinese L2 sojourners living and studying abroad and how they go about improving their language proficiency, focusing on how their language learning strategies use and social identity affect their L2 learning and how they may influence one another.

There are a number of ethical principles that will be followed, and information about the anonymity, confidentiality, right to withdrawal and informed consent of your participation.

I understand that this research constitutes some part of a doctoral thesis.

I understand that I am participating in a semi-structured interview taking approximately 30-45 minutes. I also agree to be audio recorded through the whole process of the interview as well as to allow the recording to be transcribed for the purposes of analysis. I understand that the data will definitely be kept confidential until their destruction upon the graduation of the researcher in 2012.

I confirm that the researcher Hung-Chun, Pen has fully explained the task to me; has informed me how I can withdraw from the participation without prejudice or penalty and even providing reasons; has answered  any questions that I might have been concerned with the procedure of the research.

I confirm that some of the transcripts of the interview may be used in research documents and may be published in scientific journals.

I,                                            state that I am over 18 years of age and that I voluntarily agree to participate in study conducted by Hung-Chun, Pen, a doctoral student in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at the University of Leicester.
Your kind participation is crucial to my research. The deepest appreciation and thankfulness of mine will go to your time and effort on the task.
Signature of researcher


………………………………….......
Signature of participant


…………………………………..
Contact details of the researcher:
Hung-Chun Pen
School of Education
The University of Leicester

Mobile: 07830001288
Email: hp104@le.ac.uk


Contact details of supervisor:

Dr Simon Gieve
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Leicester,
LE1 7QA
Telephone:+44 (0)116 229 7525
E-mail: sng5@le.ac.uk

# Appendix D Sample of conversation online (MSN)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 04/09/2010 05:14:07 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 到家？At home? |
| 07/09/2010 22:24:54 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 你去不去周四 pannu 家 我想去 去的话一起？Would you like to visit Pannu's home this Thursday? I want to go, and will you go with me? |
| 07/09/2010 22:35:25 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 我还不确定，想好了告诉你。I am not sure yet and I will tell you my decision later. |
| 07/09/2010 22:35:34 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 去吧去吧 Please go with me. |
| 07/09/2010 22:35:37 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 有什么好想的 There is nothing to worry about, |
| 07/09/2010 22:35:40 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 机会难得 and also it is a good opportunity |
| 07/09/2010 22:35:53 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 练英语也好啊 to practice English. |
| 07/09/2010 22:36:06 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 再说认识个院长有什么不好的 In addition, he is the head of the college after all |
| 07/09/2010 22:36:14 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 我觉得没什么可说的。But I don't know him, I am afraid that I have nothing to talk with him. |
| 07/09/2010 22:36:23 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 瞎聊呗 听着也行啊 Take it easy, and at least, you can practice listening |
| 07/09/2010 22:36:36 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 找工作啊 啥的 说不定还能给点指导 and maybe, he can give some valuable advice on job-hunting. |
| 07/09/2010 22:37:01 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 容我再想想。晚上告诉你 Well, I will let you know my decision tonight |
| 07/09/2010 22:37:09 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 好 尽早 Ok. Tell me as soon as possible |
| 07/09/2010 22:37:12 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 我要回邮件 I have some emails to respond |
| 07/09/2010 22:37:16 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 恩 OK |
| 07/09/2010 22:37:26 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 留言就行 我要去睡觉 Leave me a message please, I will go to sleep. |
| 07/09/2010 22:37:55 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 我也要睡觉。Ok. I am going to sleep too. |
| 08/09/2010 21:59:46 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 我问你是不是在忙？Are you busy? |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:02 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 再查学校老师 找合同法老师 Yes. I am doing some research on universities and tutors. |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:08 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 你明天去教堂吗？Will you go to church tomorrow? |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:11 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 去 Yes, I will. |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:29 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 恩。那我跟你去。到时找你。Ok, I would like to go with you. |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:35 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 好 No problem. |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:44 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 我又想申请 phd 了 I want to apply for PhD again, |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:52 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 都做着 看着再选好了 so the first thing is to do some research |
| 08/09/2010 22:00:53 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 你怎么这样？What happened? |
| 08/09/2010 22:01:07 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 你怎么查老师？How are you trying to find a proper tutor? |
| 08/09/2010 22:01:13 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 我老娘还是想让我读 My mum hope that I can continue my study. |
| 08/09/2010 22:01:22 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 学校网站啊 From the websites of the Universities. |
| 08/09/2010 22:01:28 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 一个学校一个学校的看吗？One by one? |
| 08/09/2010 22:01:51 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 在看咱学校的 Yes, from Leicester University first, |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 08/09/2010 22:02:00 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 然后再看其他的吧 then others |
| 08/09/2010 22:03:51 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 你忙吧，我要出去看房子了。Well, I am going out to look for an accommodation right now. |
| 08/09/2010 22:04:15 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 嗯 Ok |
| 09/09/2010 00:47:26 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 你那个地毯卖了吗？想卖多少钱？Have you sold your carpet? What is the price? |
| 09/09/2010 00:47:52 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 我卖的是 5 磅 5 Pounds |
| 09/09/2010 00:47:55 Jun | (R)zoeliu | 你要送你 I will give you for free if you like it |
| 09/09/2010 00:49:54 (R)zoeliu Jun | | 好啊:) 我就知道你会这样说，那就不客气了。Thank you. |

# Appendix E Sample of Language Learning Diary

**Language Learning Diary**

Name: Zoe

Date: 2010年 11月 15日

Place: 公司法课堂

Event(s): 今天上课的内容是关于为何用公司法解决企业社会责任的问题。课前我作了充分的准备，阅读了老师推荐的论文并做了笔记。因为英语不好，所以我常之有问题也不敢问，我总是不确定自己是否用错了表达方式，也会招致别人的嘲笑。有过几次这样的经历后，我真的很紧脸。所以，这一次我把自己想说的话都用英语写出来并且背熟了，我想这样就不会有问题了。上课的时候，我用流利的英语总结了阅读过的一篇文章，并指出了文中论述的不足，提出了疑问。老师夸奖了我，并把我的问题交给其他同学们讨论。于是老师和同学们开始陈述他们的观点并向我发问。而这些内容都是我不曾准备的，我一时乱了阵脚，搪塞应付。大家都有些失望，也对我的英语水平参差不齐的反差感到诧异。

Reflection: 这堂课，虽然上得很愉快，但却给了我很好的经验。我想我今天的做法，只是阐述了自己的观点，自己的任务完成就好了，而忽略了与他人的思想交流，无论从语言的学习和专业的学习来说都是不成功的。语言最重要的功能是交流，如果一味追求完美，不想去丢面子，而采取背书的方式，那永远也不可能真正用英语交流。我想，学习语言还是应该回归它的本源，哪怕不流利，也要讲出来，不要怕丢脸。就今天来说，倘若一开始我就用自己的方式说出自己的观点，即使不完美，但别人一定会根据我的英语水平来适当调整他们的谈论方式，尽量使交流更畅，更有效，形成良好的互动。而正是在这种互动中使自己尽快进步，而掌握英语。