The Discursive Construction of College English Learners' Identity in Cross-cultural Interactions

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Abstract

There are abundant studies on second/foreign language learners' identities. However, there appears to be insufficient longitudinal research on the construction of learner's L2 identities in systematic interactions between fixed dyads in an out-of-class context. Adopting a critical discourse analysis framework (Fairclough, 2003) and suitably informed by discourse theory (Philips & Jogensen, 2002), this paper explores how Chinese college students discursively constructed English learner identities in and through processes of interaction and how English learner and user identity and learner's language use were mutually constructed. Learners were found to exercise their own agency to establish multiple and changing identities. Such learner identities were found to be constructed through discursive strategies that established oppositions and differences, and sometimes were crafted in *situ* to fit the contours of the interactive setting. This paper begins with a discussion of the constructs that guide the study and then provides an interpretation of interactional, interview and diary texts that takes account of the sociocultural context from which these were generated.

Keywords: Identity, discourse, interaction, Chinese learners

Word count: 10, 939 words (excluding references)

Introduction

Interaction research, focusing on interactional practices that might facilitate second language learning, evolved from efforts to examine the linguistic and interactional adjustments in interaction in the 1980s (Krashen, 1980), through empirical studies designed to test the interaction hypothesis in the 1990s (Long, 1983, 1996), to current endeavors to introduce sociocultural theory into the traditional interactionist perspective in order to examine not only the role interaction plays in language acquisition, but also learners' moment-by-moment learning processes in dialogic exchanges (Hall, 1997; Lantolf, 2000; Ohta, 2000; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Despite the many advances in interaction studies, a more complex picture of SLA has yet to emerge in the interaction studies published to date.

Several new perspectives that could be taken in interaction studies are suggested by the literature. First, the prime emphasis on the cognitive and linguistic dimensions of interaction has resulted in widely-held assumptions that construct participants as nonnative speakers and native speakers. However, in the field of applied linguistics and Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the constructs of native speaker/nonnative speaker have often been viewed as controversial by certain researchers (*e.g.,* Cook, 1999; Davies, 1991). Criticizing the NS/NNS dichotomy in traditional research practices as over-simplistic, these researchers called for a deeper understanding of language learners as social beings engaged in social interaction (*e.g.,* Firth & Wagner, 1997). As Liddicoat (1997, p. 313) pointed out, "interaction is accomplished by participants in such a way that it creates and recreates the social relationships between the participants". Thus, interaction research, like studies in other areas in second language acquisition, requires "an increased emic (*i.e.*, participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts" (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 286).

Furthermore, most interaction studies focus primarily on the conversational interaction between newly formed dyads. Pica (1996) and others (*e.g.*, Long, 1996; Brock, Crookes, Day, & Long, 1986; Schmidt & Frota, 1986) therefore call for longitudinal studies of interaction and emphasize the necessity and importance of collecting data over a more extended timeframe.

In addition, almost all work on interaction has been carried out within a western educational setting (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). Extensive cross-cultural studies of interaction are thus needed to investigate the role interaction plays in L2 learning among people of different sociocultural backgrounds. This study, looking at the interaction between Chinese English learners and English L1 speakers, will address the issue.

Finally, the aim of interaction studies was to identify discourse features linked to the potential means of providing the desired exposure to comprehensible input believed to drive the acquisition process, and to do so in a way that would inform classroom language teaching by providing research-based criteria for the design of how to create quality speaking tasks. Frequently, only the discourse features, such as comprehension checks or clarification requests, were considered relevant because the goal was to arrive at a generalizable template for task design. As a result, the identities, imaginative projections, and histories of the learners were not examined or

described in any great detail. Nonetheless, second language learners' identities and the relationship between language and the construction of self has been gaining momentum attention in the field of applied linguistics over the past decade (*e.g.* Belz, 2002; Block, 2007; Chik, & Benson, in press; Gao, Li & Li, 2002; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2000; Norton, 1997, 2000; Norton and Toohey, 2001, 2002; Pavlenko, 2001, 2002, 2003; Ros i Sole, 2007). L2 learners' or users' identities have been investigated among immigrants with different sociocultural backgrounds in various host countries (e.g., Block, 2006; Norton, 2000), and also among students who learn an L2 in their home countries (e.g., Gao et al, 2002; Ros i Sole, 2007). These studies emphasized learners' agency and illustrated how particular sociocultural environments have shaped human agency in L2 learning experiences. With a few exceptions (McKay & Wong, 1996; Park, 2007; Siegal, 1995, 1996), this line of research has focused on the larger social backdrop rather than the immediate interactional contexts. However, researchers working within a Conversation Analysis framework began to study learner identity in social interactions (e.g., Park, 2007) and some interesting aspects of the co-construction of NS/NNS identities were consequently revealed. Adopting a somewhat different perspective from the CA focus on the nature of the procedures the conversationists follow to produce orderliness in interaction (Cameron, 2001), and aiming to better understand the mediating role of discourse plays in identity construction and the interplay between the individual and the social, this study employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework.

The above discussion implies that investigating learners' identity construction in an out-of-class interaction context, and taking into account the sociocutural and political meanings of the interactions, over a prolonged period, would shed light on both interaction and identity studies. It is not intended to adopt an eclectic approach embracing both technicist SLA and poststructuralist identity research due to their inherently incompatible epistemologies. What I attempt to do is to take a fresh look at interaction studies, *i.e.*, to move beyond the focus on learners' language acquisition in order to encompass the identity construction of learners in a context characterized by cross-cultural negotiation and marked by an asymmetry in linguistic resources. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the effect of cross-cultural interaction on the construction of Chinese college English learners' identities and also to gain greater understanding of the constitutive role that discourse takes in identity construction. As a theoretical framework, I employ a CDA framework imbued with insights emanating from studies in anthropology, sociology, and related fields such as education and language teaching that regard identity as multiple, shifting and in conflict (Norton Pierce, 1997; Weedon, 1987), as deeply embedded in sociocultural and political contexts (Duff & Uchida, 1997), and as constructed and maintained through language and discourse (Gee, 1996; MacLure, 1993).

In exploring the discursive construal of identity, I do not conceive its on-going development as a one-way process. Rather, I recognize individuals as social agents who create and change things with their pre-positioning in social events and texts (Fairclough, 2003), and who continuously develop a sense of self in their engagement with the world (Archer, 2000). So identities are socially constructed and individually enacted in distinctive ways. In addition to CDA, I draw on the

notion of imagined identity (Norton, 2001). The identification of 'imagination' in this study enables us to overcome the dichotomy between agency and structure as posited by extreme constructivism, which overemphasizes the role of the social in shaping the individual, while leaving the agency of the individual somewhat unattended. Imagination is one of the three modes of belonging to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), and provides space for the learners to enact their agency within social structures. Yet, unlike liberal individualism, it recognizes the role of the social in shaping the individual. Learners' imagined identities are constructed in the interaction between individual learners, historical processes and social practice. In particular, the following research question will be addressed:

> In what ways do the sociocultural discourses in mainland China and the learners' histories as well as their imagination influence their identity construction in an dyadic interactional context?

In the following sections, the notions of identity and discourse that guide this investigation are discussed. I then introduce the sociocultural context of the PRC where the study is located as well as the participants, the multiple data collection methods, CDA as the analytical framework, and the data analysis possess. Learners' discursive construction of identities is then examined in relation to interpersonal relationships in the interaction, to the broader sociocultural context and to their imagined identities.

Identity

From a poststructuralist and sociocultural perspective, L2 learners' identities are regarded as dynamic, multiple and fluid (Butler, 2005; Weedon, 1997; Zemblyas, 2003). As Luk and Lin (2007) have emphasized, L2 learner's identities are not pre-decided, fixed and static but are "highly fluid, sometimes incoherent, fragmented, multiple, and conflicting" (p. 50). It was Norton (1997, 2000), however, who introduced such concepts of identity into SLA theories. In her study of female immigrants to Canada, Norton (2000) defined identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). The notion of identity helped reveal the relationship between the language learner and the social world and learner's varying investment in learning a second/foreign language. As an extension of identity in SLA, imagined communities (Norton, 2001) are concerned with learner aspirations when they engage with a second/foreign language. Norton (2001) argues that a language learner's imagined membership in the L2 community might produce one's imagined identity. L2 learners' imagined community not only "offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future", but may also be "a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships" (Norton & Gao, 2008, p. 114). Therefore, a learner's imagined communities and identities shadow his/her relationship with English and influence his/her interaction with the target language speakers.

Furthermore, in poststructuralist theory, identity and language are mutually constitutive

(Norton, 2000). As Weedon (1997) points out, “language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (p. 21). Also, poststructuralist inquiry emphasizes that the status of different languages, discourse or registers are unequal in the linguistic marketplace (Pavlenko, 2000). Language is viewed as a form of symbolic capital which can be later transformed into economic and social capital. The view of language as a form of symbolic capital makes it possible to “link the individual and the social in the L2 learning process, tracing ways in which particular linguistic varieties and practices become legitimized and imbued with values or stigmatized and devalued in the linguistic marketplace” (Pavlenko, 2000, p. 88). In other words, Pavlenko (2000) views a learner’s identity as a mediating factor when examining learners’ access to linguistic resources and concludes that learner status, race, ethnicity, gender, class, age and social status might mediate a learner’s access to linguistic resources, and especially, to interactional opportunities in the second/foreign language. Perhaps even more important, identities are found to be performed in situated episodes of talk (Pennycook, 2003). As Pennycook (2003) states, “it is not that people use language varieties because of who they are, but rather that we perform who we are by (among other things) using varieties of language” (p. 528). Similarly, Davies and Harre (1999) see identity as individuals’ constant positioning in interactions with others, where positioning is defined as “the discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines” (p. 37).

Discourse

This study involves interactions between speakers from different language groups and different cultures. It is tempting to view cultures as synoptic ‘things’ rather than see culture as a dynamic process in a constant state of change and always adapting to new contexts. A related concept that helps us see culture as an active process of meaning making is provided by the notion of discourse. The term ‘discourse’ has been very widely used across disciplines, including linguistics, critical theory, philosophy and social psychology. In one sense, discourse refers to “all utterances or texts which have meaning and which have some effects on the real world” (Mills, 2004, p. 6). In a second sense, discourse means a group of utterances that are inherently coherent; in this latter sense, we could talk about a discourse of Christianity, a discourse of globalization, a discourse of femininity, and so forth. A third sense is concerned more with the rules and structures under which utterances or texts are produced than with the utterances or the texts themselves. Nonetheless, these definitions are interrelated and discourse theorists adopting different theoretical stances often use them interchangeably. Therefore, I do not intend to pin down the meaning of this term narrowly, because taking an open and flexible stance to the meaning of discourse maintains its value as a heuristic tool (Phillips & Jorgenson, 2002).

I draw on the view that discourse constructs the meaning of the social world, and that, as “the fixation of a meaning within a particular domain” (Philips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 26), it is never

permanent, but formed and transformed through interaction with other discourses. As a supplement to the investigation of discourse in a more abstract sense, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (1992, 2003), which emphasizes the interaction between the individual and the social and offers detailed analytical tools for discourse, is employed in this study. According to Fairclough, discourse is a "[way] of signifying experiences from a particular perspective (1993, p. 138), and is an important form of social practice that "both reproduces and changes knowledge, identities and social relations including power relations, and at the same time is also shaped by other social practices and structures" (1992, cited in Philips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 65). Fairclough states that one of the constitutive effects of the discourse on reality is intrapersonal identity and that, "achieving social identity in a full sense is a matter of being capable of assuming social roles but personifying them, investing them with one's own personality (or personal identity), enacting them in a distinctive way" (2003, p. 161). As such, in analyzing the data, I draw on Fairclough's idea on intrapersonal identity to gain insights into the role discourse plays in the formative process of learner identity construction.

English Language Learning in the PRC

Since the implementation of its Open Door Policy and shift towards a market economy in the mid-1970s, China has experienced great economic growth and become one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. China's economy expanded at an average rate of 9.3% between 1979 and 2004 (Morrison, 2005). Since the adoption of this new policy, economic advancement has become the government's foremost concern, and cultural and economic exchanges with western countries have been encouraged. The Reform and Open Door policy has also brought China into a new era of widespread English language learning and teaching. English has become the foreign language of choice and its study and use has rapidly increased, dominating foreign language study in China. Initially reserved for international business communications, the use of English in China has gradually expanded to include everyday domestic communication between Chinese people such as email correspondence and online chatting. Such phenomena appear to validate Pride and Liu's (1988) prediction regarding the spread of English in China, that "the learning process will certainly be speeded up and, in the long run, a foundation can be laid for societal bilingualism in Chinese and English" (p. 68). People's enthusiasm for learning English comes, as well, from their realization of the potential impact English can have on their career development (Zhang, 2003). In universities in China, while passing the College English Test Band 4 (CET 4) test is a prerequisite to getting a bachelor's degree, a good performance in CET 6 test together with the high English proficiency implies is a necessary prerequisite for a host of high flying professional and academic opportunities. (Hu, 2002; Jeon & Lee, 2006). Therefore, given such powerful societal influences, English is clearly more than just another subject in the Chinese curriculum.

Chinese culture, heavily influenced by the philosophical and historical traditions of the past 5000 years, is currently undergoing a major transformation under the powerful influence of these

sociocultural reforms. Chinese people are consequently faced with a potential conflict between Chinese cultures and the cultures associated with English language. English, as the vehicle of the western cultures, tends to be seen as the language of "modernity, science and technology, success, national 'unity', democracy, and other such positive features" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, xi). To learners, it represents more than just another foreign language, and the learning of English poses some complex questions. What does English mean to Chinese people? How will English learning influence learners, with respect to not only linguistic improvement, but to their identities, values and ideologies?

The Study

The participants in this study were two female students learning English as an L2 at a leading university in China. They interacted for the duration of the study with two English L1[1] speakers who were not in any direct sense participants of this investigation. With a history of nearly ninety years, the university attended by the Chinese informants is one of the most prestigious comprehensive universities in China. Students are selected strictly according to their performance in the national higher education entrance examination. The two Chinese students were recruited from the English Department. L1 speakers of English of the same gender were chosen as the conversation partners for the participants, as it was assumed that a shared-gender relationship would be more self-sustaining and culturally congruent in China. L1 speakers of English were recruited from an international school in the city where the university is located. Chinese participants and English L1 speakers all participated in the project on a voluntary basis. In the introductory session, it was clearly indicated to the participants that this project had no intention of testing how their English language proficiency had been enhanced through the interaction and that they and their conversation partners were free to choose any topics of conversation. By accident rather than by design, both English L1 speakers were from an evangelical community. To distinguish the Chinese participants from the English L1 speaking counterparts, I capitalize the names of the two Chinese participants hereafter.

The conversational program lasted two academic semesters. JOCELYN met with Katherine every fortnight from early September 2004 to late August 2005, as did LISA and Karin. Both dyads suspended meetings during the summer and winter vacations. It is important to note that as JOCELYN and LISA systematically engaged in the dyadic interaction, they also interacted with other English L1 speakers, who were either introduced by their language partners or who they came to know on campus.

The different data sources furnished therefore different perspectives on the matters under investigation and served to facilitate triangulation of the findings. The interviews were semi-structured with open questions so as to obtain as much rich contextual, historical and individual information from the participants as possible (Patton, 1990). The periodic interviews provided opportunities to confirm and check the themes continually emerging. In spite of the greater potential for interviews to elicit deeper insights into their English learning experiences in

and out of the interactions, and to identify events that were critical for their identity construction, the presence of an interviewer may also deter the participant from responding candidly. Furthermore, while the interviewer's questions may encourage the participants to be more articulate, they may, at the same time, restrain the participant from fully presenting their first person voices. Therefore, diaries which enable a language learner to introspectively and/or retrospectively reflect on her experiences were also used in this study (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). JOCELYN and LISA returned their diaries on a three- to four- week basis through emails that recorded their experiences and reflections immediately after meetings with their English-speaking partners. They were also encouraged to take timely notes about any critical incidents around English learning that they encountered in daily life. The conversation pairs met every fortnight and conversed in English on whatever topics they were interested in for at least 20 minutes every session. The participants were responsible for recording the conversation and for sending the recordings back to me via email. The audio-taped interactions helped capture learners' moment-to-moment development in terms of identity and L2 in use at the interactional level. The data collected are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Transcribing interviews and interactions was an important and difficult process in this study due to the inherent differences between speech and writing. Moreover, according to Roberts (1997), transcription, like talk, is a social act in which transcribers, like speakers, imbue texts with personal perspectives and language ideology so obviating further any claim to absolute 'objectivity' in the resulting manuscript. Efforts were made to reproduce the talk as exactly as possible, by translating it verbatim to maintain its original flavor. In translating and transcribing the interviews, I paid strict attention to preserving and recording grammatical and language features (tense, use of modality, hedges, subjunctive moods, etc.), as these were critical to my analysis. I also checked the translation of key passages with other researchers who have expertise in both English and Chinese. Regarding the interactions in English, I transcribed five meetings for each conversation pair at intervals of about eight weeks between meetings. As with transcriptions of interviews, pauses and intonation were not incorporated, as sequence and structure were not the main focus of the critical discourse analysis. Rather, I looked at the construction of reality in and through discourse. However, repetitions, false starts, incomplete sentences and audible outbreaths (mm) were indicated because, while they were not the focus of analysis, they did offer some insight into the natural flow of the interactions between a learner and an L1 speaker. Nonetheless, the transcriptions are my representation of the interviews and interactions and, as Green, Franquiz and Dixon (1997, p. 173) point out, a transcript is to be regarded as a "partial representation" of a spoken interaction.

With the help of Nvivo 7, and guided by the research questions, the emerging categories and subcategories in interactions were used for the initial qualitative analysis. Comparisons were made across dyads to elicit some general understanding of interactions, and also within a dyad to identify the patterns peculiar to each.

Drawing on analytical tools from Fairclough (2003), I examine the construction of identities through deontic modality, epistemic modality and evaluation. Deontic and epistemic modality indicate speakers' certainty with and commitment to necessity, obligation, truth and the reliability of the sources of knowledge in one's claims (Fairclough, 2003). Deontic modality is often realized through modal auxiliary verbs such as 'must', 'may', 'can', and 'should', modal adjectives such as 'possible' and 'probable', as well as model adverbs such as 'probably', 'obviously' and 'definitely', to indicate necessity, obligation, and permission. Epistemic modality deals with the degrees of certainty with and commitment to truth and the reliability of the sources of knowledge in one's claims (Chafe & Nichols, 1986). It is often achieved through tense, hedges, subjectively or objectively marked claims, intonation and tag questions. Hedges, such as 'a bit', 'or something', 'sort of' and 'kind of', 'it seems' or 'it appears' help the speaker distance him/herself from the proposition. First-and third-person statements also produce different modality effects. For example, in "I think they go too far that way", the speaker makes explicit their degree of affinity with a proposition and mitigates the effect of the proposition, while in "They do go too far that way", the speaker allocates the perspective to some other individual or group, which indicates some form of power. Evaluation involves statements about what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad. In this study, a lot of instances such as "that's great", "you are right" were identified as part of both the learners' and the English L1 speakers' responses to each other.

In addition to the examination of deontic modality, epistemic modality and evaluation in utterances, I also look at learners' discursive strategies in establishing identities. Here logics of equivalence outlined by Fairclough (2003, p. 87) are of relevance. The logic of equivalence, which is established by placing words of similar ideological import throughout one's text to strengthen a particular ideological effect (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), was considered. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) theorize the construction of antagonistic relations in political processes through the logic of equivalence, which "consists in the dissolution of the particular identities of subjects within a discourse by the creation of a purely negative identity that is seen to threaten them" (Howarth, 2000, p. 107). The textual analysis of identities is based on Fairclough's (2003) assumption that speakers' self-identification is, to a large extent, reflected in what they are committed to in text.

Bearing in mind the broadly pedagogical nature of the interactional context, it was also important to remain conscious of the possibility that learners might possibly craft specific subject positions in order to seek the approval of their interlocutors when struggling to define and delineate relationships – something perhaps less likely in non-hierarchical relationships. To avoid the possible equation of utterance and identity in analysis, the texts from diaries and interviews are analyzed to cross-reference the texts in interactions. Analyzing data from different sources also guards against criticisms of CDA that all text interpretations are filtered by the analyst's subjectivity (Fairclough, 2003). Moreover, member checking is also involved to enhance the validity of the interpretations. All excerpts in this paper are translated versions from the original Chinese unless otherwise stated. To record a time sequence, the extracts from different data sources were labeled with a series number indicating in which month of the investigation they

were collected (e.g., Meeting 1, month 1).

Findings

Affordance of the interactional context on national identity construction

In this study, the participants' national identity emerged as a theme and appeared to shape and be shaped by the interactions with English L1 speakers. Whereas Katherine's positive attitudes towards Chinese society and cultures were found to facilitate the construction of JOCELYN's national identity, Karin's negative attitudes seemed to arouse LISA's desire to defend hers/her national identity. Evidence that interlocutors made different linguistic choices to construct a national identity or an 'us' or 'otherization' discourse in interaction could be found.

JOCELYN adored American culture in her first and second years in university (Diary 2). Interestingly, JOCELYN's sense of being Chinese was strengthened after she started interacting with her conversation partner, Katherine, who was an ardent lover of Chinese culture.

> Since I met Katherine, her enthusiasm deeply influences me and leads me to the nearly lost, or to put it more precisely, ignored ancient Chinese culture. I make a decision to follow her example. I will take the time time to learn Chinese culture and try to be a purely complete Chinese. Chinese culture is so dazzling and colorful that we have to spend whole l life studying; we could only touch a tiny part of it. However, I still believe that only when we Chinese understand and feel proud of Chinese culture, could it gain Westerners' appreciation. (Diary 8, month 6, original in English)

The present tense in the above statement expressed JOCELYN's strong affinity with truth, as she said that "her enthusiasm deeply influences me", and "I make a decision to follow her example". JOCELYN's high affinity with the necessity was shown in the use of "have to" instead of 'could', 'might' or 'should'. In the last sentence, JOCELYN used a personalized "I believe" to express her commitment to truth, and also said "we Chinese" to indicate her solidarity with Chineseness and to establish a dichotomy between Chinese and foreigners. Furthermore, her positive evaluation of Chinese culture was shown in the adjectives "dazzling" and "colorful". JOCELYN's national identity as a Chinese thus gradually emerged from her statements.

Similar examples could be also found in interactions. The following excerpt occurred when JOCELYN and Katherine were talking about Katherine's interest in Chinese culture:

Excerpt 1 (JOCELYN and Katherine, meeting 1, month 1)

1 JOCELYN: you like Chinese painting?

2 Katherine: yeah I just learnt to paint

3 JOCELYN: this is done by yourself?

4 Katherine: yeah, I have different teachers

5 JOCELYN: oh how long have you been studying Chinese painting?

6 Katherine: five years

7 JOCELYN: wow you did much better, I am a Chinese but cannot do Chinese painting. You are a

foreigner, but you are studying it, you are better than I am

In turns 1, 3 and 5, JOCELYN posed three questions about Katherine's interest in Chinese culture and her efforts to learn Chinese painting. JOCELYN's national identity was construed in turn 7, when she said "I am a Chinese but cannot do Chinese painting, you are a foreigner but you are studying it, you are better than I". It seemed that instead of viewing it as a personal interest, JOCELYN connected it to the responsibility of a Chinese to maintain his/her mother culture. Katherine's enthusiasm towards Chinese culture made JOCELYN strengthen her sense of being a Chinese. For example, rather than use the first person pronoun 'we' to construct an 'us' community, JOCELYN adopted the third-person pronoun "you" when talking about Katherine's interest, so establishing her national stance.

Unlike Katherine, LISA's conversation partner Karin did not hold very favorable attitudes towards Chinese cultures and living in China. LISA consequently felt almost obliged to defend the image of China in interactions. For example, in the following excerpt, Karin compared America and China in the aspect of orderliness and implied her preference for the American way.

Excerpt 2 (LISA and Karin, meeting 4,month 8)

1 Karin: yeah, I think America is more orderly

2 LISA: orderly?

3 Karin: you know how in China people in China don't wait in line, people just crowd, and kind of push in a queue [laugh]

4 LISA: oh, sometimes, maybe, it happened, in the past, but most of the time, nowadays, people are orderly in China

In turn 1, Karin stated that "America is more orderly", though she used "I think" to moderate the effect. In turn 3, Karin's statements were quite strong, with no hedging or modality, when she described the queuing problem in China. Responding to Karin's comments that Chinese people "don't wait in line" and "push in" in turn 3, LISA indicates her reservations. LISA used "sometimes" and "maybe" to hedge "it happened", which reflected her reluctance to accept Karin's negative evaluation of one aspect of the social system in China. LISA also used the past tense in "it happened" and "in the past" to emphasize the effect. There is a shift from past to present tense, signaled by "but", which indicated she had a stronger sense of the later statement that "people are orderly in China" (Yule, 1998).

Constraints of the interactional context on identity construction

However, as will be shown in this section, due to the specific nature of the interactional context, which was between an English learner and an English L1 speaker, and thus unavoidably hierarchical, learners were found to construct identities, sometimes at odds with those that were enacted in their diaries and interviews, in an appeal for the approval of their interlocutors.

Actually, as early as late 2003, JOCELYN was converted to Christianity under the influence of an English-speaking Christian group. However, JOCELYN admitted that she was not as pious a Christian as her Christian friends were:

> I am not a passionately pious believer, whenever I learn something from Buddhism and Confucius, I want to compare it to the Christian view, for in my heart, they belong to Chinese culture, they are my roots and I feel much more familiar with them. But every time when I read the Bible, I also feel it is quite true. As a result, I am confused, usually. (Diary 10, month 7, original in English)

JOCELYN used discursive strategies to establish different relationships with Buddhism, Confucius and Christianity in the above excerpt. JOCELYN employed categorical assertion "they are my roots" to describe Buddhism and Confucius, while using "I also feel it is quite true" to describe Christianity, in which the adverbial "quite" lowered the degree of certainty. From "they are my roots", we could find her strong sense of being a Chinese and the contradictory feelings she, as a Christian, had towards Christianity which she believed was rooted in the western world. The conflict between her identity as a Chinese and that as a Christian emerged.

Therefore, as she communicated more with the English-speaking group, JOCELYN started to ponder on the discourse of Christianity in China.

> They tell me that I should take missionary work as my mission. But I believe I still need to learn more about Christianity and I cannot persuade others to believe before I still need to think about the belief. But every time when I showed my doubt they would think I was guilty. I don't think they are sensible in this aspect. Former and modern Western missionaries have never given up their efforts of disseminating Christianity in China. (Interview 2, month 8)

JOCELYN didn't feel comfortable when English L1 speakers ask her to "take missionary work as my mission" when she still had a lot of questions about Christianity. JOCELYN gave an unfavorable evaluation of some English-speaking Christians' zeal to spread their religious belief in China, saying "I don't think they are sensible in this aspect". JOCELYN's critical reflection on Christianity in China was from a historical perspective, which was evident in the last sentence, in which the present tense was used to show her high commitment to the truth of the proposition that the Western missionaries have been trying to disseminate Christianity in China.

However, JOCELYN's uncertainty about Christian beliefs seemed to be concealed intentionally in interaction with Katherine:

Excerpt 3 (meeting 2, month 4)

1. JOCELYN: I attended our church activity last night
2. Katherine: oh! What was that like?
3. JOCELYN: learnt a lot. I was touched by the moving stories the sisters and brothers shared with us, about taking care of the kids at the orphanage. I think the current Chinese society needs Christianity, this will be good to guide people to lead a more valuable life
4. Katherine: exactly! Exactly!

In the above excerpt, all the comments JOCELYN made about the church activity were positive. This seemed to be contradictory to the identity she constructed in the above texts from interviews and diaries in which she established an inherent opposition between Christianity and the religious beliefs rooted in China, and reflected critically on the dissemination of Christianity in China. It could be observed that in an interactional context where the interlocutors held unequal symbolic

resources due to the unequal distribution of linguistic resources regarding the language being used, the language learners tried to craft a specific identity in order to maintain the relationship with L1 speakers.

While LISA interacted with Karin and other members from the Christian English-speaking community, unlike JOCELYN, LISA didn't become a Christian. She said:

> I can feel Karin to a certain degree tries to persuade me to believe in God, although indirectly. I understand that the feeling of believing in something is really worthwhile, but it is far beyond the imagination of a Chinese person. You know, Chinese are seldom religious. After all, although I really appreciate this kind of belief, and the feeling of having something to trust and of being protected, I will not fall back upon the Christian church so easily. Life is not easy for everyone, and I prefer to search for the right path all by myself. (Diary 4, month 4, original in English)

LISA used "to a certain extent" and "feel" to mitigate the attempts of Christian groups to persuade her to believe in Christianity. LISA positively evaluated religious belief, but showed her lack of acceptance by stating that Christianity was "far beyond the imagination of a Chinese person". Here LISA constructed the opposition between being Chinese and believing in Christianity. LISA's strong assertion was also reflected in the personalized and categorical "I will not….." LISA also tried to strengthen the effect of her disagreement with the English speakers in terms of Christian beliefs, in the personalized statement starting with "I prefer" and through adding "all" before "by myself".

Similar to JOCELYN's intentional subject position construction in interaction, in order to maintain the relationship with her Christian interlocutor, in the following excerpts, LISA also formed an identity fundamentally at odds with that was enacted in her diary entry above:

Excerpt 4 (meeting 2,month 4)

1 LISA: and I want to say another day, now we are learning Bible

2 Karin: oh really?

3 LISA: yeah Bible I bought one uh Bible, I found it is very what fantastic?

4 Karin: fantastic

5 LISA: fantastic, I think the stories are very very interesting

6 Karin: mm

7 LISA: Ok, last week I read stories on the Bible

8 Karin: mm

9 LISA: and I know what kind of man Jesus Christ is

10 Karin: mm

11 LISA: I learn the story

12 Karin: what did you learn? What story did you read?

13 LISA: how, what, where he was born and what kind of, what, what did he do? And how did he die

14 Karin: oh

15 LISA: mm, I found him really a great man, really really a great man

16 Karin: mm

17 LISA: I, I think it is not strange that so many people admire him, and believe him, to believe him as God and pray to him

18 Karin: mm

19 LISA: yeah

20 Karin: yeah

In spite of the fact that LISA didn't have much interest in Christianity, she sought to extend their friendship by reading the English version of the Bible for several months "for the purpose of finding out some common topics with Karin" (Interview 3), and initiating topics Karin might have interest in. LISA showed her positive attitudes towards Christianity by using words with strong positive affective connotations such as "fantastic", "very very interesting", "really really a great man" in turns 3, 4 and 15, which obviously contradicted her true subject position with Christianity constructed as revealed in the previous diary entry. Asked about why she had indicated strong interest in Christianity in interaction with Karin, LISA admitted that it was not totally genuine and that she did so with the hope of establishing a more harmonious relationship with her evangelical interlocutor (Interview 3). Nonetheless, her efforts did not seem to draw Karin more actively into the conversation, as reflected by Karin's brief response in most turns.

Like JOCELYN, LISA's national identity was constructed through comparison and establishing certain oppositions:

> I find that many Americans are quite versatile. They can play several musical instruments. I am surprised that they have very good chances to enrich themselves in childhood. When we Chinese are young, we are usually under great pressure to finish lots of homework and pass various exams, and have little chance to nurture hobbies. I have great interest in American education system. But I also think Chinese education is suitable for our current situation, so it is unnecessary to distinguish which is good and which is bad. (Diary 1, month 1, original in English)

LISA opened the statement with "I find" and used the categorical "are" to indicate her close affinity with the generalizations that "many Americans are quite versatile" and "can play several musical instruments". Based on the analytical framework provided by Fairclough (2003), we can understand that LISA's generalized statements highlighted the process of discursive construction involved in establishing systems of knowledge and belief and identities, since clearly not all Americans can play several musical instruments, while surely some Chinese youths have the chance to nurture hobbies. Despite her reservations, LISA still provided a positive evaluation of Chinese education, saying it "is suitable for" the current situation. LISA also regarded it as "unnecessary" to debate which education system was better. The inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" constructed an "us" group and an 'other' group, through which LISA's national identity was construed by identification with the former and opposition to the latter. Overall, and consistent with the pattern observed in JOCELYN's case, this indicates her construction of identity through difference (Connolly, 2002). As Connolly (2002, p. 44) states,

> Identity and difference are bound together. It may be impossible to reconstitute the relation to the second without confounding the experiences of the first. And that may help to explain the tenacity of

resistance to reconstituting the tenor of these relations.

Both participants appeared to establish identities in interactions contradictory to those enacted in diaries and interviews. It indicated that the characteristics of utterances cannot be assumed to be a direct and clear representation of identity, but rather that the situated context in which the utterances take place needs to be accounted for in analysis.

Identity construction imbued with sociocultural meanings

As will be shown in this section, the socio-cultural context in China and learners' increasing knowledge about English speaking countries impacted on their identity construction as they interacted with English L1 speakers. The converge of 'modernity' accompanied by globalization as well as 'tradition' in Chinese cultures in current China, together with the rapid development of Chinese society, complicated participants' English language learner identities.

Discussions with Katherine about educational and social problems pushed JOCELYN to learn more about Chinese and American society on her own (Interview 3). JOCELYN gradually developed a new view of the Chinese and American education systems and societies, without particularly favoring either one. She said:

> I think that China and American societies both have problems. In China, the moral education and democracy are not good, but in the US, the social problems such as the teenager crimes, drugs and gays or lesbians are very serious. I believe that now American education is very weak in the fields of science, while China is very strong in science education. So I believe now the two education systems both go to a certain extreme. Katherine hopes that American education should re-direct part of children's energy. I hope that Chinese education should help the children learn more than the textbooks. (Interview3, month 12)

JOCELYN's commitment to the statement was expressed through the use of the present tense in "I think that China and America both have problems". In the second sentence, JOCELYN used the categorical language "are" when pointing out the disadvantages of the Chinese and American education systems, without using hedges such as 'I think' or 'I feel', so expressing a high degree of affinity with truth of the claim. In "so I believe now the two education systems both go to a certain extreme", JOCELYN made explicit her affinity with the truth of the claim by using "I believe". In the text, JOCELYN also employed evaluative words like "not good", "serious", "very strong" and "very weak" to express her degree of commitment concerning what is good or bad. Positive evaluations were given to the American system through reference to its 'democracy' and 'strong moral education', while negative evaluations of the Chinese system were associated with comments about its 'lack of democracy' and 'weak moral education'. However, JOCELYN gave the Chinese system a positive evaluation for 'being strong in science education' and 'having social harmony', and the American system a negative evaluation for 'being weak in science education' and 'having social problems'. Overall, what JOCELYN viewed as true was that both Chinese and American education systems require improvement. Her intrapersonal identity was created through her commitments, reflected in her deployment of modality and evaluation, and through a series of

identifications and differentiations. It also reflects that in the process of English learning, JOCELYN developed a stronger sense of being Chinese and reflected on the discourse of Christianity in China. In addition, her perceptions of Chinese and Western cultures became deeper. Instead of choosing one culture as superior, JOCELYN compared them and pointed out their differences.

JOCELYN's identity is particularly striking in the following excerpt when she discussed China's transformational changes with Katherine, and this excerpt offers a good example of the social impacts on learner's identity construction:

Excerpt 6 (meeting 3, month 6)

1 Jocelyn: you know our university is a key university. Several years ago , it was very easy for us to find a job….. But now it is not easy for the whole class to find a job now because it is very competitive in society

2 Katherine: yeah it is

3 Jocelyn: yeah so after only more than a dozen, more than 13 years, the situation is so different, sometimes I think it is a good thing because the rapid development of society can push us to use all of their potential. I feel excited whenever I imagine the competitive, energetic society I will enter after graduation. I will equip myself with more skills now. I will practice my spoken English even harder.

JOCELYN illustrated the social change in China by referring to the employment situation of college graduates. In turn 1, the shift from a past tense (several years ago, it was…) to a present tense (not it is…), which was signified by "but", reflected JOCELYN's high affinity with the latter statement. In turn 3, her positive feelings about the swift evolution of China were obvious in the use of evaluations such as "excited" and "energetic". JOCELYN thought of spoken English as one of the key skills that would enable her to survive in a modern, highly competitive society.

LISA said that although the topics of their conversations on American society and cultures were not as profound as she had expected, she still thought they had taught her some aspects of American life. She said:

> Through the conversations, I learn about some part of American life. This clearly shows the difference between US and China. Although living there is generally advantageous, the US has its own problems. This reminds me that there's no perfect society in this world, even in the most developed country. The conversation helps me know the American way of life in greater depth, and enables me to judge America more comprehensively. (Diary 5, month 5, original in English)

LISA's high affinity with her statements about American society was reflected in her comment that the "US has its own problems" in which no modality or hedges were used. The information she gained from the interaction helped her "judge American more comprehensively". LISA also mentioned elsewhere that gaining more understanding of American society deepened her desire to study in France, and reminded her that studying in a foreign country meant not only dealing with language problems but with cultural adaptation (Interview 4, Jan 6 2006).

The rapid development of Chinese society was found to serve as a symbolic resource when LISA interacted with Karin. However, LISA only expressed this in an ambiguous way so as to avoid

any direct conflict that may adversely affect their relationship:

Excerpt 7 (meeting 4, month 8)

1. LISA: you know, I watched a TV program before I came here, it was, it was said that the economy of China has become the fourth largest in the world, wow, so quick
2. Karin: oh I have no idea about the economy of the world
3. LISA: China is still a developing country, it cannot be compared with the developed countries, like the US
4. Karin: right
5. LISA: did you learn Chinese language and history?
6. Karin: no I don't know anything about Chinese history, well I learnt Spanish as my second language in college
7. LISA: Spanish is very hard to learn?

In the above excerpt, Karin provided two negative responses to LISA's initiation about China's development, Chinese history as well as language in turn 2 and 6. Being aware of this, LISA compared China with the US in turn 3 to stress the point that China was still in the developing stage. In turn 7, LISA switched the topic from China to Spanish learning. In a later interview, answering my prompt about the topic-shifting in the above excerpt in interaction, LISA said that she intentionally did so to move the conversation on:

> China is advancing at an amazingly swift pace. At present there is no other country in the world that can compare with China's dynamism… I didn't emphasize it when I was talking with Karin because I found that she had little interest in this topic. (Interview 3, month 12)

The interesting point – and one we have observed repeatedly already – was that JOCELYN and LISA made efforts to define the cultures of China and America through comparison and contrast. In the era of globalization, English learners in China tend to see themselves at a crossroads between the two dominant discourses: one, a discourse concerning Chinese culture with its long traditions and China's rapid advancement nowadays, and the other, a discourse of modernity that is accompanying the spread of the English language. By constantly comparing and trying to identify the pros and cons of the two cultures, learners' identities were shaped as they positioned themselves in relation to broader social discourses.

Imagination and identity

As will be demonstrated in this section, the data analysis revealed that the learners' prior histories had an influence on their relationship with English and their identity construction in interactions. The historically constructed nature of JOCELYN's relationship with English could be found in the following excerpt from an interview:

> Since childhood, my parents told me many stories about the lives of successful people, such as politicians, scientists, musicians and writers. Inspired by my parents' encouragement, I dreamed of being a successful person in the future and of leading a meaningful life….. They often emphasized the importance of English and told me that English was critical to my future career….. My parents have very

high expectations of me, hoping that I can be No1 in all examinations and have a prosperous career in the future, and to a certain extent I have been working very hard so as not to make them feel disappointed. (Diary 15, month 12, original in English)

Jocelyn's family had a significant effect in moulding her ambitions and imaginations, which might be reflected in her answer to my prompt about her family's influence on her learning trajectory. The many inspiring stories told her by her parents together with their high expectations of her had pushed her to strive for a successful and meaningful life, an indication that her L2 identities were historically constructed. The importance of English, as emphasized by her parents, and was later incorporated into her expectations about the future, was found to exert effects on her identity construction in interactions. For example, in the following excerpt, JOCELYN talked about her plan to study overseas:

Excerpt 8 (meeting 5, month 12)

1 JOCELYN: the professor professor and I talked about my future,

2 Katherine: mm

3 JOCELYN: and I think I really want to learn more beyond just English because I think English is merely/just a tool, I really want to know more other knowledge in order to enrich my mind and my background knowledge, I think for a long time I have been quite interested in education, maybe I have talked about it with you

4 Katherine: mm you talked about it when you are doing research on Christian school in China

5 JOCELYN: yes yes I think that program helped me a lot, and my teacher says if you really want to learn more, maybe I think you will have a try to apply for the graduate school in the US

6 Katherine: mm

7 JOCELYN: my teacher said my my GAP

8 Katherine: GPA

9 JOCELYN: GPA is good, is very high, so if I can have a good score in GRE and TOEFL

10 Katherine: mm

11 JOCELYN: it is a great opportunity for me to apply for a college or a university in the US for graduate study

12 Katherine: what college?

13 JOCELYN: I don't know so right now I just think about it because I have to choose my major, but I really really want to study in the US [laugh]

14 Katherine: you are right, you will learn a lot there, please let me know if you need help with the application

15 JOCELYN: yeah, thank you

In turn 3, JOCELYN used "I think" three times to frame her statements, positioning herself closely with the statements that she wanted to use English as a tool to equip herself with greater knowledge. Here English language skills became an important precondition for her plan and JOCELYN's relationship with the English language was mediated by her wish to study in one of the English-speaking countries, particularly the US. It was found that through imagining such a

future, JOCELYN experienced an ongoing process of identity formation in which English was found to play multiple and shifting roles. JOCELYN's firm intention to study in the US invoked Katherine's identity as an American, and reduced the distance between them. This is evidenced by Katherine's voluntarily offering help for JOCELYN"s possible application for English study in turn 14

English major though she was, LISA did not see a close relationship between English and her future. She explained why she chose English as her major in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 9 (meeting 1,month 1)

1 Karin: is your major something you wanted to do?

2 LISA: I studied English, I do not like English enough for me to choose English as a major, I chose this subject, I chose the subject I am studying in at university, because I didn't like economics

3 Karin: economics?

4 LISA: yeah I don't like economics

5 Karin: yes

6 LISA: I want to learn advertising

7 Karin: mm

8 LISA: my mother did not allow me to do that, because it is so far away, in Nanjing, ok you can choose English and choose what you want to do later, so I live in my hometown.. I am thinking about studying abroad

9 Karin: mm

10 LISA: America, England, or France?

11 Karin: oh

12 LISA: because I learn French as my second language, French is so hard

13 Karin: harder than English?

14 LISA: yeah it is harder

15 Karin: oh

16 LISA: before I learned French, someone said, yeah French is the most beautiful language in the world, I think so too, what do you think?

17 Karin: I don't know, maybe [laugh]

LISA used modality in turn 1, saying she did not "like English so much", which indicated that although she had little interest in English, as an English major, LISA didn't want to distance herself too much from English. By contrast, LISA used the present tense, with no modality, to show her strong affinity with the statement that she wanted to learn advertising in turn 6. LISA's relationship with English appeared to become ambivalent because French was needed if she was to study in France. Her preference for France and the French language was demonstrated in turn 16, in which she quoted others' view that "French is the most beautiful language in the world" by way of legitimizating her point, and then identified with this viewpoint by explicitly adding "I think so too". LISA's relationship with English was constructed through her positive evaluation of the French language and culture, and in her negative attitudes towards English as well as through the high

affinity, evident in the choice of the present tense with no compromising hedging devices, when she described the process of choosing her major subject. However, Karin's response in turn 17 indicated her actual non-confirmative answer to LISA's enthusiastic endorsement of the French language. Using two hedges, "I don't know" and "maybe", Karin, did not echo LISA's view.

As also reflected from the data in one interview, Lisa's imaginative portrayal of life studying in France was historically shaped:

> Researcher: what was you your ideal work when you were young?
>
> Lisa: when I was very young, in junior high school, I dreamt of becoming an advertiser
>
> Researcher: why?
>
> Lisa: at that time I thought I was very creative, and had good sense of arts and fashion, and I was very much suited to becoming an advertiser (Interview 3, month 8).

Either the dream of becoming an arts designer or her appreciation of the French language had alienated her considerably from English and had restricted her learning behavior, as was reflected in her musings in one further interview, "I think that my appreciation of French culture is fundamentally at odds with my role as an English major….. I feel that English is remote from me now" (Interview 3, month 12).

Discussion

This paper examines the discursive construction of learners' identities in the context of dyadic interactions. Moving beyond the focus of most interaction studies on learners' language acquisition, it examines the constitutive role of discourse in the development of learners' identities. The findings in the interactions are cross-referenced to the data from interviews and diaries. When analyzing the data, I have remained aware of different possible interpretations and the ambivalence of language, text and discourse, while looking for recurring patterns across texts from different sources in order to reach reliable interpretations.

Perhaps supplementary to the previous findings on L2 learners' identity, the identities of JOCELYN and LISA were found to be constructed through their discursive strategies of establishing oppositions and differences. JOCELYN's identity as a Christian wins her legitimacy in her interaction with Katherine, but through her constantly comparing and constructing two cultures, many points of opposition emerge. In her discursively constructed oppositions, JOCELYN constructed conflicting identities, such as a Chinese who loves her mother culture, a simultaneous interpreter and so on, as she provides changing evaluations about, and developed different degrees of affinity with the cultures in these two broad categories. JOCELYN says "I am on the edge of the Chinese and English cultures" and her appreciation of the Western cultures is always framed by her strong affinity with Chinese cultures. JOCELYN's relationship with English is subtly influenced by her conflicting identities, in spite of the ongoing importance English held for her, in that she discovered the politics and concealed values embedded in any language. LISA doesn't see English as critical in the process of pursuing future career goals. In interacting with her English-speaking conversation partner, the second respondent LISA draws on the symbolic

resources of her identities as a Chinese woman who loves art, music and history and as Francophile to balance the power relations. LISA's identities are constructed in the differences between her own values and the Western values epitomized by Karin's utterances. LISA appears to construct her identity through the differences between 'us' and 'others' and by employing different pronouns when explaining why English is prevalent across the world, whereas Chinese is not, a process in which her strong sense of Chinese identity emerges. LISA became aware of the patterns of colonization by the English language throughout the world, and her unwillingness to study in America can be understood as her way of resisting it. Fairclough's CDA proves to be a useful theoretical and analytical tool in investigating L2 learners' identity. Through understanding the shaping effects of the particular interactive setting, the broader social context and learners' learning history on identity, identity itself has been explored in an integrative way and is consequently conceptualized as interpersonally, historically and socially constructed (diagrammed in Figure 1 below).

Insert Figure 1 about here

As revealed by the identity studies which show how learning contexts influence the development of learners' identities (e.g., Block, 2006, 2007; Norton, 2000), the situated, jointly constructed context of dyadic interaction has influence on learners, impacting their future goals, values and concerns. Impressed by her conversation partner's (Katherine) strong interest in Chinese culture, JOCELYN established a stronger sense of Chinese identity, while still maintaining favorable attitudes towards some aspects of Western culture. Her friendship with Katherine and the interactional context motivated her to learn more about Western education, society and politics. Through interaction, LISA gained more knowledge about American society, and ideologies, to which she had had no direct previous exposure. Karin's relatively negative attitudes towards Chinese society and cultures, instead of weakening LISA's national identity, pushed her to look at things from her own perspective and establish a stronger sense of nationality. Her somewhat aloof relationship with one English L1 speaker and the unfavorable feelings she harbored towards America influenced her against studying in America.

In addition to the affordance of the interactional context on learners' identity construction, this context also exercises constraints on it, as in such kinds of interaction between English L1 and L2 speakers, there is, unavoidably, a power structure different from that in voluntary non-hierarchical relationships. The findings indicate that English learner identity has been shaped to accommodate to the interactive setting. Within the somewhat pedagogical relationship, the learners were found to sometimes craft an identity that helps move the interaction ahead and appeals to the interlocutors. For instance, despite LISA's pride in the rapid economic advancement in China as well as the complexity of Chinese language and her avowed intent to adopt these as the symbolic resources to balance the power status in interaction, she chose to avoid these topics after sensing that her interlocutor had little interest in Chinese society - intentionally switching therefore to talk to the predictable topic of Christianity. Furthermore, the learners' utterances in interactions reveal both a mastery of discourse for display and appropriation of discourse as partially constitutive of

one's identity. Thus, for example, although JOCELYN had ambiguous feelings about Christianity in China, as construed in interviews and diaries, she exhibited favorable attitudes to Christianity in interactions in order to establish a closer relationship with her interlocutor. Moreover, and perhaps paradoxically, JOCELYN became a Christian herself, which might be understood as her appropriation of the Christianity discourse, despite the somewhat fragile nature of her conversion, and this new creed then being partially constitutive of her identity. In both JOCELYN's and LISA's cases, identity construction is found to be multiple, contradictory and a site of struggle (Norton, 2000).

The findings support the contention that L2 learners' identity should be examined across their whole learning trajectory, from the past and present to the future (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Lave& Wenger, 1991; Norton, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Their learning history and their future imaginations are fundamental in understanding their present linguistic behaviors that construe identity in interactions. Thus, for example, we see that JOCELYN who had established a close relationship between her imaginative projections for the future and English since her childhood appeared to reach a solidarity with her conversation partner, whereas Lisa failed to do so partly due to the open expression of her preference inclination for the French language and cultures.

The rapid transformation of Chinese society also played a part in shaping learners' identity in interactions. On the one hand, the spread of English as a global language implied an asymmetry between the participants in this study of English learners and their L1 speaking interlocutors. On the other hand, the increasing emphasis on and appreciation of Chinese traditional cultures in present Chinese society, much neglected in the 1960s and 70s in China (Li, D., 1999)), and the emerging powerful status of China in the global community, jointly empowered the learners in interaction. The struggle of learners in the process of constructing identities can be understood as a representation of the negotiation between the global status of English language in the era of globalization and the increasing symbolic power acquired by Chinese language as a result of the economic advancement of China today. In addition, the social influence on identity once again indicates that identity is a dynamic and multiple construct, imbued with ideological and political meanings.

The analyses of the interaction between language learners and L1 speakers suggest that interaction in the dyadic context might be a potential learning context. However, we should remain cautious since although learners have reported to and seemed actually to have enhanced their fluency, enlarged their vocabulary, increased their confidence in learning English, and learned more about L2-related cultures (JOCELYN, Interview 4; LISA, Interview 4), the frequent moments of negotiating politics, religious beliefs, values and cultures between interlocutors were found to have an impact on the formation of learners' identities, and to influence the ways in which they engage with the learning communities, and the ways they negotiate and coordinate with social discourses. This raises the question as to whether the systematic interaction between English learners and English L1 speakers is beneficial in learning a second/foreign language per se, or is another form of English 'invading' other nations linguistically and culturally? In LISA's case, can we

interpret her subtle attitude towards English and her equally subtle relationship with her interlocutor as a learner's counter-measure to the imperialism of English language in China? In the era of globalization and the discourse of Christianity, the meanings embedded in such kinds of dyadic interaction between English learners and English L1 speakers merit further exploration.

Conclusion

In sum, this study has taken a fresh look at L2 learners' identities, a topic that has gained increasing attention in the L2 learning and teaching field. In doing so, a critical discourse analysis approach has been implemented to investigate English L2 learners' identity construction through micro-level dyadic interactions with English L1 speakers, while simultaneously encompassing the histories of participants, their imaginations and the macro sociocultural setting of China. Utilizing both a CDA framework and the theoretical concepts that have been developed through previous studies (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997; Gee, 1996; MacLure, 1993; Norton Pierce, 1997; Weedon, 1987;), it was possible to conceptualize learner identity in interaction as interpersonally, historically and socially constructed and discursively manifested. Fairclough's CDA model provides useful analytical tools within a principled method that is in alignment with the theoretical orientation of this study. By putting English learners' identity under the microscope, yet linking this phenomenon to history and the broader social context, the present study has shed light on the complexity of the interaction between Chinese English L2 learners' identity, and the current social and economic changes in China as well as the perceived global domination of English. Further research is now needed to provide not only a better understanding of English learners' identity in interaction with English L1 speakers but also of the discursive strategies that can shape identity to fit the contours of the interactive setting in mainland China and, likewise, in other contexts where similarly dramatic sociocultural, economic and political changes are occurring and having important impacts on learner identities.

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[1] Since the constructs of NS and NNS are psychologically, culturally and ideologically value-laden (Cook, 1999; Davies, 2003), in most sections of this thesis, the terminology L1 and L2 speakers of English will be used instead of native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs).

Table 1 Dataset summary

Data	Method of collection	Quantity	Language
Interaction (over one academic year)	The conversation pairs met and conversed for at least 20 minutes every two weeks. Five meetings of each dyad, with an interval of about eight weeks, were adopted for analysis. The audio-recorded interactions were transcribed by the researcher.	Jocelyn (5) Lisa (5)	English
Interviews (over one academic year)	Interviews were conducted in Chinese with the participants every four months over a period of one year.	Jocelyn (3) Lisa (3)	Chinese
Diaries (over one academic year)	The informants wrote the diaries on a three- to four- week basis and sent the diary to me through email.	Jocelyn (15) Lisa (12)	English (75%) Chinese (25%)

Figure 1 Learners' identity in a Dyadic Interactional Setting