Stories of autonomy: international students successfully surviving, striving and thriving in a second-language ecosystem

By

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Abstract

Out-of-class language learning is an under-researched area of education which has started to receive more interest in the last decade. Research into autonomy in language learning has tended to investigate learners engaged in language courses. This omits swathes of international students at UK universities who engage in programmes in English, a second language. The research attention these learners have received often highlights the challenges they experience transitioning culturally and linguistically to new academic environments. Despite the challenges investigated, over 140,000 international students successfully graduated from UK universities in 2016-17 (UKCISA, 2019). Few studies have considered the out-of-class learning that likely contributes to this success until now. This study incorporated literature on autonomy from general education, adult education and language education to consider the out-of-class learning of three successful international students.

I conducted a small-scale longitudinal investigation of learning behaviours that three Chinese postgraduates engaged in beyond the classroom during their UK business Master's programmes, and their associated beliefs. The nationality and programme selection for investigation was determined by the UK-wide statistics showing that Chinese students on business programmes were the largest proportion of postgraduate students divided by nationality and study programme (UKCISA, 2019). A contextual approach to beliefs was taken, and so beliefs were considered 'contextual, dynamic and social' (Barcelos, 2003, p. 20). At the beginning of the participants' academic year in the UK, I investigated the historical behaviours and beliefs around language learning. This provided insights into prior learning beliefs and behaviours and the extent to which learner autonomy had been restrained, ignored or encouraged in each participant's language learning experience. The research continued by exploring participants' unfolding perceptions of their contexts and the interplay between beliefs, behaviours, context and experience as the year progressed.

A multiple case study was used in that each participant was one case with beliefs and behaviours conceptualised as particular to that person. Data was gathered through 90-minute in-depth interviews four times at approximately four-month intervals. The longitudinal nature of the interviews enabled the

complexity of the participants' language-related engagement to emerge. Consequently, it was possible to identify participants' varying perceptions of certain contextual affordances and obstacles such as interactions with others who appeared welcoming or judgemental. It was also possible to identify when and why Chinese was used socially and academically. Of particular interest were perceptions of the importance of first and second language use for particular purposes, and how this changed. A narrative analysis was applied to the data in order to present the findings chronologically thereby highlighting both the relevance of experience on consequent perceptions of contexts and the interplay between beliefs and behaviours.

Overall, the extent to which the participants engaged with living and studying in an ecosystem dominated by English did not appear to be related to their language level prior to arrival. Instead, competing priorities, chance encounters, and perceptions of others' attitudes influenced their beliefs and behaviours throughout their stay. This somewhat challenges the current narrative that language and culture are the obstacles. This is important because if universities are to support international students, they could consider support beyond academic literacy and language development courses. The small number of participants in this study restricts the generalisability of the findings, particularly given the divergence of experiences and perceptions amongst the three participants. However, the restricted number of participants allowed for an in-depth exploration of each person's experiences and how these were understood. The complexity uncovered supports the case for more research in out-of-class learning which privileges learners' perspectives of experiences related to learning in a second language. Areas of particular interest appear to be aspects of first and second language use amongst bilingual international students, particularly regarding strategies involving machine translation and knowledge construction. There also appears to be a case for a wider conceptualisation of lecture listening and engaging with unfamiliar accents. A minor finding confirms previous studies' identification of the need for educator communication of expectations, particularly around Dissertation supervision.

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I am eternally grateful for the patience my family have shown. My wife has selflessly supported me throughout, giving up her time so that I have more. My son has extracted me from the screen to play, relax and imagine.

I am also extremely grateful to all the participants who have helped through my doctorate and given their time so generously at both the pilot and trial stages, and during the study reported in this Dissertation. Your stories are fascinating and enlightening. Thank you so much for sharing them with me.

Dedication

I dedicate this Dissertation to Chie, Stanley, Brian, Mary, Ginsaku, Hiroko, Andrew and Clare.

Thank you.

Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this Dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature _____

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Abbreviations

ALL	Autonomy in language learning
BAK	Beliefs, assumptions and knowledge
BALLI	Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory
CFA	Chartered Financial Analyst
CR	Critical reflection
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
EU	European Union
HE	Higher education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	First language
L2	Second language
LDBs	Language development brokers
LLHs	Language learning histories
LLS	Language learning strategy
PCT	Personal Construct Theory
PST	Private supplementary tutoring
SDL	Self-directed learning
SPL	Self-planned learning
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Chapter 1 Introduction

> [I]f learners are to learn, then they have to do the learning for themselves (Nunan, 1999, p. 166).

This Dissertation is focussed on learner autonomy as it plays out in the lives of international postgraduates undertaking one-year Masters' programmes in English, their second language[1]. My investigation explores participants' beliefs and behaviours around language use as they engaged in second-language-dominant ecosystems[2]. My initial concern was how these students developed their English language skills outside the classroom. After second interviews, this expanded to include language-related activities that potentially circumvented the need for English but provided a fuller understanding of international postgraduate engagement. For example, all participants tried translation software for purposeful engagement with English texts. This changed the focus so that learner autonomy became as important to this investigation as autonomy in language learning. To allow reference to the data before the methodology chapter, the research instrument and participants are briefly outlined here. The research centred on 90-minute in-depth interviews conducted four times over a one-year period with three full-time Chinese postgraduates. The interviews covered both language learning prior to UK arrival and out-of-class learning within English-language ecosystems during participants' sojourns. Following other authors researching international students (see for example, Blaj-Ward, 2017; Gao, 2005; Wang, 2018), I use sojourn to refer to the planned fixed-term period when such students study abroad. I undertook the research over the 2017-18 academic year while the participants were enrolled on taught programmes in the business school at one ancient Scottish university[3].

The terms used in the title are explained below. In the title, my participants are identified as successful. In China they all successfully completed compulsory education, gained access to university and graduated. They successfully achieved the conditional English grades for direct entry onto postgraduate

[1] Second language as a term is discussed in Section 1.1 Terminology.

[2] Ecosystem as a term is discussed in Section 1.1 Terminology.

[3] To protect the anonymity of participants, this term is used as discussed in Section 4.8 Ethical considerations and rigour.

programmes in Scotland (see Section 4.2), and graduated from their postgraduate programmes in 2018 as planned. During their academic journeys from primary school to earning their postgraduate degrees, at times I describe them as surviving. To me, surviving was passing obligatory assessment but with limited commitment to learning:

> *I worked only a few nights but I passed it* (Bella, Interview 2).

At other times, participants strove by working very hard through a particular stage and completed that stage by persevering:

> *I wrote [my answer to] every topic – sixteen topics! I wrote day and night […] I printed it and I took it to school, to my home, on my walk to every destination, I used it. Maybe somebody thought I was a freak but I thought it was worth it* (Amy, Interview 1).

Different participants at different stages of education sometimes wholeheartedly engaged, becoming involved with additional activities and groups which appeared life-affirming. I describe this as thriving:

> *I tried to integrate with people from different parts of the world in order to change the environment, my language environment. And to sometimes think in English and then write in English just like I keep my diary […] Before I came to Scotland […] I had decided to go back to China [after my postgraduate studies] but I think I love this city so I want to work here for several years* (Jie, Interview 3).

These stories of successfully surviving, striving and thriving are central to this Dissertation. The stories provide insights into each participant's language education in China and of language-related experiences as their sojourns unfolded.

The following section describes key terms used in this Dissertation. In Section 1.2, I detail the professional significance of autonomy in language learning (ALL) and learners' beliefs. Section 1.3 then discusses why international postgraduates' experiences are significant in terms of numbers, and highlights challenges international students experience. ALL is touched on briefly in Section 1.4 before being examined more thoroughly in Chapter 2. In Section 1.5, constructivist theories of knowledge and learning are discussed to frame my research. I also argue here that Personal Construct Theory is particularly

relevant to research on adult learner autonomy and beliefs. This chapter ends by further detailing my research interest and providing the overarching research question guiding this study.

1.1 Terminology

I use ecosystem in the title rather than surroundings or environment since surroundings or environment might be understood as distinct from those that pass through it. In this context, ecosystems are complex networks of organisms. Each organism alters the ecosystem and is altered by it. Palfreyman (2014) similarly discusses the complexity of networked organisms and interdependent relationships in the context of human activity, yet his ecology is metaphorical. My conceptualisation of ecosystem is literal. From a constructivist perspective (see Section 1.5) individuals' beliefs are shaped by the individual's understanding of the ecosystem and that perception impacts on behaviour. Individuals are part of the ecosystem they inhabit and their presence alters those that they come into contact with just as others' presence alters the participants. So, for example, Barkhuizen (2004, p. 555) conceptualises learners as being 'partly constitutive of' rather than distinct from the social contexts in which they learn. The ecosystem, including the participants' experiences during the research interviews in this study, informed and potentially influenced subsequent beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK), a triumvirate term coined by Woods (1996) and discussed in Chapter 3. Consequently, subsequent behaviours could also have been influenced by the interactions which occurred between the participants and me. BAK and behaviours are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and the potential influence of interviews in Chapter 4, Methodology.

Another aspect of the ecosystem, as I use it, is connected to the linguistic ecosystem. This is determined by an individual's language of thought, possibly reacting to, or seeking interactions with, the ideas, language or actions of others. A second-language ecosystem does not necessarily refer to the language that appears to be dominant in the surrounding environment but the language of thought used by the individual to engage within that ecosystem. If autonomy is focussed on activity of mind (see Chapter 2) then the language of thought will be an element of this. Continuing with the constructivist perspective discussed above, this may shape and be shaped by perceptions of that environment, those

within it, and anticipation of how others may react. International students who are studying in a second language may embrace the language of their studies and seek opportunities to interact, think, and construct knowledge in the second-language ecosystem. Alternatively, the second-language ecosystem may be avoided for a range of reasons from apathy to the anticipation of negative consequences arising from engagement. Potentially, international student second-language ecosystem engagement could be minimal and restricted to brief visits for the purpose of fulfilling academic obligations.

Throughout this Dissertation I refer to Chinese, first language (L1), and second language (L2). Participants referred to Chinese rather than differentiating between Chinese languages. Chinese or L1 are therefore used interchangeably throughout. English is also used interchangeably with second language while recognising participants may be polyglots. Learning and using English as a second language (ESL) is often distinguished from learning and using English as a foreign language (EFL). In general ESL is used when the majority of the adult population have English as an L1 or because English has a purposive use as an official language within a country (Nayar, 1997). EFL is more commonly referred to when English is learned in countries where English is a minority language, and often implies that English is taught in school and rarely experienced beyond the classroom except when learners complete their homework tasks. I refer to English as a second language throughout as it appears that physical location does not necessarily determine the EFL-ESL categorisation of learning. If the internet is accessible, it is possible to engage in social intercourse within English-language ecosystems across modalities for periods of linguistic immersion (Richards, 2015). Conversely, even when supposedly immersed in an English-speaking environment such as the UK, there is no guarantee that international students have adequate or unrestricted contact with others in English simply on the basis of being present (Block, 2008). With a compatriot community, it may be possible to avoid using spoken English outside the classroom beyond simple transactions, as Kashiwa and Benson (2018) found with some study-abroad students in Australia. Having defined certain key terms, Section 1.2 now details why autonomy in language learning became professionally significant to me.

1.2 Professional significance

I had been teaching English to adult learners for fifteen years when I became a learning advisor at a Japanese university specialising in foreign languages and cultures. As an advisor, I supported and guided undergraduates' out-of-class language learning. Out-of-class language learning can be categorised in various ways (see Section 2.5) but essentially occurs away from the classroom and without educator oversight. In the Japanese post, students were not obliged to engage with learning advisors and any interactions were instigated by learners through face-to-face advising sessions or by submitting learning journals. As a learning advisor I listened to and read about students' language learning aims and experiences. I offered encouragement and sometimes recommended alternative or additional activities if I thought my ideas were useful. At the end of my first year, I reviewed students' journals and follow-up advising sessions. Much of my unsolicited advice had been ignored. I realised that students undertaking additional out-of-class language learning did so on their own terms and according to their own beliefs. These undergraduates were successful language learners in that they had successfully passed high school and university entrance exam English tests. Consequently, and following Schulz's (1996) findings, by contradicting their beliefs, and potentially the beliefs of their previous teachers, parents and community, I concluded that I was more likely to lose credibility and negatively impact on learners' motivation than I was to catalyse change in their own beliefs. Beliefs are integral to this study and are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

I now work at a university in Scotland and remain interested in out-of-class learning. I teach optional English language courses for international students with English as a second language, which are designed to support students in the development of their academic English. All the international students I work with are in the UK primarily to study on degree programmes and, to be accepted as international applicants with English as a second language, they will have reached minimum language requirements set by the university. However, once accepted, there is no requirement to attend language support courses. Nevertheless, for any international student entering a UK university at or close to the threshold minimum language requirements, it is highly likely that they will be better able to manage social and academic interactions if they are able

to develop their linguistic skills as their sojourns progress. It is my belief that to progress effectively these students must engage in out-of-class language learning regardless of whether or not they enrol in additional English language courses. The strategies they select to engage in this new linguistic ecosystem and the thinking behind their choices are the subject of this research and the next section highlights why this research might be of wider interest. Recent figures for international students are provided before selected published research findings relating to international student experiences are presented. These indicate that transitioning academically, socially and linguistically to the UK can be an unsettling experience and that more research is needed in this area.

1.3 International students on postgraduate programmes

International students dominate UK taught postgraduate university programmes. In 2017-18, around 50,500 taught Masters' degrees were awarded to full-time UK domiciled students compared to 17,500 full-time non-UK European Union (EU) students and 81,000 full-time non-EU international students (HESA, 2019a). These large numbers potentially impact all those involved in postgraduate programmes, including, of course, international postgraduates themselves. Across all levels of university study, Chinese students represent the greatest number of international students, outnumbering the next largest nationality, Indians, by a factor of five in 2017-18 (UKCISA, 2019). The greatest proportion of international students by subject area were on business and administrative studies programmes and, as a percentage of the total number of university students, Scotland accepted the greatest proportion of international students of all four UK nations (UKCISA, 2019). These statistics informed my research design and hence Chinese business school postgraduates from one Scottish university were invited to participate.

Much interest has been generated around international students' experiences of studying in the UK, with research often highlighting these experiences as difficult. For example, Harrison (2015, p. 414) identifies the possible 'conflicting perspectives' of domestic and international students as potentially problematic and 'emotionally strained'. Nevertheless, intercultural interactions are not necessarily smooth within either international or domestic student cohorts, or as

M. Murphy and Fleming (2000)[4] found, between academics and students. Transitioning from previous learning experiences and complying with UK university expectations often requires students to adopt unfamiliar approaches to learning and teaching whether they are international (Brown & Holloway, 2008) or UK students from non-traditional backgrounds (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008)[5]. This can be cognitively and emotionally disruptive, 'leading to feelings of psychological vulnerability and insecurity' (Christie et al., 2008, p. 567). While incoming students may anticipate differences in academic culture at UK universities, learning shock is likely if they are unable to interpret differences well and (re)act accordingly (D. Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005). Traditional domestic students, from backgrounds where progression to university is expected, may also experience some shock. However, shock is potentially more acute in students from families and communities without UK university experiences, as advice can less easily be sought from parents, siblings or friends. This shock might be further intensified for international students by the additional stresses of unfamiliar environments and second-language ecosystems compounding their 'psychological, cognitive and affective struggles' (Q. Gu & Maley, 2008, p. 229).

Although research highlighting problems international students encounter attracts considerably more attention than how they overcome these challenges (Quan, He, & Sloan, 2016), positive stories do sometimes emerge. Montgomery and McDowell's (2009) research provides insights into a successful learner-led multinational study group (n=7). The group included an Indonesian student who had received the highest marks for an assignment, contradicting the prevalent discourse that tends to identify international students as lacking study skills, language and background knowledge. Students in this group valued the academic support they received from each other but also recognised and valued the social aspect of their learning experiences. In addition, working together was perceived to develop intercultural communication skills and provide alternative perspectives. This group demonstrated many of the attributes of a community of practice as described by Wenger (1998), with the social network itself

[4] Following the APA 6th Manual, the initial of different authors with the same surname is included for in-text citations.

[5] Following the APA 6th Manual, publications with three to five authors include all names in the first in-text citation but are abbreviated to the first author name plus *et al.* upon subsequent citations.

establishing peripheral and core members rather than being defined as peripheral to domestic students.

Despite such occasional positive case studies, studies of international students' experiences at university more often highlights these students' self-perceptions as outsiders, with lower linguistic ability often identified as causing this perception (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009). Brown and Holloway (2008) found that, among international postgraduates, anxiety about their linguistic level and associated feelings of shame and inferiority, prevented them from participating in class discussions and wider social interactions. While Chik and Benson (2008) accept that difficulties occur, they also attribute problems to the 'attitudes and practices of their hosts' when those hosts define international students by 'linguistic and cultural difficulties' (pp. 166-167). For example, Murray and McConachy (2018) discovered that UK university lecturers commonly took an ethnocentric view of participation based on observing students in their lectures, seminars and group work, often perceiving international students to be unresponsive and problematic. What constitutes participation in such contexts, Murray and McConachy (2018) argue, is based on sociocultural assumptions leading to students and lecturers from different backgrounds having quite different expectations. It is noteworthy that in this study the extent to which international students actively participated in their own learning beyond the tasks initiated by or involving the lecturers was not considered. With the exception of Montgomery and McDowell (2009), the studies cited in this section provide little information about what strategies international students used, how they used them or the rationale for these. It is these out-of-class strategies and these details that concern my study.

UK universities commonly have a variety of academic language and study skill support available for all students. When this is specifically designed for students using English as a second language, it is generally termed English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP often involves more than enabling students to use English to interact in the same way as they would in their first language. Academic writing, for example, poses challenges to students transitioning from other academic cultures not only because the language of the text is English. Potential differences in academic discourses in different languages may confuse or frustrate international students moving from L1 academic discourses to L2

academic discourses. Such issues are discussed in more detail with reference to the research in Subsection 2.2.4.

Research on EAP and international student language support has generally focussed on developing and assessing language (see for example Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, & Walkinshaw, 2018) and particular types of study skills (for example lecture listening and notetaking, Deroey, 2018). What seems to have been generally overlooked are strategies which may occur outwith the timetabled time teachers meet students. I am interested in what out-of-class language-related activities postgraduates engage in, how they engage and why they engage (their beliefs). As I indicate in the literature in Section 2.4, out-of-class learning is under-researched amongst students enrolled on language learning courses. Moreover, research into out-of-class learning amongst international students learning in a second language on university programmes without taught language components is almost non-existent. My research is with such students and investigates all forms of out-of-class language-related learning, not restricted to EAP. My research develops understanding of learner autonomy and autonomy in language learning as discussed in Chapter 2. The next section briefly outlines a working description of learner autonomy to frame the potential centrality of learner autonomy in postgraduate experiences, and the centrality of learner autonomy in this research on international postgraduates using English as a second language.

1.4 Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy is a phrase commonly used in education, which can have different meanings to different people depending on their background and experience. In Chapter 2, various definitions and conceptualisations of learner autonomy are explored along with a selection of common near-synonyms that are often used interchangeably. However, using the term loosely to mean taking responsibility for learning, it is generally the case that postgraduate students in the UK are expected to assume responsibility for their own learning (Mello, 2016). For students engaging in a second language there may be the potential further responsibilities of developing their ability to learn in a second language and expanding their linguistic repertoire to facilitate learning.

There has been research on educational practices designed to foster autonomous learning and autonomous language learning, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Research combining both areas is less common, in that considering out-of-class language-related activities while on a programme which is not a language programme has received little attention to date. At the outset of this doctoral research it was unclear whether Chinese postgraduates arrive with experience of autonomous language learning, whether the structure of postgraduate programmes necessitated autonomy in language learning (ALL) regardless of students' prior experiences, or what language-related activities participants might undertake to engage with the L2 ecosystem. This doctoral research sought to discover the prior language learning experiences of international postgraduate participants, particularly regarding out-of-class language-related activities, with a view to identifying the extent to which ALL may have previously been imposed, encouraged, restricted or ignored. I was also interested in how this appeared to impact on beliefs and participant-anticipated behaviours around language learning as their postgraduate programmes commenced. This study adds depth to previous research investigating overseas study experiences by investigating the specific language-related activities participants engaged in or avoided, and exploring any changes in beliefs and behaviours as the sojourn progressed. Before moving on to discuss autonomy in Chapter 2, and beliefs and behaviours in Chapter 3, consideration is given to the nature of thought, knowledge and learning as this fundamentally shaped this Dissertation from key concepts to research design.

1.5 Constructivism and Personal Construct Theory

Constructivism is a collection of ways of conceptualising thought, knowledge and learning, which holds that 'knowledge cannot be taught but must be constructed by the learner' (Candy, 1991, p. 252). It is concerned with how people attempt to understand the bewildering diversity of their experiences and reconcile these with what they know (Candy, 1991, p. 255)[6]. Learning from this perspective is an active process as learners consolidate what they discover with what they already know, which may lead to re-evaluating existing knowledge (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

[6] I use page numbers when referring to page-specific information from authors' work as recommended in the APA 6th Manual.

Rather than rejecting reality, constructivism posits that reality is external to the mind, and knowledge is the interpretation of this reality understood through the perspective of experiences (Amineh & Asl, 2015). It therefore follows that any sharing of knowledge is not the sharing of reality but the sharing of constructions of reality and therefore of 'social artefact[s]' (Candy, 1991, p. 252).

Key to constructivism is the acceptance that people, principally adults, have some part to play in their own understanding of the world and how they act within it (Candy, 1991, p. 258). This, I suggest, is a vital component across conceptualisations of autonomy in education. Personal Construct Theory (hereafter often PCT), also known as Personal Construct Psychology, is a constructivist theory developed by George Kelly in the 1950s which rejects the inherent determinism of behaviourist and psychoanalytical theories. Behaviourist learning theories are concerned with observable behaviour and view behaviour as learned responses to environmental stimuli (Harris, 2000). To behaviourists, knowledge is 'completely detached from the human mind, human relationships and society' but is commodified and can be possessed by learners' exposure to appropriate stimuli (Harris, 2000). The determinism inherent in such a position is that 'there is a causal network which produces [specific] behaviour' (Churchland, 1981, p. 99). Psychoanalytical theories around that time similarly perceived of individuals' thoughts and behaviours as being inevitable outcomes causally linked to inherited traits and experiences (Knight, 1946). Following either theory assumes an inevitability about where individuals find themselves in their lives, which can potentially be mapped in hindsight to the unavoidable culmination of causal factors. By contrast, in PCT, past events are understood as influencing how adults anticipate future events rather than determining them (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 10).

In PCT, learning cannot be detached from the learners, their particular circumstances and the vicissitudes of their lives (Salmon, 1995). This is relevant to my study as Kelly's PCT is a theory of adult learning, belief formation and action. In PCT, learning can involve interactions with others, and with this is the potential for social mediation. Accepting the ideas and adopting the behaviours of others, or at least perceptions of these, can be relatively effortless, and Kelly acknowledges that both insightfulness and prejudice can be and often are shared. However, whatever is constructed is the result of individuals'

interpretations of events and so individuals should take ownership of their perceptions and the resulting actions they take (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 4). While change is situated within each individual, behaviours and outward expressions of beliefs are likely to receive social reactions according to the social and historic norms of specific contexts (Salmon, 1995), which could maintain activities and learning through the positive influence of others, or constrain these for fear of negative consequences. Social mediation may challenge and encourage deeper thought but ultimately each person decides whether to assume responsibility for what they choose to question, reject or accept. In many ways, this encapsulates autonomy as detailed in Chapter 2.

At its core, PCT is located in constructive alternativism in which:

> … all our present perceptions are open to question and reconsideration […] even the most obvious occurrences of everyday life might appear utterly transformed if we were inventive enough to construe them differently (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 3)

Events are of utmost importance in constructive alternativism, but it is for individuals to decide the importance of the meaning they assign to those events, and this will be based on perceptions of what has gone before and interpretations of the consequences. For example, whether sunrise and sunset are understood as the sun orbiting the earth or the earth spinning on its axis depends on perceptions of what has gone before and interpretations of the consequences. In other words, dawn and dusk can be correctly anticipated through contrasting constructions. As G. Kelly ([1960] 2017, p. 5) states, 'different meanings are involved when identical events are correctly anticipated by different sets of inferences'. The constructions my participants held were investigated through their discussion of their beliefs and behaviours, which included discussions around events and the meaning they assigned these. By undertaking a series of interviews, I had the opportunity to revisit perceptions of prior learning and interpretations of the consequences. This provided the opportunity to investigate whether beliefs about language-related activities became construed differently as their sojourns progressed.

In constructive alternativism, certainties are no longer assumed, knowledge is considered temporary and becomes open to other interpretations. By taking this

stance, seeking to establish one proposal before exploring other possibilities seems counterproductive given that exploring other possibilities creates the potential to reverse any previously established proposals (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 6). Extending this point, Kelly argues that:

> … audacious proposals […] may well serve as springboards for novel inquiry – even while we retain a preference for their traditional alternatives (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 6).

For those persuaded by the ideas inherent in PCT, not only is one consequence less certainty, or perhaps more openness to other possibilities, but also that knowledge and learning are unlikely to develop in a linear fashion. Potentially conflicting ideas can co-exist even though one idea may be understood as more feasible. What someone knows, believes and understands about themselves and the world they inhabit is therefore open to inquiry and likely to change. However, people tend to seek certainty and in so doing may perceive their 'constructions as objective representations of the universe' (McWilliams, 2003, p. 78). In the case of language learning, if learners have set beliefs about how to learn a language and have difficulty learning a language that way, they may retain their beliefs about language learning but attribute this lack of progress to an innate flaw, seeing themselves as inadequate.

PCT has as its basic postulate that 'a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he [sic] anticipates events' (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 9). In other words, individuals attend to their expectations, influenced by their knowledge and understanding of the world to date. This is not to say that anticipated outcomes are always preferred, since there are anticipated outcomes that individuals would happily refute or avoid. However, when outcomes appear not to meet expectations, this forms the basis of 'reconstructions' which 'may be used to improve the accuracy or significance of further anticipations' (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 10). Individuals apply their own personal constructs to interpret and anticipate events by drawing on their understanding of prior events, yet people who live and grow up together may develop similar constructs (Scheer, 2003). This is not to assume that disagreements do not occur nor that disagreement indicates significantly different constructs, but that 'it may simply be that they locate themselves at the opposite pole of some constructs' (Scheer, 2003, p. 153). Ways of construing

are likely to be similar among those who share 'bio-psycho-social' affiliations to particular demographics, based on such categorisations as nationality, ethnicity, religion, profession, gender, and age (Scheer, 2003, p. 153). Combinations of these affiliations and other cultural domains might also lead to deviation from certain constructs associated with any particular group (Scheer, 2003). In other words, there seems little reason to attribute construct homogeneity to a single domain of culture. Nevertheless, the research referred to in Section 1.3 identifies inter-country academic differences as causing unhappiness amongst international students indicating that unmet expectations, while not necessarily homogeneous, can frustrate. This study sought to investigate the personal constructs of a small number of international students with shared demographic categorisations to avoid attributing divergence of experience interpretation and anticipation to surface-level demographic differences.

Another challenging area pertinent to international students in second language ecosystems is engaging in constructs across languages. Jankowicz (2003) highlights two problems of working across languages, and in particular of using translation. Firstly, terms may have multiple meanings and translators must have enough contextual understanding to select correctly. Secondly, greater difficulties arise when social structures are such that concepts or experiences do not exist across languages. Experienced users of a specific language are able to share and make sense of particular concepts in that language. Students learning in their second language at lower proficiency levels may interpret terms through their own personal constructs formed in noticeably more distinct sociocultural contexts than those discussed in the L2. Understanding may diverge from intended meaning. Consequently, misunderstanding potentially occurs, perhaps with little realisation of misinterpretation at the time. For example, Jankowicz (2003) discusses problems experienced by Western academics involved in Polish development projects after the fall of the Soviet Union. Teaching Management Theory as the country moved from a command economy to a more open economic system when Polish lacked a word for 'manager' seriously impacted effective communication (Jankowicz, 2003, p. 261). The closest Polish equivalent of ruler or governor led to different ways of attributing meaning to the course content, and ultimately to miscommunication. The challenges

inherent in postgraduate study are similarly potentially exacerbated by potential misunderstanding of L2-specific constructs.

Although Kelly's PCT continues to attract interest in the field of psychology (McWilliams, 2013), in education PCT has attracted less interest for decades. There is some mention of PCT in publications focussed on autonomy in both adult education and language learning (for example, Benson, 2011; Candy, 1991; Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017). However, despite little criticism of this theory in these educational sectors, PCT receives scant attention nowadays. It seems to have been superseded by interest in sociocultural constraints, perspectives and influences. Such concepts are not excluded from PCT, and the preponderance of personal constructs are often conceptualised as arising from the social ecosystems in which children grow up and then interact as adults (Little, 1991). And so the social ecosystem shapes and is shaped by socially-situated individuals. This results in a unique system of personal constructs with each individual 'constantly shaped and reshaped by our attempts to make sense of the experience that is ours and ours alone' (Little, 1991, p. 18).

PCT has implications for my research into learning. Learning histories become important as does longitudinal research, as both facilitate inquiry into constructions and reconstructions. Methodology which allows data to be collected that may highlight conflicting beliefs, assumptions and knowledge also aligns with PCT. Similarly, PCT indicates an approach to analysis that embraces contradictions rather than rejecting these as anomalous or indicative of less-than-rigorous research. Researchers have an obligation to reflect on their own constructions and reconstructions as the research unfolds, and to consider their place in constructing data through gathering it, as discussed further in Chapter 4. The construction of perceptions that underlies behaviours should be investigated while remaining cognizant of individuals being influenced by perceived societal forces (G. Kelly, [1960] 2017, p. 21). Those individuals include both researcher and participants. Investigating learner autonomy from a constructivist perspective requires emphasising the participants' views of their contexts and 'their interests, attitudes, intentions, and understandings' (Candy, 1991, p. 260) as discussed further detail in Chapter 4. The following section ends this introductory chapter by providing further information about my research interest.

1.6 Research interest

I often work with Chinese postgraduates on business school Masters' programmes, and I was keen to research these students. My language teaching background and my particular experiences of autonomy in language learning drew me towards investigating out-of-class language-related activities. My overarching research question was:

- What out-of-class behaviours do international postgraduates in the UK use to engage with living and studying in an ecosystem dominated by English, their second language, and what are their underlying beliefs?

Uncovering these out-of-class behaviours and exploring the evolving contexts, perspectives and purposes would, I hoped, provide insights into how international students survive, strive and thrive. Such insights often remain hidden but I started this research believing that stories of how students engaged and possibly adapted could be shared and discussed with international students and those who work with them. Kashiwa and Benson (2018) suggest that being aware of out-of-class affordances ultimately enhances students' overseas experiences. They identify the need for more educators to be aware of happenings beyond the classroom. Bringing these stories to prominence and sharing international students' out-of-class learning experiences with future international students and educators could raise awareness of obstacles and affordances within second-language ecosystems and prompt further discussion.

Accordingly, this Dissertation presents and analyses the stories of three international postgraduates. Before providing these stories, the next chapters explore the constructs underpinning them. Chapter 2 discusses historical conceptualisations of autonomy across different educational sectors, highlighting the developing prominence of social and other contextual factors. Chapter 3 explores language learning beliefs and behaviours. As in Chapter 2 these are contextualised historically to highlight changing approaches and corresponding shifts in research from quantitative to qualitative analysis of data. Chapter 4 presents decisions around the research methodology designed to capture and present participants' perceptions of their experiences over time. In Chapter 5

and Chapter 6 the stories are presented as auto/biography before the concluding Chapter 7.

Chapter 2 Learner autonomy

Chapter 1 introduced how I became interested in autonomy in language learning as well as my emerging realisation of the fundamental influence of beliefs on how language learners engage with out-of-class learning. The potential wider interest in my research topic was framed through the significant numbers of international students successfully graduating from UK higher education while noting that research commonly focuses on challenges. Given the apparent adversities facing international students, I was interested in how international postgraduates succeed by investigating their out-of-class beliefs and behaviours as they engage in second-language ecosystems. My main focus was their one-year UK sojourn but my interest extended to their prior L2 learning behaviours, their associated beliefs, and the extent to which autonomy in language learning might have occurred. Knowledge, thought and learning are central to this research, and in Section 1.5, the epistemological perspective underpinning this Dissertation was outlined. In broad terms this is constructivist and George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory appears particularly relevant to investigating autonomy in language learning in this context, given its focus on adults and the conceptualisation of beliefs as the responsibility of each person. Responsibility features in the working definition of learner autonomy given in Section 1.4, while definitions, historical contexts, and a range of associated terms and meanings are discussed more fully in this chapter.

As noted, my research focussed on postgraduates interacting in social, transactional and academic contexts within second-language ecosystems. Socially, there was the potential for learners to spend much of their time with compatriots, possibly interacting in their first languages. Transactionally, relying on companions to interact with others when shopping, travelling and eating out was also conceivable. However, engaging academically would, I assumed, require engaging with challenging concepts and content in a second language. Given these learners were on postgraduate programmes rather than language learning programmes, learner autonomy in adult education informed this research in conjunction with autonomy in language learning (ALL). How these terms are variously conceptualised is discussed below.

The concept of autonomy within education seems to incorporate three variations: autonomy as a fundamental aspect of learning; autonomy as an approach within formal education[7], and autonomy as a goal (Boud, 1988). My research explored what happened outside the classroom, with autonomy conceptualised as a fundamental aspect of learning. At the same time, formal education would have played, and might continue to play, a part in the development of participants' beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (hereafter BAK) about learning, and roles and responsibilities in learning endeavours. The extent to which autonomy was allowed, encouraged or possibly first emerged within formal settings was therefore of interest.

This chapter presents certain tendencies when considering autonomy in general education (Section 2.1), in adult education (Section 2.2), and in adult language education (Section 2.3). Autonomy in general education appears to have attracted academic attention first and influenced adult education, which in turn influenced language education. This chapter shows the progression of conceptualisations of autonomy across time and sectors. Consequently, Section 2.1 on general education contains older sources than subsequent sections, with ALL having the most recent citations. This is to position ALL within a historical context influenced by other sectors rather than to suggest that outside ALL conceptualisations of autonomy have not evolved. Although autonomy entered the language education academic discourse later than either general education or adult education, Benson (2011, p. 4) states that ALL publications substantially outnumber autonomy publications in other education sectors and academic fields, including philosophy. Nevertheless, autonomy as a philosophical concept predates and influences autonomy in education as outlined in the next section. Throughout this chapter, I outline how concepts discussed were incorporated into the research design and the potential for these concepts to occur in the data.

2.1 Personal autonomy

At the time of the European Enlightenment individual autonomy was an important way of disconnecting the individual's moral will from the control the

[7] Learning credited with formal qualifications (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 26).

church (Smith, 1997). Kant influentially developed the concept of personal autonomy (Pennycook, 1997, p. 36), which he applied to the human potential to make independent rational choices with certain caveats (Schmenk, 2005, p. 109). Independent rational choice, for example, should be restricted so that choices respected others' autonomy (Schmenk, 2005 p. 109). For Kant, the reason and rationality of the individual combined with freedom to choose and freedom from coercion and indoctrination are essential elements for the realisation of autonomy (Beck, 1999). The multiple ways in which this construct is considered and adapted in education from various perspectives in English-language academic publications are considered below.

2.1.1 Conceptualising personal autonomy

Philosophers of education concerned with personal autonomy as an educational goal commonly reach beyond the Enlightenment to identify the Ancient Greeks as using *autonomous* to describe states as self-ruling (Boud, 1988). Benjamin Gibbs (1979, p. 119) applies this political autonomy of a state as an analogy to individuals, so that 'to be autonomous is to be self-ruling'. Accordingly, personal autonomy refers to someone making and implementing decisions of their own volition, and taking responsibility for these. However, personal autonomy is understood and delineated variously with Dearden (1972), for example, distinguishing autonomy from freedom and independence, and from truth and morality. For him, freedom and independence are requirements for autonomy while truth and morality are not. Dearden (1972) points to acts of criminality as one way personal autonomy is implemented whereas Gibbs (1979) identifies a conceptualisation of autonomy comprising of moral values, 'a disposition of character rather than intellect: self-mastery or self-discipline, having command of one's own feelings and inclinations' (p. 121). This mastery Gibbs divides into fortitude and temperance. This is the autonomous person asserting control over his or her own affective states. Gibbs (1979) also identifies a middle ground between autonomy and its opposite, heteronomy. He describes willing obedience as neither autonomy nor heteronomy, and accords this in-between status similar to seeking guidance from a competent other, with the caveat that guidance is only sought when the individual lacks the capacity to undertake the task alone. For example, in my context working for a Scottish university, many of the language support courses for international postgraduates are optional, fully

subscribed and have high completion rates. This perhaps demonstrates willing compliance to be guided by competent others. In this study I questioned participants' instances of compliance to investigate whether these were willing or imposed.

Following Gibbs, there is also the potential for willing obedience to be a step towards autonomy if, upon reflection, the individual chooses to continue with the activity or seeks an alternative. Gibbs' analysis of a range of theories concerned with autonomy as an intellectual concept identifies a common theme. This is autonomy as freedom from bias 'protected against undue pressure from external cultural forces' (p. 121) for general decision making, pursuing projects and for considering answers to problems affecting societies. Gibbs (1979, pp. 119-120) describes autonomy as being 'free' from others' edicts and intrusions, 'free' from confounding elements of one's personality and having the 'freedom to act and work as he [sic] chooses'. He suggests that this type of autonomy is often conceived as 'part of an individualistic, anti-authoritarian ideology which is very deep rooted in Western capitalist democracies such as Britain' (p. 121). However, he doubts whether this necessarily results in more dissenters in the UK than under more authoritarian regimes, and is mindful of the possibility of intellectual independence in closed societies. This is despite freedom often being viewed as a prerequisite for personal autonomy within the theories Gibbs analyses.

However, while the presence of freedom, or absence of control, may be a prerequisite, it is insufficient for a person to be considered autonomous (Dearden, 1972). Partridge (1979, p. ii) identifies her own overlapping three prerequisites for personal autonomy to exist: 'freedom of choice, rational reflection and strength of will'. The first of these could be seen as freedom from external imposition or restriction of choice. The other two prerequisites potentially come from within. Of these, rational reflection (which I develop in Section 2.2) evolves as a person's experience and understanding develops so that the understandings which come from rational reflection today may differ from those that come tomorrow. Strength of will may also vary, for example when implementing a decision or as a result of uncovering or re-evaluating information which may cause internal conflict. The strength of will to follow through on decisions or to work through conflicts is, for Partridge, a requirement for

personal autonomy. Strength of will is implied in Kelly's Personal Construct Theory for individuals to challenge their own beliefs (Section 1.5) and willingness is part of the definition of autonomy in language learning used for this Dissertation and discussed in Section 2.3.

It seems that personal autonomy can potentially be conceived of as having intellectual, moral and emotional aspects. For Dearden (1972), autonomy is dependent on reason with the autonomous person having reasons for his or her thoughts and actions. These beliefs do not need to be connected to incontrovertible truths for a person to be autonomous, but they do need incontrovertibly to be the person's own and to result from reasoning, an activity of mind. For Dearden (1972), personal autonomy requires beliefs to be subject to reflection, while acknowledging that people's beliefs are heavily influenced by the culture surrounding them. To this end, Dearden (1975) conceptualises autonomy as 'very much a matter of degree' depending on a person's capacity to select appropriate criteria for decision making, the capacity to implement decisions and the complexity of reflection that has gone into the judgement (p. 9). Hence the extent to which personal autonomy is enacted is both context dependent and dependent on individual perceptions of contexts. This way of considering autonomy extends to the adult education sector as discussed in Section 2.2, and is germane to my study given my concern with individual participants' perceptions of their circumstances and how they acted within their second language ecosystems to achieve their goals as their perceptions of their circumstances and goals potentially evolved.

2.1.2 Personal autonomy within education

Writing in 1972, Dearden describes personal autonomy as a 'new aim'(p. 448) of formal education, arising from wider social changes in the West which required adults to be more involved than hitherto with decision making in all aspects of their lives. By the end of the 1970s, Gibbs (1979, pp. 119-120) highlighted scepticism among policy makers and some teachers around promoting autonomy arising from confusion around the nebulous notion of autonomy and what autonomy meant in practice. Despite these changing perspectives, developing learners' personal autonomy has been a common educational goal (Candy, 1991; Gibbs, 1979; Kerr, 2002), a goal that appears, somewhat paradoxically, to be

regularly deemed educators' rather than learners' responsibility. One reason to aim for personal autonomy as an outcome of formal education is the necessity of rational judgement for democratic citizenship, enabling the claims of others to be assessed (Wringe, 1997). Another reason to aim for personal autonomy within formal education is the crucial role of autonomy appears to play in motivation as identified in Self-Determination Theory (Little, 2006). Encouraging personal autonomy in education may therefore benefit learning itself as discussed below, even though balancing encouragement and control can be a challenge for educators (Deci & Flaste, 1995, p. 42).

For Dearden (1975), personal autonomy is typically the outcome of a particular form of education. He questions whether autonomy flourishes as a result of educators relinquishing control, fearing that peer intervention has the potential to replace teacher intervention as another type of control (Dearden, 1972). This echoes Riesman (1950) earlier warning of compulsive decisions based on the internalisation of others' opinions: what appears to be autonomous is in fact the implementation of others' preferences. Dearden (1972) and Gibbs (1979) both acknowledge others' influence and control in childhood in forming opinions and preferences. But, in their view, autonomy can still be attained through intellectual effort and reflection. Dearden (1972) also questions whether the conditions necessary for autonomy to be exercised are the same conditions necessary for autonomy to develop. If personal autonomy development is seen as an essential objective, then paradoxically it rationalises the imposition of personal autonomy in education (Partridge, 1979). There may also be individuals who would prefer not to be autonomous in certain circumstances (Dearden, 1972), a point later discussed with regard to adult education (see Section 2.2).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), an extensively researched theory of motivation, has been developed over several decades (Stone, Deci, & Ryan, 2009). SDT connects autonomy with intrinsic motivation and other-imposed 'rewards, deadlines, threats and evaluations' with demotivation (Deci & Flaste, 1995, pp. 30-33). Motivation is also regarded as autonomous when it develops from the self through 'a sense of choice, volition and self-determination' without control or compulsion from others (Stone et al., 2009, p. 77). Informed meaningful choice seems to 'engender willingness' (Deci & Flaste, 1995, p. 34) and, in education, this could be one way of developing personal autonomy.

Candy (1991) suggests general education might support learners to make considered choices, to select and apply knowledge to a particular situation rather than offering learners complete freedom to react spontaneously. Guiding learners appears to align with SDT. Deci and Flaste (1995, p. 42) propose that intrinsic motivation for learning in schools can be developed through 'autonomy support', which is 'actively encouraging self-initiation, experimentation, and responsibility, and it may very well require setting limits'. Dewey ([1938] 1997) similarly sees a place for educators offering suggestions and guiding learners rather than fully relinquishing control.

> The teacher's business is to see that the occasion is taken advantage of. Since freedom resides in the operations of intelligent observation and judgement by which a purpose is developed, guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils' intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it (Dewey, [1938] 1997, p. 71).

If autonomous skills and knowledge can be developed in the classroom, they are then likely to be applied out of class given the nature of intrinsic motivation (Little, 2006). In my study, the participants' formal schooling in China was investigated and is analysed in Chapter 5 to show the extent to which autonomy was imposed, encouraged, restricted or ignored. Whether autonomy should be an educational goal is contested in certain quarters and I now highlight these and show how such concerns may be addressed. The focus and limited length of this Dissertation prevent an in-depth development of the issues, arguments and counterarguments.

2.1.3 Problematising personal autonomy

The focus on the individual in conceptualising autonomy in education has drawn criticism from communitarians and feminists (Kerr, 2002), and Wringe (1997) and Mezirow (1999) identify further criticism from poststructuralists. Communitarians often argue that liberal conceptualisations of education and personal autonomy reject communities' judgements over what is valued. Kerr (2002) counters that freedom to act can be conceived within contexts rather than through creating an 'imaginary independent self' (p. 13). For Kerr, personal autonomy can involve individuals developing a critical distance from the beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) of their upbringing while relating to and acting within their social and moral contexts. From this perspective,

communities' judgements over what is valued can co-exist alongside individual community members who may exercise their autonomy by querying their own community's judgement, thereby making their values salient and exercising their own contextually-bound judgement. R. Smith's (1997) earlier call for a reconceptualisation of autonomy that acknowledges social engagement also identifies communities as fundamental to autonomy:

> … we can see knowledge as a social and not an individual achievement: the knowing that enters into autonomy can be seen as a function of our shared world rather than as something built up by the solitary self on the foundations of what presents itself as indubitable to the individual consciousness (Smith, 1997, p. 131).

An important critique of autonomy from some feminists, especially poststructuralists, is a similar objection to autonomy understood to depend on rational individuals unaffected by social connections (Stoljar, 2013). Feminist authors reject such conceptualisation, which appears to reify a particular idealisation of successful men while devaluing familial and other social relationships and obligations often associated with women (Stoljar, 2013). However, autonomy has been reconsidered and reconceptualised by some feminist authors as relational autonomy (Stoljar, 2013). Herring (2014), for example, identifies individuals' obligations to others constraining their freedom but still allowing relational autonomy in that goals and choices are considered with relationships in mind. From the perspective of relational autonomy, the 'relationships constitute the self' so that 'autonomous decisions can only be understood in the context of those relationships' (Herring, 2014, p. 21). While Dearden (1975) acknowledges others as potential sources of knowledge, and Kerr (2002) recognises the importance of communities and context in personal autonomy, relational autonomy highlights relational obligations as aspects of the decision-making context. When decisions involve considered judgement and adequate reflection, autonomy may be present alongside obligation (Christman, 2004). This seems to echo Gibbs' (1979) willing obedience, albeit with greater emphasis on potential feelings of obligation, that forms aspects of relationships.

Autonomy is frequently rejected by poststructuralists for its focus on rational autonomous individuals (Mezirow, 1999). For poststructuralists, the extent to which there is truth or knowledge can only ever be 'partial, corrupt or

contingent' (Wringe, 1997, p. 117). There is also a refutation of autonomy conceptualised by poststructuralists which is both prescriptive and produces like-minded individuals misguidedly searching for 'certainty and control' (Mezirow, 1999). Mezirow agrees with much poststructuralist critique of personal autonomy as historically conceptualised. However, he argues that autonomy is no longer understood as the replacement of false beliefs with truth, but rather is understood as critically examined beliefs. Such critical examination, he suggests, could potentially lead to a poststructuralist perspective. Questioning beliefs is consistent with autonomy as discussed throughout this Dissertation and aligns with George Kelly's views of personal constructs and constructive alternativism discussed in Section 1.5. To briefly recap, constructive alternativism considers knowledge as temporary and experiences as open to other interpretations, with no promise of an eventual "truth" to be uncovered. Mezirow's (1999) view of personal autonomy parallels this by advocating critical questioning of beliefs and only tentatively accepting those which withstand scrutiny.

While the criticisms above query autonomy as an appropriate educational goal in liberal democracies, this study focuses on learning in a second language by people raised and educated in China. The current political ideology in China can be considered a blend of 'Marxism, economic pragmatism and Chinese traditional values' (X. Yan, 2018, p. 1), and formal education tends towards heteronomy, particularly prior to university entrance exams as detailed in Chapter 5. Despite the control exerted within the formal education system in China, personal autonomy may, however, emerge in various degrees. Moreover, once at university in the UK, particularly at postgraduate level, a degree of autonomy is likely to be assumed by lecturers and built into study programmes. Investigating a small number of Chinese students' learning histories in depth provided opportunities for identifying personal autonomy through their retrospective accounts. There was also the potential to uncover participants critical questioning their beliefs as they entered unfamiliar or unexpected contexts and communities. The following subsection summarises contextually-bound personal autonomy and aspects of learner autonomy which overlap.

2.1.4 Personal autonomy and learner autonomy

Personal autonomy is conceptualised in multiple ways that have evolved and responded to some of the criticisms of the atomistic version of the autonomous self in which personal autonomy was regarded as individualistic. The more recent conceptualisation of contextually-bound personal autonomy, in which individuals are understood to act in contexts which may restrict choice, or in which they may choose to willingly relinquish control to others, is that adopted in this Dissertation. As discussed above, relinquishing some control while maintaining overall control is a considered decision which may change over time. Control also features as a key aspect of learner autonomy, which is the focus of the next section of this chapter. In the adult learning sector, learner autonomy is often referred to as self-directed learning (SDL). The central theme of SDL is of adult learners taking control of their own learning (Candy, 1991). The amount of control learners must take to be considered autonomous is discussed in Section 2.2. SDL often involves seeking help from others (Tough, 1971), as Dearden recognised with personal autonomy. Identifying learner autonomy depends on identifying the intention underlying outward expressions of learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Proponents of learner autonomy in adult education, such as Merriam et al. (2007), highlight its importance in formal learning, and the importance of fostering and supporting learner autonomy there. While this Dissertation investigated aspects of formal learning to develop an understanding of prior contexts and the influence they had on beliefs, the main attention was on the autonomous learning occurring away from teachers and classrooms. The focus was adult education in its broadest sense, not only within formal education. This is where the following section starts.

2.2 Learner autonomy in adult education

Published in 1961, Houle's study into the activities of twenty-two adult learners is considered by some as the genesis of interest in self-directed learning in adult education (Candy, 1991, p. 158). Research that followed Houle's study similarly sought to verify that adults actually engage in learning away from formal educational contexts (Merriam et al., 2007). Self-directed learning (SDL) gained traction with interest in learner autonomy in adult education increasing dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s (Morrison & Navarro, 2014). This interest

seems to have accompanied interest in lifelong learning itself as many publications on learner autonomy in adult education refer to lifelong learning and vice versa (for example Merriam et al., 2007). Candy (1991) makes the connection explicit in his book *Self-Direction for Lifelong Learning,* specifically identifying learner autonomy as an aspect of lifelong learning enabling adult learners to adapt to social and technological changes which occur throughout their lives. Within Candy's definition, SDL involves:

> … "self-directed individuals" who are capable both of carrying on their education and of learning for themselves without the cumbersome apparatus of educational institutions (Candy, 1991, p. xiii).

2.2.1 Conceptualising learner autonomy

The adult education sector often uses terms interchangeably with learner autonomy, including self-planned learning (Tough, 1971), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975), and autodidaxy (Candy, 1991). While these and other terms may involve degrees of learner autonomy in adult education discourses, the precision or looseness with which the terms are used, combined with the vast array of learning situations labelled adult education, often complicate the situation. This is potentially further confused when educators interpret these terms from institutional documents, course materials, conferences and other resources (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Terms associated with learner autonomy have been applied both to activities within classrooms and out-of-class. Some authors write of learner autonomy as learning that happens independently of others, perhaps in isolation, yet other conceptualisations involve collaboration. While independence is often associated with learner autonomy, independent study is used, for example by Wedemeyer (1975) and Moore (1977), to refer to one-to-one tuition, distance learning, and individualised study programmes designed for individual students. Within such frameworks, learners are potentially given certain freedoms to choose, particularly regarding pace but possibly with choice of materials and perhaps even approaches to learning (Candy, 1991, pp. 11-12). However, even when absent, teachers have often curated the choices from which learners select (Candy, 1991, pp. 11-14).

With self-planned learning (SPL), the focus of learner autonomy is on deliberate learning projects that adults undertake to develop their understanding, skills or to implement some other personal change (Tough, 1971). Tough (1971) stipulates that a learning project must be a minimum of seven hours of learning within a six-month period. This opens up learning projects to include a vast array of learning activities. To be considered SPL by Tough, learners initiate the learning process and plan aspects of this, intending to increase and retain knowledge and abilities. Despite the "self" in SPL, when investigating the SPL activities of adult graduates in Canada, Tough (1966) found that all 40 interviewed participants sought advice, motivation and specific information from others, yet maintained control over their projects and chose to select, modify or reject shared advice. Tough (1971) also includes printed materials in the category of help from others but suggests that self-planned learners might also request assistance to overcome difficulties which may emerge from attempting to rely on texts alone. In my study, I investigated whether my participants sought others in pursuit of their learning, under what circumstances, and if not, why not.

Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning (SDL) in similar ways to Tough's definition of SPL. SDL is focussed on activities involving learning management such as goal setting and selecting materials with learners taking the initiative. Knowles dismisses the terms autonomous learning as implying learning in isolation. He juxtaposes individualist autonomous learning with SDL, conceptualising SDL as 'usually tak[ing] place in association with various kinds of helpers, such as teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people and peers' (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). This inclusion of teachers as a resource seems to differentiate SDL from SPL. For Knowles (1975, p. 21), self-directed learners engage in teacher-directed learning with a particular questioning mind set and purpose, allowing them to maintain their self-directedness. Knowles (1975, p. 21) also maintains the relevance of taught learning, for example when learners lack subject area experience. When teacher-directed learning occurs in such circumstances, he encourages educators to facilitate learners to become more self-directing.

More recently, Knowles et al. (2011, p. 174) have defined SDL as being 'learner controlled' and they differentiate it from 'unintended learning' in which there is 'no control', from 'meditated learning' in which there is 'shared control

between the learner and an external authority' and from 'authority-directed learning', which is 'authority controlled (organization or individual)'. Key to my study is the participants' rationale for particular language-related activities, which I probe to discern if this offers insights into whether choices appear to be participant- or other-directed. Knowles et al. (2011) also identify two distinct categories within the overarching term SDL. One is synonymous with independent study as outlined above, and the other they call personal autonomy. This is defined by combining both commonly perceived processes and goals associated with learner autonomy with a causal connection implying that critical or analytical thinking results from taking control of learning.

> Taking control of the goals and purposes of learning and assuming ownership of learning […] leads to an internal change of consciousness in which the learner sees knowledge as contextual and freely questions what is learned (Knowles et al., 2011, p. 184).

The authors provide no evidence for the causal link implied here between taking control and critical thinking, or even for the co-occurrence of such features. However, including these additional features within the definition fits well with the personal autonomy discussed in Section 2.1, where questioning beliefs, assumptions and knowledge is fundamental to personal autonomy. Criticality similarly appears integral to the learner autonomy espoused by Mezirow (1985) as he advocates questioning cultural assumptions, beliefs and rules which otherwise restrict learner autonomy. Ecclestone (2002) also sees critical thinking as fundamental to many forms of autonomy but never synonymous. Whether critical thinking is a constituent part of learner autonomy, a consequence, or even distinct and potentially occurring in the absence of learner autonomy:

> … the footprints left by advocates of personal autonomy and of critical thinking are commonly parallel, frequently cross one another, and often are quite indistinguishable (Candy, 1991, p. 329).

This tendency for the processes and goals of autonomy to be amalgamated is also common (Ecclestone, 2002, p. 34) even though there is evidence that taking control over the processes of learning in one context does not necessarily lead to individuals being more autonomous in other contexts (Candy, 1991, p. 123). The extent to which this is relevant to language learning is discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

2.2.2 Learner autonomy as autodidaxy

Candy (1991) distinguishes between SDL and autodidaxy. For Candy (1991, pp. 14-22), self-directed learning can take place either within or outwith an instructional domain but it requires learners to have some control over the learning endeavour. This contrasts somewhat with Knowles et al. (2011) who stipulate that learners take majority control. Within the overarching concept of SDL, Candy (1991) terms learning that occurs away from teacher control and 'outside formal institutional settings' autodidaxy (p.15). Despite the inherent learner control, self-directed learners may choose to seek expert assistance or temporarily relinquish control over their learning in the pursuit of knowledge or practical skills which they know they lack (Candy, 1991, p. 62). So autodidaxy does not preclude seeking assistance but when assistance is sought by autodidacts they initiate this and maintain control just as they may choose to follow or reject any advice received (Candy, 1991, p. 197).

Seeking assistance should not be considered purely transactional but rather 'as an act of sharing, marked by warmth, empathy, and authenticity' (Candy, 1991, p. 201). This social element extends beyond seeking assistance to knowledge affirmation or refutation. After all, the discourse community ultimately judges the appropriateness of behaviour and communicated ideas and 'whether some proposition or utterance is to count as knowledge or not' (Candy, 1991, p. 88). The social aspect of learning has positive influences, yet pervading tropes, narratives and shared constructs influence and affect the knowledge, assumptions and beliefs of people within communities (Benson & Lor, 1999). Family and community attitudes to learning influence motivation and willing participation in learning (Ecclestone, 2002, p. 30), which may encourage or discourage certain types of inquiry and behaviour (Sade, 2014). This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5, aspects of the Chinese education system are described along with this study's participant learning histories. This situates the participants' stories in the wider educational context as their experiences are related alongside the social and familial attitudes they felt within their communities. By discussing these and explaining learning behaviours at specific stages, participants potentially shared experiences of contextually-bound learner autonomy.

The extent to which learners are identifiable as autonomous depends less on their learning behaviours than on how they elucidate and rationalise these (Candy, 1991, p. 125). At times there may be no observable difference between learning in an instructional domain and assisted autodidaxy, and learner autonomy is perhaps only really identifiable when intentions underlying learners' behaviours are understood (Candy, 1991, p. 114). In universities, outside the classroom but still on campus, libraries or self-access centres could, following Candy, potentially be instructional domains given the presumed input of educators into the materials available within such settings. Taking this position to its logical conclusion then books, journal articles and MOOCs[8] could be considered as curated items presenting the world as the creators of these artefacts want others to view it as Tough (1971) recognised. Nevertheless, this presupposes that such artefacts are accessed for the purposes the creators intended. It is quite possible that such materials are accessed, for example, in order to criticise the content, or that they are used in unintended ways (see Manning et al., 2014 for examples of resource repurposing). This has clear implications for research into learner autonomy and is one reason why I used in-depth interviews in my study to investigate this area as discussed in Chapter 4. Section 2.2 has so far presented learner autonomy by considering learners' behaviours and intentions. However, educators might also encourage learner autonomy as discussed next.

2.2.3 Educators as facilitators of learner autonomy

Merriam et al. (2007), referring to educators' roles, identify various SDL goals in adult learners and group these in three ways: developing the capability to be self-directed learners; 'foster[ing] transformational learning'; 'promot[ing] emancipatory learning and social action' (p. 107). The first group is concerned with learning management, such as planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating learning, and is where most research has been focussed (Merriam et al., 2007). Transformational learning is generally associated with Mezirow (1991) and Brookfield (1995), both of whom feel that SDL should include learners questioning their own assumptions. For Mezirow (1985, p. 17), SDL is

[8] Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are online courses free to anyone with access to the internet (Manning, Morrison, & McIlroy, 2014)

fundamentally about 'becoming critically aware of what has been taken for granted about one's own learning', echoing aspects of Kelly's Personal Construct Theory discussed in Section 1.5. A feature common to Personal Construct Theory and SDL, and the autonomy espoused by Dearden and Gibbs discussed in Section 2.1, is reflective practice. This also underpins the third categorisation of SDL associated with 'emancipatory learning and social learning' (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 108). Given the importance of reflection, and 'the vagueness and elasticity' of meanings attributed to this term (McLaughlin, 1999, p. 10), reflective practice is now briefly discussed before returning to the topic of goals from educators' perspectives.

2.2.3.1 Reflection and reflective practice

For Dewey ([1933] 2008), reflection is interpreting incidents which rouse feelings of uncertainty by drawing on previous knowledge and experiences to hypothesise and test these hypotheses. Like Dewey, Schön (1983, p. 153) suggests that discomfort ('surprise') during practice can trigger reflection. Both authors' reactive conceptualisations mean beliefs, assumptions and knowledge remain unexamined until uncertainty is felt. Brookfield (1995) has a more proactive, robust (and extended) conception of reflection: critical reflection (CR). CR is also about experience but unremarkable events are considered and questioned within socio-political and economic structures. By engaging in CR, people recognise that their decisions, and the impact these have, are not only a result of those decisions but include influential factors both within and outwith their control. Thompson and Thompson (2008) subdivide CR into 'critical depth' (individuals questioning the assumptions underlying their practice) and 'critical breadth' (looking at the wider social context) and believe both are vital. Peer collaboration can help uncover assumptions, identifying areas overlooked by individuals to 'check, reframe and broaden [their] own theories of practice' (Brookfield, 1998, p. 200). There are however limitations. The institutional narratives Brookfield (1995) identifies exist throughout communities and can perpetuate assumptions. Nevertheless, the questioning of assumptions is key in critical reflection (Thompson & Thompson, 2008) and in the constructive alternativisim of George Kelly. For Kelly the responsibility for thoughts, actions and beliefs belong with the individual even if challenging these through reflection can be arduous, 'difficult [and] painful' (Little, 1991, p. 19).

However, Kelly ([1960] 2017) states that without reflection, experience is unlikely to lead to reconstruction and resulting personal growth and learning. Educators aiming to facilitate learner autonomy therefore should encourage reflective learning in order to achieve SDL goals, as discussed next.

2.2.3.2 Achieving SDL goals

In my study, unless the goals of capability for self-direction, transformative learning, and emancipatory learning and social action highlighted in Subsection 2.2.3 were encouraged by my participants' postgraduate lecturers and supervisors, identifying all three goals in the participants' data would likely have been challenging. At the same time, for participants engaging in autodidactic learning, it was likely that they engaged with learning management, such as planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating learning, regardless of educators' requests. The possibility also existed that relocating to the UK from China potentially prompted a re-evaluation of prior learning and assumed knowledge. Perhaps also importantly, in-depth interviews included guided reflection (see Subsection 4.6.7). Although the interviews did not purposefully prompt change, encouraging reflection involved self-evaluation and possibly encouraged change in participants' learning beliefs and behaviours. This is discussed further in my approach to data gathering in Chapter 4 Methodology.

How the goals of self-direction are achieved vary. Students given more responsibility for their learning may lack effective self-directing capability. Insisting on learning self-management may sometimes be unwelcome and have detrimental outcomes, particularly amongst less academic learners (Candy, 1991, p. 64). My participants had already achieved undergraduate academic success prior to their UK arrival. However, potentially postgraduates might experience difficulties self-managing if their previous educators maintained control over what was learned and how, as Marbeau claims.

> The pupil's potential aptitude for successful self-education [as an adult] will depend upon the extent to which he or she has been exposed to situations of responsibility and autonomy in the school years (Marbeau, 1976, p. 15).

This assumes that adults may not be able to learn to, or choose to, change if as schoolchildren they were not encouraged to be autonomous. If Marbeau is

correct, international postgraduates in the UK whose schooling offers little responsibility beyond obeying teacher-directed learning might inevitably fail in contexts that rely on self-directed learning. However, certain conceptualisations of SDL assume that maturity brings the capacity and preference to be more self-directing which, if encouraged, scaffolded and facilitated, enables more rapid development of SDL (Knowles, 1975, p. 20). My study aimed to investigate participants' language learning histories to provide an understanding of the extent to which they were given, or took, responsibility for prior language learning. The next section further develops the relevance of prior learning, learner autonomy, and beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) to this study.

2.2.4 Learner autonomy in this study

The participants in my study were expected to take a certain amount of responsibility for their own learning within their postgraduate programme (see Section 4.2). How they engaged with learning in a second language was informed by their BAK and their perceptions of their contexts. The BAK learners develop about themselves as learners, about the content and about how to learn it, likely 'represents a reasoned response to previous learning' (Candy, 1991, p. 137). By investigating participants' prior language learning experiences, this study acknowledged previous learning, and framed participants' initial BAK and behaviours within the contexts that had informed these. BAK were then discussed as participants progressed through their postgraduate programmes. How learning BAK and behaviours might have been reinforced or changed as experience developed, and how this experience was interpreted through personally constructed BAK, was central to this study. This relied on conceptualising learners:

> … as active construers of their circumstances – making choices on the basis of their constructions, searching for cues, striving to interpret and even anticipate the demands made in various situations, and adjusting their learning behaviour accordingly (Candy, 1991, p. 381).

Having achieved previous academic success, international postgraduates may feel confident that previously efficacious strategies will enable future academic success. However, while learners' previous experiences and BAK may shape their conceptualisation of their new domains (Candy, 1991, p. 284), the learning

behaviours they apply based on these conceptualisations could be less effective than in previous contexts. As discussed in Section 1.3, successfully transitioning to UK universities involves international students complying with often unspoken academic expectations that require these students to adapt to unfamiliar learning and teaching approaches (Brown & Holloway, 2008). How individual learners cope with selecting effectively from their strategy repertoire or developing this range is likely influenced by the apparent learning task, the perceived relevance, and previous experiences and conceptualisations of the knowledge, skills and attributes being developed (Candy, 1991, p. 284). Hence, this study investigated these as participants' sojourns progressed and their perceptions of their contexts developed.

I anticipated that academic reading and writing strategies would be used to overcome challenges transitioning to the unfamiliar English-medium academic ecosystem. The social purpose of texts determines the language structures conventionally found within each genre (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 126), and social-purpose knowledge is influenced by experience to date. It requires a minimal familiarity with discourse configurations in a specific subject to understand that subject enough to become a peripheral member of the discourse community (Candy, 1991, p. 343), a type of discourse socialisation (Duff, 2007). Unlike language learning classes participants likely experienced, in which students commonly read in class and teachers check and guide comprehension, reading on postgraduate programmes is often allocated to time between lessons. How reading proceeds may therefore be left to the students with the onus on individuals to decide what, whether and how to read. Candy is unambiguous that, in adult education, self-directed learners must develop the capacity to judge the veracity of the content being learned:

> … we do not simply want people who can find resources for themselves, manage their time appropriately or set learning goals, but rather learners who know and understand enough to be able to distinguish plausible from implausible knowledge claims or convincing from unconvincing evidence (Candy, 1991, p. 344).

This is possibly not so relevant for second language learning *per se*, yet evaluating the content of others' texts, often underpins effective postgraduate study. Details around academic reading are rare in the literature on learner

autonomy in adult education. By contrast, this Dissertation provides detailed insights into how participants selected and interacted with texts as well as how these informed the production of their own texts for learning and assessment.

As with academic reading, how students undertake assessment writing is seldom investigated in learner autonomy publications. Yet writing is the dominant assessment instrument in UK universities (De Vita, 2002), and there is potentially much for international students to become cognisant of and practised in before their first written assessment is due. Tian and Low's (2012) research into Chinese postgraduates at UK universities discovered that as undergraduates in China, the text types they had written diverged hugely. There were also 'qualitatively different' expectations between China and the UK in terms of structure, referencing, appropriate sources and level of argumentation, which led to postgraduate confusion and frustration (Tian & Low, 2012, p. 311). Academic writing is neither a single genre nor a neutral medium of communication dictated by a discrete list of lexicogrammatical rules (Rai, 2004). It includes multiple prestige forms that are highly context dependent (Wingate, 2007), conferring status on proficient users who structure, format and apply appropriate linguistic choices in ways that conform to the conventions and expectations of very specific discourse communities (Rai, 2004). For those who misunderstand these conventions and expectations, grade underperformance (Preece & Godfrey, 2004) or failure (Klinger & Murray, 2012) is inevitable, and it is the student-writers who are considered responsible (Lillis & Turner, 2001). Poor assessment results profoundly impact students who already have low self-esteem, a common feeling amongst international students (Wu & Hammond, 2011).

While academic writing is not merely the capacity to apply a discrete list of lexicogrammatical rules (Rai, 2004) as noted above, understanding and applying appropriate rules in a second language remain part of the skills and knowledge international students require. From the perspective of autonomy in language learning, this was an additional layer of understanding and learning required both to interpret meaning when interacting with texts produced by the business and academic community and to use the language of business constructs to confer academic discourse community belonging. Students engaging in their L2 are likely to encounter a multitude of new or not well-known words and phrases

in the texts they read. This lexical plethora provides many vocabulary items to consider learning, some of which are key to a particular body of knowledge, have specialist meanings and denote borders and categorisations within a subject (Candy, 1991, p. 303). However, with the volume of texts to read and comprehend on postgraduate programmes, the time for learning unfamiliar lexis is limited. Key vocabulary occurs relatively frequently whereas other words and phrases may be so infrequent that they are seen once in a sojourn. Effectively differentiating between these is advantageous but if students have not had to self-select vocabulary to learn previously, they may struggle to identify effectively that lexis which is most likely to reoccur. Hence this study inquired about how participants engaged with unfamiliar lexis and the reasons for their (in)actions.

Aside from the importance of literacy and familiarity with language and genre, the purpose for learning is likely to affect how learning is approached. Marton and Säljö (1976) distinguish between surface-level learning, where facts are memorised with little attention paid to underlying interconnectedness of ideas and how new information connects to existing knowledge, and deep-level learning. An aspect of deep-level learning is thinking through possible connections and exploring the ideas signified by the words in ways that require critical and analytical thinking. Strategies leading to either level of learning could be seen as effective if these fulfil the learner's purpose of achieving a specific goal (Beattie, Collins, & McInnes, 1997). For example, if learners aim to pass exams with minimum effort and perceive little value in content engagement beyond obtaining their passes, surface-level learning strategies are probably optimal. Nevertheless, given that strategies may not align with motives (Candy, 1991, p. 293) and instead might be strategies learned in different circumstances, my study investigated motives. Engaging with participants, I set out to learn about their contexts, intended learning outcomes, and their beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) behind certain learning behaviours.

While engaging with academic literature and the language used to portray meaning and nuance is an aspect of postgraduate participation, there are other ways of participating and engaging during a sojourn. Referring to language learning, Kalaja, Menezes, and Barcelos (2008, p. 3) view participation as learners' active pursuit of opportunities. The aim, as Kalaja et al. (2008) see it,

is of language learners becoming fluent in the linguistic and social practices of target discourse communities so that they are viewed as legitimate members of those communities. However, this investigation specifically involved participants not enrolled primarily on language learning programmes. Such international students may engage in social or academic pursuits with other English speakers. Similarly, social or academic pursuits may include active first-language participation with compatriots. Other discourse communities may exist which international students potentially seek membership of, for example the business community in China. These other discourse communities potentially have different linguistic and social practices which may offer affordances or challenges transitioning between communities. Language-related activities beyond academic engagement were included in my study as were instances of Chinese-language use the participants chose to discuss. This provided a multifaceted insight into the participants' lives during their UK sojourn.

The remainder of this chapter focusses on autonomy in language learning (ALL). Sections 2.3 and 2.4 present in more detail how ALL has been conceptualised amongst adults. The next section initially highlights the apparently waning interest in learner autonomy in adult education contrasted with increasing interest in ALL, while also drawing parallels between conceptualisations of autonomy in each sector. Subsection 2.3.1 provides details around classroom approaches in which most ALL research has developed. Following this, Subsection 2.3.2 deals with the criticism sometimes levelled at ALL as an ethnocentric construct inappropriately imposed on learners from other cultures. Section 2.4 focusses entirely on out-of-class learning and starts with defining and categorising out-of-class learning to situate this study in relation to others. The four main research areas of out-of-class ALL are then discussed with relevant findings and research gaps discussed. Subsection 2.4.5 presents non-language related programmes and autonomy in language learning to specify the research gap this study addresses.

2.3 Autonomy in language learning

Brockett et al. (2000) analysed SDL coverage in adult education journals over the last two decades of the twentieth century, finding that SDL articles peaked in the mid-to-late 1980s and the first few years of the 1990s. By the turn of the

Millennium, interest had waned leaving areas of SDL under-researched (Brockett, 2000; Brockett et al., 2000; Merriam et al., 2007). Interest in the individual learner appears to have been replaced by a greater interest in 'the socio-political context of adult education' (Brockett, 2000, p. 543). By contrast, interest in ALL burgeoned with sociocultural aspects increasingly being brought to the fore (L. Murphy, 2014, p. 120). There is generally an increased acknowledgement amongst ALL researchers that social ecosystems are dynamic, both benefiting and restricting individuals who are consistently shaped by and shaping their ecosystems (Block, 2008, p. 143). Benson argues the importance of maintaining the focus on the socially-situated individual:

> … we need to find ways of situating research on individual learners in its social contexts that neither treat the social context as background nor erase the individuality of the learners within assumptions of social and cultural conditions (Benson, 2013, p. 89).

As with learner autonomy in adult learning discussed above, ALL has been conceptualised in multiple distinct ways from independent learning, to self-study, learner training courses, project work and task-based learning (Cirocki, 2016). While many millions of people learn additional languages without relying on classes, ALL theory has generally been oriented towards learning in the classroom (Benson, 2011, p. 9). Some commentators (for example Holec, 1981; Pemberton, 1996; Nunan, 1996) view learner autonomy as a capacity which is not innate but must be learned. For example, Nunan (1996) suggests that to presume that learners are capable of choosing 'wisely and well' is inaccurate (p. 14). This implies that unless my participants already had experience of ALL, they would be unable to choose wisely and well. However, Voller and Pickard (1996) report on a language exchange programme where ALL developed without prior learner training or educator intervention.

ALL publications commonly reference Holec's (1981, p. 3) definition in his report to the Council of Europe as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (for example Cotterall, 2000; O'Leary, 2014; Palfreyman, 2014). In the introduction to his report, Holec acknowledges the importance of autonomy in adult education and throughout he references Janne's (1977) Council of Europe Adult Education report. While Holec's (1981) report focusses on ALL, it includes steps that overlap with the stages proposed by Knowles (1975, pp. 11-13) outlining the

SDL process in which individuals take the initiative, often with the help of others:

- diagnosing needs for learning
- setting learning goals
- identifying human and material resources for learning
- choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies
- evaluating learning outcomes

Holec (1981, p. 4) describes autonomy as learners taking responsibility for their learning through a series of steps:

- determining the objectives
- defining the contents and progressions
- selecting methods and techniques to be used
- monitoring the procedures of acquisition
- evaluating what has been acquired

Holec groupings while similar add monitoring and incorporated language acquisition, yet overlook the implementing identified by Knowles. To address this overlap in meaning Pemberton (1996, p. 3) distinguishes between capacity and practice '[language learner] autonomy' is a capacity and 'self-directed learning' is a way in which learning is carried out'. In other words, SDL is the learning that occurs once the capacity to learn in this manner is attained. However, Candy (1991, p. xiii) describes SDL in terms of capability indicating that there are discrepancies in this argument. Rather than differentiating self-directed learning (SDL) from autonomy in language learning (ALL), it may be more productive to acknowledge the work undertaken from the 1970s onwards in the adult education sector which appears to underpin much thinking in autonomy in language learning. ALL clearly shifts the focus specifically to L2 learning, allowing detailed features relevant to language learning and language use to gain salience under the auspices of language learning autonomy. Theories and research from second language acquisition and applied linguistics can inform support and guidance offered to language learners in formal education contexts

both within classrooms and in out-of-class contexts. These theories and research include the language learning strategies and beliefs discussed in Chapter 3.

As in adult education, language learner autonomy researchers widely accept that the capacity to take control of learning is multidimensional, varying according to contexts and time (Benson, 2011). For research on ALL to be viable, it 'must be describable in terms of observable phenomena'(p. 58). These, according to Benson (2011), could be observable behaviours or 'mental states […] inferred from observable behaviours, elicited introspections or learning outcomes' (p. 58). However, given the importance of intentionality underlying observable behaviour discussed in Section 2.2 above, I used in-depth interviews to discuss and clarify intentionality with participants. I also used follow-up emails for additional clarification of specific points but forewent observations as both impractical and intrusive for out-of-class learning.

Holec's definition of learner autonomy, 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (1981, p. 3), has not gone unchallenged. Benson (2011, p. 58) prefers 'control' rather than 'charge', suggesting that it is more researchable. Leni Dam extends the definition to explicitly include interdependence along with independence, and willingness along with capacity.

> Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person (Dam, 1995, p. 1).

Dam is not the first to connect ALL with interdependence (see for example Little, 1991), and the inclusion of being socially responsible addresses the much earlier discussion by Dearden (1972) associating criminality with personal autonomy (see Subsection 2.1.1). However, as with Holec's definition, it is unclear why the definitions identify learning in general rather than focussing on language learning. Indeed, Dam's definition above seems to align well with the aspects of learner autonomy in adult education discussed in Section 2.2 even though her focus is language learning and much of her work was with middle school learners in the classroom. The definition for autonomy in language learning (ALL) in this Dissertation therefore slightly modifies Dam's (1995)

definition with ALL made explicit and to distinguish it from learner autonomy in adult education. Such a distinction allows people to be potentially considered autonomous language learners but lacking autonomy in another aspect of education or vice versa. The definition used here for ALL is as follows.

> Autonomy in language learning is characterised by a readiness to take control of one's own second language learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person.

Benson (2011, p. 61) is keen to point out that there are multiple areas of control researchers and educators may choose to emphasise, all of which can coexist. For example, Holec (1981) seems to emphasise the learning management of planning, organising and evaluating language learning. This fits well with the first of three distinct SDL goals Merriam et al. (2007) identify, developing the capability to be self-directed learners (see Subsection 2.2.3). As in SDL, this has been criticised for overlooking the cognitive processes thereby narrowing the scope of ALL (Little, 1991, p. 4). Researchers such as Navarro (2016) emphasise psychological aspects. These researchers are interested in 'control over the cognitive processes underlying effective self-management of learning' (Benson, 2011, p. 60). These include beliefs and preferences, affective states and emotions, and motivation, which are influenced by factors such as social-mediation, the social environment and the L2 motivational self. With my focus on behaviours and beliefs, the research in this Dissertation combines learning management with psychological aspects. Accordingly, investigating factors which influenced behaviours and beliefs from participants' perspectives, formed an important part of this study. The third area Benson (2011) identifies as an area of control is political. This appeared to be less relevant to this study because although the participants took some control of the content they engaged with, their concerns were with the suitability, credibility and accessibility of resources. Nevertheless, questioning the authority of experts through analysing and evaluating their work could be considered political and potentially connects ALL with critical thinking.

Participants in this study engaged with and avoided certain second-language ecosystems and behaved in ways they believed were effective in achieving specific goals in particular situations. Some of these behaviours might appear counterintuitive; however, by inquiring into the intention behind certain behaviours and encouraging participants to evaluate these, it was possible to develop an understanding of how and why individuals behaved in particular contexts at specific times. The longitudinal research design allowed investigation of the interplay between BAK, behaviours and participants' perceptions of contexts and experiences as their UK sojourn progressed. However, a research challenge was the manifold ways learners exercise control over their learning, as Little (1991) warns. For example, while one learner was adept at seeking opportunities for interacting with others in the L2, another developed effective strategies for preparing for assessment with minimal effort. Both learners could be considered autonomous through the control they exerted over their learning 'but in different and possibly non-comparable ways' (Benson, 2011, p. 66). This can confound narrowly-focussed research since 'the learner who displays a high degree of autonomy in one area may be non-autonomous in another' (Little, 1991, p. 5). The scope of this research covered social, transactional and academic uses of language, and L1 use to facilitate L2 achievements. While out-of-class learning was the overarching focus, prior learning was instrumental in forming and developing beliefs and behaviours and so previous learning in China was investigated, including in-class learning. Classroom practice was potentially structured in ways that encouraged language learner autonomy, and so to identify if this was the case, how this might have been manifest is now considered. The following subsection outlines ways ALL has been interpreted for classroom practice.

2.3.1 Classroom approaches

Much research published on ALL, like the literature on second language acquisition in general, has been focussed on classroom learning (Benson, 2011, p. 77). While my study was concerned with adult out-of-class learning, a brief discussion of ALL within the classroom is arguably necessary for context and for considering how ALL might have been supported during the participants' compulsory and post-compulsory education. Holec's (1981) influential view that ALL is a learned capacity seems to have resulted in various approaches to

developing ALL through classroom activities. For example, Dam's approach with younger learners involves supporting them to research their own language learning through research cycles (see for example Dam, 1995; Little et al., 2017; Dam, 2018). These cycles include planning learning projects individually or in collaboration with others, implementing these, evaluating them and subsequent planning (Dam, 2018). Efforts have also commonly been focussed on learner training (Sinclair, 1996, p. 150), including self-assessment (W. Lee, 1996, p. 167), and to a certain extent, peer assessment (Miller & Ng, 1996). Meanwhile, The term learner training is open to interpretation and has been criticised for not necessarily signifying the underlying learning processes language learners develop (Sinclair, 1996, p. 151). Nevertheless, the following definition is relevant to this Dissertation.

> Learning training aims to help learners consider the factors which affect their learning and discover the learning strategies which suit them best, so that they may become more effective learners and take on more responsibility for their own learning (G. Ellis & Sinclair, 1989, p. 2).

This focus on process in learner training is reiterated by Nunan (1996), who suggests ALL can be developed in a 'learning-centered classroom' (p. 14) with the twin aims of attending to language content and the process of language learning. This dual-focus of language learning and making explicit the process of learning language is seen by some practitioners such as Esch (1996) as crucial because '[l]earning by doing is not enough'(p. 42). While raising awareness of the language learning process within a classroom along with language learning seems principled, this awareness may emerge without teacher intervention. My participants discussed their learning processes, with reference to when and why they developed these. To identify possible learner autonomy training, I looked for evidence in the interview transcripts of the five criteria Esch (1996, p. 38) suggests for evaluating whether education practice is more likely to facilitate than subdue learner autonomy. These are choice; flexibility; adaptability/modifiability; reflectivity, and shareability. Of these, choice must be genuine rather than teacher-led tasks being completed in learner-led sequences (Esch, 1996, p. 39). The flexibility should exist to change earlier choices and repurpose resources (Esch, 1996, p. 40). She also identifies reflective practice and sharing incorporated into classwork as more likely to

encourage ALL. These criteria are referred to in this study when discussing participants' learning histories in Chapter 5. However, questions around the cultural appropriacy of promoting autonomy in language learning beyond "the West" remain. The following subsection addresses these.

2.3.2 Autonomy in language learning as an ethnocentric construct

As discussed, ideas around individual autonomy took root during the European Enlightenment (Section 2.1), much early work on SDL emanated from the United States (Section 2.2), and ALL commonly references Holec's report to the Council of Europe (Section 2.3). Criticism has sometimes been levelled at the cultural appropriateness of encouraging ALL with learners from non-Western backgrounds (Pemberton, 1996). Little (2012b) responds that such criticisms are founded on three fictions: Western education is defined by and routinely achieves learner autonomy; the values underpinning learner autonomy 'are not universally applicable'; learners in other countries 'are the helpless victims of the cultural and other traditions that shape their educational experience' (p. 15). As discussed in Section 2.2, Western education does not necessarily produce autonomous learners, despite autonomy being named as a goal in policy documents such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001). Mezirow (1985; 1991; 1997) believes effective SDL requires transformation in adult learners' beliefs and ways of understanding the world, and R. Kelly (1996) sees the need for language learners to undertake a substantial transformation in their beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) about 'language and their role as learners' (p. 94) to become effective autonomous language learners. The socially-situated concept of learning and language learning, raised throughout this chapter, potentially counteracts critiques of learner autonomy as being Western and individualistic (L. Murphy, 2014, p. 120).

Autonomy as a goal also appears in international universities in countries with Confucian heritages (Humphreys & Wyatt, 2013). Autonomy in language learning (ALL) has attracted the attention of mainland China's academics, with 133 ALL articles published in key language education journals between 2006 and 2016 (Ou, 2017), indicating that ALL can perhaps, at least in academia, coexist

alongside Chinese virtues. Some commentators offer evidence that non-Western 'traditional learning practice' and 'cultural traits' could potentially facilitate learner autonomy (Pemberton, 1996, p. 6). Pierson (1996, p. 51), writing about Hong Kong Chinese learners, argues that observed 'passivity and rote-learning behaviours' among learners are less cultural traits than potentially effective strategies to deal with the particular structure of the education system which assesses, and therefore rewards, the reproduction of transmitted knowledge. By investigating my participants' learning histories, I gained insights into the participants' prior learning and their contextual perspectives. These are presented in Chapter 5 and these influences on participants' contextual perspectives during their sojourns are then discussed in Chapter 6.

2.4 Out-of-class learning

Merriam et al. (2007) split adult education into formal, nonformal and informal, adapting a framework proposed by Coombs (1985; 1989). Within this framework, formal learning is associated with compulsory and post-compulsory education, where learning is accredited in the form of formal qualifications. Nonformal learning often involves following a syllabus with a tutor but is generally 'local and community-based', and may be used to complement, supplement or as an alternative to the formal system (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 30). Informal learning occurs without a syllabus planned by others and is sometimes not recognised as learning by those engaged in the learning activities (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 26), and is perhaps generally overlooked by educators in formal education. Such categorisation provides certain clarity, and draws attention to nonformal learning potentially supporting formal learning. Informal learning, which could otherwise be overlooked, is also made salient. These definitions, however, seem to depend on identifying the "other" who has planned the learning (informal learning being the lack of an other-planned syllabus rather than the presence of a self-planned syllabus) and the qualifications (other assessed). While this Dissertation has referred to formal learning, the extent and type of learner control is of greater interest. Of particular interest is when learners step outside the classroom and have the option to control their own learning rather than instances in which the educator relinquishes control or facilitates learner autonomy in the classroom, as these are choices which ultimately depend on teachers and their approaches.

Benson (2011, pp. 76-77) identifies three categories of out-of-class learning: self-instruction; naturalistic language learning; and self-directed naturalistic learning. Self-instruction is when learners actively initiate, plan and implement language learning activities. While Benson (2011, p. 76) points out that a strong version of this, where learners only work in isolation, is not synonymous with autonomy in language learning, a 'weaker, episodic sense' is in keeping with ALL. Naturalistic language learning by contrast is mainly incidental language learning through interaction with other target language users, generally through spoken interactions but also potentially through written interaction. The third category, self-directed naturalistic learning, refers to situations learners intentionally create for themselves in which, while language learning may be taking place, the primary purpose of the interaction is 'on communication or on learning something other than the language itself' (Benson, 2011, p. 77). My participants' discussions ranged across all of these out-of-class learning types, as Hyland (2004) similarly found when investigating successful undergraduate and postgraduate language learners in Hong Kong. As with Hyland's findings, perceived contexts and goals as well as beliefs impacted on language learning behaviour. Her findings highlighted the importance of social contexts and beliefs around the appropriacy of second language use within certain contexts and these were key components of my research.

While out-of-class language learning is broadly recognised as playing a substantial role in becoming proficient at advanced levels (Benson, 2011, p. 139), publications on out-of-class learning are less common than those involving ALL connected to classroom-based language learning (Nunan & Richards, 2015). Certain out-of-class learning such as teacher-instructed homework appear to involve little learner autonomy, and teacher-initiated tasks do not easily fit Benson's out-of-class categories. For this study I considered homework as out-of-class learning because while tasks are teacher-selected, processes are still potentially learner-controlled. For example, teacher-directed vocabulary memorisation homework tasks could involve learning with others, learning by translation, learning through recitation or writing, or any other learning behaviour the learner deems effective. In other words, learners might exert control over out-of-class learning even when goals are educator-directed.

The remainder of this chapter discusses published research into out-of-class ALL. Research is grouped according to common aspects of the learners or the learning while acknowledging some research can be placed in multiple categories. This section identifies research gaps in out-of-class ALL. First research into ALL as educator-guided tasks is considered in Subsection 2.4.1 before looking at research into ALL with individuals who had immigrated and were learning the dominant language of their host country. Subsection 2.4.3 then highlights autobiographical studies undertaken by researchers who investigated their own language learning. Subsection 2.4.4 presents some studies on ALL within higher education where students were enrolled on language learning courses, before Subsection 2.4.5 discusses ALL research within universities in which students learned in a second language without taking language courses.

2.4.1 Educator-guided out-of-class tasks

Some researchers have investigated learners enrolled on language courses engaged in educator-guided out-of-class language learning activities (Benson & Reinders, 2011). For example, Gilliland (2015) describes the challenges her international students experienced in English-dominant ecosystems. These learners understood their teachers and other international students but struggled to understand other locals. The teacher asked her students to engage in out-of-class listening and write weekly reflective listening logs. Gilliland (2015) provides ideas for integrating listening logs for extensive listening practice without presenting research data or indicating how learners' undertook this task, the strategies they used, or their perspectives of task efficacy. My participants encountered similar challenges to Gilliland's students but I investigated participants' responses, their behaviours and the perceived efficacy of their strategy use as the sojourn progressed.

Alice Chik (2015) researched the affordances of video games to fill knowledge gaps through the case study of a learner on an academic English course. The learner felt his course fulfilled his academic language needs but struggled with everyday conversations about his interest in sport, particularly basketball. The learner developed his second-language knowledge around basketball through playing a basketball video game in English. From his experience, Chik (2015, pp. 77-78) produced guidelines for educators aiming to encourage out-of-class

learning through video gaming. She includes information about how groups of gamers dealt with new lexical items. Chik's chapter mainly discusses what is likely to happen in games and the principles of vocabulary learning that apply. My participants' potential to have similar interests in developing second-language expertise outwith their academic studies was considered and deliberately incorporated into the research questions to avoid narrowly focussing on academic English.

2.4.2 Immigration

Research into language acquisition amongst adult immigrants' commonly emphasises how aspects of immigrants' identity hamper language acquisition (Chik & Benson, 2008, p. 156). However, this perspective potentially ignores wider opportunities which may arise through the capacity to interact in two languages and access various language communities, albeit perhaps with peripheral membership. Kanno (2000, p. 3) postulates that the L1 and L2 offer access to two equally relevant parallel worlds. For postgraduates arriving in the UK, having met specific language requirements, the affordances Kanno identifies are similarly relevant. Nevertheless, how those within immigrant and international compatriot postgraduate communities perceive themselves and other communities undoubtedly impacts on willingness to learn and engage in the dominant language of host communities. While out-of-class ALL is perhaps less frequently studied than other aspects of immigrants' experiences, publications have connected second-language immigrants with ALL for many decades.

Schmidt (1983) carried out a longitudinal study of a Japanese learner's development of sociolinguistic competence over a seven-year period, initially in Japan and later as an immigrant to Hawaii. In Hawaii, the linguistic ecosystem created a demand for increasing interactions with other English speakers. Schmidt chose to focus on the capacity of his participant to use directives in speech and although by the end of the study blatant errors in directive use were not evident, speech patterns remained which reflected certain Japanese structures not evident in the wider community. This study suggests that acquiring sociolinguistic competence to the level of the surrounding community can be a slow process. While my study did not involve researcher assessment of

linguistic or sociolinguistic competence, participants themselves were asked to evaluate both their linguistic skills and learning behaviours since evaluation is a fundamental aspect of SDL and ALL as defined by Knowles (1975) and Holec (1981) respectively.

Navarro (2016) conducted longitudinal case studies of six Colombian-born adult immigrants to New Zealand. He investigated their language learning histories, the influence these had on their beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK), and the subsequent out-of-class language learning activities they engaged in within their host country. His PhD data collection primarily used interviews, interviewing some participants periodically for more than a year. He found that previous formal and informal language learning experiences appeared to impact current BAK about language learning equally and that they impacted 'consequent experience with L2 learning and use' (p. 182). His findings also point to dynamic interconnectivity between social contexts, learner cognition, and second language behaviour. While the participants in Navarro's (2016) study were distinct from the participants in this Dissertation, as were their reasons for engaging in English, the interaction between context, BAK and consequent behaviour might be similar even if specific contexts, BAK and behaviours differed.

2.4.3 Autobiography

Second-language teachers and researchers commonly engage in second-language learning and many have opportunities to live and work in other linguistic ecosystems. Limited studies exist in which these individuals document their second-language learning using reflective journals, which are subsequently analysed to develop autobiographical accounts of out-of-class language learning. Schmidt and Frota (1986) followed Schmidt's Portuguese learning in a target language environment over a five-month period from complete beginner as he developed the language through both classroom-based instruction and out-of-class spoken interaction. Campbell (1996) similarly documented her language learning in a target-language environment both in-class and out-of-class over a two-month period. Her focus was on the conversational social interactions she had outside the classroom and she connected her prior language-learning experiences with those she implemented when learning this additional language.

Her motivation to be accepted and respected outside the classroom by teachers and their friends is noticeable throughout her account in her pursuit of social target-language interaction.

Kerekes (2015) wrote about using songs and lyrics in her out-of-class learning and focussed on the affective aspect of the various activities she tried. Her self-observations of her affective state often seemed to be influenced by the linguistic level of the resources used and her perceived progress. The activities she undertook included translating and learning songs, joining a choral group in Hungary and then moving to the US with the choral group. For her, song lyrics and poems were useful for aspects such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary as well as memory recall. She eventually went on to study a two-year college course and integrated with other English speakers. The importance of others is highlighted particularly in Kerekes' and Campbell's studies above and, again, reinforces not just the social purpose of language use but the social nature of being human (Little, 1991). I ensured that data gathered in this study covered social aspects and affect thereby allowing the development of an intricate understanding of the ecosystems within which learners chose to participate. The extent to which participants explicitly attempted to influence the social groups they were part of in pursuit of language learning goals and social acceptance was also considered in light of Campbell's study.

2.4.4 Higher education

Published research on out-of-class learning initiatives in university contexts with the aim of developing language out-of-class has appeared mainly in the last decade. Some publications provide possible ways of involving out-of-class learning but provide limited insights into what learners actually did or how they learned. For example, Day and Robb (2015) write about an extensive reading programme integrated into courses for all incoming undergraduates at a Japanese university. This appears to have had successful results in that English test scores for reading increased as did other test scores. That reading test scores increase when learners read more is unsurprising, but no details are given regarding the other tests. Day and Robb (2015) write from the perspective of course designers and no research or data is presented from the learners' perspectives. Extensive reading programmes, such as that Day and Robb (2015)

report, tend to focus on regular reading for the purposes of developing learners' second-language reading fluency. While extensive reading is rarely if ever associated in the academic literature with postgraduate programmes, my participants read extensively for several reasons, and their strategies evolved as I report in Chapter 6. In my study the focus was on participants' perspectives and included their evaluations of their second-language abilities after a year of engagement.

Research involving university students but investigating out-of-class learning unconnected to a particular language programme occurred in a series of case studies carried out by Palfreyman (2011), who focussed on five female Emirati students attending an English-medium university in Dubai. Using hour-long interviews with the learners and later with family members, the researcher built an understanding of the learner-participants' experiences of learning and using languages, and of family members' participation in the learning process. Participants referred to formal and informal sites of learning. University language classes were mentioned but dismissed as inadequate. Some opportunities were taken on family members' recommendations (speaking with siblings, watching television), but other advice was ignored, although Palfreyman (2011) seems not to have probed for reasons or connected these to beliefs. At the same time, encouragement was often important, even when the person encouraging knew less English. The research focussed on what participants did rather than their reasons for doing, with a particular focus on strategies within different social contexts. I was equally interested in this focus on strategies but also wanted to uncover the associated rationale.

Out-of-class language learning is a niche research area and there is little known about the blend between out-of-class language learning and language learning in the classroom in various contexts (Reinders & Benson, 2017). The vast range of contexts and learners contrasts with the limited number of small-scale context-dependent studies undertaken to date. This suggests there is still much to know about how learners develop their language beyond the classroom. Within this niche research area, extremely limited publications indicate even less is known about how language development outside the classroom is undertaken in support of taught non-language-focussed university programmes. Of the few studies, that presented next does focus on how international postgraduates in the UK

developed their L2 skills with the help of others as they engaged with their academic programmes. Another focussing on lexical strategies is discussed in Subsection 3.3.3.

2.4.5 Non-language related programmes and autonomy in language learning

There appears to be little research on ALL with students enrolled on non-language related programmes but who are living overseas in an L2-dominant society, studying in L2-medium and likely to have immediate needs to develop aspects of their L2 abilities. Blaj-Ward (2017) conducted one of the few published studies to uncover the experiences of such students developing their English. Her focus was on 'language development brokers' (LDBs), people who 'prompt and support a qualitative increase in students' capacity to function linguistically in an English-medium education environment' (Blaj-Ward, 2017, p. 57). She undertook in-depth interviews with 21 full-time international postgraduates in the UK with a combined 13 different first languages. The overwhelming majority of the LDBs identified were not trained language educators. Instead a range of people, including lecturers, friends, classmates and flatmates, provided 'direct language correction or opportunities for meaningful language use' (Blaj-Ward, 2017, p. 58), much of which occurred outside the classroom. This corroborates many of the ideas discussed earlier around the collaborative and interdependent aspects of learning, including language learning. Knowing that LDB interactions occur then raises other questions around how these are initiated and potentially change behaviour and beliefs. Initiation of LDB interactions were explored in my study and show that participants sought and offered linguistic support, or provided rationale for actively choosing not to seek help from others. The extent to which participants perceived these as changing behaviour or beliefs is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Overall, there is relatively little known about how international students engage with the second-language ecosystem beyond the classroom. The postgraduate participants in my study experienced a certain amount of educator control over the course materials selected, the intended learning outcomes and assessment of these with respect to the postgraduate programme. However, the out-of-class

language learning and strategies used to engage with learning in a second language were subject to learner control and were likely beyond the postgraduate educators' knowledge and consideration. My study brings overdue attention to this area. I investigated international postgraduates' learner autonomy with a particular focus on the beliefs and behaviours associated with language learning and learning in a second language. The study was designed to identify and highlight the language-related activities these participants selected and rejected as they lived and studied in the UK and in new social, cultural and linguistic ecosystems. Each participant's background was unique, as were her experiences and the sense she made of these as she progressed through her postgraduate studies. By bringing these stories to light, there is the opportunity to observe the various ways that autonomy may manifest itself within the remit of the academy and the social contexts the participants sought, avoided, or in which they found themselves.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has sought to identify the different ways that autonomy has been viewed across time and sectors. These different ways of viewing, understanding, and referring to autonomy, learner autonomy and language learner autonomy can confuse matters if autonomy is discussed imprecisely. I have argued with reference to the literature that there are different ways of being autonomous and that autonomy is both dependent on the individual but also dynamic, changing across time and contexts. In many ways, it is dependent on how the individual views the context, and this is dependent on the individuals' personal constructs. Throughout Chapter 2 I have endeavoured to connect the concepts discussed in this Dissertation to demonstrate their relevance to my research, including aspects of the methodology discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. The following chapter explores beliefs with a particular focus on beliefs related to language learning before considering language learning behaviours. My research interest is out-of-class learning and how my participants engaged with learning outside the classroom (behaviours) and how this influenced, and was influenced by, beliefs. Both beliefs and behaviours are informed by previous experiences but remain dynamic and context dependent as discussed next in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 Language learning beliefs and behaviours

Chapter 3 explores how language learning beliefs and behaviours have been conceptualised and researched over the last three decades. The purpose is to show which of these align with both Personal Construct Theory and ways in which learner autonomy and autonomy in language learning are understood in this Dissertation. In Section 3.1 I define beliefs and supporting rationale for grouping beliefs with assumptions and knowledge before detailing why these matter in language learning. The possible interplay between beliefs and behaviours is discussed here as is the evolving conceptualisation of beliefs in language learning. In Section 3.2, three approaches to conceptualising beliefs are described: normative, metacognitive and contextual. The approach taken to conceptualising beliefs directly impacts and is impacted by both the research purpose and corresponding methodologies to support this research. This leads to why I believe the contextual approach is most relevant to my study with its alignment to learner autonomy and autonomy in language learning. Following this I discuss the effects of prior experiences and current context on beliefs before summarizing two case studies of language learners and their changing beliefs and learning behaviours. I then provide reasons for using language learning histories along with a summary of some language learning history research.

Section 3.3 focuses on learning strategies and behaviours and starts by outlining the association that language learning strategies (LLSs) have with self-directed learning. Next the historical normative perspective of LLSs is discussed along with the earlier prevalent use of questionnaires and the limitations of these with regards to this study. The changing views of LLS, which tend to emphasise the context, the purpose and sometimes the proficiency of the learner, are then discussed along with selected research on adult learners which take this perspective. These are individual accounts that explore how language learners deployed or modified strategies to align with their perceptions of their changing ecosystems. Most attention is focussed on Gao's (2003) study as one of the very few which investigated Chinese postgraduates studying in the UK without required language course components in their programmes, much like the participants in my research.

3.1 Defining learner beliefs

Research published by both Horowitz and Wenden at the end of the 1980s led the way on investigating student beliefs around second language acquisition, resulting in much greater interest in this area (Kalaja, 2003, p. 87). Language learners' beliefs have been researched from a variety of approaches (Kalaja, Barcelos, & Aro, 2018), as discussed further in Section 3.2 below. Learner beliefs is the term commonly used in applied linguistics to refer to 'the conceptions, ideas and opinions learners have about L2 learning and teaching and language itself' (Kalaja et al., 2018, p. 222). Barcelos (2008) quotes her earlier definition of beliefs (originally in Portuguese) from Barcelos (2006a, p.18):

> … [a] form of thought, as constructions of reality, ways of seeing and perceiving the world and its phenomena, co-constructed in our experiences and resulting from an interactive process of interpretation and (re)-signification (Barcelos, 2008, p. 37).

Certain terms, such as knowledge and assumptions, are sometimes used interchangeably with beliefs. For example, Sakui and Gaies (2003, p. 154) acknowledge slight distinctions between beliefs and knowledge but state that they use these terms synonymously to emphasise similarities. Dewey differentiates between beliefs and knowledge, while also including knowledge as one factor which informs beliefs. He conceptualises beliefs as a type of thought which:

> … covers all the matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet which we are sufficiently confident of to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true, as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future (Dewey, [1933] 2008, p. 116).

In this way, he describes both beliefs and knowledge as leading to action while emphasising the dynamism and fluidity of beliefs, basing them on knowledge to date but recognising that this may change and so require beliefs to change to accommodate future knowledge. Rather than attempt to distinguish between beliefs and knowledge, Woods (1996) adds the construct of assumptions to produce the triumvirate term: beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK), to encapsulate the interrelated cognitive systems influencing the interpretation of events. BAK is therefore used interchangeably with beliefs throughout this

Dissertation to refer to these systems while also using the terms separately if specific writers distinguish between them.

Beliefs matter because BAK influence the interpretation of events and the way in which people understand and interact in the world, as discussed in Section 1.5. Beliefs shape both intentions and interactions and, in turn, the interactions and interpretations of these shape people's beliefs. Initially largely ignored by those researching language teaching and learning, beliefs, along with other interrelated factors including place, relationships, and expectations, have been established as 'much more important than methodology' in terms of language teaching and learning (Murphey & Carpenter, 2008, p. 17). Beliefs, motivation, anxiety and self-esteem are all examples of aspects of individual differences that vary between people (R. Ellis, 2004; Loewen et al., 2009), all of which are dynamic and context specific, and have an impact on how individuals learn languages. Consequently, regardless of apparent similarities within language learning environments, language learning outcomes differ as learners experience, actively understand experiences, and respond differently (Menezes, 2008, pp. 202-203). This is not to isolate individuals from their social contexts or social and peer commitments, which may influence behaviour, but rather to emphasise that individuals interpret events differently and learning diverges accordingly.

Chik and Benson (2008, p. 167), investigating students from Hong Kong studying abroad, suggest that these students apply their 'expectations, experiences and possibilities that are specific to Hong Kong' to their new contexts. This aligns with Personal Construct Theory and other literature on learner beliefs, which would suggest that international students in a new country and an unfamiliar environment are likely to understand their new environment through their experiences to date. Past, present and anticipated experiences are interpreted according to current BAK, which research suggests are individualised despite any surface-level similarities connected to age, sex, nationality and other demographic indicators. For example, Willing (1988 cited in Nunan 1996, p. 16) investigated the preferred learning styles and strategies of 517 adult immigrants learning English in Australia. Using a range of demographic identifiers including age, ethnicity, educational level and speaking proficiency, he claimed that the

most significant finding was the lack of generalisability by demographic category:

> … for any given learning issue, the typical spectrum of opinions on the issue were represented, in virtually the same ratios, within any biographical subgroup (Willing 1988 quoted in Nunan 1996, p. 16).

This appears to unshackle beliefs from identifiers such as nationality leaving BAK more open to variation than perhaps assumed. Nationality variation was avoided in the research design to avoid attributing differences to that. Serendipitously the volunteers were all women the same age further avoiding variations being attributable to sex and age.

BAK are often dynamic, influenced as they are by later experiences and influencing the experiences that are sought and avoided. These 'continuous processes of reconstruction of experience' are, for Dewey ([1938] 1997, p. 87), indicative of learning. Experience is both in the mind and the 'interaction, adaptation and adjustment of individuals to the environment' and others within it, informed by perceptions of previous experiences and informing the quality of future ones (Barcelos, 2008, p. 37). Active learning involves '*subjective* experiences, not universal ones' understood through the perspective of each individual's BAK resulting in individualised meanings (Kalaja et al., 2008, p. 3). Second language learning is also subject to contextual affordances and obstacles (Kalaja et al., 2008, p. 3), including learners' perceptions of these as understood through their BAK. When learners struggle to develop or implement a plan that will take them closer to their target outcome, possibly as a result of 'both psychological and actual barriers', these obstacles may discourage and result in feelings of disempowerment (Murphey & Carpenter, 2008, p. 18). By designing a longitudinal study, I was able to investigate learning plans as well as perceived affordances and barriers to the implementation of these.

Research on language learning beliefs varies enormously in the focus of what is investigated. For example, Yang (1999) researched self-efficacy, Aragão (2011) investigated adult learners' self-perceptions in their language classroom and how this interplayed with emotions, and Kalaja (2016) compared learners' feelings towards their first language and the additional language they were learning. The belief focus in my research was the underlying rationale for

language-related activities that each learner selected or rejected and the particular goals they hoped to reach by choosing from their repertoire of resources and activities. How these beliefs and behaviours changed over time as the contexts change, or activities were evaluated, are important to my research given the approach taken to beliefs and behaviours in this study as discussed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 below.

3.2 Beliefs, assumptions and knowledge about language learning

As with autonomy in language learning, before becoming an area for research in applied linguistics the study of beliefs in language learning was established in education and other fields such as psychology and anthropology (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003b). In ways that parallel certain conceptualisations of learner autonomy, some studies into language learners' beliefs, particularly earlier studies, tended to suggest that learners' beliefs were rather stable and could only be changed by pedagogic intervention (for example, Wenden, 1986). Initially studies into language learner beliefs emerged from research into the traits of good language learners, and so there was a strong evaluative aspect to belief studies (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003b).

Kalaja and Barcelos (2003b) identify most second language learning belief studies until the turn of the Millennium as quantitative in nature, pointing to cognitive psychology's influence on research design. They also highlight researchers' attempts to establish causal relationships between language learner beliefs and associated factors considered important in second language acquisition. This was problematic for a variety of reasons, particularly as beliefs were viewed out of context and with little attention given to the views of learners about their own beliefs (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003b). In other words, beliefs were described without considering either why learners held specific beliefs or how these influenced the way learning was experienced (Riley, 1997). Studies that have investigated the relationship between language learning beliefs and L2 level of proficiency have generally not found strong correlations because relationships between what people say they believe and the existence and frequency of their language learning activities is not straightforward (R. Ellis, 2008). It is not the beliefs themselves that language learners hold that

influence learning but the actions which actually follow (R. Ellis, 2008, p. 703). Research into language learning beliefs would seemingly benefit therefore from investigating learners' stated beliefs, the extent to which these are implemented, and any language-related activities undertaken, avoided, or started and abandoned. My research investigates these as explained in Chapter 4 Methodology.

Barcelos (2003) identifies three different approaches to language learning beliefs studies: normative, metacognitive and contextual. In a more recent publication, Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro (2018) have subsumed the first two within an approach they term traditional. Given that each approach tends towards a different methodology for research purposes, all three are considered in more detail below along with additional commentary on the research methodology used, as this provides a further rationale for the methodology underlying my study.

3.2.1 The normative approach

Within the normative approach, 'beliefs are primarily viewed as preconceived notions, myths or misconceptions' (De Costa, 2011, p. 347). These are attributed to culture and studies generally collect data using Likert scales, such as the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) questionnaire (Barcelos, 2003). These studies often attempt to use beliefs about language learning to predict language learning behaviour and the extent to which these will result in autonomous or effective learning (Barcelos, 2003). Learners' beliefs are commonly classified as misconceived if they deviate from with the researchers' beliefs and published work on second language acquisition (Barcelos, 2003). Most research taking this approach has tended to describe beliefs, develop typologies, and assume causal relationships between particular beliefs and behaviours without investigating the predicted behaviours (Barcelos, 2003). Researchers using this approach generally conceived of beliefs as constant although De Costa (2011, p. 348) identifies some more recent work using this approach which 'recognises the situated and dynamic nature of learner beliefs'. Nevertheless, Freeman (1991) astutely criticises such normative approaches arguing that researching beliefs amongst adults should be an investigation around what they know, rather than identifying what they ought to know.

Many studies drawing on this approach highlight the extent to which certain student participants identify the beliefs they have about second language acquisition from those that are presented in the questionnaires. For example, Yang (1999, p. 520) selected statements from the BALLI that aimed to capture beliefs across four factors: self-efficacy and expectations about learning English; the perceived value and nature of learning spoken English; beliefs about foreign language aptitude; beliefs about formal structural studies. Although she combines these items with a list of 49 strategies selected from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) for participants to identify how frequently they used these, there is no attempt to investigate their beliefs about those strategies. Investigations into beliefs and behaviours that only use questionnaires are problematic not least because of the inadequacies of questionnaires for investigating 'the complexities of learners' thinking about language learning' (Benson & Lor, 1999, p. 460). At best these provide indications of what participants think according to presented statements, but there is little indication of how beliefs and behaviours are enacted, under what circumstances, and why. For example, when investigating autonomous learning, I am interested in how learners implement beliefs, and their thinking behind why they would do that. I want to know whether they are merely enacting the internalised beliefs of others or whether these beliefs and actions are the consequences of a deeper level of understanding and reasoning about second language participation. Even if questionnaires provide some insight, the cross-sectional nature of questionnaires show responses from a moment in time (Gao, 2004). This could lead to assumptions suggesting the stability of beliefs and causal connections between beliefs and behaviour.

3.2.2 The metacognitive approach

The metacognitive approach differs from the normative approach but beliefs continue to be conceptualised as mental traits often devoid of context (De Costa, 2011, p. 348) and the relationship between beliefs and behaviour is viewed as causal (Barcelos, 2003). There is a greater emphasis on 'the connection between beliefs and autonomous behaviour' than in the normative approach (Barcelos, 2003, p. 17). Nonetheless, it differs from the normative approach as beliefs are understood as a type of metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive knowledge being seen as promoting, and as part of, reflective

practice with reflective practice influencing effective learning (Barcelos, 2003). Research into beliefs about language learning from a metacognitive approach generally involves semi-structured interviews and so provides greater insight into aspects of participants' learning in their own words and from their own perspectives (Barcelos, 2003). However, while the connections between experience and beliefs are of interest, contexts and how these impact on beliefs are generally overlooked in this approach (Barcelos, 2003). Given the fundamental importance of context discussed in Chapter 2 on learner autonomy and autonomy in language learning, this approach does not fulfil the remit of my research despite its espoused connections to autonomous learning.

3.2.3 The contextual approach

Contextual approaches evolved from reactions to and criticisms of the approaches above (Kalaja et al., 2018). Studies taking a contextual approach to language learning beliefs aim for a greater understanding of beliefs within the language learners' specific contexts, which change as interactions unfold (Barcelos, 2003). Beliefs are seen as 'contextual, dynamic and social' (Barcelos, 2003, p. 20) and are therefore co-constructed between interlocutors and associated with language since language facilitates communication and behaviour (Kalaja et al., 2018). Studies taking this approach tend towards case studies and often combine a variety of research methods (Barcelos, 2003). These studies often point to the changing nature of language learning beliefs and behaviours and the interplay between beliefs and behaviours (Barcelos, 2003). Representing language learners as interactive social creatures allows changes in beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) to come from within through experience and interaction rather than only from external forces.

The contextual approach to BAK therefore aligns well with concepts of autonomy discussed in Chapter 2. My research aimed to understand what participants were doing and why. This is to provide some insight into behaviours and beliefs of postgraduates within their contexts as they perceive these, and 'the communities to which they claim membership'(Murphey & Carpenter, 2008, p. 18). This is important because Benson and Lor (1999) postulate that individuals' beliefs are likely to be restricted to a certain range that are held by the sociocultural group to which they feel an affinity. Nevertheless, by revisiting

these behaviours and beliefs several times with participants, there were opportunities to develop an understanding of their contexts and communities as well as allowing participants to reflect on their progress, evaluate their actions, and potentially adjust their BAK as they negotiated the sociolinguistic contexts they inhabited in order to engage in the contexts they chose or within which they were required to interact. This responds to calls such as Barcelos' (2003, p. 29) for more research into how students' beliefs, behaviours and experiences interact beyond the classroom through students' interpretations of these and their contexts.

Beliefs are understood through contextual approaches as constructed both cognitively and socially, and arising from experiences and experiencing problems (Barcelos, 2003, p. 10). Experiences that are not predicted may lead to outcomes that seem beneficial or detrimental to the individual but are nevertheless part of the process of learning and personal development (Menezes, 2008, pp. 202-203). While the majority of studies investigating beliefs and behaviours have used interviews and questionnaires with international students on English language courses, especially in university and L2 contexts, very few have investigated the interplay between beliefs and behaviours developing over time as part of the 'changing contexts of their life and language learning experiences' (Malcolm, 2005, p. 69) and this study sought to address this gap.

Although contextual approaches are less common, research identifying beliefs as related to context, as being flexible, and at times as being contradictory has been undertaken and is gaining traction in the field (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2006). Benson and Lor (1999), amongst others, consider beliefs about language learning to be influenced by prior experiences of language learning and schooling. As learners experience changes in their environment or uncover information they were previously unaware of, and as they reflect on such changes, their beliefs may also change (Benson, 2011; Kern, 1995; Tanaka, 2004). For example, Malcolm's (2005) research into the language learning beliefs and behaviours of an Arabic-speaking English learner's out-of-class reading strategies identified how these changed. The participant in the study had many English texts to read for his degree programme, which he found rather overwhelming. In order to deal with the content, he sought ideas from peers. He experimented with a number of strategies and developed his beliefs about reading in a second language,

maintaining language learning behaviours which he perceived were effective for him and his context and rejecting those that were not.

Similarly, Navarro and Thornton (2011, p. 298) carried out a longitudinal case study, but of two Japanese undergraduates on a self-directed language learning course. Both of these students had been through a school system where classes were very structured and teacher-led. The researchers focussed on these students' beliefs and behaviours and found that the interaction between beliefs and actions influenced students' language learning beliefs and the development of skills related to language learner autonomy. Participants also highlighted the guidance offered through spoken and written one-to-one interactions with learning advisors. They identified these interactions as encouraging reflection on beliefs and actions and therefore as a potential catalyst for adaptation and change. Their study underlines the complex relationship between beliefs, behaviours and environment.

As reiterated throughout this chapter, prior experiences influence current beliefs. A type of beliefs study which seeks to examine aspects of these prior experiences is commonly termed language learning histories. The following subsection discusses these in more detail to show their relevance to my research before moving to consider learning behaviours.

3.2.4 Language learning histories

Language learning histories (LLHs) can offer insights into learners' BAK about language learning from their own perspective (Murphey & Carpenter, 2008, p. 17), particularly if learners go beyond recounting what they have done to also discuss how, why and what they thought of such language learning practices. If it is also possible to identify learners' awareness of such activities being informed by others and to what extent they feel they have made an informed choice, it is possible to have some insight into aspects of autonomy or heteronomy which may underlie such beliefs. Opportunities exist for investigating the extent to which participants' opinions and preferences are their own or emerge from the implementation of others' preferences. This could help alleviate the concerns Riesman (1950) raises about social influencers leading to compulsive decisions and undermining autonomy.

Murphey and Carpenter (2008) investigated the extent to which Japanese undergraduate language learners attributed their L2 success or failure to external factors or to their own agency[9]. They analysed 20 written LLHs gathered as part of an English course. The LLHs averaged 680 words with 586 items coded. Overall, around 33% of in-class items coded highlighted negative aspects of language learning compared to around 5% of out-of-class items. Although the research was narrowly focussed on beliefs around factors identified as leading to success or failure rather than the intricacies of how these students went about developing their second language, Murphey and Carpenter point to:

> … the intensely personalised nature of the learning experience for these students despite the many experiences they shared in the Japanese educational system and as moderately successful English learners (Murphey & Carpenter, 2008, pp. 28-29).

While this conceptualisation of learning experiences as intensely personalised aligns with my understanding and preferred conceptualisations of Personal Construct Theory, autonomy and beliefs, perhaps it is erroneous to consider experiences in the education system as shared. Although it may be tempting to think of compulsory education as resulting in a standardised experience, especially if all 20 students were in the same school with the same teachers in the same classes, constructivism predicts they would have experienced those classes differently. That these 20 students became 'moderately successful English learners' while their learning experiences were intensely personalised points to a multitude of ways of experiencing language learning and of becoming moderately successful language learners. Investigating these experiences and the environments they occur within can provide insights into how languages are learned from the perspective of those who are interacting and learning within those evolving contexts (Menezes, 2008, p. 200). My study investigated contextual experiences from the participants' perspectives and possible changes as their sojourns progressed.

LLHs have the potential to disclose aspects of language learning as perceived by the learners, and may possibly include elements of personal reflection on the

[9] Agency is the preferred term in the field of sociocultural theory in which the concept of an autonomous individual is often rejected in favour of socially constructed individuals with the agency to act within social constraints (Benson, 2011, pp. 47-49).

role of contextualised factors in the development (or lack of development) of a second language, and beliefs around these (Menezes, 2008, p. 199). While Murphey and Carpenter (2008) asked their student participants to write about their past learning experiences, this could also be undertaken orally either as a monologue or in collaboration with others. While collaboration may move the discussion away from topics learners would have covered on their own, it perhaps allows for topics to be discussed in greater depth, and for the collaborator's assumptions to be queried. LLHs potentially allow for some identification of previous language learning strategies, where these came from, and the value and benefits the learners ascribe to these. Connecting these activities and beliefs to current learning beliefs and endeavours provides opportunities for discussing any changes and the rationale for these. It could also highlight discrepancies in language learning BAK and actions. My study uses in-depth interviews to develop participants' LLHs from their initial introductions to English through to successfully achieving the English requirements to study at postgraduate level in the UK. The rationale for collecting data this way is developed in Chapter 4 Methodology.

3.3 Learning strategies and behaviours

3.3.1 Defining strategies and behaviours

Language learning strategies can refer to the 'special thoughts or behaviours' used by people to facilitate their comprehension, learning or retention of information relating to a second language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 1). In this Dissertation I use this definition but replace 'behaviours' with 'actions' as I use behaviours in a wider sense to include strategies that the learner considers but consciously chooses not to use, calling this active inaction. The decision to use a dictionary is therefore both a strategy and a behaviour while a decision not to use a dictionary is a behaviour. Not using a dictionary because it is not considered is neither a strategy because it is not an action nor a behaviour as it is not a conscious decision. With behaviours there are underlying beliefs about the suitability of action or inaction in particular contexts, and seeking to understand the connection and the choices as contexts change is an important component of this Dissertation.

Research on language learning strategies (LLSs) has long been associated with individual differences and autonomy in language learning, with a particular focus on developing independent learning strategies (for example, O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002) , with a view to encouraging self-direction in language learners (Oxford, 1990). LLSs were often gathered from effective language learners with the purpose of selecting from these to train less effective language learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Early lists of LLSs focus on the individual learner but still tend to involve interactive strategies with others, although often with reference to "native speakers" (for example Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1981; Oxford, 1990). Autonomy in language learning (ALL) seems to become more influential in LLS studies from 1991 and the publication of Wenden's *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy* (Benson, 2011).

Some researchers are keen to categorise strategies (for example, Rubin, 1981; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) and in doing so reveal their own notions of LLSs and second language learning (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). The best known and most widely used extensive taxonomy of LLSs is Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Gao, 2004). Building on the work of Rubin (1981), Oxford (1990) differentiates between direct and indirect strategies. The former are associated with L2 mental processing, while the latter she associates with general management of learning. The indirect strategies are further divided into three groups: metacognitive, social and affective. She connects social strategies with behaviours that involve others while affective strategies are behaviours more concerned with the self, such as emotion, motivation, and attitudes, which also have a cognitive effect. Because the indirect strategies are associated with controlling the learning processes as opposed to controlling language *per se*, these are potentially constituents of ALL (Benson, 2011). They also overlap with areas of control discussed in Section 2.3.

Researchers writing on LLSs, such as Oxford (1990), often advocate LLS training as part of second language learning programmes and there are clear overlaps between this and the learner training discussed in Subsection 2.3.1 on ALL development in the classroom. Advocates of LLS training see it as particularly beneficial for students who are less successful learners and who therefore may perceive themselves as lacking innate abilities for L2 language learning when

perhaps they are merely unaware of strategies that could help them learn (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 161). In contexts where strategies are instructed or advised in the classroom, they are clearly other directed (Thomas & Rose, 2019). LLSs that are other-directed in the classroom may be maintained outside the classroom in high-stakes situations when learners cling to the educator's expertise in the hope that this will enable exam success (Tao & Gao, 2017). This is somewhat problematic when so many definitions of LLSs require strategies to be self-regulated[10]. This convergence of LLSs with ALL has been criticised for failing to acknowledge strategies used by learners who are not yet in a context or at a stage to be self-directed (Thomas & Rose, 2019). I included other-directed strategies in my study to allow me to investigate participants' rationale for certain language-related behaviours in out-of-class learning contexts.

3.3.2 Context and effective strategies

Strategies for the most part are not considered innately beneficial or detrimental but rather the effectiveness of any particular strategy depends on the context and the purpose to which it is applied (Cohen, 1998, p. 8). There are multiple factors driving strategy choice including motivation, awareness of strategies, prior experiences (Oxford, 1990), and current sociocultural influences (Oxford, 1999), including educator instruction and advice (Thomas & Rose, 2019). Which LLSs are effective may change as second language proficiency develops (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). Change may be necessary as LLSs successful in one linguistic ecosystem with particular requirements regarding second language use may be ineffective in another. For example, Rochecouste, Oliver, and Mulligan (2012, p. 1) found that LLSs encouraged by educators and effective in second language learners' home countries may 'be detrimental to academic success' in an Australian university context.

Given the context-dependent effectiveness of LLSs, understanding the interplay between beliefs about language learning in context and students' behaviour becomes paramount (Barcelos, 2003, p. 13). However, language learning behaviour may at times appear not to correspond with beliefs (Palfreyman, 2003, p. 10), highlighting a complex relationship between these, sociocultural

[10] See Oxford (2017, pp. 22-23) for a list of definitions.

context, motivation and potentially other factors, including the perceived tasks. Palfreyman exemplifies this clearly by setting out possible behaviours people may exhibit when encountering a new word.

> The usefulness of a dictionary to a particular learner in a particular situation depends on the learner's skills, motivations and other factors: a learner coming across an unfamiliar word in a newspaper might not think of using a dictionary, or s/he might not have time to, or perhaps s/he cannot be bothered; s/he might look up the wrong word, or s/he might find the wrong meaning for the context; s/he might have difficulty applying the dictionary definition to the context in which s/he met the word; s/he might ignore or misunderstand the abbreviations [accompanying the dictionary entry], and so on (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 177).

Strategies such as 'consulting a dictionary' (C. Griffiths, 2007, p. 92) in and of themselves provide a rather limited understanding of behaviours, underlying beliefs, and how these interact in a specific context when the person is reading for a particular purpose. Add to this the dynamism inherent in personal constructs and the resulting beliefs discussed in Sections 1.5 and 3.2 respectively, the likely dynamism in behaviours, other factors in Palfreyman's example, and the complexity around consulting a dictionary becomes much more apparent than can possibly be understood from a strategy questionnaire and a Likert scale. As Smith points out:

> … [people's] control over their own learning can only be developed in ways which are relevant to *them*, and always in relation to and under the influence of particular backgrounds and new cultures (Smith, 2003, p. 256).

This suggests that research into learner autonomy which includes beliefs and behaviours requires more flexibility than drawing from set lists and categories. The following subsection discusses how this might be achieved while summarising a selection of relevant research onto learner behaviours, which often also reveal aspects of participants' beliefs.

3.3.3 Researching strategies and behaviours

SILL questionnaires have been used extensively in LLS research (Benson, 2011). However, while indicating LLS use across diverse populations of learners, these questionnaires are unable to 'capture the multi-dimensionality' or 'dynamic and

fluid nature' of LLS use (Gao, 2004, p. 6). Other research methods, including interviews, reflective journals, recollected narratives and observation, have been used in an attempt to better capture the complexity and nuanced use of LLSs (Gao, 2004). Individual accounts of language learners' experiences have explored the nature of language learners' strategies in a variety of situations such as self-access centres (Cotterall, 2008), pre-sessional courses (Wang, 2018) and postgraduate programmes (Gao, 2003). From researchers' perspectives, such studies offer opportunities to understand not just the strategies used but also the contexts in which they are used and the reasoning behind their use, all viewed from language learners' perspectives, a perspective privileging the learner (Cotterall, 2008).

Cotterall (2008) conducted case studies of three Japanese learners of English not enrolled in any programmes but visiting the self-access centre at a Japanese university. With data drawn from sessions with learning advisors discussing out-of-class learning over approximately one year, and two interviews with two of the participants, Cotterall investigated the learners' English learning goals, the issues they experienced learning English independently, and the strategies they used to overcome difficulties. In keeping with a normative approach, Cotterall (2008) provides an account of what two of the participants should be doing. The third participant, Taguchi-san, Cotterall describes as using the centre for leisure and not self-identifying as a language learner. Instead, he used the centre to develop his knowledge of other areas. After booking an extended holiday to New Zealand, all the activities he engaged in at the centre were focussed on gaining knowledge and preparing for this impending trip. The participants in my study similarly did not always identify as language learners. Like Taguchi-san, their focus was mainly on gaining knowledge and LLSs were often directed towards this and ways of displaying this knowledge for assessment.

Although not purely out-of-class, Wang (2018) investigated the vocabulary learning strategies of six newly-arrived Chinese learners on pre-sessional programmes in the UK. These programmes are often intensive full-time courses combining second language development with study skills and acculturation to UK academic expectations. Using multiple methods of data collection including observation and interviews, her in-depth analysis did not focus explicitly on autonomy in language learning (ALL) but on investigating how her participants

went about learning vocabulary both in- and out-of-class. Nevertheless, she builds a picture of ALL and beliefs around vocabulary development. My study similarly builds a picture of ALL and beliefs but explicitly aimed to investigate learner autonomy and ALL, and with a wider perspective that went beyond vocabulary development and academic life to also consider living in a second language ecosystem.

Gao's (2003) study on vocabulary learning strategies pre-dates Wang's and is one of the few investigating postgraduates' LLSs. His research focussed on how living and studying in another country might prompt changes in learning strategies amongst his participants. All thirteen had graduated in China and relocated to the UK to study postgraduate academic or pre-sessional programmes. Gao (2003) used retrospective interviews conducted some two thirds into the one-year sojourn after postgraduate taught courses had finished but before Dissertations were submitted. His study aimed to identify any changes in LLS use and underlying factors influencing these changes. His three main findings were that unfamiliar lexis was more likely to be ignored as learners became more discerning in their selection of words to meaning check. For those words they chose to check, they often focussed on the contextual meaning rather than the variety of meanings, and drew on a greater range of strategies rather than the previous strategy of using dictionaries. Consolidation of vocabulary learning also tended to be restricted to 'learning through use' rather than the 'reviewing and notetaking strategies' they had commonly used in China (Gao, 2003, p. 45).

Through this study, Gao (2003) identifies ten factors learners reported as influencing the strategies used and he categorised four as 'learner factors' and six as 'contextual factors'. Learner factors are motivation, beliefs, proficiency and prior experience, and there appeared to be interaction between these. For example, as proficiency was perceived to increase, there was often less motivation to use strategies to learn unfamiliar vocabulary. The underlying beliefs about effective language learning seemed not to change but how these beliefs were actioned did appear to alter. Those with prior experience of learning in an English-medium environment were less likely to adapt strategies. The contextual factors Gao (2003) highlights are language input, language production opportunities, learning needs, academic priorities, academic culture, and the application of technology. The abundance of second-language input

meant these learners tended to wait for unfamiliar words to re-occur, thereby demonstrating greater frequency, before learning them. While many participants reported that they used more Chinese than English during their sojourn, those who interacted more socially with non-Chinese students tended to have greater motivation and to organise their vocabulary learning better. As Gao's participants perceived their learning needs changing, so too did their LLSs. Academic studies became prioritised and English shifted from the focus of learning to the medium of learning with strategies adapted to changing needs. The academic culture in the UK, assignments, and permitted dictionary use in exams impacted on these participants' motivation to memorise words. Strategic technology use, such as word-processing and dictionary software, occurred when writing assignments. This exemplifies how international students may use strategies to engage with studying in a second language ecosystem which do not necessarily develop language learning as the main focus. It is these additional language-related behaviours that I included in this Dissertation to gain understanding of participants' engagement with their learning.

Gao (2003, p. 55) reports that the contextual factors in his study are often overlooked and he calls for more studies to develop a greater understanding of the interplay between LLSs and changing contexts, and to confirm and develop the factors he identifies. This requires going beyond descrete-item questionnaires such as the SILL, in which learners respond to decontextualized strategies identified and articulated by researchers. I attempted to understand behaviours language learners selected in a particular context and for a particular purpose. My research was concerned with the relationship between beliefs and behaviours. Context and purpose for using or not using LLSs became salient, as did the details. I also expanded behaviour beyond exclusively focussing on second language learning and included language-related activities for engaging with second language ecosystems. For example, at times participants used Chinese first, perceiving the L1 as offering certain effective learning benefits. This research therefore stepped outside the notional area occupied by autonomy in language learning and into areas more commonly associated with adult learner autonomy while maintaining a focus on language-related activities. By crossing these conceptual boundaries, the resulting stories were able to encompass activities and contextual detail that would have been excluded had I

restricted stories to language learning. Such information is, by its very nature, often missing from published research on autonomy in language learning. The next chapter provides details of the methodology, including the evolution of the research design which was used to gather and analyse the data used in this Dissertation.

Chapter 4 The story of the methodology

This chapter initially overviews the broad research context to situate this research within the literature to date and identify the gap which the research aims to address. The chapter then has an unorthodox structure in that Section 4.2 provides detailed information about participant selection and contexts. This is done to show how investigating participants from such contexts redresses aspects of the research gap and provide background for later discussion of the research design. In Section 4.3 the main research question is presented followed by five specific questions related to this. In Section 4.4 the research paradigm is explained and Section 4.5 discusses the appropriacy of case studies for this project. From Section 4.6, the methodology chapter follows a narrative order of events to retell the principled decisions underlying accepting or rejecting aspects of the research design. These include changes that occurred through the process of piloting, trialling and collecting the main research data. Piloting is differentiated from trialling in this chapter. Piloting was done to check the comprehensibility and cultural appropriateness of the questions and aspects of language use during interviews. The modified interviews were then used at the beginning and end of a course in a distinct two-part trial study to check the longitudinal suitability of the modified interviews. Section 4.7 describes how the data was used in the main study both between interviews and for later analysis and presentation of the participants' stories. The narrative order was deliberately selected to engage with narrative analysis, the analysis used for working with and presenting data in Chapters 5 and 6. How this analysis was arrived at is discussed in Sections 4.7 and 4.8 deals with aspects of rigour, ethics and project management. Limitations are addressed throughout and summarised in Section 4.9.

4.1 Overview

There is interest in investigating how language learning is managed by individual learners over time, and how the learning is integrated into, and potentially alters, their lives (Cotterall, 2008, p. 126). As noted in Section 1.3, research into international students studying in their second language has tended to highlight the challenges they face transitioning to studying overseas. Longitudinal research investigating how students transitioned and the changes they

underwent over time is relatively rare (James, 2018). Learner autonomy is likely to be integral to this transition, particularly for postgraduates with limited class time in a context in which institutional academic expectations are for out-of-class learning as a substantial proportion of the programme's study requirements (see Section 4.2). With growing numbers of Chinese students studying in the UK (see Section 1.3), there is a clear need for research into how Chinese students deal with learning in English and living in an predominately English-speaking environment (Gao, 2003).

As discussed in Section 3.2, researchers investigating language learning beliefs traditionally undertook quantitative studies, viewing these beliefs as stable and indicating activity types language learners actually undertook. More recent contextual approaches consider beliefs to be situated, dynamic and shared (Kalaja et al., 2018), with a complex interplay between beliefs and behaviours. Section 3.3 discussed how the effectiveness of strategy use depends on both purpose and context, and highlighted the limited longitudinal empirical research into environmental influences on learner strategies and beliefs, including if, how, and why these change (Gao, 2003). I aimed to provide insights from international postgraduate participants in my study that could highlight a diversity of experiences relating to living and studying in a second-language dominant context. The study considered the extent to which these participants adapted to, and adapted, the linguistic ecosystems they inhabited.

This research investigated three international postgraduates' beliefs and behaviours related to their own learning. Researching individuals' experiences was a bid to understand those experiences rather than to identify aspects or effects of learning that are necessarily generalisable to other learners (Cotterall, 2008, p. 126), regardless of any common demographic identifiers. As discussed in more detail in Section 4.6, after trialling questions for cultural appropriacy and linguistic clarity and what became an unsuccessful narrative approach to interviewing, data was gathered four times during the participants' one-year sojourn mainly through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded and I took notes to allow participants to maintain their contributions uninterrupted. I used my notes for questioning, requesting further details and clarifying at opportune moments, as recommended by Seidman (2013, p. 84).

Initially I elicited each participant's language learning history to investigate how this experience had shaped her beliefs and behaviours. Three subsequent interviews occurred during their academic programme. The purpose of later interviews was to identify beliefs and behaviours as the sojourn progressed. With social and academic contexts likely to change along with the development of knowledge and proficiency, there was the potential for participants to alter their beliefs and their engagement with the L2 ecosystem. The longitudinal aspect also allowed discrepancies between planned behaviours and actual behaviours to be explored to understand changing perceptions and possible obstacles to implementation.

4.2 Participant selection

Five recently-arrived Chinese students enrolled on one-year postgraduate taught business programmes volunteered to participate in this study over one academic year in 2017-18 (see Appendix 3: Project timetable) and three completed all interviews. The business school the participants attended was one of only two schools in the University predominantly comprised of international students at postgraduate level. In 2017-18, out of almost 2000 students, over 90% were international and of this, around 80% (approximately 1400) were Chinese[11]. The numbers suggest that maintaining compatriot social groups and Chinese-speaking environments outside the classroom was likely the default position for Chinese postgraduates in this school. All volunteers had learned their English in China. None had been involved with academic study-abroad programmes lasting at least one semester, and only one had any experience of formal learning which could vaguely be considered English-medium. All met the language requirements to be accepted directly on to their chosen programmes but were close to the minimum requirements (detailed in Subsection 5.2.4). Other selection criteria were to not have taken pre-sessional preparation programmes and to be unaccompanied by family. The reasons for these selection criteria are explained below.

Entering the programme with minimum language requirements was likely to require learners to develop their second language skills *in situ*. As discussed in

[11] This data is publicly available information published by the University. The numbers have been rounded and the citation is withheld to maintain anonymity.

Subsection 3.3.3, Gao (2003) found the Chinese postgraduate participants he investigated who achieved a certain proficiency were less active language learners during their UK sojourn. His participants who had already studied in English-medium universities maintained language learning strategies (LLSs) from their undergraduate studies. It is likely that the learner training integral to pre-sessional preparation programmes influences LLSs and, as has been discussed in Section 3.3, is potentially other-regulated learning. Postgraduates who come to the UK unaccompanied by families potentially have opportunities for interacting with others on and off campus, enrolling on additional academic or professional skills courses, and studying unconstrained by family commitments. In other words, I set the selection criteria to maximise the potential for participants to need to develop their linguistic proficiency as they transitioned from learning English to learning in English. Without a family in the country to rely on or who relied on the participants, there was potentially more "freedom" but also possibly more need to seek social interaction than if families had been present.

The structure of business programmes was a contextual factor which put the onus on students to study outside the classroom. The business school organised one-year postgraduate programmes around two ten-week semesters followed by a four- to five-month period for Dissertation research and writing. Full-time students took three 20-credit courses per semester and generally had two or three hours of class time per week per course. Each 20-credit course was set by the University as nominally 200 hours of study. For a typical course delivering 30 hours of material in-class, there was an institutional expectation of 170 hours of out-of-class learning from course orientation to assessment submission. Assessment was all through written work across a mixture of exams and assignments, with some assignments involving group work. The Dissertation period started in April with a submission date of mid-August. All participants' supervisors lived overseas and in 2017-2018 the Dissertation programme included two face-to-face supervision sessions and three supervision meetings using video conferencing software. Before the final supervision, participants were asked to submit a first draft and received feedback on this as their final supervision.

There were additional voluntary no-cost courses and workshops available for all students, including those aimed at students engaging in their second language. In addition, the business school had developed a scheme to encourage greater

engagement in academic, social and professional activities, which included courses and workshops. Students engaging in the scheme received recognition on their postgraduate transcripts but the extent to which any of the research participants would attend their postgraduate courses or participate in additional learning activities offered through the University was unknown at the outset. The nature of the research prevented pre-selection of 'cases that show different perspectives' (Creswell, 2013, p. 100), yet as Chapter 3 indicates all three were likely to show very different perspectives, providing what are arguably case studies of individuals. Flyvbjerg (2004) identifies the difficulty determining the extent to which a case is representative in advance. How typical any of the participants were of Chinese business school postgraduates studying in the UK in 2017-18 remains unknown. However, a multiple case study with appropriate data collection and analysis potentially answers the research questions and sheds light on international students' out-of-class learning, this under-researched area of learning (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018).

4.3 Research questions

I conducted a longitudinal investigation of language learning beliefs and behaviours that international postgraduate taught students engaged in beyond the classroom in a predominantly English-speaking environment. The primary aim was to explore these over the duration of postgraduate programme.

- What are the out-of-class behaviours and underlying beliefs used by newly-arrived international postgraduates studying in the UK to engage with living and studying in an ecosystem dominated by English, their second language?

Questions 1–2 are answered in the initial part of the study. Questions 3–5 are investigated throughout.

1. What were the prior language learning experiences of newly-arrived postgraduate international students?

2. Which beliefs about effective out-of-class language learning activities were associated with participants' prior language learning experiences?

3. How did the beliefs identified in their learning histories seem to relate to beliefs about engaging with living and studying in environments where English predominated?

4. What were their self-perceived needs for English in their current contexts as their year of postgraduate study progressed?

5. What behaviours did these postgraduate international students engage in beyond the classroom to meet their self-perceived needs?

The next section outlines the research paradigm. The research paradigm is the overarching perspective which informs the research design, implementation and analysis of the resulting data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

4.4 The research paradigm

Of the five main paradigm categories Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011, pp. 101-115) identify, this research fits best within the constructivist category, a rather loose term that covers a variety of paradigms (Riegler, 2012). Constructivist paradigms posit that ways of knowing and understanding the social world participants inhabit cannot be separated from the participants themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This seems key when investigating learning beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK) and behaviours. With constructivist paradigms, the individuals' perspectives become fundamental to investigations (Creswell, 2013) with realities regarded as multiple and situated in participants' perceptions (Guba, 1996; Morçöl, 2001). While each individual has her own reality, these are often collectively constructed 'through the historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives' (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). By inviting international postgraduates to participate according to specific criteria, they were potentially exposed to, and made meaning from, 'similar structural and social conditions' (Seidman, 2013, p. 59) both in China and as postgraduates in Scotland. Nevertheless, their experiences, and how they interpreted these, could differ substantially (see G. Kelly ([1960] 2017) and, as discussed in 3.1, demographic indicators are poor predictors for beliefs and associated behaviours. For example, Kiely's (2009) longitudinal case study of two female Chinese TESOL postgraduates' language awareness development described

significant divergences in learning beliefs, expectations, and social and academic trajectories during their studies in the UK. See Section 1.5 for further discussion of constructivism and Kelly's Personal Construct Theory.

The findings of this research depended on the individual participants who provided perspectives informed by their unique life experiences, an assertion associated with constructivist paradigms (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). By following a social constructionist inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (2000) envisage ontological and educative authenticity by raising awareness about the participants and their interactions with others with whom 'they come into contact with for some social or organisational purpose' (p. 180). Formal education shapes the way people are expected to view and behave in the world (Riegler, 2012), yet constructivism explores variation. My study started from the premise that the participants' previous studies and English language needs and motivations in China would have shaped their various perspectives of second language learning requirements to achieve particular goals. This potentially contrasted with their English language needs in their new contexts as postgraduate students in the UK as they moved from learning English to learning in English (Gao, 2006). I anticipated that the participants might re-evaluate how they viewed learning in the second language ecosystem and the activities they engaged in to achieve their goals. This was the reason for conducting longitudinal research. Understanding the interplay between beliefs, experiences and behaviours was also crucial and dependent on 'the participants' view of the situation being studied' (Creswell, 2013, p. 8). This was a primary influence when choosing interviews as the main data collection instrument as discussed in Section 4.6.

4.5 Research design

This research investigated participants' specific learning beliefs and the interplay with out-of-class behaviour in a second-language ecosystem as the sojourn progressed. I investigated this from participants' perspectives 'with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be' (Kvale, 1996, p. 52). An exploratory multiple case study was used in that each participant was one case with beliefs and behaviours conceptualised as particular to that person. Case studies are particularly useful for describing

contemporary events and for investigating ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions ‘over which the researcher has little or no control’ (Yin, 2014, p. 14). Creswell (2013, p. 98) states that case studies require multiple sources of data to develop an in-depth understanding. However, case study research design is flexible and has not yet developed ‘a comprehensive and standard catalogue’ (Yin, 2014, p. 27). This research developed in-depth exploration primarily through interviews occurring across a year, with some input from email exchanges and my research notes. Case studies are sometimes seen as problematic because they often generate large quantities of data and they lack generalisability (Crowe et al., 2011). With more than 40,000 words in transcribed data from each participant, this study was a substantial undertaking and how I managed and analysed the data is discussed in Section 4.7. However, generalisability was not an aim of this research (see Section 4.1) and rigour is discussed in Section 4.8 along with further issues relating to ethical considerations. First, Section 4.6 discusses interviews as the main data collection instrument and outlines the interviewing approach taken.

4.6 Data collection

This study is an investigation of the unobservable (student beliefs, assumptions and knowledge) and of what would be impractical to directly observe (out-of-class learning behaviours). This section discusses the principled decisions taken to accept or reject aspects of possible methods, including changes that occurred through the process of piloting, trialling and collecting the data. In the next subsection, the rationale for interviews is discussed including the potential impact of interviews on how participants perceived their context and their part within it, and how this possibly impacted on what the participants subsequently did. The subsection following this then presents the rationale for pursuing a narrative inquiry approach to interviews. In Subsection 4.6.3, I explain the pilot study success of this approach but trial study failure. Subsection 4.6.4 discusses the semi-structured interviews that were substituted for narrative interviews, and in Subsection 4.6.5 I problematise English as the interview language. In Subsections 4.6.6, 4.6.7, and 4.6.8, I describe the preparation, process and post-interview activities respectively. In Section 4.7, I describe what I did with the resultant data.

4.6.1 Rationale for interviews

Interviews offered the potential to discover more about how the participants conceived their worlds and their place within these (Kvale, 1996), in this case their worlds as international postgraduates in English-dominant surroundings. This provided opportunities for accessing specific descriptions of 'what they experience[d] and fe[lt] and how they act[ed]' (Kvale, 1996, p. 32), as well as the underlying rationale (Yin, 2014) explaining why they thought they experienced, felt and acted in these ways. This was designed to offer insights into language learning and language use as these pertained to the participants' perceived requirements and how these were acted upon. Seidman (2013) provides a clear rationale for undertaking in-depth interviewing, which emphasises lived experiences and 'the meaning [participants] make of that experience' while acknowledging the transience of experiences (p. 16). The historical context of participants' experience, the valuing of their stories and confirming of their worth (Seidman, 2013) aligned with the research questions and underlying paradigm. Kvale (1996, p. 33) highlights how interviews can be used to move beyond opinion and delve deeper to uncover what lies behind opinions, and to identify 'specific situations and action sequences from the subject's world'. Interviews were selected, in sum, to provide access to beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK), the ecosystem experience, and behaviours all from the participants' perspectives.

Although interviews provided insights from the participants' perspectives, this might have been limited, following Seidman (2013), for example by what participants could recall, what they chose to share, and the participants' capacity, including my own, to articulate thoughts during interviews (Yin, 2014). Discussing beliefs and behaviours in an interview was also likely to increase their saliency, which might have changed the meaning attributed to experiences (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2013). Some participants explicitly identified behaviours potentially changing as a result of the interviews, as seen in the exchange below with my words emboldened:

> *I feel that I have got a lot of valuable information from you. And I feel it's a meaningful event for me today.*

I'm glad. Did the valuable information come from me or did it come from you?

Both, because when I think about the past things in my life, I started to examine my life right now and I think there's something that I should do (Bella, Interview 1).

Given the longitudinal nature of this research, the interview experiences provided participants with opportunities to engage in reflective practice, which potentially impacted on their subsequent BAK and behaviours discussed in follow-up interviews. I also asked all participants whether they would engage with academic support courses and workshops, thereby informing them of these and potentially changing behaviours. These and other aspects of interview research are further discussed throughout this section, with the potential suitability of narrative inquiry presented below.

4.6.2 Narrative inquiry

The holistic aspect of narrative inquiry is concerned with the complexity of learners' lives, while also valuing the idiosyncratic and imprecise nature of their stories (Cotterall, 2008, p. 127). The gathering of stories as data to then analyse, termed paradigmatic analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995), is perhaps the most common way of carrying out narrative inquiry with second language learners (Chik & Benson, 2008, p. 158). Flyvbjerg (2004, p. 135) also identifies narrative as a common component of case studies that can reveal 'the complexities and contradictions of real life'. Narrative can be a way of communicating that 'make[s] familiar events and feelings that confront ordinary everyday life', which should 'preserve perspectives in a more genuine form' and be connected to specific times and contexts in ways that make these meaningful (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 57). Narratives are also likely to contain critical events, 'or specific tensions or interruptions' identified as relevant by the speaker to the story (Creswell, 2013, p. 72). The participant selects what is told and orders the events, providing details that both add texture to the story and attempt to bridge the knowledge gap between participant and interviewer (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). For these reasons, in-depth narrative interviews appeared appropriate for this research.

There were also interpersonal dynamics (Kvale, 1996) to account for both during the interview and at the data analysis stage. There were issues of power around identities and social-norm interactions from both my interviewer perspective and participants' perspectives. These included L1 English speaker versus L2 English speaker, age differences, teacher and student roles, gender differences, and Chinese versus non-Chinese. Differences accentuate interview question authenticity, yet drawbacks also exist (Seidman, 2013, p. 102). For example, as the interviewer my lack of knowledge of the Chinese education system and of what it was to be a Chinese student living and studying in Scotland might have elicited details that could have been less explicitly told to Chinese interviewers. However, participants might also have assumed that as a language teacher, language learning activities and the rationale underlying these would be self-evident me and provided limited details.

Further drawbacks included my inexperience interviewing Chinese students and lack of knowledge about questions that might perceive as innocuous but could be deemed unclear or inappropriate to Chinese participants. Goldstein (1995) outlines the challenges of interviewing participants from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. She stresses the importance of piloting the interview to assess how participants perceive certain questions. I therefore piloted my interview questions to check for linguistic clarity and cultural appropriacy within an interview setting. Following the pilot, I undertook a trial to test the longitudinal aspect of the study. Although the trial was distinct from this Dissertation study, it fundamentally impacted my approach to interviewing and data analysis. The use of English for the interviews in the pilot, trial and main study is discussed in Subsection 4.6.5.

4.6.3 Pilot and trial

I contacted a Chinese ex-student who was fluent in English. She agreed to participate and offer me feedback on a pilot interview. The pilot participant was an English teacher, had substantial overseas studying experience and I knew her to be forthright. Knowing each other meant I could describe the purpose of the pilot interview, explain that any inappropriate questions were unintentional, and that I hoped she would help me interview Chinese English speakers appropriately, clearly and unambiguously. During the pilot she discussed her

experiences at length. My first question elicited an uninterrupted 15-minute narrative. I audio recorded the interview and afterward transcribed my contributions, and sent these for her to check the appropriacy of my language. She found no cultural issues regarding the questions but offered ideas for rephrasing to increase comprehensibility, and identified phrases likely to be unknown or misunderstood by the target non-teacher participants with a lower-level of English than she enjoyed (Appendix 1).

Following the pilot I conducted a trial study using similar research questions but with different participation criteria and research structure. The study involved two Chinese students on a pre-sessional summer course in Scotland. This was an intensive course of English for Academic Purposes (100 hours contact time over five weeks), in which the content was academic in nature but the focus was on the use of English to convey meaning in academic contexts (see Section 1.3). The content of the course was general academic English, activities were scaffolded, and class sizes were small (around 10–12 per class). This was a course for language learners. The longitudinal aspect was limited to interviewing both participants in the first week of their course and again at the end of the five-week block of lessons.

The narrative interview style discussed in Subsection 4.6.2 did not work well with these two trial participants. Both participants answered my questions but required prompting for me to gain a deeper understanding of how English was taught and learned. Jovchelovitch and Bauer's (2000) suggestion that the differences between our life experiences would encourage participants to develop their stories did not have that effect. Both participants seemed unaware of how situation-specific their experiences had been, which appeared to lead to assumptions of shared knowledge that I did not have. I became a much more active co-participant in the 'meaning-making enterprise' (Talmage, 2012, p. 295) than I had anticipated. Throughout the interview I asked many further questions to clarify the participants' perceptions of the situations under discussion. It was inevitable that my understanding of the participants' stories involved interpreting them through my own life, constructing knowledge in a way Karlsson (2008, p. 86) refers to as 'auto/biography' (see Subsection 4.7.4). Nevertheless, by consciously not presuming I had understood, by delving deeper and pursuing further information when answers seemed straightforward, I also

discovered much more complexity and situation-specific nuance than initial responses indicated. This experience changed my approach to interviewing as detailed below with an example which highlights how further questioning altered my understanding of an initial response.

4.6.4 Semi-structured interviews

Following the trial, I abandoned in-depth narrative interviews with little structure and, instead, adopted a semi-structured interview technique. This put me more in control of the agenda (Denscombe, 2014). As my knowledge of the participants' perspectives and experiences developed during each interview, so too did consecutive interviews, a change considered relevant to certain research projects (Denscombe, 2014, p. 187). Prior to subsequent interviews I prepared questions, as discussed in Subsection 4.6.6 below, to allow me to refer back to stated beliefs, experiences and behaviours previously discussed. This enabled me to clarify the similarities and differences in the activities that the participants had described and check my understanding of these (Talmage, 2012). Although the interviews were led by my agenda, responses influenced what I subsequently asked about within an interview and in successive interviews. Within a constructivist paradigm, the 'research interview as social practice orientation' Talmy (2010, p. 128) identifies is understood as collaborative production of interview data. My interviewer role was therefore collaborative, and although Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the participants' stories, at times I make explicit my role in the data production including aspects of their stories I did not ask about.

There were several instances in the second trial interview in which further questioning uncovered information that fundamentally changed how the information that preceded it might have been construed. This made me question how much I might have misconstrued in the trial because additional information remained unsaid. A clear instance of this with Participant A occurred when it appeared that his beliefs had changed over the five-week period. In our first interview he had clearly stated that students should study alone and collaborative study was problematic. In the second interview, he appears to evaluate collaborative study in a more positive light until I checked. The transcript sample below shows our exchange. My words are emboldened.

So it was valuable for the weaker students but it was also valuable for you as a stronger student.

Yes

Have you changed your mind then?

Well…

Or did you already think that? Because I definitely got the impression when I talked to you last time that you thought it was a bad idea. Did I get the wrong impression or have you changed your ideas?

In fact, I always have held the opinion that we should try to finish the work by ourselves but for some people they could think up some of their own opinions by themselves if they gave it some more time but if they think about it for a while and cannot come up with anything then give up and ask others, it is not ideal but it is OK. It is better than doing nothing.

I see your point that students should all try their best to think about it, not just give up and ask someone else straight away. Does that mean you changed your idea or not?

In fact I strongly believed five weeks ago, and still now, that students should finish their homework by themselves could be the best way. So, for me I always try to finish by myself but if others ask me for help, it's OK for me and sometimes it helps me develop my meaning.

OK. That's very clear, thank you.

So I think this is an opinion I believed five weeks ago and now – so it didn't change.

I had anticipated belief change and was delighted when I perceived that had occurred. Further questioning showed me in this case the belief had not changed, but also that the participant's belief was more nuanced than I had initially understood. So, while active questioning brought me closer to this participant's perceptions, it seemed difficult to have any certainty that other comments had not been misinterpreted by information that remained untold or under-explained. Becker (1996) and Denscombe (2014) warn of inferring participants' meanings and encourage ongoing checking to verify what is meant. In response to this experience, I composed participants' stories between interviews to cross-check and clarify points raised in previous interviews (see

Subsection 4.6.8). This was also integral to my interviews given one aspect of the research was concerned with possible changing beliefs and behaviours. The trial taught me a valuable lesson about checking apparent changes, particularly when those seemingly met my expectations.

4.6.5 Language

Using English likely affected interviews given that the 'linguistic designations of [the] world [being perceived]' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 176) were possibly first language designations. The participants' English language proficiency might have impacted precision and the capacity to talk freely about perceptions compared to conducting interviews in Chinese, thereby affecting authenticity of voice. Lower confidence in spoken English abilities might also have impacted the quality and length of responses. Nevertheless, my self-selecting participants explicitly volunteered for these English-language interviews as a language learning strategy just as Copland and Garton (2011) and Blaj-Ward (2017) found in their interview-led investigations of international students attending UK universities. In other words, my participants might not have volunteered had the interviews been conducted in Chinese, and different participants would have provided different case studies.

My previous one-to-one work as a learning advisor, which involved eliciting information about English language learning, had developed my sensitivity to language use and nonverbal responses that indicated confusion when interacting with students with low English spoken proficiency. My prior experience was beneficial and I remained vigilant of the language I used and how it was being understood. Nonetheless, despite sensitivity to language and nonverbal responses, conducting interviews in the participants' second language has consequences for what is said and how it is said (Seidman, 2013). Pavlenko (2007) problematises the use of a second language in interviews, yet Nekvapil (2003) found that when interviewing multilingual participants, the particular language made little difference. Nevertheless, I remained acutely aware of my language use throughout and actively sought to express myself in ways I thought appropriate. I also spent time preparing for each interview for the reasons described below and remained aware of possible limitations in the data collected.

4.6.6 Interview preparation

While interviews can appear superficially to be conversations with some structure, and Kvale (1996, p. 84) extols 'the virtue of […] their openness', my preparation included clearly informing the participants of the purpose and context prior to each interview. I created a page of interview themes to structure each interview around (Appendix 2), and sent these to participants once interview times were arranged. These themes acted both as an indication to participants of what we would discuss and guided me through discussion points during interviews. In addition, for the second, third and fourth interviews, I read through the narratives I had created from earlier interviews to remind me of each participant's story (see Subsection 4.6.8). Once in the interviewing space with each participant, I invited questions before starting. I also explained to participants that I would take notes and what my purpose was for these (see Section 4.1).

4.6.7 Interview process

I undertook a series of four interviews as noted above. The first took place at the start of semester one and focussed on participants' language learning histories, establishing the contexts of participants' experiences. The second and third were conducted at the beginning of the second semester and the Dissertation period (see Appendix 3). These times were anticipated to be convenient for the participants, to avoid assessment periods, and to allow for some reflection on their learning in the preceding period. The fourth interview happened after Dissertation submission and also focussed on learning, with the expectation that this would be influenced by Dissertation engagement, lack of timetabled lessons and the end of the postgraduate programme. Conducting a series of interviews was an attempt to discover participants' perceptions of their on-going experiences and evolving contexts and possible changing beliefs and behaviours as their sojourn progressed. Consistency was not necessarily expected, but understanding how the participants accounted for change became germane.

Modalities in language learning and use (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) featured in the interview themes. During the interviews I made a

concerted effort to cover each modality both to understand the participants' priorities and to confirm whether non-mentions indicated a lack of activity in that modality or merely that it was not being attended to during the interview. This agenda setting reflects my positioning as a language teacher and clearly affected what we discussed. Given that the main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of interviewees' utterances (Kvale, 1996), as the interviewer I was 'observant of […] vocalization, facial expressions, and other bodily gestures' (p. 32) and checked my interpretation. I endeavoured to listen to the content, the language, the interview progress and determine when and whether to move the interview forward (Seidman, 2013).

Wenden (1986, p. 198) believes interviews can disclose both learners' strategy use and their determination to 'designate, diagnose, evaluate, self-analyse and theorize' their learning behaviours, and so potentially reveal their beliefs. I was less confident that detailed behaviours or beliefs would necessarily emerge unprompted given my trial study experience. During interviews, I therefore purposefully drew on R. Kelly's (1996) micro-skills (reproduced below), which she had identified as relevant to educators facilitating the development of learner autonomy through a process of one-to-one therapeutic counselling sessions. These had informed my practice as a learning advisor. In using these skills, I encouraged participants to reflect on their learning experiences, learning beliefs, and the effectiveness of their activities. I endeavoured to actively listen and empathise with participants. I often paraphrased, restated and summarised to clarify if my interpretation aligned with the participant's, and gently challenged contradictions.

Attending	Giving the learner undivided attention
Restating	Repeating in your own words what the learner says
Paraphrasing	Simplifying the learner's statements by focussing on the essence of the message
Questioning	Using open questions to encourage self-exploration
Interpreting	Offering explanations for learner experiences

Evaluating	Appraising the learner's process and achievement
Reflecting feelings	Surfacing the emotional content of learner statements
Empathising	Identifying with the learner's experience and perception
Confronting	Surfacing discrepancies and contradictions in the learner's communication (R. Kelly, 1996, p. 96).

While participants could challenge my interpretation of events during the interview, participants potentially agreed without considering alternatives. Candy (1991, p. 168) points out research participants are renowned for aiming to please researchers by offering plausible responses because, without time to think, spontaneous responses are thought preferable to silent reflection. Sending interview themes prior to interviews was my attempt to prepare participants for our interactions, and the longitudinal nature of research allowed me to refer to previous interviews to clarify my understanding and challenge inconsistencies. I could not ensure responses were not merely telling me what I wanted to hear, but as with Participant A in the trial study, participants in the main study seemed comfortable correcting me or, as the next example shows, challenging common narratives and activities. For example, while one participant discussed other Chinese students developing friendships to practise English, she was rather critical of this activity:

> *I don't want to speak English just to practise, just for speaking English with someone, because it will have embarrassing results, because you don't know why you're talking about a particular topic, it's just for practicing, or sometimes I will need to struggle to talk about something also I will not be interested in the topic but still I need to perform, just perform like an actress to stimulate others interests in communication (Amy, Interview 2).*

Another participant was keen to encourage incoming Chinese students not to study too hard, which in my role as a university lecturer was not likely intended to tell me what I wanted to hear:

> *I just hope the incoming students don't spend too much time studying. Although I haven't spent much time studying, I just don't*

want them to spend so much money here and just study (Bella, Interview 4).

Self-reporting through interviews is an undependable indicator of what actually happened (Pavlenko, 2007). Nevertheless, Kashiwa and Benson (2018) feel that self-reporting provides comparatively dependable depictions of the participants' perceptions of events and 'the meanings they attach to them' (p. 729). My interpretations offered during interviews provided participants opportunities to refute these and clarify their own interpretation. Nevertheless, as a university lecturer and researcher, it was possible that some responses were selected as "right answers" and this remained a limitation.

4.6.8 Post-interview and notes

When interviews finished and the recording equipment stopped, I debriefed participants by asking if there were any questions they had or anything they would like to add. My dual role as language support lecturer and postgraduate researcher sometimes resulted in queries relating to accessing language development activities. Having been asked by the first participant for details of social opportunities around campus, I offered and emailed all participants an annotated list (see Appendix 7) after our first interview.

After participants left the room I took notes 'to recall and reflect on what [was] learned from a particular interview' (Kvale, 1996, p. 129) and later listened to the recording to discern ambiguity, inconsistency or contradictory statements (Kvale, 1996, p. 34) that I had missed as the interviewer and, when necessary, I emailed the participant to clarify meaning. This was an attempt to reduce interpreting or appropriating the words of the participants for my own benefit (Seidman, 2013). After each round of interviews, I transcribed, analysed and rewrote the data into narrative prose to refer to in subsequent interviews. While this was initially solely for my convenience as the researcher and had a purposeful place in the research design as discussed so far in this chapter, this became the basis of analysis for the entire data set as detailed below.

4.7 Working with data

In this section, initially my approach to transcribing the data is provided, followed by a description of how I first analysed the data between interviews to facilitate subsequent interviews. Subsection 4.7.3 revisits narrative inquiry to present the rationale for using this for data presentation, and this section ends with a discussion around auto/biography and data interpretation.

4.7.1 Transcription

To decide how to transcribe the recorded data, I considered the primary purpose of data analysis and use, and access to the finished Dissertation. This study is concerned with participants' stories, explicitly relying on spontaneous spoken language converted into a written narrative medium (see Subsections 4.7.2 and 4.7.3). The stories presented in Chapters 5 and 6 draw directly from the transcription. This Dissertation will be available online as an open access document in due course and the participants have requested digital copies. I therefore endeavoured to sensitively 'render [transcribed interview data] in a more fluent written style' (Kvale, 1996, p. 172) to avoid lowering the participants' confidence in their spoken abilities. While spontaneous spoken language naturally contains features that generally go unnoticed, such as false starts, repetition and linguistic errors, these become obvious when transcribed verbatim as in 'naturalized' transcription (Widodo, 2014, p. 105). Naturalistic transcription reveals features which may appear to be errors and could lower the self-esteem of participants. There were also "real" errors in the participants' speech, and so to avoid 'unethical stigmatization of specific persons' (Kvale, 1996, pp. 172-173) I removed these during transcription since quotes feature heavily in this Dissertation. Such 'denaturalized' transcription is used when focussing on the 'meanings and perceptions' of the participants' constructed reality rather than closer inspection of the 'different aspects of talking data' (Widodo, 2014, p. 105). Given the nature of this study, whereby the ideas were more important than how they were represented in speech (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005), and my strength of feeling about not undermining participants' contributions by drawing attention to linguistic errors in their contributions, I used a denaturalized approach to transcription. However, I was mindful of reformulation and how this might have involved changing the meaning and so did

this sensitively, error corrected and removed consecutive repetitive words, so that “I I I meet him yesterday” became “I met him yesterday”.

4.7.2 Initial analysis

A key feature of the data I gathered was its ‘biographical narrative orientation’ (Kiely, 2009, p. 333), and so I had to deal with the idiosyncrasies of each biographical narrative account (Pavlenko, 2007). In the first interviews focussing on learning histories, activities inside and outside the classroom were discussed, and these were mainly organised by level of schooling. Using a printout of the transcription, pages of A3 paper and four differently coloured pens, I selected the information and created mindmaps on sheets of A3 paper, one sheet for each level: primary; middle; high; undergraduate university; preparing for the UK; and current postgraduate studies (see Appendix 8 for samples). The information transferred from the transcript was grouped by modality (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and colour coded: black for in-class activities; blue for out-of-class activities; red for beliefs; green for my comments. These mindmaps were then reformed into a coherent piece of narrative prose, cross-checked against the transcription, and selected transcribed data was incorporated for referencing in later interviews if required. Interviews two and three followed the same mindmap activity leading to prose production with modalities rather than schooling level as central themes. This process was in response to my concern that I would confuse stories or forget important aspects. I was keen to demonstrate I valued participants’ stories (Seidman, 2013) by not confusing one participant’s experiences for another’s or inadvertently asking the same questions again. This also enabled me to clarify, query and connect points raised in prior interviews during subsequent ones.

4.7.3 Narrative analysis

The longitudinal nature of this study was premised on likely changes in participants’ personal constructs, contexts, and the way contexts were understood. These changes are of interest as experiences sequenced in particular orders (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018, p. 726), as participants transitioned from studying English to engaging in English-language ecosystems. The focus on the temporal, dynamic and contextual nature of language learner autonomy,

beliefs and behaviours in this study indicate the importance of 'teas[ing] out the narrative threads within the interview data' (Chik & Benson, 2008, pp. 167-168). Polkinghorne (1995) delineates analysis of narrative inquiry into a paradigmatic-type and a narrative-type. Data which is gathered in storied form is often subject to paradigmatic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). However, taking a paradigmatic narrative approach to interviewing in an attempt to gather data in a narrative form was unsuccessful during the trial study and abandoned (see Section 4.6.3), yet the collected data was analysed to produce stories, a 'narrative analysis' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 6). Narrative analysis involves the researcher synthesising the plot from 'the data elements', and creating connections across the narrative time frame (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). With narrative inquiry, the participants are situated temporally, socially and geographically (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Beliefs and ways of behaving at particular times, in particular social situations and in particular places are therefore influenced by the past and anticipated future, and the individual in the social landscape and the physical space, all of which are common themes in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Through the construction of stories, 'notions of human purpose and choice as well as chance happenings, dispositions and environmental presses' can be integrated (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16).

Initially, the narrative reconstructions used between interviews created coherent, memorable stories for me. Realising there were principled reasons to revisit this process, I applied a narrative analysis. This improved readability and brought coherence to 'experiences, thoughts, reflections and emotion' (Sakui & Cowie, 2008, p. 99). It should also provide readers with an understanding of participants' location within each story, and the sequential nature of events (Kashiwa & Benson, 2018). While this may appear similar to writing a biography, this is reconsidered below.

4.7.4 Auto/biography and interpretation

Stanley (1993), writing about sociology, melds the idea of biography with autobiography. By combining these as auto/biography, she allows me to make explicit my place in constructing another's story by understanding it through my own beliefs, assumptions and knowledge. This also occurred during other

interactions as I gathered and analysed data so that, whether during interviews or in email exchanges, auto/biography occurred in that when 'talking and writing about life, or learning experiences', I actively constructed knowledge by using my own life to comprehend and construe participants' lives (Karlsson, 2008, p. 86). In taking an auto/biographical approach, I explicitly identify myself as the researcher in the process in constructing the narrative, and take responsibility for my ideas (Holliday, 2002). I am aware that, as I examined the narrative within the data, my beliefs had a fundamental impact. What I attended to was based on my own interpretation of the data and informed what I perceived as a pattern. Krauss (2005, p. 764) encourages researchers to 'record their own biases, feelings, and thoughts and to state them explicitly in the research report' while also endeavouring to avoid preconceptions and imposing their own views on the data collected. I kept notes after interviews and during analysis, and refer to my own part in the dialogue in Chapters 5 and 6 to make explicit my place as a researcher making meaning from my own perceptions. I discuss my reactions to the stories in Chapter 7.

In addition, when interpreting the data I endeavoured to 'examine plausible rival explanations' (Yin, 2014, p. 140), rather than following those that seem most obvious to me. Flyvbjerg (2004, p. 136) reports describing a multitude of aspects in a case but deliberately under-interpreting the data in order to allow readers from diverse backgrounds 'to discover their own path and truth inside the case'. This became a fundamental aspect of my data analysis and presentation of the findings as narratives. While I offer my own tentative interpretation of the data, I also incorporate quotes from the transcripts, at times with multiple turns in a dialogue, in which readers may perceive other interpretations. I acknowledge that readers understand and conceptualise the story through their own constructions, thereby inevitably bringing their own interpretations to the narratives I have constructed. Readers' alternative interpretations may prompt further development of the discourse and research on out-of-class learning, both of which would be welcome outcomes.

4.8 Ethical considerations and rigour

Constructivist paradigms create challenges for my research if reality and validity 'are derived from community consensus regarding what is "real", what is useful

and what has meaning' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 167). This is because what has shaped my beliefs and understanding of the world is likely to diverge from the reality that shaped those of my participants. This limits my insights, and my own reality always impacted what I attended to, investigated, and understood. This research was biased and value-laden from a variety of perspectives, from the participant role I took as the interviewer through to my data selection, analysis and interpretation (Kvale, 1996). As the interviewer I was an inherent part of the instrument and it was my role to seek to minimise bias while acknowledging its presence (Seidman, 2013, p. 26). While case study research has been criticised previously for 'bias toward verification of the researcher's preconceived notions', this bias is no greater than in other research design (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 135).

Recognising how my own 'personal, cultural, and historical experiences' influenced my data gathering, analysis and interpretation was a crucial aspect of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). My notes helped here and formed part of the data. In the analysis I refer to aspects of which I am unsure and offer a variety of possible interpretations of the data. I take responsibility for the narrative production constructed from interviews, notes and email correspondence. I followed the advice of Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2013) to remain alert to selecting only supporting data while ignoring problematic and contradictory data. When ambiguity emerged during transcription and initial analysis, I sought to clarify meaning through email exchanges and in subsequent interviews. Similar to the narrative analysis undertaken by Menard-Warwick (2004, p. 299), 'I have tried to represent the tellers in keeping with the way that they represented themselves to me'.

While the applicability of validity is contested outside positivist and post-positivist paradigms (Golafshani, 2003), Kvale (1996, pp. 241-242) sees validity as dependent on the researcher's craftsmanship, requiring the researcher to continually question 'the credibility, plausibility and trustworthiness' of claims during the research process. Seidman (2013) also argues validity's relevance within a multiple interview structure since this allows consistency in stories to be checked across interviews. I did not aim for consistency as the literature predicted temporal and contextual dynamism. However, applying micro-skills (see Subsection 4.6.7) and undertaking an interview series allowed me to

crosscheck points across interviews, seek clarity around ambiguity, and check my interpretations with participants.

Morrow (2005, pp. 252-253) collated suggestions that can increase trustworthiness in constructivist studies, many of which this study followed. I provided contextual information to understand the meaning participants make of their experiences. This is referred to when discussing international students' contexts in the UK generally as well as specific aspects of the business school the participants attended. The context of the Chinese education system is also discussed throughout Chapter 5, framing participants' experiences at particular times and stages of their education. Morrow (2005, pp. 252-253) also views rapport building with participants as aiding trustworthiness, and specifically identifies active listening skills as helping in this regard. This is also an aspect of the counselling skills I explicitly used in the interviews (see Subsection 4.6.4), and, without rapport development, I could never have hoped to have received six hours of each participant's time across the year of her sojourn.

Ethical issues were foremost in mind when piloting the interview to avoid both unintentionally placing participants in uncomfortable positions and wasting their time by gathering data compromised by misunderstanding. The interviewing style I adopted, drawing from advising in language learning practice, encouraged reflection and was, I hoped, likely to benefit the participants while also potentially causing participants to question their beliefs and behaviours. The transcription style explained above was also selected in my attempt to minimise any potential shaming or "othering" of participants, and so was an ethical issue. As this empirical research involved data generated by and with participants, ethical approval was granted by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. Participation in the trial and main study was only open to students I did not know and whom I did not teach. Data was stored securely, and used sensitively and anonymously in the Dissertation. Names of participants were changed as were other proper nouns which could have identified the participants. Narrative inquiry raises some specific ethical tensions as it can be difficult to 'obscure people's lives' (Bell, 2011, p. 578). An aspect of one participant's life in Scotland was her involvement in a club involving few Chinese people. This information changed how much detail I could provide about the university, the city, and the club as she became potentially identifiable. I therefore had the

choice of omitting the story in order to maintain anonymity or not identifying the institution, thereby removing the opportunity to discuss specific support available, and I chose the latter. This is because the story focussed on an important social aspect in the participant's life and demonstrated thriving engagement beyond her studies.

4.9 Limitations

The limitations of this research have been discussed throughout this chapter. The small number of participants and voluntary nature of participation prevented pre-selection of participants or generalisations being drawn regarding the experiences of international students. It is unknown how representative participants' stories were. Indeed, different participants would have provided alternative stories and perspectives. Nevertheless, the small number of participants was an integral aspect of this research design in order for more in-depth data to be gathered. The lack of generalisability is a feature of case studies and does not, overall, detract from the research because its aim was to understand individual perspectives and experiences.

The use of interviews and the nature of these meant that the data collected was influenced by what participants could recall, could articulate and were willing to share with me, a researcher and lecturer at the participants' university. The interview was led by my agenda and responses may have reflected what respondents thought I wanted to hear. Information could also have remained untold or under-explained, and I might have misinterpreted meaning. My understanding of responses during interviews and post-interview analysis of data was subject to my own constructions. When transcribing and analysing the data, I was led by these with participants' utterances understood through my own beliefs, assumptions and knowledge. These influenced the direction of the interview as well as the analysis I applied to the data. Furthermore, interviews and email interactions were conducted in English. While some precision and detail might have been lost, the use of English in interviews attracted participation in this study.

Participating in this study was part of participants' experience during their sojourn. They asked me directly for advice about language learning, and during

discussions and email exchanges I shared information about possible local language learning opportunities. In addition, actively discussing language learning and learning in a second language most likely raised participants' awareness of their beliefs and behaviours around their language learning and possibly changed these. In other words, participating in these interviews potentially contributed to language learning belief and behaviour change, thereby leading to subsequent interviews being directly impacted by previous ones.

4.10 Summary

Chapter 4 has provided an account of the decisions made during the research process so that the research aligned with the research questions and the overall approach to knowledge (see Chapter 1), autonomy (see Chapter 2), and beliefs and behaviours (see Chapter 3) underlying this study. The participant selection requirements were provided in Section 4.2 with an overview of the volunteers who agreed to participate and their postgraduate programme structure. The research questions in Section 4.3 included a brief explanation of which of these applied to the initial part of the study and which were investigated throughout. In Sections 4.4 and 4.5, the research paradigm and research design were discussed respectively. Section 4.6 involved discussion around interview types and how changes were made to align these with the research and the participants. Section 4.7 presented how I dealt with the large amount of data generated, and how I engaged with the data to produce Chapter 5 Learners' stories: language learning histories and Chapter 6 Learners' stories: surviving, striving and thriving, which follow. Section 4.8 addressed ethical considerations and rigour, and the final section described limitations which I return to in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 5 Learners' stories: language learning histories

This chapter establishes the contexts through which the participants engaged in second language learning in China and how they interpreted these contexts during interviews. I included questions about activities within language learning classes, attempting to understand the interplay between these and the out-of-class activities discussed. Section 5.1 provides a contextual overview of the education system in China to highlight relevant policies and the wider sociocultural environment. This overview outlines year-specific details regarding education to situate the participants within the temporal contexts of their schooling. The dates provided allow reference to policy reforms, data on student numbers, and the format of the state-run English exams, all of which changed during the sixteen years participants were in education in China. For example, in 2001 government policy was introduced mandating all children learn English from Grade Three at around nine years old (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). This came in after these participants started primary school but was implemented before they reached Grade Three and so affected them directly. Section 5.2 presents the participants' English learning histories in China. This section is organised by education level from primary school to university, with an overview of the education structure at each level provided to situate participants' stories. International English Language Testing System (IELTS) preparation is included in the university subsection as all participants started this while undergraduates. To maintain a narrative coherence, references to relevant literature are withheld until Section 5.3 where research questions one and two are answered. Overall this chapter provides background to participants' sojourns in the UK. Their stories of their sojourns as they lived and learned in English-dominant ecosystems are told in Chapter 6.

5.1 Historical and educational context

The various levels of the Chinese educational system these participants were engaged in and some wider influences considered relevant are outlined below. These participants were born in the early 1990s and their parents, born perhaps 20 to 30 years earlier, had very different experiences. Life in China changed dramatically after the economic reforms implemented from the late 1970s

onward, with substantial yet unevenly distributed rises in living standards for many residents (Hannum, Park, & Cheng, 2007). Rapid economic development was accompanied by educational restructuring in a bid to sustain economic growth (Hannum et al., 2007). By the turn of the Millennium, as the participants were entering formal schooling, access to education had expanded as had disparities between rural and urban schools (Hannum et al., 2007). Simultaneously, ongoing economic reforms were increasingly creating a labour market offering high financial rewards to the highly educated (Hannum et al., 2007). Access to education has continued improving, yet education quality remains unequally distributed with more economically developed regions attracting more experienced and better-qualified teachers from primary through to tertiary education (Morgan, Gu, & Li, 2017).

All the participants followed a similar overall pattern of schooling, attending primary, middle and secondary schools before moving directly on to four-year undergraduate degrees. During or shortly after undergraduate studies, each participant applied for postgraduate programmes and prepared for and took IELTS English assessment tests. The approximate years entering each education level are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: approximate year of entry and education level duration

	Primary school	Middle school	High school	Undergrad university	Postgrad university
Indicative year	2000	2005/6	2009	2012	2017
Duration (in years)	5 or 6	4 or 3	3	4	1

Since 1986 the Chinese education system has included nine years of compulsory education from the age of six (J. Lee & Song, 2017). This consists of five or six years primary schooling followed by four or three years of junior secondary (middle) school, depending on the regional education authority (KPMG, 2010). After primary school, schools become more selective with each successive education level dependent on examinations, which determine the schools students can attend at the next level (Kong, Yu, & Zhao, 2017). China's dual-school system where "key schools" attract more funding, better students and better teachers (Zhang, 2017) was fully operational during the participants'

schooling. When introduced in the 1950s, such schools were a cost-effective way of delivering selective education (Jing Liu, 2018) at a time when education was less ubiquitous and fewer resources were available (Zhang, 2017). However, places at these schools became highly sought-after and competition for places was often restricted to families who could afford to pay for after-school tuition, buy property close to a school, or make large donations (Zhang, 2017). Key schools were officially abolished at primary and middle school by 2009 due to the intense competition they engendered (Kong et al., 2017). The government also launched a series of policy reforms to deal with the problems which remained with key senior secondary schools in 2014 (Zhang, 2017). Both changes occurred too late to affect the participants in this study. They entered middle and high school just a few years after the peak school enrolment years across China, 2001 for middle schools and 2004 for high schools (Zhang, 2017) during a period when, perhaps, competition for places was at its fiercest. Competition over places at highly-rated schools and universities led the demand for private supplementary tutoring, which is discussed next.

5.1.1 Private supplementary tutoring

Private supplementary tutoring (PST) has become normalised in metropolitan areas across China with parents choosing additional lessons in the hope of bolstering academic achievement (Kong et al., 2017). Tutoring can be in any academic subject and although percentages vary between the top three subjects across the country and at different levels of schooling, Chinese Literacy, English and Mathematics are consistently the most common subjects (Kong et al., 2017), as these are the three subjects tested in the National University Entrance Qualifying Exam (Bolton & Graddol, 2012), a nationally-administered entrance exam all university applicants must take (KPMG, 2010). Some studies have found that certain learners have an interest in learning more about the subject they are being tutored in but the vast majority attend due to parental pressure (Kong et al., 2017). While only one participant discussed PST during compulsory education, two participants engaged with private tutoring as adults preparing for their IELTS tests. The extent to which they enrolled on courses, did their own research and engaged with others to prepare for IELTS varied considerably. While PST has attracted academic publications (for example, Chan, Tang &

Delaney, 2017; Chu, 2009; Junyan Liu & Bray, 2017), I found no published work on out-of-class IELTS preparation in China.

5.2 Participants' language learning histories

Going overseas to study is perceived in China as having economic benefits, yet access to international education is reserved for the economic elite with only around 2% of the total university student population studying overseas (UNESCO, 2019a). The study participants were part of this demographic in 2017 and their language learning histories are told in this section from primary school through to achieving the language requirements for overseas study. A very brief overview of the education structure at each level is provided and intended to offer some indication of the situation in China around the time the participants engaged in that level of education. This is not to suggest that there is no regional variation or that within China educational resources are distributed equally or equally accessible. For example, Liang, Yue, Li, Li, and Zhou (2019) identify an ongoing lack of adequate educational resources in less developed regions of the country, while Peng, Qi, Wan, Li, and Hu (2020) show how the children of rural migrants to urban centres may not have the same opportunities and access to schooling in the cities to which they have relocated. Hence when I use phrases such as 'in China' those should not be read for all of China. As detailed below, while all three participants grew up and studied in China as undergraduates, their journeys all had divergent trajectories. The purpose of this section is to describe how the participants learned English inside and outside the classroom from childhood through to acceptance on postgraduate programmes. The participants' pseudonyms, Amy, Bella and Jie, reflect the names they used with me in that Amy and Bella used Anglophone names while Jie introduced herself by her Chinese forename.

Amy grew up in a wealthy part of China but was unable to achieve the necessary grades to join her high school peers at university in Shanghai or Beijing as planned and she ended up studying Economics in a lower-tier university in a more rural location. At university she was allocated to the lower group for her English course. This seemed to suit Amy and she did well, achieving better scores than some of the students in the higher group. Amy was very aware of her grades and relative position of her scores in both groups. She expressed her

preference for achieving grades at the top of the lower group than the bottom of the higher group.

Bella grew up in a small city in a relatively undeveloped part of China, attended *humble*[12] elementary and middle schools before gaining entry to the best high school in her province and one of the top ten universities in Beijing to study Accountancy. English provided Bella an escape from her middle school studies to the Anglophone worlds depicted in American music and television. At middle school and at university, it appeared that Bella's out-of-class engagement with second-language ecosystems exceeded coursework and assessment requirements. At university, out-of-class engagement seemed to have enabled her to pass compulsory language exams with seemingly minimal academic effort.

Jie learned English from kindergarten onwards. At primary school as well as using audio in class she had a copy of the textbook audio to use at home and her mother bought her additional English audio recordings for listening practice. At middle school, translation featured heavily but she attended weekend school PST where she gained confidence speaking. As an undergraduate, she studied Accountancy at an international university in China, during which time she spent three weeks on a study trip to the UK. This experience appeared to have been an important moment, which both shook her confidence and prompted her to engage in behaviour intended to strengthen her spoken skills.

To maintain a narrative focus, I use present tenses to indicate what was the case at the time of each interview, and past tenses to refer to time before the interviews. For example, when Amy told me about primary school activities and then adds her beliefs, I write:

> Typically stories were read by Amy's teacher or played as an audio recording, students then retold the tales to each other but without producing them verbatim, and Amy comments that she could *master sentences this way, maybe it's efficient*.

I use this style to differentiate between participants referring to language learning behaviours at primary school and beliefs about these. Her beliefs

[12] I use italics here and throughout to indicate direct quotes from interview transcripts.

'*master sentences this way, maybe it's efficient*' I perceive as evaluative statements not referring to her beliefs as a seven-year-old but her evaluation and beliefs at the time of the interview as an adult. The use of present tenses here has the advantage of differentiating between a belief at the time of the interview and a belief prior to that. Using a past tense could imply the belief has ended. The use of present tenses to refer to the past is known as the historical present and although linguists debate why it is used, it tends to foreground the narrator (Schiffrin, 1981). Compare the sample above with what would happen if the tenses are all in the past:

> Typically stories were read by Amy's teacher or played as an audio recording, students then retold the tales to each other but without producing them verbatim, and Amy commented in the interview that she had been able to *master sentences this way, maybe it* had been *efficient*.

Experimenting with tense and style led me to conclude that the first of these examples was less ambiguous, and more readable and accessible as a story-telling format than the second version.

The following subsections describe participants' experiences at each level of schooling. Each is subdivided into in-class and out-of-class activities, with participants' language learning behaviours and beliefs presented through paraphrasing and quoting the transcript. Longer quotes are indented and my words are emboldened. Shorter quotes are integrated into the text using italics. In Section 5.3, two research questions are answered with reference to relevant literature. The in-class and out-of-class activities as well as the identifiable beliefs and associated behaviours from the narratives in Section 5.2 are summarised in tables in Appendices 4, 5 and 6 for Amy, Bella and Jie respectively, providing reference points for Chapter 6.

5.2.1 Primary school

Primary education in China is organised around two semesters of around 38 teaching weeks (KPMG, 2010). Children typically attend primary school from 7:30 to 16:00 before possibly accessing private supplementary tutoring (PST) (J. Lee & Song, 2017). Engagement with PST results from perceptions of academic competition, inadequate state sector teaching, and the exam focus of private

classes (J. Lee & Song, 2017). Parents' wishes buoy this lucrative sector and influence learning, as Lee and Song state:

> Much of primary school children's learning is shaped by parental expectations of getting their children into an elite secondary school, which paves the way to enter reputable universities (J. Lee & Song, 2017, p. 109).

While none of the participants referred to PST at primary school, and I did not directly ask about this, the competitive undercurrent and parental expectations were likely to have influenced participants and their peers. Similarly, I did not ask about class sizes but average class sizes vary by province, city and popularity (J. Lee & Song, 2017). In Henan Province, for example, the stipulated standard in primary schools was 45 students per class, in the capital for the province 70 – 80 pupils was common, and a highly sought-after school averaged 133 learners per class in 2011 (Teng & Liang, 2012 cited in Lee & Song, 2017). This provides some context for the primary school experiences participants discuss below.

5.2.1.1 In-class activities

At primary school, while Amy and Bella's English learning started in third year as 10-year-olds, Jie learned English from first year and remembers having four 45-minute classes a week. Jie and Bella's classes seemed similar in that both read and listened to English generally presented as dialogues in textbooks. In both classes, students listened and repeated then practised the dialogues in pairs, and speaking was restricted to the script. In Jie's class there was an audio recording but, in Bella's, the lack of audio resources meant her teacher read textbook dialogues aloud.

Amy's memories of primary school classroom activities are somewhat different and revolve around stories and singing songs. Amy enjoyed English at this stage. Typically stories were read by Amy's teacher or played as an audio recording, students then retold the tales to each other but without producing them verbatim, and Amy comments that she could *master sentences this way, maybe it's efficient*. The atmosphere was uncompetitive and she describes these activities as stress relieving but also as generally *low efficiency*.

Bella is the only participant who talks about regularly writing in class. In the final year of primary school, she had to write texts of about 100 words twice a week on topics such as *describe your day*, or *my favourite teacher*. Teacher feedback for Bella focussed on spelling and grammatical errors, which were circled. Her teacher also selected the best stories to read to the class and sometimes also copied and distributed these to classmates.

All participants had regular in-class spelling tests involving teachers dictating words from set wordlists and students writing them down. Teachers also administered simple reading, listening and writing tests after every textbook unit. Although oral output featured in primary school classrooms, speaking was never tested or graded. Nevertheless, Amy explicitly pointed to a general understanding regarding the importance of spoken output amongst her peers:

> *Most of us always said we need to speak if we want to master more English skills.*

The beliefs throughout Amy's discussion of learning English at primary school relate to vocabulary learning and the centrality of speaking. The connection between vocabulary and oral output is reiterated below when Amy and Bella talk of out-of-class learning using talk-aloud memorisation techniques.

5.2.1.2 Out-of-class activities

For homework, all participants had to learn the wordlists published in each unit. Each participant used repetition but differences occurred in how they did this. Jie wrote out the words several times along with their Chinese meaning:

> *At first, I thought it was very interesting because it was my first contact with English learning. But over time I felt it was a little bit boring because I had to write them down many times and I think if I can remember I don't need to write many many times.*

Nevertheless, Jie still did as instructed and rationalises continuing this activity she found boring as she believes it helped her memorise and become familiar with the vocabulary. Despite this belief, she no longer writes words repeatedly to aid memorisation:

> *… because now I know many words so I think that it's not really needed for me to do that.*

Amy and Bella both memorised their wordlists by repeating each word aloud. Bella believes this *helped a lot. It's a good way to learn English.* Amy also spelled her words and uttered the Chinese meanings. Amy's teacher recommended this technique to her and during her first interview Amy said she still uses it, *and I think if it is possible, I will always use it.*

Amy was busy with homework for other subjects and so did no further out-of-class English learning. At the end of primary school Amy achieved a high score for English which she attributes to her diligence:

> *If you just spend some time to try to do it you can get back what you put in, and it's a principle that not only relates to primary school but to all other situations of your life, too.*

In the feedback on in-class writing texts, Bella's teacher instructed students to correct their mistakes for homework. Bella is the only participant who had homework connected to writing beyond Jie's memorisation strategy. However, written corrections were not checked so Bella estimates she perhaps corrected one in four of her compositions because of this lack of oversight, stating clearly that:

> *If the teacher forced us to do it, I'd definitely do it.*

Bella recalls that English was less important than she perceives it to be in China nowadays. Much more emphasis was put on learning Mathematics and Chinese. As a result:

> *At primary school I didn't pay much attention to English study, so I didn't like spending so much time or have a regular routine to do this. It's like, sometimes before the test maybe I read it aloud.*

However, when asked why she corrected any of her written work, her response highlighted a different motivation:

> *If I really liked the story I wrote maybe I would correct it because I want it to be perfect.*

Jie's out-of-class experience was different because she had access to audio recordings. Her whole class had copies of the textbook audio and instructions from the teacher to listen to the dialogue and wordlist audio. Jie was instructed to record herself reciting the dialogues. In addition, Jie's mother had bought other English audio recordings for her. These had no accompanying textbook or transcripts. Jie listened to these every morning as she prepared for school. She believes these helped her become familiar with the *rhythm and sounds of English*.

5.2.2 Middle school

Chinese secondary education functions to provide both an educated workforce for the labour market and preparation for tertiary study with the general understanding that this focus brings prosperity to the population (Zhang, 2017). It is split between compulsory junior secondary (middle) school and, for those wishing to continue to university, senior secondary (high) school. Middle school includes 13 compulsory subjects, including a foreign language (KPMG, 2010) and is free (Zhang, 2017). High school is selective, requiring hopeful students to pass a 'locally administered entrance exam' (KPMG, 2010, p. 6). I specifically asked participants about English language learning and although participants referred to other subjects during the interviews, I did not pursue discussion of these.

5.2.2.1 In-class activities

Amy and Bella report little change in classroom activities at middle school – the audio and written texts just became longer and featured a greater range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. For Amy, middle school was *more serious than primary school* and she disliked learning English at this level. There was also more focus on grammar compared to primary school, often using gap-fill-type exercises with multiple-choice answers. Amy, Bella and Jie all identify translation-type exercises becoming prominent in preparation for high school entrance exams. Jie's teacher translated the English paragraphs in her textbook into Chinese and talked about their meaning in Chinese.

Memorising texts became a key task for Amy and Jie but not for Bella. Amy's enjoyment of re-telling stories introduced through her textbook at primary

school was replaced by teacher-instructed verbatim memorisation of every text for homework. A teaching assistant was sometimes present in the classroom to check the texts were recited correctly. When there was no assistant or a lack of time, the last 10 minutes of class time were allocated for students to individually transcribe the learned text which the teacher checked before students were allowed to leave the room. Any students unable to reproduce the text had to report to the teacher's office and try again. In her three years at middle school, Amy only had to visit the office once or twice. Despite her capacity to complete this task most of the time, Amy explicitly states that *in middle school I was not happy learning this way*.

Similarly, Jie was asked to memorise a paragraph once or twice a week, which her teacher would check in class either by asking all students to transcribe at the beginning of class, or one student would be selected to stand and recite the text while everyone else listened. Anyone who made mistakes was criticised by the teacher and had to repeat the memorisation task after class. Jie did not always do this homework but was always able to recite when chosen. Jie was taught certain aspects of English that neither Bella nor Amy learned about in middle school. She was taught English phonemic script[13], which she describes as useful for reading unknown words. She also learned to structure a small, simple essay by being taught about paragraph structure, topic sentences and supporting sentences. Bella and Amy both missed out on this instruction, and although Amy had to write for homework and received sentence-level feedback, she had no guidance regarding structure.

As well as her middle school, Jie attended additional *interest-oriented classes* in a small private English language school established by two Chinese PhD graduates who had studied in the UK. The two-hour classes she attended were on Saturdays and Sundays. Conducted in English, the classes were taught by a variety of volunteers from the UK and some very fluent English-speaking Chinese teachers. While Jie mentions that she was extremely shy about speaking English when starting these classes, she gained confidence there. These classes had no homework to accompany them but Jie prepared by looking ahead at the

[13] written symbols used to represent specific spoken English sounds and commonly used in dictionaries

upcoming units in her textbook and checking the meaning of unfamiliar words. This meant she was better able to participate in classroom discussions around the core texts. This preparation is a strategy she continued to use as a postgraduate in the UK.

5.2.2.2 Out-of-class activities

At home, Amy memorised her wordlist maintaining the technique taught at primary school. However, to make best use of her limited time she memorised her five- to six-line homework texts on her walk to school. Every weekend, she had writing homework set around a topic. Interestingly, despite her dislike of verbatim memorisation:

> *I think at that time I could finally understand why teachers made us memorise the text because I think when I wrote, I could write better because I could use some of the sentences I had memorised.*

Feedback on writing consisted of a grade and circled errors, highlighting what she should correct. Any student with too many errors reported to the teacher's office and corrected these there. However, error correction was generally set as an out-of-class task. Amy talks of her wish to score highly:

> *If she circled in my essay and so on, and I knew I couldn't get an A grade then I would feel regret at not being able to get an A grade and I would find the mistake. I wanted to find it. And if I couldn't find it, I would ask the teacher why I made the mistake.*
>
> ***Did you ever ask your friends?***
>
> *No, I don't think they would be able to find the mistakes because they were at the same level.*

When asked what motivated Amy to aim for perfection in her essays, and whether this was only about grades, she was quite adamant that:

> *I can't stand it if there are some very simple mistakes in my essay. But sometimes I can't find them.*

Despite Amy's dislike for aspects of her English learning, and her dismissal of seeking friends' help with error correction, Amy worked with friends outside the

classroom on homework tasks when there were particular questions that were unclear, and seems to have found this emotionally beneficial:

> *Sometimes we needed to discuss particular questions. There might be a very confusing question so we were able to talk to our classmates and then we were able to finish it after discussion.*
>
> ***How did you feel about doing it with other students?***
>
> *I think it was relaxing because if you cannot work it out by yourself you can discuss it with others so finally you finish it. I think it's relaxing.*

Although I neglected to ascertain the purpose of the questions, the collaborative peer learning Amy engaged in was not mentioned as a feature of other participants' language learning during their compulsory education. She was selective about who to collaborate with depending on her evaluation of their L2 understanding. This is also the first appearance of her as a striver, as she strove for A-grades and perfection in writing despite her dislike of certain English tasks.

Jie memorised texts once or twice a week but had to translate one paragraph into Chinese every evening as well as memorising any new words. She describes these activities as being very helpful at the time as they developed her understanding of texts. Jie believes she consequently read more in English and therefore improved her reading skills. Further homework included writing paragraphs or short essays, which received teacher feedback such as *good work* or *good vocabulary* as well as errors highlighted. There was then a follow-up homework activity of reading through the writing again, thinking about the errors and maintaining an error-correction notebook with errors and corrections duly recorded. She tells me that this was useful as it helped her remember correct uses of vocabulary and grammar. This activity continued until university, when essay writing was no longer a course component. Similar to primary school English homework, Jie was instructed to listen again to the audio used in class in her own time. She describes this as voluntary because it was never checked, yet she always completed this task.

Bella identifies middle school as a crucial time for her and, although she specified that she had no text memorisation tasks, she did not indicate what

homework she did. However, she spent much time learning English at home of her own volition using songs and television shows she accessed online. She listened to many tracks by hip-hop artist Eminem and watched the US sitcom, Friends. The resources she accessed were of her own choosing and she was encouraged and inspired by her elder sisters who were interested in life outside China and who travelled overseas. She talks of her years in middle school as being a painful time due to the pressure to succeed. As a language teacher I believed these authentic English resources must have been challenging and asked about this. She acknowledges the effort of engagement as being five on a ten-point difficulty scale, but says that life as a middle school student was a constant ten. Bella found the television shows inspiring. She identified messages in the content about being unique, being different from others and being brave enough to conquer adversity. The characters she watched became her role models and she had a recurring thought at this time about not belonging in China with the prominence afforded to grades and the pressure this created:

> *I thought maybe I belonged to other countries. I was so immature to think about that but it meant so much to me.*

She also talks about the huge comfort she derived from engaging with these programmes and songs and the escapism they provided, and this in turn created a *passion* for learning English:

> *As I learned it my skills became better and my English grade became higher.*

The strategy she used for music and television included repetition but more besides. For songs, she searched for the lyrics online and checked all the new words using an English-Chinese dictionary. She listened on a portable audio player on her way to and from school and while at home. She also sang along with the songs when alone. For the television shows, she used Chinese subtitles while watching and listening to the dialogue. She re-watched episodes perhaps a month later when she had forgotten the storyline. She took no notes nor checked new words when watching the television, engaging in a naturalistic approach to learning. At middle school, she was listening to English every day outside the classroom.

In addition, she also used a high school entrance exam preparatory textbook containing reading and listening texts that her teacher had recommended to her class. She is sure her classmates avoided this supplementary out-of-class material, yet she frequently used it. This helped her stay ahead in class meaning that she already understood whatever linguistic points her teacher presented:

> *I think maybe I even knew more about the textbook than the teacher because I really paid so much attention, and spent so much time on the textbook.*

Bella also had listening homework, finding the tasks easy. She achieved the top grades in her class and was accepted for the most prestigious high school in her province.

5.2.3 High school

Senior secondary school lasted three years with a curriculum including Chinese, Mathematics, Foreign Language, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, and Information Technology (KPMG, 2010). While high school was neither compulsory nor free, the enrolment rate rose from around 40% in 2000 when the participants were starting primary school to just under 80% in 2009 when they themselves became high school students (Zhang, 2017).

5.2.3.1 In-class activities

For all three participants, the intensity of the school day and compulsory homework left little time for anything else. Amy lived at home while Jie and Bella lived in high school dormitory accommodation. Amy was at school seven days a week with only Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings without lessons, Bella had 22 hours away from school once a week and Jie was able to return home to see her family once a fortnight for a day. The remaining time for everyone was devoted to intensive study and learning. English classes were taught in Chinese.

All three participants had variations on a theme for the first scheduled learning activity of the day, where teachers might have been present but students fulfilled specific tasks independently. Amy's school day started by listening in class to teacher-selected audio recordings in English or Chinese on alternate

days, but without a teacher present. On the English days, she listened with her classmates while reading the transcript and marked the audio's prosodic features on the text. The audio used was studied with the teacher later in the day. She views this as an effective way of becoming a better speaker through listening and noticing, yet has never done this activity in her own time. Bella's high school day started at 6:00 when everyone on her dormitory had to rise and go for a run. After the run, *morning reading class* was scheduled. Bella's class read set English texts aloud at the same time but not in unison. Sometimes a teacher would monitor the class or join in. Despite Bella's belief that this can improve spoken English and *is very useful*, the noise prevented her from hearing her own voice. Jie's morning activity at school was exam listening practice with comprehension check questions to complete, and this activity was repeated in the evening. Jie was less positive about this activity, describing it as boring.

Amy was unhappy, stressed and pressured into attempting to maintain her learning speed but was unable to keep pace with her peers across all subjects:

> *I think they were very fast, or maybe they spent the whole weekend on it but I didn't know so I just used the same method from primary school and middle school so I couldn't keep up with them and finally I couldn't get a good grade in the national exam.*

Amy repeatedly mentions the lack of time during high school for herself. Learning English at this stage was mostly about wordlist and text memorisation, and testing. She had to memorise a paragraph from a long text daily. Every day, the first 10 minutes of the taught English class were assigned to transcribing the memorised paragraph in class with the entire four-paragraph text being rewritten at the end of the week. While she views this as efficient, she also reflects that eventually she forgot the texts.

High school was a disappointment for Amy because in the final exam she failed to achieve the grades she needed across all of her subjects to enter a top-tier university. She had wanted to enjoy high school but her classmates were taking studying much more seriously:

> *… but I couldn't realise it at the beginning and I just studied at my own speed so I think it was just a very very horrible mistake I made the first time I entered high school.*

In Bella's daily English classes, the teacher covered around ten pages of content in every class, which Bella perceives as quick and very beneficial, *soaking us into an English atmosphere:*

> *We found that it's a great way to learn English because if you just learn one word one day maybe you'll just be like "ah, I've remembered it", but if you learn like 100 words today it can motivate your potential.*

As well as the standard vocabulary lists required for national exams, and the longer reading texts associated with high school English language learning in China, Bella's teachers also brought in additional listening materials. According to Bella these were deliberately more challenging, including faster spoken language and British accents:

> *… because for the audio listening we all knew that the British accent is a little more difficult than the American accent.*

Bella relates this to her autonomous language learning experiences at middle school, explaining that by dealing with more challenging material, standard material seemed simple and easy. English classes at high school were a positive experience for her:

> *I felt very very good because you could see your progress every day.*
>
> ***And seeing your progress was motivating for you?***
>
> *Yes, it's motivating. You can master a lot of very complex grammar and you can write very complex and very good essays and even for the reading comprehension in our final year we even did some reading comprehension for university students because we had already finished all of the high school materials.*

As well as the abundance of materials Bella and her classmates tackled, speed and accuracy were encouraged. Bella thoroughly enjoyed learning English, devoting more time to this than other subjects:

> *I didn't want to do the work for other subjects I just did a lot of English exam papers because in the papers we could read English articles and I found it really interesting so maybe I worked hard.*

Jie remembers high school English involving much grammar study and reading many paragraph-length texts. Classroom activities included completing countless multiple-choice exercises. In her final year, a mock university entrance exam occurred weekly. The mock exam feedback consisted of her teacher reviewing each answer and providing instructions about the grammar that highlighted the correct response.

5.2.3.2 Out-of-class activities

The restrictions on Amy's time also appeared to restrict her choices around learning in general as well as language learning. Testing and preparing for tests seemed to influence what Amy did outside the classroom and how she did it. Amy allocated blocks of time for out-of-class studying for other subjects but English was studied on the way to school, between classes or as she fell asleep in the evening. She listened on headphones to wordlists and tried to spell them as she listened, and she took two separate approaches to daily paragraph memorisation. The first she used more often as it was faster. She translated the text into Chinese, memorised this, and then translated the memorised story back into English during the test. The second strategy continued the technique used throughout primary school and middle school of reading aloud:

> *And then I could just say it, like not having to think too much.*
>
> ***And as you said, it was high pressure, so you're listening to stuff, you are memorising wordlists but mostly, most of your time is memorising texts for your tests?***
>
> *Yes, and I didn't love to be pushed to study anything. So maybe at that time I didn't feel very good. I just wanted to study at my speed. If I couldn't follow, I needed some time to make me feel better so I could study again and I think at this time, nearly every student – in my class, as far as I know – in my class we were pushed to study. If I didn't have time to mark up a transcript and listen to a tape, I wouldn't do that. I didn't have much time I just wanted to finish the tasks that teachers gave us and that they would check, I would finish that first and then I have my own time to do something to help my English study.*

Bella did not elucidate much on out-of-class activities at high school. Those she had previously chosen to engage in at middle school stopped as she was not allowed a phone, audio player or any other *entertainment device*. There was

homework every evening, including during her weekly visit home, and much more during the holidays. She describes this period as:

> *A great change for me in my life because I started to know there are so many students that are good at studying - so different from my middle school - and they learn English in different ways.*

Outside the classroom, Jie had much homework to complete using an exam-practice workbook. This involved reading texts and answering comprehension questions. There was also essay-practice homework once or twice a week and sometimes she had to memorise a text, but this was less common. More time was allocated to university entrance examination grammar practice exercises. She occasionally practised outside class with other students but this was relatively uncommon because the long school days and the quantity of homework limited the time available for additional practice. Jie describes the activities she engaged in and out of school as *very boring* but that through working hard, she gained a place at university. As she points out, she needed *good* grades to access a *good* university in China. Without this, she would have been unable to aim for postgraduate studies in the UK. Therefore, although boring, she perceives such activities were essential for fulfilling her academic objectives.

5.2.4 University

Undergraduate programmes take four years in China and are delivered by a mix of state-administered and private higher education (HE) institutes (Cai & Yan, 2017). A series of HE reforms from 1993 to 2010 were principally related to decentralising, liberalising and privatising (Cai & Yan, 2017). The result was a huge increase in the numbers attending HE, with the enrolment rate reaching almost 30% in 2012 (UNESCO, 2019b), around the year the participants commenced their undergraduate degrees. However, increasing class sizes negatively impacted on teachers' conditions, widening participation brought in students whose exam scores would previously have prevented university study, and a shortage of qualified teachers all seemed to impact teaching quality (Cai & Yan, 2017). Since 2010, a new initiative has been underway aiming to improve quality by 2020 (Cai & Yan, 2017). The extent to which this was implemented in

any of the participants' universities from 2012 to 2016 when they attended[14] is unknown. Nevertheless, Pan and Block (2011), researching the beliefs of Chinese students at six Beijing universities just before this time, found that only 21% of the 637 students surveyed in class felt that their English language education met their needs and expectations.

All undergraduates at Chinese universities take English classes regardless of their university programme (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). The College English Tests (CET) are national English tests held biannually across China and are designed to ensure university students have reached particular levels of English language competence (J. Yan & Huizhong, 2006). There are two levels, the lower CET-4 and the higher CET-6. Each level has distinct "written" and "spoken" exams, and candidates must pass the CET-4 written exam before registering for any other CET (M. Gu, 2018). The CET-4 written exam is a requirement for graduation, and all participants passed this and the CET-6 written exam. The current written exam iteration commenced in 2005 (Zheng & Cheng, 2008) and was therefore the version taken by the study participants. The exam is mostly balanced between listening and reading, with 35% of the score allocated to each (M. Gu, 2018). The other 30% is split equally between writing a short essay and translating a paragraph from Chinese to English (M. Gu, 2018).

University seemed to offer a more relaxed atmosphere after the intensity and competitiveness of high school. Each participant entered a very different environment for higher education. Amy went to a lower-tier provincial institution, Bella was in one of the best universities in Beijing, and Jie attended an international university in a major city. However, none of the English language curricula dealt with CET-4 exam preparation, and not all language learning was focussed on gaining qualifications. Amy's classes included *opera performances*, and Bella and Jie engaged in English recreationally and for entertainment outside the classroom.

[14] Bella attended from 2011-2015.

5.2.4.1 In-class activities

Having failed to get into her *dream* university, Amy attended a less auspicious university in a less-developed area than her high school classmates, something she seems sanguine about:

> *The development there is very slow but maybe it could let me relax and I could do whatever I wanted there, not only study […] my high school classmates studied in Beijing and Shanghai so they faced more competitive tests in university. Maybe they developed faster than me but I think I could enjoy my university.*

For the first time, her English classes were streamed according to test results and Amy was placed in Group B, the lower group. Much of the coursework involved translating between English and Chinese. In Group B, she outperformed the rest of her classmates and attained higher grades than some of the students in the higher group both in the university exams and the national CET-4 and CET-6 exams. She was the only student in Group B to do this. She initially reasons that:

> *I think maybe too much pressure ruins [the higher group students].*

But when I push to identify why she performed well, she says:

> *I think when I study with classmates who study in the same level or lower level I feel better but when all the classmates study at a higher level I feel I'm not very good. I don't feel that I would have enough confidence to do anything because with everything I did, if I tried my best I still wouldn't get as good grades. But with the second group, the teachers gave us more freedom and more leisure time in English so sometimes we had an opera performance activity and we tried that. But in this first group, they always have examinations and they study very fast so they need to do more exercises so that they can feel better.*

Amy identifies engaging in language learning with less time pressure, a lower workload, and in a less competitive environment as beneficial. She perceives positive impacts on her grades and on affective factors such as confidence and pleasure.

Bella's high grades gained her entrance to an elite Beijing university. For the first time, English was taught in English by her Chinese teachers, who even

responded in English to questions unrelated to the lesson. The English courses followed textbooks and teachers explained the textbook articles in English, sometimes explaining specific vocabulary or grammar. Homework was additional reading or listening from the textbook but it was never checked and students were allowed to *play* with their mobile phones in class providing they were set to silent mode. Writing was neither taught nor assessed. Group discussions were sometimes organised but class time mostly involved teachers talking and students appearing to listen.

Bella tells me that from birth many Chinese students' singular focus is to attend a *good* university; however, once there they pay minimal attention to their studies:

> *There is one thing about university in China - it is very lenient on students. You have a lot of free time to do what you want. And if you just skip a class no-one will really get you into trouble. So, at university […] I didn't spend that much time on study so the English classes were alright.*

Bella cruised through her undergraduate studies, doing as little as possible to pass and often missed classes. On the rare occasions teachers recorded attendance, an attending classmate would text by mobile phone and she would hurry from her on-campus dormitory to the lecture theatre to register as attending. Bella believes that almost all students miss classes and everyone in China knows this happens; however, it seems that no one openly discusses it. She says a celebrity recently created much media attention by admitting this was the case in his own undergraduate experience before having to publicly dismiss his comments as a joke. Bella sees absence as normal:

> *If you're in China and you're in university and you haven't skipped classes, it's like almost as if you haven't completed your university life.*

Bella only attended about half her scheduled classes but she passed everything. She explains that assessment was by examination, only material from the course textbooks was included, and the lecturers provided clear guidance:

> *Before the examination, the teacher would be like, "Okay, I'll tell you the important parts, in the first chapter this theory is*

> *important". So, we just had to, I don't know, remember it, memorise it […] It's just kind of like a quick memorisation, and I just got a pass and that was okay.*

The effort she afforded to her formal higher education remained consistent and in her final year she selected easier courses to improve her grade average in order to achieve her overseas ambition with minimal exertion.

While Bella's attendance revelation came too late for me to ask Amy about absenteeism in her first interview, when I ask Jie she says she attended all her English classes. The international university Jie studied at included teaching staff from Australia and the US. While the majority of Jie's courses were taught in Chinese, including her English course, from her second year some business courses were taught in English by *foreign* teachers, and some were taught in Chinese but used an English textbook and English for specific terminology:

> *In the class, sometimes we used Chinese, but sometimes we used English because the terminology was in English so we needed to talk about these things in English.*

This meant that some courses also required English in the assessment. For example, her Management Accounting course required receptive skills in English as the exam included questions in English with multiple choice responses or answers requiring numerical calculations. Her Marketing course was taught in English and assessment required *simple paragraph* responses in English although how to write or structure these was not part of this particular course. To learn the terminology, Jie:

> *… remembered again and again when I read the book. Then I remembered - became familiar with them.*

In her English classes, the majority of activities involved listening to English audio and reading texts from the books with comprehension questions. The teachers translated and explained these English texts in Chinese but unlike in middle school, she was not required to translate the texts. However, the topic of the texts informed follow-on peer-discussion classroom activities conducted in English. She was unimpressed with the textbook topics as these were not particularly interesting but she remembers some *useful* information about how to discuss and develop discussions in academic contexts.

In her second year, Jie took part in a three-week exchange programme at the University of Cambridge where she attended seminars. During these, she was required to ask questions and actively participate. She discusses this as providing her with an experience that was new to her, and which influenced her subsequent language learning behaviour:

> *When we needed to talk to the fellow students, foreign students, I found that I was not speaking very fluently with them and that lowered my confidence, so I thought I needed to do more about learning English and speaking. So, I pushed myself to listen to the BBC and speak out and also in the class break I talked to my English teachers in our university to get feedback from them.*

5.2.4.2 Out-of-class activities

Amy passed both CET exams in her second year, studying for these by working her way through vocabulary lists:

> *I think it really enlarged my vocabulary and I think by preparing earlier I was well prepared and I had more time to do other things.*

Amy maintained her vocabulary memorisation technique from primary school. In the month leading up to each exam she also completed a past exam paper every day. Jie similarly worked her way through practice exam activities using CET exam books her English lecturer distributed to her and her classmates with instructions to practise in their own time. Outside class, Jie practised with the book but did nothing else specifically for her exams. She found both exams relatively straightforward. Bella passed both the CET-4 and CET-6 exams first time without revising for either. Before the CET-6 exam, she went clubbing all night then straight to the exam without sleeping.

Despite the seeming lack of effort applied to mandatory courses and exams, Bella actively engaged in English outside the classroom on her own terms. In first year, she continued with her high school exercise of *morning reading* every day at home but eventually stopped. She returned to watching English-language television programmes, becoming interested in American chat shows, which she finds:

> *… very humorous, and I don't know it's like the humour is quite different from the humour in China. It's more like – I don't know how to describe it - wiser, more intelligent, something like that.*

Bella participated in her university English Corner[15] for several years, and in second year, her teachers assigned her as mentor to a group of visiting American exchange students because of her impressive spoken English. She took them to bars and clubs where they *hung out* together for the whole month these students visited. She also frequented this area with Chinese friends looking for English-speaking international students to converse with in English. In third year, she became the English Corner Organiser. She invited *foreigners* she had met to English Corner to allow other Chinese students the opportunity to practise speaking English and organised events every weekend with a similar aim. Bella became less active in English Corner in her final year as she prepared for postgraduate studies overseas.

Jie had no official homework for English classes. Despite her lack of interest in the textbook content, she always prepared before class by reading through the upcoming material. Jie's willingness to engage in out-of-class language learning beyond what was required for courses occurred throughout her university years. In addition to class preparation, she listened to much English content through songs, BBC radio programmes designed for English language learning (*The English We Speak* and *6 Minute English*) and English films and television programmes. With songs, she checked and learned the lyrics and would often sing to herself. With television programmes and films, Jie watched with Chinese and English subtitles displayed on screen. If she had difficulty following the audio, she paused to read the subtitles in both languages and sometimes used her dictionary. However, she never took notes of any of the language she checked, but believes this still enabled her to learn new words. Sharing undergraduate university dormitory accommodation with five others meant she often watched these films and programmes with roommates. Afterwards they discussed the characters and actors in Chinese; however, they never discussed the English

[15] A space for meeting and speaking English informally, English Corners have become common on and off campus in China (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002)

used. When asked about her use of these materials for developing her English, she says

> *I think that it's a more relaxing way because I don't need to write many words. I just use my way to learn English. So, it's more relaxed and a better way of learning English.*

While most of her out-of-class learning was listening to spoken language, Jie also read a few English novels, selecting one particular novel having enjoyed the film.

5.2.4.3 IELTS preparation

For L2 users of English applying to study in the UK, a recognised English language proficiency test is also generally required in addition to relevant academic qualifications. All participants chose the academic International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test. With this test, separate sub-tests are provided for each of four modalities (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Sub-test grades appear on the test certificate along with an overall score averaged from the four sub-tests. Possible grades range from 1.0 to 9.0 in 0.5 increments, with 5.5 – 6.5 being equivalent to independent user (B2) on the Common European Framework of Reference scale, and 7.0 – 8.0 indicating a proficient user (C1) (IELTS, 2019), albeit with an academic focus to the tasks and texts in the IELTS exam. The postgraduate business school programmes the participants applied for required an overall score of 6.5 with no sub-test below 6.0. They started preparing for this as university students.

Amy prepared for the IELTS exam in 2015 without enrolling in classes and took the exam three times in 2016, her final year of undergraduate studies. She organised all aspects of her studies herself and approached a range of people to help her develop her understanding of the exam and her linguistic abilities. She shows me photos of the materials she used and there are piles of papers she printed for learning. Although Amy went into some detail about how she prepared for IELTS reading, writing and speaking (see below), we ran out of time before discussing listening in any detail other than to identify the difficulty she experienced following the range of accents in IELTS compared to CET-6.

Bella took the IELTS exam three times before attaining the required score. The first time she did not prepare and it was a *bad experience,* somewhat explaining her anxiety taking the exam the second time when her extreme nervousness caused her hands to shake so much that she could not finish writing and *abandoned* the exam. She accounts for her anxiety as stemming from a *lack of practice*, and describes this as the first time she was nervous about using English *because* she had been *so confident about English all the way* through her education. After returning from her second attempt at the exam, Bella took her preparation seriously. Her third attempt happened in the year between graduating and pursuing her postgraduate degree in Scotland. Bella focussed her efforts on the reading, listening and writing papers (see below).

Jie was the only participant to enrol on an IELTS course at a private language school. This was during her third year at university. She started her IELTS preparation one to two months before her first exam but had not completed the course before she took IELTS for the first time. She did not achieve her required score so continued with the course. She discusses how the approach had been different from her university courses because of the different skills being tested within the various IELTS papers. She specifies differences in the productive skills in particular and says that for the speaking test there is a *need to talk in an English way, not in a Chinese way*. In a similar vein, she emphasises a particular logic and critical thinking *different from Chinese thinking*.

In their final IELTS tests, participants received the grades displayed in Table 2. While all three participants were above the minimum overall score of 6.5, both Amy and Jie would not have gained entry to their postgraduate programmes had they scored any lower for speaking or writing. It is also noteworthy that the range of scores for each participant indicates wide discrepancies across modalities.

Table 2: IELTS test scores for postgraduate entry

	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
Amy	7.5	8.5	6.0	6.0	7.5
Bella	6.5	8.5	6.5	7.0	7.5
Jie	8.0	7.5	6.0	6.0	7.0

5.2.4.4 In-class activities

Despite Jie highlighting the differences in productive skills mentioned above, she had little productive practice in IELTS class. Instead, the teacher mostly used class time to explain in Chinese about the exam and how to achieve higher grades. Some class time was dedicated to IELTS listening practice, nevertheless the onus was on students to practise outside the classroom. For the writing paper, Jie was encouraged not to memorise texts but rather to prepare around topics and practise writing logically. Similarly, to prepare for the speaking test, she was encouraged to think about the possible topics and what she wanted to say.

5.2.4.5 Out-of-class activities

Given the nature of the IELTS exam, my prior knowledge of teaching and testing for this, and IELTS preparation often being the most recent English study prior to coming the UK, the discussions of participants' out-of-class exam preparation were detailed. However, this part occurred at the end of the first interviews and I was aware of the information inviting participants for interviews informing them of these lasting up to 90 minutes. Sensitive both to ethical issues and establishing trust with participants, I was careful not to extend beyond 90 minutes, even when it meant stopping interviews knowing I had more to ask about exam preparation. The following subsections are organised by modalities to reflect the four parts of the IELTS exam. Where participants are not mentioned in any particular section, this is the result of maintaining 90-minute deadlines.

5.2.4.6 IELTS reading

Practising with past papers, Amy and Bella both achieved almost perfect 8.5s in IELTS reading on their third attempts. Amy bought books of past exam papers three times so that she could prepare afresh with a clean book before each exam while Bella bought the entire series of past exam papers, working her way through every book for the first time on her third attempt. Amy remembers paying particular attention to timing, calculating how much time to allocate each question before reading all the questions and skimming the article *just to*

find the answers. When reading Amy was specifically looking for synonyms to words in the questions, any synonyms tended to locate answers:

> *… and then I realised it must be the answer, and I guess I managed to get about 90% correct doing this.*

Amy did further work with this part of the exam to develop her familiarity with the format of the exam, build her vocabulary and develop her knowledge of synonyms. Repetition also developed her knowledge:

> *After practising enough I got to know why they gave me that kind of question and the kind of answers they are looking for, which words and that sort of thing.*

During her past paper practice, she would ignore unfamiliar words. However, words that she recognised because they reoccurred in other texts but that were unfamiliar, she attended to after the test practice. She wrote these down, wrote the Chinese meaning and attempted to memorise, then quickly reviewed before her exam.

Amy said the CET exams had not particularly helped prepare her for IELTS reading, and her preparation for each exam was quite different:

> *In the CET test, it's not always clear why the Chinese test writers focus on a specific question or a specific answer, so I guess after I finished that examination I never reviewed, not for the test not for the practice tests nor for the final examination. I never reviewed. But, for the IELTS test I always reviewed for two reasons. First I found some differences because the IELTS examiners choose an answer that must be the only answer, it's very clear. And also […] after the first test I had to figure out why I didn't perform well.*

Bella by contrast ploughed her way through the practice tests, checked her answers against the keys and calculated her reading scores against the IELTS criteria. Although Amy and Bella achieved their highest grades for reading, neither did any extra reading outside the textbook nor ever read English in their leisure time.

5.2.4.7 IELTS listening

Bella achieved 6.5 for listening in her final test using similar language learning behaviour as her IELTS reading preparation. She worked her way through all the past papers in the series of books she had bought, checking her answers against the keys and evaluating her own listening. Although her score was adequate, it appears lower than I would have expected for someone who had been listening to English in authentic contexts at middle school and then again throughout her undergraduate years in her leisure time. It is possible that Bella underperformed in this part of the test.

5.2.4.8 IELTS writing

Amy and Jie's IELTS writing grades were at the minimum threshold for acceptance onto their postgraduate programmes. To improve her writing Amy read the grading criteria and focussed on writing to meet these, but she talks of experiencing difficulty and of writing requiring her to go beyond memorising and of practising:

> *I think the writing part is very hard because you can't depend on any memorising, it just needs you to practise but I couldn't find any very efficient way to improve my writing level.*

Jie also emphasised not memorising but of practising writing *logically*. Amy searched for IELTS questions online and practised by writing around twenty essays. She describes using Taobao[16] to find a *native speaker* who offered a paid writing checking service. However, she was not pleased with the service she received on her essays and stopped after receiving feedback on five or six. She then enlisted the help of a close friend who had majored in English at university and asked her for advice. Her friend gave feedback on both the language and the content, which she found *much more useful than the online advice*:

> *Well my friend, because we are very close, she spent a lot of time to help me. She would read every sentence very carefully and she would write her suggestions around the sentence and I would read it to think about how to improve it.*

[16] Chinese consumer-to-consumer e-commerce website

Nevertheless, Amy was not always in agreement with the feedback:

> *My friends […] have their own system about writing, finally I just checked myself.*

To prepare for her IELTS writing exam, Bella read sample essays from the books and searched online for model answers. She then used her *morning practice* strategy of reading the texts aloud that she wanted to practise, and therefore erred towards memorisation. She describes this as *very useful* in her successful attempt. While it may be tempting to conclude that because her strategies yielded a higher score than other participants' achieved they are more effective, there is no evidence regarding her level prior to preparing to take this exam.

5.2.4.9 IELTS speaking

As with IELTS writing, Amy and Jie's IELTS speaking grades were minimally acceptable for postgraduate studies at their chosen university. Amy was most nervous about her speaking test having rarely spoken English in class after primary school without a script to guide her. To prepare, Amy researched the sixteen topics being used in the speaking exam at that time by joining Chinese social media groups. These groups consisted of unknown others interested in studying for the IELTS exam. As group members took the exams, they shared the topics and the questions they had been asked. Amy then used this information to write out her answers to each topic:

> *I wrote [my answer to] every topic – sixteen topics! I wrote day and night […] I printed it and I took it to school, to my home, on my walk to every destination, I used it. Maybe somebody thought I was a freak but I thought it was worth it.*

Amy composed her own answers while also using IELTS-related websites as linguistic resources:

> *Some sentences were from the Internet but it's my own story. I just wanted to explain it better.*

She feels memorisation could have taken less time had she written everything in her own words. Nevertheless, she also feels that this experience developed her

spoken English since she prepared and practised talking about sixteen topics from her own perspective.

Using a language exchange app, Amy found speaking partners online, and paid these partners for English practice lessons with feedback using video calling software. She then used the feedback to practise alone, coming back for another one-hour session when she felt the need for a further lesson. She did this video-calling practice around five times as she prepared for IELTS speaking, focussing on this topic-specific speaking practice as her exams approached. She rationalises this pattern through the importance of regular speaking practice:

> *If I didn't practise speaking frequently, I would have forgotten it easily.*

While she achieved the score she wanted by drawing on memorisation strategies from previous language learning experience, she perceives that:

> For *the IELTS test you shouldn't do this because it's testing your speaking level and I prepared for it this way and it's kind of cheating, I think. You prepare it and memorise it*.

However, she also talks of being able to recycle across topics, so although some sentences were relevant to one topic, they could also be used with another:

> *If you have not used a lot of words in the previous section of the exam, you can use them very easily in the next part.*

Amy perceives in the first interview with me that her spoken English level was now lower having taken the speaking exam the previous year and then stopped using English until arriving in the UK for her postgraduate studies.

Jie tells me mostly about developing her spoken English for IELTS. As recommended in her IELTS class, she anticipated certain topics for the IELTS exam, and spoke aloud to herself when she was alone. She audio recorded herself speaking. She also listened to *BBC 6 Minute English* and used the audio to listen and repeat after the speaker, or attempt to speak along with the speaker[17]. After some practice, she recorded herself repeating the audio several

[17] This is known in English Language Teaching as shadowing.

times and selected what she thought were her best examples. These recordings she then sent to her IELTS teacher, with a request for feedback. Listening to the podcast and recording herself seem to be adaptations of out-of-class tasks from elementary school but were both strategies she selected for herself. She did this everyday while enrolled on the IELTS preparation course and has continued to use podcasts from the BBC for repeating, recording and listening back to her own speaking in her first month in Scotland. She does this activity to listen to her own pronunciation, and check whether she has included new grammar and idioms in her recordings:

> *At the beginning I just practised for IELTS, but after the IELTS examination I found it's really helpful so I persisted.*

The following section draws on the narrative in this section to answer the first two research questions, which are restated in each subsection below.

5.3 Answering research questions 1 and 2

5.3.1 Prior language learning experiences

1. What were the prior language learning experiences of newly-arrived postgraduate international students?

All three participants had increasing structure imposed on their learning from primary school. This culminated in high school schedules and homework that allowed little time for learning outside mandated study, and sometimes restricted access to resources. Opportunity for autonomous language learning (ALL) was largely withdrawn at this stage through a lack of time for anything not teacher led. However, once at university, participants had substantial freedom to choose and to engage with English in multiple ways. All of them had certain external exam requirements to graduate related to Chinese government policy. At some point during their undergraduate studies, all participants also prepared for IELTS to meet postgraduate entry requirements for their UK programmes. With no university preparation courses for external exams, these influenced out-of-class language-learning behaviours at times but exams by no means guided all language learning behaviours. The contrast between the extreme control

experienced by participants as high school students to the sudden freedom at university to a certain extent shows their adaptability.

All participants maintained certain out-of-class activities at each education level, and stopped others as soon as they were no longer mandatory. This indicates that all of them, to a certain extent, evaluated the benefits of the out-of-class activities according to their English language needs in particular contexts. This may also be connected to strategy effectiveness possibly changing as second language proficiency develops (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). That Bella and Jie also seemed to engage with English outside the classroom at middle school in ways which complemented but did not appear to be for school supports the idea of autonomy being context dependent (Little, 1991) rather than necessarily a product of maturity (Knowles, 1975). At high school while they were more mature, the context constrained ALL. Freedom for the pursuit of ALL appears in these cases to involve freedom from learning schedules that restricted what was possible outside the classroom other than fulfilling teacher-directed study.

When participants had extracurricular goals such as IELTS and the freedom to pursue these without teacher intervention, they appeared to pursue them by selecting from their repertoire of prior learning strategies, researching new strategies, or trying new strategies or resources apparently out of interest in the content or social aspects of these. This indicates learner autonomy can emerge naturally, possibly with maturity, despite reservations by authors across educational sectors such as Dearden (1975), Holec (1981) and Pemberton (1996). Participants seem to be choosing wisely and well in order to fulfil their intended purposes within particular contexts (Cohen, 1998), even if initial attempts were unsuccessful and learners evaluated their behaviours as requiring more time or modification. Esch (1996, p. 38) identifies five criteria for evaluating the extent to whether education practice is more likely to facilitate than subdue learner autonomy: choice; flexibility; adaptability/modifiability; reflectivity, and shareability. These did not appear to be met by the classroom or homework activities my participants discussed, and when out-of-class choice was removed by restricting available time, then ALL seemed to be absent. However, notwithstanding time pressure, the lack of Esch's criteria being identifiable in the histories as told by participants of their in-class and out-of-class language learning did not appear to prevent the emergence of ALL in various forms.

Pierson's (1996, p. 51) point about Hong Kong Chinese 'passivity and rote-learning behaviours' being potentially effective strategies for successfully navigating their education and assessment system rather than enduring cultural traits appear to hold true in these participants' learning histories as they moved through education levels. Teacher oversight and potential classroom criticism also appeared to influence out-of-class learning as did pride and interest. Therefore, Little's (2012a, p. 15) position that ALL is cross-culturally appropriate and that these participants were not 'the helpless victims of […] their educational experience' seems to be supported. Once time constraints were loosened, participants seemed ready to take control of their own second language learning in the pursuit of their needs with the capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, mirroring the ALL definition used in this Dissertation in Section 2.3. The extent to which they acted as socially responsible people is difficult to ascertain but I identified no socially irresponsible behaviour during interviews.

All three of Benson's (2011) classifications of out-of-class learning can be identified in participants' out-of-class learning during their undergraduate days. Self-instruction was evident when Bella used a test preparation textbook during middle school, and Amy and Jie used preparation books for the CET-4 exam. Given these episodic periods of self-instruction were one activity within many identified in each language learning history, according to Benson (2011) these would still be in keeping with ALL. Naturalistic language learning appears to be evident with Bella at university as she watched US chat shows purely for entertainment and the particularly humour they offered. It is therefore likely that language learning was mainly unintentional and occurred through interaction with English. Bella and Jie also appeared to engage in self-directed naturalistic learning, in that they intentionally engaged in English language ecosystems in which, while language learning might have been taking place, the primary purpose of the interaction was 'on communication or on learning something other than the language itself' (Benson, 2011, p. 77). This was apparent when using songs, films and television to engage with interesting content while also checking lyrics and subtitles whenever they were unsure of meaning.

The rationale for particular learning behaviours elucidated by participants demonstrate considered choices enacted according to contexts and individual needs as understood by participants, a sign of learner autonomy highlighted by Candy (1991, p. 125). Opportunities for personal autonomy were taken and created by individual participants at different times and in various contexts through their compulsory education and undergraduate studies in China. As Murphey and Carpenter (2008) found with Japanese undergraduates, despite seemingly similar school experiences, the nature of each participant's experience was intensely personal. Participants also appear to have interpreted situations differently as anticipated by Menezes (2008), with Bella convinced that all undergraduates avoided attending classes, while Jie attended all lessons. A summary of each participant's in-class and out-of-class behaviours at each education level are presented by participant in Appendices 4 to 6. Amy's summary is in Appendix 4 and Table 6, Bella's summary is in Appendix 5 and Table 8, and Jie's summary is in Appendix 6 and Table 10. The following sub-section brings together the stated beliefs around activities in which the participants engaged.

5.3.2 Language learning experiences influence on beliefs

The prior language learning behaviours and associated beliefs for each participant are discussed in the Section 5.2 narrative and summarised in tables in Appendices 4 to 6. Amy's behaviours and associated beliefs are tabulated in Appendix 4 and Table 7, Bella's are in Appendix 5 and Table 9, and Jie's are in Appendix 6 and Table 11. These are used for reference in Chapter 6 when discussing beliefs and behaviours during the sojourn, and also to answer the second research question:

2. Which beliefs about effective out-of-class language learning activities were associated with participants' prior language learning experiences?

As discussed in Section 5.2 the behaviours were remembered from various stages of language learning education, yet the beliefs were likely to be those at the time of the interview in October 2017 regarding prior behaviours. Consequently, the dynamic aspect of beliefs (Barcelos, 2003) is less evident in this chapter than in Chapter 6, although the situated aspect of strategies for particular purposes

(Cohen, 1998) is apparent. This is seen in the array of out-of-class language learning behaviours changing as the participants progressed through levels of education. Below are selected points that I regard as key features of the data and which I discuss in relation to the academic literature on language learning beliefs and behaviours. In all three participants' stories, beliefs, affect and social context appear to be linked (Pan & Block, 2011), with affect mediating learners beliefs (Mercer, 2011) and having a profound effect on participants' language learning behaviours (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011).

Amy was the only participant who engaged in learning beyond the classroom solely to support classwork or prepare for exams. Although she underachieved at high school, she believed this was due to her lack of effort rather than factors beyond her control. This belief in self-efficacy has been shown to correlate with self-regulated learning strategies such as monitoring, self-assessment, and assistance seeking (Kim, Wang, Ahn, & Bong, 2015), behaviours Amy discussed, particularly with IELTS preparation. Efficiency was a key criterion of Amy's evaluation of her learning activities throughout her interviews and possibly a reflection of her worldview as an Economics graduate on a postgraduate programme. Translation and memorisation feature prominently in Amy's discussion of her teacher-directed language education. Teacher-instructed behaviours can impact on out-of-class activities (Benson & Lor, 1999) and seemed to do so when Amy's out-of-class activities contradicted her stated beliefs, mirroring contextual belief studies discussed by Kalaja and Barcelos (2003a) and Palfreyman (2003). For example, she refers to IELTS preparation through memorisation of written responses for a speaking exam as *cheating* even though memorisation was one of the behaviours she used in preparation for her exam. Tao and Gao (2017) identify a common reliance on teacher-directed strategies when preparing for high-stakes exams, and Amy's use of memorisation, a previous teacher-directed learning behaviour she found uninteresting, might have been in response to exam pressure. Nevertheless, there were many other identifiable behaviours and beliefs when preparing for the IELTS exam, with planning, monitoring and evaluating evident while drawing on previous experiences. For example, the various people Amy contacted for feedback on spoken and written work indicated her belief in the importance of feedback but also demonstrated the discerning way she accepted or rejected

this feedback even from those she identified as being more proficient English language users than herself. She remained unsatisfied with feedback she received on her writing even after changing feedback providers, eventually changing her behaviour and becoming self-reliant.

As discussed in Section 5.2, Bella was particularly strategic, engaging with mandatory learning only when monitored or interested. Exposure seemed to pervade Bella's out-of-class learning whether exposure to exams through exam practice or exposure to interesting content through engaging with songs, television or people. In each case the exposure was for a different purpose and the behaviours differed accordingly, aligning with Cohen's expectations (1998). Her engagement in English outside the classroom surpassed what was necessary to participate in classroom activities or prepare for exams, and her engagement was with the content that she could access through English. While Huang (2018) identified conflict between students in Taiwan desiring to increase spoken modalities of English but being drawn to written modalities for exams, Bella managed both. She believed that engaging with English at a higher level outside the classroom and at high school than the curriculum required was one factor in her success in English language exams from middle school onwards. Another notable feature of her actions and underlying beliefs was that she generally differentiated between using English and preparing for exams. While preparing for exams was a solitary activity and involved textbooks, using English focussed on spoken modalities of English. This became a social activity at university when the opportunity was available via the English Corner and socialising in bars. Here and at middle school she demonstrated her ability to create her own opportunities for using (and learning) English, unlike Huang's (2018) undergraduate participants who did not demonstrate this capacity. As Bella herself identified, speaking English well in China is afforded prestige status (Pan & Block, 2011). This seems to connect beliefs, affect and social context (Pan & Block, 2011), particularly 'reflecting the linguistic attitudes of the community at large' (Dufva, 2003, p. 138) indicating English as a highly-valued attribute (Gray, 2010) within the social narrative to which Bella probably ascribed. Nevertheless, the initial attraction of English I interpret not to have been a result of the prestige narrative but of an escape from her middle school environment and her imagined American/non-Chinese identity. From my perspective, these seem to

be mutually exclusive but as her English proficiency improved, was noticed and afforded her certain privileges (attending a prestigious high school, university and guiding incoming overseas students), her identity as a skilled Chinese user of English may have become more attractive.

As did Bella, Jie engaged with out-of-class English that was not always directly related to classroom activities or exams during middle school and at university. This additional engagement in English and most of the beliefs Jie explicitly stated also generally involved spoken English. Unlike the other participants, she had access to audio at home from the beginning of primary school, and engaged with English-speaking teachers in weekend classes through middle school. She also briefly attended an overseas English study programme, and it might have been this that raised her awareness of spoken discourse structures differing between Chinese and English. From this time, she also used audio materials specifically created for language learners in addition to authentic materials, possibly influenced by significant others to believe in the efficacy of such behaviours (Navarro & Thornton, 2011). Her awareness of differing discourse structures appeared to influence the activities she engaged in and her assessment of teacher-selected textbook materials. When preparing for IELTS, she enrolled in a formal course to develop her understanding of the exam even though she had successfully prepared herself for other English exams. The additional out-of-class behaviours she implemented during this time can be identified in earlier learning behaviours. Jie entered second language ecosystems in classrooms at two different stages, first in weekend classes at middle school and then again on her overseas study trip. Each new entry to a new ecosystem initially was accompanied by embarrassment and shyness, believing herself to be relatively inept compared with those around her, reflecting Aragão's (2011) research in Brazil where his participants experienced the same emotions in the belief that classmates they did not know well spoke English more proficiently than themselves. However, over time Jie's confidence grew as her perceived competence developed.

5.4 Language learning history conclusion

As anticipated by Personal Construct Theory, while there may be surface similarities to the contexts and the participants, the participants' experiences

and their perceptions of these diverge significantly. While the sociocultural and political contexts required participants to achieve particular scores in English exams to gain entry to subsequent levels both in China and for acceptance onto postgraduate programmes in the UK, each participant's journey was unique. Although there were some similarities within the classroom and with out-of-class teacher-directed tasks, there was also diversity at every education level. There was no single Chinese experience of language education evident here even though examination requirements were the same. How educators prepared their students for these and the activities participants undertook of their own volition varied school by school, class by class and participant by participant. This influenced the beliefs and behaviours they developed prior to arrival in the UK and indicates that once in the UK that their experiences also diverged both in how they interpreted their classroom experiences and how they engaged with the second language learning ecosystem outside the classroom. The next chapter details the very different experiences each participant had while enrolled at the same business school in the same year.

Chapter 6 Learners' stories: surviving, striving and thriving

Chapter 5 established the contexts in which participants engaged in second language learning in China and the beliefs and behaviours they discussed during interviews at the various levels of education. Multiple examples in all participants' learning histories showed how they took control of their language learning at particular points. There was little teacher encouragement for autonomy development identifiable beyond self-study advice using exam preparation textbooks. Sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 in this chapter describe the stories of each participant's sojourn as they lived and learned in an English-dominant ecosystem. The diverse nature of their experiences means that each story is presented separately but in an attempt to maintain narrative threads, their stories are presented as engagement in, firstly, spoken English (listening and speaking) followed by engagement in written English (reading and writing). Chapter 5 used the historical present to describe events at the time of the interview to contrast these with events from the pre-arrival past. In Chapter 6, the integration of several interviews over the progressing sojourns led me to write these stories in the narrative past thereby situating beliefs and behaviours in particular periods of the academic year. The answers to research question 3 are integrated into the stories in Sections 6.1 to 6.3.

3. How did the beliefs identified in their learning histories seem to relate to beliefs about engaging with living and studying in environments where English predominates?

Research questions 4 and 5 function as interrelated parts to examine beliefs about previous learning experiences and current and possible future contexts and so can be viewed as tandem questions and are answered together. The answers are also identifiable in Sections 6.1 to 6.3 and summarised in tables at the end of each section.

4. What were their self-perceived needs for English in their current contexts as their year of postgraduate study progresses?

5. What behaviours did these postgraduate international students engage in beyond the classroom to meet their self-perceived needs?

The behaviours each participant engaged with are presented in their stories and intertwined with other contextual aspects of their narratives. Although subsections are organised around participants' self-perceived needs by spoken and then written language-related activities, it is highly likely that content and linguistic knowledge developed in one modality also benefitted content and linguistic knowledge in another.

The initial interview at the beginning of October was focussed on prior language learning but included planned activities for engaging in the second-language ecosystem and is used as an introduction to each participant's sojourn. The final interview happened within a week of Dissertation submissions and included a question about the advice each participant would offer incoming international postgraduates. This is also included in each participant's introduction and provides an indication of that participant's outlook. The heading used for each sojourn indicates the months in which the other interviews occurred. For example, Amy's subsequent interviews happened in January, April and August.

6.1 Amy's sojourn: January, April & August

In October, Amy planned to develop her English over the following months. To improve speaking and listening she planned to talk regularly to other international students who shared accommodation with a Chinese friend, and talk to the receptionist in her own student accommodation. She might ask for writing feedback through academic support I informed her about but was not sure. For her reading, she would read what she found in her environment, such as Amazon terms and conditions, as she reasoned that *translat*ing *into Chinese and hav*ing a *Chinese understanding* would be detrimental. Nothing she mentioned other than writing was linked to her postgraduate studies. However, she was dissatisfied as her previous writing strategies were mostly connected to repetition and memorisation of teacher-selected articles. She was keen to change and *find* and *use the perfect organisation sentence*.

In addition to her postgraduate programme, Amy registered for the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) exam, which was held in June. This six-hour exam involves 240 questions with multiple-choice answers, requires around 300 hours of self-study and, in December 2017, had a 43% pass rate (Sahajwani, 2019). This commitment restricted Amy's time as she strove to gain two qualifications. Unfortunately, she failed CFA along with *nearly everyone* she knew who took it, identifying two factors for this: her initial lack of Finance knowledge given her Economics background and limited time to practise after developing Finance knowledge. Focussing on the CFA also postponed her Dissertation study, which started in earnest in July.

When asked what advice she would offer incoming students as the final interview ended, she said:

> *I guess they need to manage and discover everything by themselves because everyone is different. Maybe they won't have CFA exams so they will have more time to prepare than I had. But maybe how they balance other experiences in their minds is different. They might pay more attention to enjoying the scenery in Scotland and in other European countries, so they will lower the standard of their Dissertation, so it changes depending on the person.*

6.1.1 Spoken English

6.1.1.1 First semester

Amy's speaking plans went mostly unfulfilled in Semester One. She talked in passing to the accommodation receptionist, and interacted briefly with locals. She acknowledged the city residents were generally friendly and helpful saying that:

> *You know if I had a chance, I think I should have studied in [this city] earlier, because one year is too short to feel the true [city …] time is limited so I can't live in [this city], I just study here.*

There is an indication here that her dual academic priorities were restricting her time for non-academic activities, a theme that was prevalent throughout her interviews and was perhaps informed by her previous experience of failure and belief in effort leading to achievement (Appendix 4, Table 7). She interacted with other students in her university accommodation, including several Chinese

students but their relationship was not close. There was a Pakistani flatmate for one month who had impressed Amy with her diligence and motivation to develop her English. This woman encouraged her to speak English and shared her own strategies for developing her spoken English by watching films and shadowing[18]. While perceiving their interactions as opportunities to speak English, Amy generally relied on *very simple words because you know we were always talking in embarrassment because we didn't have so many common topics between us.* Similarly uncomfortable was respectfully switching Chinese conversations into English when the Pakistani woman entered the room because this often meant changing topic, which frustrated Amy.

Amy wished to interact in English but was reluctant to engage primarily for speaking practice, fearing embarrassment and social awkwardness. Amy's perceptions of social context and possible discomfort were therefore more important than engaging in English ecosystems for the purpose of following her belief in regular speaking (Appendix 4, Table 7). As Block (2008) and Sade (2014) anticipated, her perceived lack of social affiliation restricted her options:

> *I don't want to speak English just to practise, just for speaking English with someone, because it will have embarrassing results, because you don't know why you're talking about a particular topic, it's just for practising, or sometimes I will need to struggle to talk about something also I will not be interested in the topic but still I need to perform, just perform like an actress to stimulate others interests in communication […] I just want to talk a lot about what I'm really interested in with my friends.*

To help overcome difficulties understanding lectures in the first semester, Amy collaborated with a compatriot classmate, who Blaj-Ward (2017) would consider a language development broker in that she increased Amy's capacity to engage in the linguistic ecosystem. Amy attributed her difficulties to her international[19] lecturers' accents. Although her Mathematics lecturer was also international, his accent did not interfere with her understanding initially. The other international lecturers were more difficult to follow as unfamiliar accents combined with the

[18] Shadowing is a term used in English language teaching which involves speaking along with or slightly after an audio track, in Amy's flatmate's case while watching films.

[19] International is used as a substitute for specific nationalities throughout this chapter to maintain anonymity for the participants and the academic staff. International refers in these cases to lecturers using English as a second language with associated national accents.

complex theories being presented impeded her comprehension. To engage, she prepared for around two hours before lectures by downloading and printing slides that would accompany the lecture[20], and identifying and translating unfamiliar words. She also recorded the lectures, and electronically scanned her compatriot classmate's prolific notes after lectures. Amy studied these notes at home, showing here and later her acknowledged need for what Marton and Säljö (1976) term deep-level learning:

> *You need to understand it and express it in your own words, not just by copying the professor's words. What the professor teaches just helps me understand certain things or certain methodology on the subject, so I guess the only way to get good grades is for me to understand everything, to understand all the knowledge I'm being given and explain in my own words.*

These lecture strategies meant that she seldom had time to listen to her lecture recordings, and perhaps her other lecture strategies meant listening again would add little further understanding. As Amy's subject knowledge developed, she became increasingly capable of following lectures.

During the winter break she travelled in Europe and met a German couple when stranded there. She identified staying with the couple as *the most enjoyable moment* so far in her sojourn. The German couple were *very kind* and *never laughed at my pronunciation*. When asked she said other people did not laugh at her accent but sometimes communication broke down when others could not understand her accent and she felt acutely embarrassed. While travelling overseas she felt more confident speaking English because her English was generally better than the locals':

> *I'm not afraid of speaking English because they are not native speakers, they also have accents. If they don't understand my pronunciation they will think it's their English that's not good and that's why they don't understand me.*

This appeared to connect with Amy's undergraduate experience where being the strongest student in a weak class enhanced her motivation and confidence (Appendix 4, Table 7). By contrast, amongst expert speakers Amy seemed

[20] The university issues guidance that lecturers should make PowerPoint slides available online prior to lectures. Guidance refers to equality legislation and accessibility for disabled students.

reluctant to engage in spoken English at times, fearing embarrassment around accent, misunderstanding and topic knowledge. This fear of perceived social reactions mediated her behaviour, as Salmon (1995) discussing Personal Construct Theory anticipated. However, another factor appeared to be that she enjoyed being witty in Chinese and appeared frustrated by how English restricted this aspect of her identity:

> *I'm jealous of someone who can speak [English] in a really humorous way because in China I am able to do this when I'm speaking. I love to use my words to cheer someone up and to make others have fun.*

While Amy wanted to discuss common interests and dreamt of engaging with humour and wit, she seemed socially passive in English. *The most enjoyable moments in the past four months* were instigated by a German couple offering assistance. She wanted to engage socially in English but remained reluctant to engage for instrumental purposes:

> *I need to make some friends, not only for practising English but making friends who have the same hobbies and for real friendship it would help me.*

She had set goals for developing her English over Semester Two. For her spoken English, she wanted to remain alert and motivated in lectures. Although she did not appear to associate watching television with developing her English listening skills, she also planned to watch familiar American sitcoms to develop her ability to be witty in English and to relax. She had talked to friends and researched online for language development strategies, and she recognised the need to be selective. Nevertheless, she mentioned no English productive speaking strategies and her previous belief in regular speaking practice appeared to have changed (Appendix 4, Table 7).

6.1.1.2 Second semester

In April, Amy had a new German student flatmate who shared an interest in jokes about Scotland. I mentioned her seeming dual achievements of meeting someone with shared interests and joking in English. She responded that she had changed her attitude:

> *Well, you know maybe I've updated my thoughts, because I even find it hard to find a friend in China who I have the same interests as, I have the same goals as, and I have the same background as, it's nearly impossible […] so you need to adapt to your friends, even sometimes you need to tolerate their shortcomings. If you can get used to those, then you will be friends. If it's beyond your tolerance, so you are just going to be acquaintances.*

She had friendships in Scotland but no close friends, and she explained that time differences prevented her maintaining contact with close friends in China. She also revealed that she was much more comfortable speaking English when out without Chinese friends. She had a *mental barrier* that made her more reluctant to speak English in front of compatriots. Nevertheless, she had not actively sought contact with people who were not Chinese despite her conciliatory tone above, and remained reluctant to engage outwith social affiliations:

> *My other friends […] build friendships with others only for the purpose of learning English. But personally, I cannot maintain this kind of relationship for a long time.*

She also said that coming to meet me made her more self-conscious about her linguistic proficiency but that she was comfortable continuing to participate in this study. She also confirmed a limitation identified in Chapter 4 associated with conducting the interviews in English:

> *I guess my English isn't good like the last interview because I want to explain about some points but I cannot use English to do that.*

In academic situations Amy had some lecturers in Semester Two who she considered spoke *Standard English* and she could follow more easily than the international lecturers in Semester One. Nevertheless, she still prepared with PowerPoint slides to counter any possible lack in academic background knowledge. When encountering familiar areas, preparation time was vastly reduced. Her note-taking classmate had enrolled on different courses, but taking notes during lectures had become much easier. This increased ease indicates her out-of-class strategy effectiveness and her knowledge and linguistic development. Amy's notes were less prolific than her Semester One classmate had managed but seemed more focussed:

> *You need to catch the most important points, and I think maybe there are more effective ways to learn something. Just like if I'm learning Mathematics, if I can remember every word my teacher said, I might not be able to get better grades than my classmates because even if my classmates don't even remember every word, they know how to calculate the answers.*

I asked if she felt her listening had improved and she thought it probably had:

> *I cannot really describe it, but I guess it must have. There must have been some progress compared to when I first arrived. Yes, at that time I could not use English in practical ways. I only used it in examinations before then, and I guess it's more casual […] It has built my confidence.*

She completed three courses in Semester Two. Two courses developed and extended Semester One content, but a Finance course was new to her. This course involved assessed pair work, and students chose their own partners. Amy's partner was Chinese with a Finance background. Perhaps more of a knowledge development broker than a language development broker, he helped develop her understanding by explaining in Chinese concepts she found challenging. This was invaluable for her lecture engagement:

> *You know, Mathematics is different from other things. If you cannot understand it, it doesn't matter if you don't understand 1% or 99%. It's the same. If you can't understand it, you can't understand it of course. So, I guess I need someone to guide me and to give me some hints.*

This was a seemingly different perspective than the previous semester when she had found her international Mathematics lecturer easy to follow because his lectures centred on calculations:

> *But I guess when we talked in the last interview I needed to consider more about the complexity of the courses. When it's totally beyond my ability, it's another thing. Finance includes some computational and mathematical knowledge […] totally beyond my area of knowledge.*

6.1.1.3 Exam and Dissertation period

From May to August, Amy had little engagement in spoken English other than two one-hour Dissertation sessions with her supervisor and transactional English while shopping or travelling.

6.1.2 Written English

6.1.2.1 First semester

As well as reading to prepare for lecture listening and following up by reading her classmate's notes, Amy read texts from her postgraduate reading list and her CFA textbook. She also referred to Chinese academic texts to understand what she termed *methodology,* which I interpret as theory, linked to her courses. She perceived the texts in the different languages as having different affordances and selected accordingly:

> *In order to understand more deeply, I also need to read some Chinese methodology, and I can connect the two things because the theory is the same, but it's just in two languages, and as for some academic results, the excellent results are always in English, so I will read English texts.*

Her academic reading and assignment writing influenced each other and caused her to evaluate and reconstruct her knowledge:

> *[I] write some brief ideas and outline then I have some directions and I can find some materials to read and then I need to revise my ideas again and again. It's a very torturous process because I need to revise again and again, I will think maybe the previous idea was wrong and I need to put forward some new ideas.*

While she wrote her assignment alone, she analysed the assignment task and discussed aspects of the underlying theories and possible sections required with Chinese classmates, showing some similarity to prior learning behaviours (Appendix 4, Table 7). However, they stopped short of discussing specific essay content because:

> *… if we talk a lot, maybe we will write something very similar. I don't want that.*

Whether she feared accusations of plagiarism, acquisition of misinformation or dilution of her ideas and consequent lower evaluation if others presented similar positions was unknown. Before our January interview, Amy received feedback on assessed work, which identified frequent linguistic errors as lowering her grade. That this required attention appeared to occur to her mid-interview:

> *I think maybe next time I need to ask someone who's excellent at English to help me and read my essay and give me some feedback.*

Since the first interview, she had attended a mid-semester job-application writing workshop but not sought academic writing guidance. She was aware of the writing support, thought it sounded useful and planned to make an appointment. I clarified that with limited time her priorities might be elsewhere but she insisted she would:

> *… squeeze it in. You know, tasks have priority levels and I think this is so efficient that I will try it first. I'm proud of this university because it provides a lot of valuable resources for students. I think I need 36 hours in a day: 12 hours to enjoy the life in this city; 24 hours to study.*

Amy felt her reading speed increased over Semester One but the sheer volume of reading she had to cover meant that her progress had not had a significant impact. Amy talked of reading in English being slow and tiring. One lecturer offered a time management strategy of scheduling reading time in the morning, an other-directed strategy (Thomas & Rose, 2019) which she adopted:

> *In the morning after you get up you can learn something or memorise something more efficiently and you need to seize that moment to learn something quickly, and after that when you get tired after about half an hour you can have a break and do something to relax […] but in one day you need a plan because you need to finish your tasks, and if you finish those you can manage the rest of your time in your own way, like just watching films or something like that.*

In addition to her coursework, Amy's Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) study added significantly to her reading tasks as she aimed to cover 30 pages of materials daily in a way that Benson (2011) would consider a strong, isolated version of self-instruction. Completing 30 pages was not always feasible after coursework and exercise, but she seemed determined to push herself and avoid the failure she felt at high school (Chapter 5). Amy seemed to differentiate between reading for CFA and reading postgraduate texts. When reading postgraduate texts she would check and translate unfamiliar individual words, but did this much less often when reading her CFA book, identifying this strategy as impractical for CFA studies. As Cohen (1998) argues, strategies are not inherently effective but rather their effectiveness should be evaluated according

to purpose. Amy appeared to perceive different purposes and apply different strategies accordingly:

> *[I use] an English textbook [preparing for the CFA test] and I can't translate word by word. I need to understand it just in an English way of thinking, so that I need to memorise English words not Chinese words. I guess it's maybe just because I'm adapting to the language environment so I can easily understand the words.*

Her CFA reading strategy for improving her reading speed was reading her textbook, mirroring her prior beliefs about IELTS reading but without the vocabulary development strategies (Appendix 4, Table 7). Her written English aims for Semester Two were to improve her writing by completing written coursework. She did not mention seeking feedback on her written work at the end of interview two as she had done mid-interview. This is despite her language learning history highlighted the importance she had previously placed on written feedback and accuracy (Appendix 4, Table 7). The previously stated beliefs and behaviours might therefore have been context dependent, as Barcelos (2003) says of beliefs and Gao (2003) of behaviours.

6.1.2.2 Second semester

As mentioned, the Finance course was particularly difficult for Amy. Her study partner was, she claimed, invaluable in her knowledge development. However, she was an active learning partner:

> *I searched for a lot of materials […] I wrote something about my thoughts and how we could organise this paper, and then he selected from it and he added his ideas and we discussed it […] and if we had some trouble I would ask my teacher or ask my classmates for help and we would discuss why we always face this problem, and check if everyone else is like us and we could find out about where we have problems.*

This active engagement with others seemed to reflect aspects of her language learning history (Appendix 4, Table 7) but with greater acknowledgement of peer expertise. Her partner's behaviour influenced her own:

> *He reads some articles and he searches for some articles, I've never even seen these articles before, even though no one requires him to do that, so I was encouraged by him and by his behaviour. I also then*

searched for some articles and read them again and again to try to understand what the writer said.

By the end of Semester Two, reading dominated Amy's English engagement and she detailed her postgraduate strategies. When encountering new words, she checked her dictionary for Chinese translations and noted these on the text. She looked back to find previous occurrences of recognised words already translated and noted, but not yet learned:

If I find it on the previous page I will just like make a link, the connection. I always did that, even in some Chinese school work[21] *[…] And I guess if I always depend on the dictionary, it will make me feel unsafe in my mind.*

She discussed academic ideas with friends in Chinese and when reading she thought in Chinese to understand concepts and the connections between the ideas in the texts. She attributed this to her initial undergraduate studies being in Chinese. She often developed concepts she remembered from then, thinking these through in Chinese to understand them fully. This suggested that she was constructing knowledge in Chinese, and while she identified her undergraduate studies as the cause, postgraduate discussions in Chinese potentially reinforced this. However, she clarified that she did not translate each word while reading English content, and always took notes in English given the language of assessment. She therefore appeared to be understanding in English but (re)constructing her knowledge in Chinese. This contrasted significantly with Jie as discussed in Sections 6.3, but paralleled her own language learning history when, to learn a paragraph in English, she translated it, learned it in Chinese then reproduced in it English (Appendix 4, Table 7).

Amy read around 15 articles to write a 1500-word piece of coursework in Semester Two, seemingly influenced by her study partner. She was not particularly focussed on linguistic accuracy, a departure from previous concerns (Appendix 4, Table 7), and attended more to ideas:

[21] see Appendix 4 Table 6

> *I read a lot of books to think about the way, my own way, about how to use the model to analyse the results, and use several ideas and several angles about [how] to analyse this question.*

She critically analysed and developed her stance in her second semester written work, comparing this to the first semester:

> *That was the first time I wrote an English essay, so I think that I never put forward some critical ideas. I just used others' results, like they put forward some theory and I wrote it in my own words and I analysed it. I think I didn't get used to this way of writing [at the time] and now I think I have paid more attention to the direction, the angle.*

This questioning of content demonstrated a political aspect to her autonomy (Benson, 2011) through the questioning of academic authorities. Although, several times she discussed the importance of academic writing as being more than linguistic accuracy, criticality and stance being mentioned above, she was also aware that she had not attended to the surface features of written English. I reminded her of the previous feedback which identified linguistic inaccuracy lowering her grade. As before, this appeared to raise her awareness and prompt reflection around the importance of written accuracy and the necessity of practice to gain proficiency. Amy also thought her limited vocabulary was restricting her writing. Having read some classmates' work, she perceived that their work included a greater lexical range used with more precision than she could muster. Despite this evaluation, she had postponed explicitly developing vocabulary, citing the time she allocated to CFA studies as preventing this[22]. She perceived vocabulary development as a necessary task and was considering finding an academic writing vocabulary book to refer to during her Dissertation period, which appeared connected to her language learning history of learning other-selected wordlists (Appendix 4, Table 7). She was also very aware that developing her ability to express herself in writing was not necessarily her priority:

[22] Amy later told me that there were clear overlaps between later CFA books and her postgraduate courses in content, language and terminology.

> *If I have any time, what I need to do is only enrich my ideas and update my ideas, and I can think about that and how I can improve that, not the writing skills.*

Nevertheless, she considered that approaching deadlines might prompt priority realignment:

> *Maybe in a month I need to care more about my writing because I need to start my Dissertation, I need to meet my supervisor. I really think about maybe needing to read some books about alternative words.*

As well as postgraduate reading, Amy was continuing CFA exam preparation using a self-study book. However, she had changed her priority of reading quickly by strategically focussing on only ensuring she understood main points. By April she checked every word to ensure she fully understood each point:

> *I just wanted to extract some ideas some main ideas from these articles […] and I would miss some important points [...] I needed to adjust my methods. But, I think the only way to improve it is to spend more time on it.*

Amy slowed down to around 10 minutes per page to increase her understanding and covered around 30 pages daily, which would have taken five hours. She circled important information and underlined what was difficult to understand. She attempted the example questions and checked the sample answers. She took notes after completing these exercises. She also highlighted the importance of completing the practice exercises to help her identify what was particularly important in the texts, reflecting aspects of her preparation for her IELTS reading test (Appendix 4, Table 7):

> *It's not the quantity. You need to read massive knowledge, and then you don't know what the most important thing is, but if you do some practice, you will know what they want to say. It's not the quantity.*

She had also purchased online videos that directed CFA students to focus on specific points and provided example questions and sample answers. She intended to cover 50 pages a day with these, which:

> *… will release my pressure because I'm learning more, and more effectively […] because I'll reduce the language burden by using the video.*

Answers were written in English and explained in Chinese and English:

> *… because some exact words have a very precise meaning in English and to translate them into Chinese means that the words cannot include the entire meaning.*

In addition, Amy searched online to investigate others' experiences of the CFA exam as she had done with IELTS preparation (Appendix 4, Table 7) and talked to other local Chinese students preparing for the exam. However, she dismissed collaborative learning with these students, arguing that there would be little benefit because everyone was at different stages of the textbooks, paralleling her belief discussed in her language learning history for avoiding collaborative error correcting (Appendix 4, Table 7).

6.1.2.3 Exam and Dissertation period

Although the Dissertation period was scheduled from April, Amy was preoccupied with her CFA preparation. Amy's supervisor was based overseas. They had two face-to-face meetings before her CFA exam then used email and WeChat[23] for communication. The first face-to-face meeting was in a group. Her supervisor discussed the Dissertation format, tasks and deadlines with his supervisees, and he reassured them but also prepared them:

> *He told us he really wanted us to learn something, to truly learn something here […]. He wanted us to do something independently, we organised the Dissertations by ourselves, and we searched for materials by ourselves and tried to distinguish whether some material was useful or not.*

Even so, Amy only made *very simple preparations* for the second meeting as her CFA exam loomed. There was *little* Dissertation *progress* until the CFA had finished and she applied herself in earnest. Throughout July she read vicariously, selecting both Chinese and English sources and starting her introduction and literature review. When she identified a potential useful source in English, she used Google Translate to evaluate it rapidly in Chinese. If it seemed relevant,

[23] An online messaging app used for text chat, telephone and video calling.

she downloaded it. Initially Amy stored all downloaded articles together in one folder but around mid-July *thought it was low efficiency:*

> *I realised they were too many references because I hadn't written down any useful things. I spent too much time reading, so I found it was confusing.*

Amy then spent *one night* organising her Dissertation materials. She renamed each source to correspond with her perception of what it offered. She created Dissertation chapter folders, planned the points she wanted to cover in each chapter, and moved each source to the corresponding folder. This resulted in clear progress as she felt able to direct her attention more clearly to following the guidance she had been given for each chapter and meeting the prescribed word count

After selecting texts, Amy read in these in their original language, and took notes in that language:

> *Because when I read these Chinese references, some of the things I was thinking about in Chinese I would write them down in Chinese, but then I needed to translate these into English […] so, I used Google Translate to help me but I was worried about the language as it might cause some grammatical mistakes and mistakes in organisation.*

Amy also identified issues with key-term usages across different languages. This was at odds with her understanding in Semester One where she perceived that *the theories were the same* and Semester Two when she appeared to be developing and constructing knowledge in Chinese from English texts without identifying potential differences in constructs. Such differences Jankowicz (2003) highlights as problematic if concepts originating in one language and context are transferred to another where constructs differ and equivalencies are incomplete. Nevertheless, it appeared from her interview that she analysed, highlighted and incorporated these differences into her own writing:

> *Some references in Chinese had some different explanations for specific terms, so I needed to cite these and translate these.*

Although Amy had questions prior to submitting her first draft, she was wary of contacting her supervisor, describing contact as *a few limited discussions*. She

perceived that since her supervisor would grade her work, asking questions which would show her ignorance would be detrimental to her Dissertation grade:

> *I felt stressed about contacting him because I guessed that if I asked him some naive questions, or questions that showed my lack of experience, it would give him a bad impression. I found this quite stressful at that time.*
>
> ***Do you think you should have asked him some of the naive questions and for explanations earlier?***
>
> *Yes, I should have collected them in a list and asked him at one time. Like I should have asked about the format and I should have asked about some problems I experienced in my mathematical calculations. But most of the time I always searched by myself and I asked the [teaching assistants[24]].*

While Amy sought assistance, demonstrating what Candy (1991, p. 17) would likely categorise as assisted autodidaxy, in this instance her assumptions prevented her asking for assistance from her preferred person.

As Amy's deadline approached, to increase her output she wrote in Chinese then used Google Translate to produce an English version and corrected the translation errors. She submitted the first draft on 15th August and received feedback on 19th August. The translation software had not been as effective as hoped:

> *The feedback said that there were grammar mistakes everywhere, and I guess it was always in the part when I use this translation method because I didn't have enough time left at the end. I only corrected some mistakes to keep it going smoothly, but it's totally different from some words or some sentences if I had written them directly [in English].*

She submitted the final version on 22nd August. During this time, contact was maintained as Amy checked points and her supervisor clarified. In the final four days, she managed 15 hours sleep as she *struggled to make the changes*:

[24] Teaching assistants were PhD students employed to teach tutorial classes.

My supervisor told me I had grammar mistakes everywhere so that night I never slept so I tried to change the entire draft by myself and I contacted one proofreading service.

With such a tight turnaround, the proofreader could only commit to 5000 words so while Amy worked on the rest of the Dissertation:

… I gave him my findings, the most important part, and the conclusion.

As well as the linguistic errors, Amy described her supervisor's initial annoyance with aspects of the first draft formatting: she had not used headings, a table of contents or reference list. He became more sympathetic when he realised omissions and other problematic areas were the result of Amy's inexperience and misconceptions regarding the Dissertation conventions. Amy's problems with her Dissertation reflected those Tian and Low (2012) identified amongst Chinese students in the UK who experienced wide divergences between expectations around text structure and referencing. Klinger and Murray (2012) recognise that these expectations are rarely articulated, as Amy said:

Because in China, I guess it's different between these two - the Chinese Dissertation and the Dissertations here – so I didn't know about it.

Amy continued to enlist technology and although the Grammarly software she tried did not help, www.citethisforme.com saved time despite some non-standard referencing errors she corrected manually. On submission day, her supervisor maintained contact and offered support as she adapted and modified her work, even providing some feedback on her final draft before submission. Summing up her Dissertation writing experience, Amy concluded:

In the final three days, I learnt a lot.

6.1.3 Answering research questions 4 and 5

In October, based on Amy's planned language learning behaviours, her self-perceived needs covered all modalities but with diverging purposes. Speaking and listening were social activities, reading was transactional, and writing was academic. As the semester progressed, the purposes appeared to converge on academic study.

Table 3: Amy's answers to research questions 4 and 5

Needs	Behaviours
Develop PGT subject knowledge through lectures (September – March) - engage with unfamiliar topics - engage with unfamiliar accents	- read PowerPoint slides to prepare - checked & translated new lexis - recorded lectures - borrowed classmates notes (Sem. 1) - took notes in English (Sem. 2)
Develop social spoken English (September – April) - make likeminded friends - develop L2 wit	- talked with non-Chinese flatmates - avoided non-likeminded people - watched familiar sitcoms
Develop PGT subject knowledge through reading (September – August) - increase reading speed - increase lexical range - reading critically (from January)	- read Chinese articles - read English articles - took notes in English - discussed academic concepts from texts with friends in Chinese - attended to different authors' stances (from January)
Develop CFA subject knowledge (September – June) - increase reading speed - understand main ideas (September – March) - understand every word (April – June) - fully understand texts (April – June)	- read for general understanding - avoided checking all unknown words (September – March) - completed practice tasks - checked answers - checked all unknown words (April – June) - used CFA videos to identifying priority information to understand and apply to test questions (April – June)
Write assignments (October – March)	- collaborated with compatriots to discuss assignment tasks and related theories - prioritised content knowledge and understanding over developing written grammatical accuracy
Develop critical analysis in assignment writing (Sem. 2)	- read widely - identified alternative stance - developed own stance
Develop Dissertation (July – August) - chapter planning - gather data - write quickly - revise grammar errors - format conventionally	- read Chinese articles for data gathering - used Google Translate to select English sources (July) - read English articles in English - translated unfamiliar words and wrote Chinese meaning on the text. - wrote in Chinese, used Google Translate, tried to correct translation errors (August) - aligned the Dissertation with academic discipline conventions (August) - employed a proofreader (August)

6.2 Bella's sojourn: January, May & August

In October, Bella appeared stimulated by the interview to consider actively reengaging with learning English, perceiving little active engagement for some time. She planned to read more and seek friends beyond Chinese students. Her priority for English development after a month in Scotland was, she said, probably vocabulary and writing:

> *… so I can write good essays and I can read some English novels. And also my English-speaking skills.*

In January, Bella initially seemed very outgoing and enthusiastically discussed her holiday plans, with trips planned for April, May and June. When I asked how she would balance study, assessment dates and travel, she seemed confident in her ability as long as she studied a few days a week. However, during the interview she broke down in tears and discussed a recent unhappy relationship. After consoling her, I nudged the discussion towards language learning. She requested not to talk about her studies as this was upsetting her. There appeared to be multiple factors causing distress and I helped her book an appointment with the University counselling service.

Bella successfully survived her sojourn, seemingly by making just enough effort to pass. Her points were sometimes contradictory, for example when discussing regret then later no regret about effort exerted towards learning. Aspects of her learning behaviour and underlying beliefs were less detailed than with other participants since she sometimes asked to change topic. In May, I asked whether she would change anything if she had the year again. This exchange encapsulates for me Bella's conflicted attitude to her sojourn:

> *I would say I will change, but I know I won't. I want to but I cannot, I'm not able to.*
>
> ***Would you give any advice to new students starting in September?***
>
> *I'd say enjoy. I wouldn't persuade them to spend too much time on academic stuff. I just want to tell them to get their graduate degree, get your degree and you can spend a lot of time on other things, just enjoy your one year abroad.*

What things would you recommend they enjoy?

I would recommend that they get into a relationship, make some foreign friends, go to bars and clubs, watch films, travel.

Have you managed to do all of those thing?

Yes.

Is there anything you would like to have done more? Including those things, I don't mean just academic.

Let me see, in fact, I have tried all of those and I've enjoyed all of those but I have spent a lot of time staying in my room, I don't know why. Maybe I will try to stay in my room less but I don't know what to do with the time, maybe I should concentrate a little more on academic life. But I'm not able to. It's not like I don't want to, I'm not able to. I am also struggling with that, but I'm not able to do that.

This advice to incoming students was maintained as her final interview ended:

I just hope the incoming students don't spend too much time studying, although I haven't spent much time studying, I just don't want them to spend so much money here and just study. They have to experience this because a successful life tends to be a colourful life and you have to experience a lot.

6.2.1 Spoken English

6.2.1.1 First semester

We first met in the second week of Semester One. Postgraduate orientation was over and Bella regularly attended lectures and seminars. She understood some lectures more easily than others, with variation attributed to lecturers' accents. However, in the second interview, despite her intentions *to work harder*, reminiscent of her undergraduate days (Subsection 5.2.1) her attendance for the remaining semester had plummeted and she had avoided all tutorials. Bella described lectures as difficult to follow:

I cannot concentrate on them. Sometimes I just don't understand what the professor is talking about. I don't know why. Maybe there are some typical words, scholarly words or maybe the teacher has an accent or something, I don't know. Or maybe because there are no subtitles under the screen. I don't know, I just cannot understand so

much. I think a lot of Chinese students just do that, they do the self-teaching stuff. They cannot absorb a lot in the lecture.

She later attributed her lack of attendance to her lack of interest rather than her inability to follow the lecture, reflecting prior behaviour when disinterested and unmonitored (Appendix 5, Table 9). She was unequivocal:

I felt so bored and I started to play with my phone or my mind was absent.

Instead, she mostly engaged with English through activities which had helped her cope with middle school, namely watching television shows in her bedroom in English with friends, listening to music and checking the lyrics (Appendix 5, Table 8). She identified television as maintaining her English fluency:

It kind of helps me because when I'm talking to you, I can basically just express my feelings, I don't just stumble over words. I don't do that. Maybe just TV shows keep me fluent.

When Bella conversed in English, she thought in English and said that she acquired interesting phrases through watching television and chatting to others:

Yes, maybe I learnt from the TV shows […] Maybe when I watch TV shows there's a situation and the character just says a word or phrase like "it kicks in", and I think, "Wow, that suits the situation really well". And then I just remember this somehow, I don't even know how I remember it. But when I speak English it just pops out.

She did not check new phrases but understood them from context, as she had done previously (Appendix 5, Table 9).

When not in her room, she spent time in the university gym or socialised with friends from her programme and student accommodation. They sometimes discussed academic topics but mostly conversed about other aspects of their lives. Bella's friends in Semester One were all from China, and the vast majority of her face-to-face interactions were in her L1 with her compatriot flatmates and boyfriend. Bella perceived difficulties meeting people who were not Chinese, reflecting on an aspect of the social ecosystem with which she affiliated herself:

> *A lot of Chinese students don't like to make friends with people from other countries […] Chinese people always stick together, because we cannot make real connections with foreigners [non-Chinese]. We also don't know a lot about what foreign people think and what they do every day.*

Although Bella visited the English Conversation Corner in a local community hub three times and enjoyed it, she had experienced challenges with certain spoken interactions in the city, with seemingly traumatic consequences. She described being unable to understand a Scottish shop assistant and feeling so humiliated she burst into tears. With Amazon customer services, she called to request the return of an item and was repeatedly unable to understand the response. Unfamiliar accents in these situations led to frustration. Bella also felt that her compatriots did not always receive the respect or understanding others received. She observed university staff members being impatient with reticent Chinese female students, perceiving hesitant spoken English as leading to disrespectful treatment. Although Bella's observations upset her, possibly some aspect of cultural misunderstanding was involved. This appeared to be the case when she discussed another upsetting experience after trying on clothes when shopping. Having returned from the changing room with items she no longer wanted, she attempted to return them:

> *The shop assistant was really annoyed. She told me off and said "Don't do that!" It made me feel really bad. Couldn't she just have said, "Sorry, you're not meant to do that, you should put the clothes here"? Or even, she didn't do her job properly because she could have taken the clothes off me, then everything would have been done. She just left me standing there. Not every person is nice.*

Although she had positive interactions and had met other people locally, these were four memorable negative experiences in Semester One that left her frustrated, upset, or both.

6.2.1.2 Second semester

When I ask Bella in our third interview about her studies in Semester Two, she seemed to avoid, or perhaps misinterpret, the question and instead discussed how watching American talk shows was helping her listening. She sometimes watched television all day, estimating about 70% was in English. She watched without subtitles and followed easily:

> *I don't think my vocabulary has improved but I can really… it has improved my technique, my listening skills, because I think I can actually catch the key words to understand the whole sentence so if I hear some strange words or words I'm not familiar with I don't panic I just try to understand it and I will. I think the greatest contribution is from watching TV shows or TV series which are made in America. I haven't seen a lot of TV shows in the UK because I'm not familiar with the London accent.*

When I asked why she was focussing on American talk shows, she identified utility by pointing to the use of American English in English tests in China. Bella reoriented the discussion from her spoken English use to her beliefs about English in Chinese society:

> *In the Qing Dynasty we were dominated by some other Western countries so we think they're stronger, they're more advanced, they're developed countries, and they use English. So, we think English is, I don't know, we think English is a great language. So, we're kind of shy using English. We don't see English and Chinese on the same level. We think if you can speak English, it represents that you come from a well-educated family, you are a well-educated person. So people are too shy to show themselves up if they cannot speak well in Standard English. But [...] if people can speak Standard English in China, people will think, "Wow, he or she is so good!"*

This reaffirmed Bella's beliefs discussed in Chapter 5 about the prestige associated with spoken English in China, but also perhaps the social respect that Bella was able to attain as an expert English speaker in China. This contrasts with the perceived lack of respect and other upsetting experiences recounted above.

6.2.1.3 Exam and Dissertation period

At the end of August, Bella told me the Dissertation had been *torture* for her and many of her compatriots. She was pleased with her supervisor's responsiveness although she sometimes had difficulty following him due to his *European accent*. She therefore took her laptop to supervision meetings, asking him to spell any words causing confusion and checked Google Translate for a translation. Other than this, Bella's interaction in an English-speaking ecosystem during the Dissertation period seemed minimal, even eschewing English-language television. Reflecting on her spoken English development over twelve months, Bella felt her listening was *worse than before*:

I don't know why, maybe because I talk to Chinese people every day.

She perceived no *significant development* in her speaking; however, she was more confident that her reading and writing had *improved*.

6.2.2 Written English

6.2.2.1 First semester

To cover the content missed through avoiding lectures and tutorials, Bella read PowerPoint lecture slides over *a few nights* before exams, studying with a compatriot who helped her to review the coursework and identify knowledge to prioritise and memorise. She also had to read the unread materials assigned for tutorials. In China her lecturers had directed attention towards likely exam content, but her behaviour here of brief intensive learning for exams was essentially the same (Appendix 5, Table 9). She seemed to regret having spent so little time on her studies and identified her undergraduate experience as the cause:

> *At university [in China] I didn't spend a lot of time studying. Also, now I find it difficult to concentrate because I have lost myself for so many years. I feel this phenomenon in a lot of Chinese students.*

Identifying her behaviour as the norm, her experiences and perceptions of the learning ecosystem and her place within it diverged substantially from Amy's and Jie's, highlighting how seemingly similar environments can be perceived so differently (Menezes, 2008). Bella also perceived that she was particularly skilful at exam preparation and that she was underachieving:

> *I worked only a few nights but I passed it. Maybe other people working a few nights would not be able to pass it. I do have this kind of ability […] If I knew I wasn't good at learning, I'd be like, "Okay that's it, just be average, just pass it and get back to China". But deep inside I know I have the ability, because I did really well in my childhood.*

In January, Bella had just received a low pass for an exam. She would have liked a higher grade but accepted she had not studied much, again identifying her behaviour as common amongst compatriot postgraduates. She was aware of undertaking surface-level learning as described by Marton and Säljö (1976). As

Beattie et al. (1997) discuss, applying surface-level learning is legitimate behaviour if it effectively achieves the intended purpose. Bella's behaviour appeared appropriate given her stated objective of not studying too hard and her perceptions of exam assessment:

> *All the examinations here were like the examinations back in China. I just have to memorise it in my mind. I don't even need to understand it, I just need to know how to recite it.*

Bella acknowledged her underperformance but was more concerned about relationship issues and other aspects of her life. Minor regrets about her grade prompted the intention to improve her overall grade in Semester Two. She considered that applying herself to her studies might provide a more positive focus:

> *Maybe I should concentrate on my studying. I'll feel better, I'll feel happier because then my life would be meaningful.*

The three courses she took in Semester One were assessed through exams and 3000-word group assignments. Each group she worked with over her sojourn had four or five group members. Two groups were all Chinese and another group included a non-Chinese person. She said these group configurations were inevitable with around 200 compatriots and 10 non-compatriots on her courses. The group that included another nationality only used English to divide the work before all members worked independently. She said that Semester One group work was relatively straightforward and *not a huge amount of work*. After working individually, the group collaborated to produce a coherent text:

> *We just put it together […] then we checked each other's parts. For example, person A would check what B had done, and B would check what C had done, and then we did the references together and fixed any little mixed text parts together and fixed little bits of grammar and then we submitted it.*

She was not convinced she had learned much from the group projects. She identified her groupmates as *not very good students*, similar to herself, and the *not very good grade* was evidence. While Benson and Lor (1999) discuss the sociocultural group learners feel affinity to as restricting their range of beliefs, here Bella appeared to restrict her behaviour according to her social affinity. By

comparison, her high school experience of meeting proficient peers had motivated her (Appendix 5, Table 9) as did a similar situation in Semester Two.

6.2.2.2 Second semester

While Bella had evaluated her Semester One groupmates and resultant coursework as *not very good*, she was complementary about Semester Two groupmates:

> *Two new members are really hard-working students. They have many ideas, they have thought about it a lot, and they say in this paper what we should do, and we talked about it, and we used the theory we've been learning in the class to explain it. Oh, that was a really good two-hour meeting. It makes me feel good, "Oh, I am a graduate student! I have the ability to think!" I think maybe we can work together to get a great report.*

She worried about her overall ability because of her combined general negativity and her tendency to be *lazy* and easily *distracted*. In terms of English ability:

> *I'm not confident about my writing. I'm really not confident. All my English skills are about speaking. When it comes to writing, you have to know a lot of vocabulary that is academic […] and written English.*

Despite clearly perceiving where her strengths and weaknesses lay, she did not engage with university writing support, pay much attention to her essay writing, nor deliberately develop vocabulary. When reading and writing for the group assessment, if she checked a word she *checked the word and forgot it*. I showed her a quote from the first interview:

> *I want to improve my English vocabulary and writing skills so I can write good essays and I can read some English novels. And also my English-speaking skills.*

She expressed regret at her lack of activity and progress:

> *Oh my god, that's what I said, right? But I didn't achieve it. I'm just a bad student. When is the next time we'll have an interview? Do we have another interview in a few months?*
>
> ***Yes.***
>
> *Okay, I hope that next time it will be better.*

She then talked about being distracted by a relationship and the environment she was currently in:

> *But I think the most important reason is that this environment I am in is all Chinese students, and they're even not as good as me. So, I think they're not doing that, so I don't have to do that either. It's like we're having a bad effect on each other.*

As Sade (2014) identifies, group affiliation influences social identity and behaviour, and this appeared to be happening here. Bella later talked about changing how she would approach the remainder of her academic life in the UK:

> *My plan is that in the next [remaining part of the] semester I will take every class and preview [the PowerPoint slides].*
>
> ***Are you doing that now?***
>
> *Yes, yes, after I got the grade, I was like, I should concentrate on this, so I decided to take the class every day. There are not that many classes, I can handle it.*
>
> ***From now?***
>
> *Yes, tomorrow I have class and I will definitely go there.*

I never found out if Bella attended her lecture the following day, but her overall attendance in Semester Two mirrored Semester One. Similarly, Bella read little until the week prior to exams, when she read PowerPoint lecture slides and reading list texts. For the reading list texts, this time she used Google Translate to translate English into Chinese for the first reading. She evaluated the translation as not perfect but adequate for her purpose, which was to increase reading speed with general comprehension. After reading in Chinese, she then selectively read the text in English, focussing only on those parts which she had identified as particularly useful for the upcoming exam:

> *I just felt that there was some content that was not so important, some background, so I didn't pay so much attention to that. I just feel that, I don't know how to describe it but, it's kind of like this technique when the clock is ticking, the examination is coming then you just learn to know the important stuff. I just pick the important stuff, I picked the knowledge points and I memorised them.*

She inferred new vocabulary from the co-text and her understanding from the Chinese reading:

> *[This] helps to improve my vocabulary […] because when I see the Chinese and then get back to the English version, then I know what that word means because I have seen the Chinese meaning and the next time I see this word, I know the meaning of it.*

Nevertheless, she was clear that she thought this was a short-term improvement in vocabulary. She perceived benefits to her exam performance but assumed little future need for this vocabulary:

> *After I return to China, I will use English less maybe. It depends what kind of job I choose, but maybe for 80% of jobs I won't need so much English, or if I choose a job where I have to work abroad I will maybe need some English.*

Bella took notes in English by hand, writing these in her own words.

> *I only take English notes and never take Chinese notes […] because taking Chinese notes is useless. When I'm writing an essay or when I'm taking an examination, I need English so I just remember the Chinese meaning in my heart and I take English notes. If I take Chinese notes, I still can write nothing for the essay […] I use my own words. It's easier for me to understand […] because in the textbook or on the presentation slides some words or some sentences can be very difficult to understand because of academic words […] but when I understand what they're talking about I try to translate it into a simple sentence for myself to remember and then I put it in my own notes.*

In May, Bella was defensive when I asked about her writing from Semester Two:

> *I don't really want to talk about the academic stuff because when I talk about it I just feel I'm not doing so well at it.*

Given this reluctance, I asked if she would change anything if she had the year again. The dialogue beginning Section 6.2 ensued.

6.2.2.3 Exam and Dissertation period

Bella had her first meeting with her supervisor in June. Her initial fear of him dissipated as she realised he was there to support her. She strategically told him she was slow because:

> *… then every time you're lazy or you're doing something not so good, he won't criticize you.*

After deciding on her topic and research questions, she perceived her 12000-word Dissertation task started properly in mid-July. Bella focussed her Dissertation on Chinese company financial management. Her Dissertation process included searching online for an appropriate model and the data she needed. At this point, she depended on Chinese articles, reading many of these to understand more about financial management. The next step involved her empirical research design, and she read articles written in English for this. Initially she used Google Translate to read the text rapidly before identifying relevant parts then reverting to the English version. Her focus on methodology and analysis meant she mostly attended to the methodology and analysis in these publications. She stopped using Google Translate as the linguistic and structural conventions became familiar, indicating receptive discourse socialisation (Duff, 2007).

Bella cut and pasted text she thought would be useful into her Dissertation and added references. She used SPSS quantitative analysis software to develop her own empirical analysis. Her supervisor had emphasised the importance of the analysis in the Dissertation and she endeavoured to complete this first. She then composed the literature review, the introduction and the conclusion. She only cited publications in English and although she cut and pasted as she read and developed her Dissertation, she said paraphrasing was not difficult:

> *I just rephrased it from another perspective. That's one way, and another way is like, maybe I'll change the sentence structure from active to passive.*

Having eschewed dictionary use throughout her sojourn in favour of Google Translate, it was unclear how she incorporated synonyms as she paraphrased and summarised others' work. Occasionally she wrote in Chinese when tired, used Google Translate then corrected any errors. If she wrote in Chinese, the translation and correction was all completed on the same night:

> *… because I would have forgotten what I meant to write.*

Bella never had her work proofread and her supervisor never commented on her written English, only on the content. She eventually submitted her Dissertation first draft four days before the deadline and received feedback two days later. In the final two days, she made the recommended changes, which included creating and formatting tables. This was a new activity and she researched online in Chinese to discover how to do this. She submitted her final draft on time.

Completing her Dissertation improved aspects of her English. She identified confidence in her ability to write, when in Semester Two she had specifically identified her lack of confidence in writing:

> *In the future if someone told me I need to write an English paper, I'll say yes. I think I'll write it, it's not that hard.*

She was also convinced that her academic reading had improved, and that she was more capable of identifying where potentially useful information was in academic articles:

> *I got to know how to catch the meaningful stuff from the whole article because when I read a lot of articles I can know the rules of English, the way the English people write. I can't say it very clearly, but it's in my subconscious […] But when I first got here I tried to understand every sentence in the paper, so it was a waste of time, and it hit my confidence because I had to think, "Oh my god, I had to spend so much time reading one article!" […] But right now I don't need to translate the whole thing. I just get it. I catch what I need.*

Bella planned to maintain her English when she returned to China by reverting to some of the activities she previously used there. She intended to start *morning reading* again and make more international friends.

6.2.3 Answering research questions 4 and 5

In October, Bella's self-perceived needs covered all modalities but like Amy the purposes diverged. Speaking and listening were social activities, reading was for leisure, and writing was academic with a self-identified need for vocabulary development.

Table 4: Bella's answers to research questions 4 and 5

Needs	Behaviours
Prepare for exam assessment (December & April) - identify information to memorise	- read PowerPoint slides - collaborated with a compatriot (December) - identified together what would likely be useful - took notes in English - memorised content - used Google Translate to identify important parts of reading list texts (April) – read important parts in English (April) - guessed new vocabulary from the Chinese reading and English co-text (April)
Maintain spoken fluency (September – April)	- visited English conversation corner (Sem. 1) - watched television
Understand supervisor's comments in meetings	- used laptop and translation software for unfamiliar words
Write group work assignment (October – March)	- read and wrote individually - peer-checked individual work - combined texts collaboratively - discussed concepts & theory collaboratively (Sem. 2)
Develop Dissertation (July – August) - chapter planning - select materials effectively - read at an appropriate speed - deal with unknown lexis - rapidly identify relevant sections within texts - gather data - create and format tables conventionally (August)	- read Chinese articles for gathering data and background knowledge - used Google Translate to identify important parts of materials – read important parts in English - guessed new vocabulary from the Chinese reading and English co-text - wrote mostly in English - wrote in Chinese when tired, used Google Translate, corrected translation errors (all completed on the same night)
writing - produce a range of academic vocabulary	

6.3 Jie's sojourn: February, June & August

Jie's plans for developing her English covered all modalities. Her plans for speaking included listening and repeating speech from BBC programmes, joining student activities to engage with others and improve communication skills, and talking to other students in classes. For written English, she planned to read lecture materials and *The Economist* magazine.

Jie thrived socially and academically. Many of the language-related activities she had valued as an undergraduate remained as learning behaviours as she engaged socially and academically in the second-language ecosystem. Her belief in preparation for engagement continued and she spent time noticing how people interacted on television and in podcasts to prepare for her own social and academic spoken interaction. She remained cognisant of variation in how languages are structured and just as she had looked for guidance on structuring IELTS spoken and written responses, so too did she enrol on academic writing courses:

> *… because I didn't join the pre-sessional courses so I want to learn more of the things about writing in essays or assignments, some tips or critical thinking.*

She no longer sought feedback on spoken accuracy as she had done previously, specifically identifying errors as not necessarily impacting comprehensibility. Instead, she purposefully developed her social spoken vocabulary and academic written vocabulary.

Jie changed her original plans of returning to China after her postgraduate programme and instead applied for accountancy positions in the UK. If this failed, she was determined to find work with an international company in China where she would be able to continue using English on a daily basis. Her advice for incoming students was:

> *… not to be afraid of making mistakes and be brave and take the first steps to engage in activities either academic activities or social activities to know more people, not just new Chinese people but maybe some other students from different places. And then I think some personal advice, maybe it's just useful for me but not for everyone else, is I like to push myself into a different environment or into some difficult situations to know myself and to challenge myself. So, maybe it's not useful for everyone but I do not want to stay in my comfort zone but I want to engage with new challenges and that's why I joined the activities and the volunteering work and the workshops – to know more people and to maybe test myself about, like how to master a second language, and if other's talk about their ideas, can I follow their meaning? And can I share my ideas in a clear way?*

6.3.1 Spoken English

6.3.1.1 First semester

As in China (Appendix 6, Table 10), Jie continued to listen to BBC radio programmes in Scotland. *The English We Speak* presented idiomatic language, which she wrote. She noted examples and tips offered by the presenters. The *6 Minute English* programme covered different topics with discussions between the two presenters introducing six vocabulary items. Listening helped her:

> *… continue to become familiar with the language sense in an English [speaking] country, and to learn something, you know, like new words because there are several different topics when I listen to it so I can know some new knowledge from it, just you know, small pieces of new knowledge.*

She noted the explanations, paying attention to how the presenters interacted, as she believed this could inform her own discussion participation. As with her IELTS preparation, she listened, repeated and recorded (Appendix 6, Table 10). She endeavoured to reproduce the presenters' accents and, when unsure of what she was hearing, she checked the transcript.

She still watched television in her room, reflecting her undergraduate days (Appendix 6, Table 10). Her favourite was a US sitcom and she watched this for entertainment, for listening to informal situations, and for understanding more about social interactions. Understanding more about interacting informally in English was an explicit aim Jie identified several times in her first two interviews. This highlighted her perception that English social interactions were different and necessitated knowledge development. Jie had already engaged with other students when we met. She took her CV to a student union employability event, participating in group discussions and talking about recruitment with different employers' representatives. In her tutorial class, she actively contributed in the group of around 20 students, discussing lecture-related topics. When asked about her confidence given her Cambridge experience (see Subsection 5.2.4):

> *I just speak… if I make mistakes, maybe the teacher will understand me.*

Similar to Amy, Jie prepared for lectures. She read downloaded PowerPoint lecture slides for meaning while checking new vocabulary. She consciously considered knowledge from her undergraduate programme, connecting this to her postgraduate studies. She attributed familiarity with some terminology to her undergraduate Accounting English textbooks. She noted unfamiliar vocabulary and Chinese meanings then she attempted to memorise these.

Jie signed up for a conversational English scheme run by students, about which I had emailed participants (Appendix 7). This scheme connected student volunteer conversation partners with students engaging in L2 English. Jie's conversation partner was a European undergraduate biochemistry student with no discernible European accent. Although the first meeting was initially somewhat awkward, Jie got to know her partner and a group of his friends. She met her conversation partner weekly for around two hours throughout Semester One. They chatted about their past and upcoming weeks, music, films, and occasionally about their studies, as well as other topics of interest. Jie perceived these meet-ups improved her conversational English and created friendships. The benefits also extended to developing her curiosity and improving her general knowledge. For example, her interest in her conversation partner's country of origin grew and she visited with a Chinese friend between semesters.

In larger groups, the rapid, excited, and emotional speech combined with some linguistic unfamiliarity sometimes impacted Jie's comprehension. When talking one-to-one, asking for repetition was unproblematic but in larger groups, she generally refrained, believing that *maybe it's not polite to interrupt and ask them to repeat again*. Nevertheless, she believed meeting her partner's friends provided opportunities for engaging in an English-speaking ecosystem:

> *I just, you know, adapt to integrate and I try to adjust to the speed of speaking.*

Despite the greater challenge with larger groups, she perceived these as more relaxed because the discussion developed more naturally compared to one-to-one conversations, which could be slightly stilted. She joined his group of friends three times in Semester One, and recommended the conversation scheme to other compatriot students but was unsure whether any partook. As planned, Jie

also participated in small talk in class with non-Chinese classmates, but dismissed this as insignificant.

Jie socialised with Chinese friends on Sundays when time allowed. She also generally chatted with Chinese classmates after class. Some coursework required group participation and the groups she had chosen and those to which she had been allocated were all composed entirely of compatriots, and Chinese was spoken almost exclusively. When discussing this, Jie raised her awareness of thinking in English and thinking in Chinese, and the impact each language had on her ability to produce English when engaging with others. She sometimes thought in Chinese when conversing in English:

> *I think that may be an obstacle when conversing in English.*

Nevertheless, she was aware of thinking in English much more when reading and writing in English as discussed in 6.3.2.

6.3.1.2 Second semester

At the beginning of Semester Two, Jie decided to apply for postgraduate jobs in Scotland, finding the people, culture and weather appealing. Throughout Semester Two, she continued listening to the BBC's *6 Minute English* at weekends as well as watching films and sitcoms. Her meet-ups continued weekly with her conversation partner and monthly together with his friends. She also became involved in a student volunteering activity, attended an information session in January and regularly participated until the end of July. Jie encouraged a friend to join. They were the only Chinese students involved with the group.

The student volunteers provided hot drinks and sandwiches for the city's homeless. Twice a week they prepared and distributed hot drinks and sandwiches. The group ethos was that interacting with the homeless people was as important as distributing sustenance. The members met to organise and schedule duties. There were more members than needed for each cycle of preparation and distribution and Jie typically did this three times a month. A strong social aspect pervaded this group. Members regularly met to chat, and

socialised in each other's homes, often preparing food for each other. Through this multinational group, Jie interacted with new people:

> *… not only the people who are volunteers but also the people who need help. So, I think helping them is a good chance to get to know the local people and also it can give me the opportunity to chat to them and to find out about the living conditions, and also helping them is a good thing, I think.*

Initially she experienced difficulty following the homeless people's accents:

> *Actually, the first time I didn't understand what they were saying because maybe it's a Scottish accent I don't know but I just listened and tried to adjust to them. But I could talk to the other volunteer people and maybe after several shifts I could understand some of the people who talked to us and I could try to talk to them.*

Accent was also mentioned with reference to her studies in Semester Two when Jie initially struggled with an international lecturer's accent:

> *His English is actually difficult to understand in the first classes but he spoke slowly and if I pay attention to what he says, I can adjust to it and it's not too difficult to understand.*

In both these comments, there was recognition that unfamiliar accents required more effort but with some patience and focus, effort would be rewarded. Jie's professed *love of this city* did not extend to a desire to adopt the accent. She disliked that several people she met in London in May (discussed below) commented on her slight Scottish accent. She preferred to aim for Received Pronunciation without any regional adaptation.

6.3.1.3 Exam and Dissertation period

Jie attended an assessment centre interview in London for a major international accountancy firm. She had to participate in a group discussion task, which did not go well. One group members had dominated and everyone had been competing to talk. She was unhappy with her group's approach to the task. Despite this experience, in June Jie perceived her speaking had improved the most of all modalities. Her ability to express herself orally was substantially easier than in September. She attributed her progress to her ecosystem:

> *I meet different people from different parts of the world, so I need to talk in English, so during the communication process I need to speak in English and think in English and change my habit and then listening to the BBC is a very good way even though sometimes I didn't take notes during the listening, I just listened and I think it could also make an environment where I'm immersed in English.*

Jie identified different linguistic aspects she wanted to improve over the final three months. Her speaking and her ability to understand what others were saying regardless of accents were her priorities. To attain these goals, she preferred to interact with others, seeing this as *more natural. I can improve my English maybe subconsciously*. She continued to meet her speaking partner's group of friends until they graduated in July and she continued regularly meeting her speaking partner. She also wanted to improve her Dissertation writing. She planned to continue her writing activities, including the academic writing lessons. When I showed surprise that writing was not prioritised over speaking, she distinguished her need for Dissertation writing improvement from her desire for oral communication development.

Jie's Dissertation involved investigating an under-researched aspect of Chinese business management. This limited the articles available in English, impacting her reading as discussed below. Jie's supervisor lived overseas and scheduled her first two face-to-face supervisions across two consecutive days in April. Her first supervision was to talk through her proposal. The following day was to discuss her revised proposal. Jie felt this was suboptimal:

> *I needed to complete [the revised proposal] in a very short time and I think it's very stressful and I couldn't think about it clearly by the next day when we were going to meet again, when I might not have any better ideas and clear questions and so I think it wasn't very good.*

Jie's expectations of her supervisor included supervisor access at her request, and for prompt replies to her emails:

> *It's not very easy to arrange a meeting. It needs to be according to the supervisor's time, so like if I wanted to discuss some questions, it's not comfortable and I can't deal with the problems as soon as possible.*
>
> ***So, didn't you have a chance to Skype or send emails or anything?***

> *Yes, I sent emails but I didn't always get a reply, and also I didn't get a reply quickly because my supervisor has a habit, I know his habits. He always replies to emails before eight o'clock in the morning, so if I want to ask a question and I send the question to him after eight in the morning, I can't get a response all day – I can just get a reply the next day, so it's not efficient I think.*

The supervisor and supervisee seemed to demonstrate different role assumptions on both sides. This was possibly attributable to her previous undergraduate experiences, but it led to reduced satisfaction. Jie's discussed her annoyance at his lack of immediate support several times. However, when her supervisor did not respond, she reluctantly searched herself:

> *He didn't give suggestions when I asked him questions, so I had to manage everything by myself […] So for everything I needed to think about how to do by myself, and also when I asked my other classmates they hadn't done that step and so I just had to do it all by myself.*

And when she did receive guidance, it frustrated her:

> *When I just got my results from my analysis, I was not sure if it was appropriate, if it was right, because the findings on this topic are mixed and controversial, so I don't know. And so I discussed it with my supervisor and he didn't tell me anything he just asked me why why why and I don't know why so I don't know whether it's good or not.*

Her supervisor set strict deadlines so that she submitted her first draft in June. Although June was stressful, she had completed much of the dissertation by the end. In July, she revised, received further supervisor feedback and submitted unstressed in August, although clearly still unimpressed with her supervisor.

While both Amy and Bella referred unprompted to *too many Chinese students* at their Scottish university, I prompted Jie to discuss this in August. From her perspective, it was to be expected. She had friends studying in the US, Europe, Asia and Australasia and they reported a significant cohort of Chinese students in each university. She dismissed this as a barrier to communicating in English:

> *I think it's just about personal choice. If they have the awareness of speaking English to improve, they can always find some activities to talk to others and to improve their English. So, that's not just*

because of the environment […] I think if someone wants to they can always find the opportunities through the universities.

Apart from academic and social activities, Jie spent time in August finding accommodation to extend her stay in Scotland and applying for jobs. She was keenly anticipating interacting with her new flatmate:

I'm going to be living with a Malaysian girl and so I think I can make friends with her and also we can talk English together at the same time.

6.3.2 Written English

6.3.2.1 First semester

Jie was reading three main text types when we first met: PowerPoint slides, academic articles and *The Economist*[25]. PowerPoint slides prepared her for lectures, as discussed above in Subsection 6.3.1, and lecturers posted reading lists online, listed week-by-week for each course and categorised as *essential* and *further* reading. She prioritised the *essential* texts and selected from the *further* reading. She evaluated these *further* texts by publication date, selecting the most recent first believing these were likely the most relevant and would commonly reference and reiterate points from earlier publications.

Jie read each article in two to three hours, engaging with clear strategies:

First I just read the abstract of the article because it can give an introduction or generalisation about the whole article and then I read the introduction, which I do more carefully. And then I'll read the conclusion and findings carefully because it contains the main ideas of the article. And when I then read the main body of the article, first I read the headings because it can help me to know each part and what the authors want to express in each part of the article, and then you know I just read roughly like this rather than search for every new word carefully and specifically.

Carefully reading the abstract, introduction, conclusion and findings included identifying any key vocabulary items she was unsure of, checking these using her bilingual electronic dictionary and writing a Chinese translation on the text. However, she did not check any new vocabulary when reading the *main body*. As

[25] A weekly magazine that adds journalistic depth to articles on a range of topics.

she read, she underlined main ideas and colour highlighted what she thought could be useful. When lecturers provided questions about texts in preparation for tutorial discussions, these guided what she highlighted. She also wrote a summary in English of some of the main ideas, telling me that using English to summarise allowed her to participate during tutorials.

She reflected on how her reading had improved in Semester One as well as how some of the difficulties of reading, or the pressure to complete material, motivated her to implement strategies:

> *Actually, the first times I was reading the articles I think it was comparatively hard because you know it was too long and at first it took me a lot of time to read, so that gives me a little bit of pressure because there's a long reading list, but I just read one article and it took me a long time. So, that gives me pressure and also the motivation to try hard to adjust to reading the article […] I think I now use less time than the first time I read an article. And I think when I read an article, I think I can read it more smoothly, not like the first time when it was a struggle.*

She attributed this improvement to a combination of her growing vocabulary and familiarity with common article structures and sentence constructions in the academic texts she read. Jie also read short articles from *The Economist* to develop content and linguistic knowledge, selecting content carefully:

> *Choosing the ones that I want to read can make it easier for me to continue to read in the future […] before I look at an article, I first look at like the headings [within the article] and know the structure because every article has some different headings so I know each part and what will be expressed in it, and then maybe every time I just read one part of this article, like one paragraph, like the first time I just read the introduction, and the next time maybe the second paragraph.*

The articles selected were not only focussed on Finance or Economics. For example, having discussed Iceland with her conversation partner's friend, she read an article on Icelandic language and consequently visited Reykjavik. She evaluated *The Economist* as positively impacting her English, and detailed strategies for engaging with the content and developing vocabulary:

> *The first time I read it there are a lot of, you know, new words that I don't know and some of them are Latin words, so I just you know,*

underline or circle them as I read. The first time I don't use a dictionary and then after finishing and I know what the article is roughly about and then I look up words in the dictionary to find the meaning.

She would then write a Chinese translation beside any word she checked. However, she seemed embarrassed about writing in Chinese, concerned that writing Chinese explanations might be detrimental to content and linguistic development (see Subsection 6.3.1.1 for similar concerns about Chinese thoughts impacting spoken English). She was aware that when reading in English, she thought in English, identified useful parts and then wrote notes in English. This contrasts with Amy and Bella's use of translation software for their reading strategies and their awareness of thinking in Chinese.

Jie enrolled on additional academic writing courses but was selective about which courses to join, indicating that she was operating of her own volition and therefore in an autodidactic domain (Candy, 1991). Her language learning history showed her belief that thought and logic were conveyed differently in different languages and she had sought guidance on this when preparing for IELTS (Appendix 6, Table 11), and she appeared to be following through on this. In Semester One classes focussed on structuring paragraphs, referencing and supporting ideas. The 90-minute lessons involved writing in class for 20 to 30 minutes, and she received feedback on her short pieces of handwritten work. She perceived the classes as useful and was happy with her progress. At the time of the second interview in January, Jie's only feedback on her academic written work had been from these academic writing workshops.

On her core programme, Jie participated in three separate pieces of group written work that were submitted for assessment in Semester One. The groups initially met, agreed on how to divide the work and set deadlines. Typically the group allocated one part of the task to each member. Members worked individually then regrouped to present their answers, combine the different parts of the essay and collaborate on an introduction and conclusion. One team member was then assigned as editor, based on workload and prior English academic experience, to check the style and logic of the whole piece.

Jie started writing a diary two or three times a week. She generally wrote a paragraph each time about something that had happened or something thought provoking someone had said, and her feelings about the occurrence. She wrote primarily in English but code switched if she felt her English lexicon lacked precision. She handwrote her diary explaining these were purely personal thoughts and this was a private activity. Asked if this helped her psychological wellbeing:

> *Yes, I think so. First I can write my feelings or my thoughts in English that can in another way help me to think in English, and then write in English, and also record the things that happened. When I, you know, feel foreign or when my emotions are not too high I can, you know, say what happened and it can help me to be happy.*

Jie identified this as an extension of an activity she had undertaken in China where she would note sentences or ideas she discovered online that she liked in order to remember them. She started doing this of her own volition, and it had evolved to include noticed experiences and her thoughts around these.

6.3.2.2 Second semester

In May, the exam period had just finished and Jie was working on her Dissertation as we discussed Semester Two. Her Semester One activities, such as reading *The Economist* and keeping a diary, had continued through the second semester. She had not engaged in any new text-based activities. Nonetheless, she talked of her awareness of a change in purpose for learning English since arriving in the UK. Previously she learned English to meet the linguistic requirements for her course and to prepare for academic study in the UK but:

> *Now I learn English just to live better, to communicate better, and to study more easily.*

Jie had just finished block four of the academic writing course she had been attending. Since the previous interview, she had written seven or eight assignments. These started around the third or fourth week of Semester 2, the vast majority being group work requiring around 2500 words. She had also written a 4000-word individual assignment, which she described as:

> *Too much work […] I needed to read articles and write down the useful things and then to connect them together and critically analyse them, and then to write a whole assignment and then to maybe revise it again and again so it was too much work. I needed to do it by myself so I needed quite a long time compared to the group ones.*

I ask if she focussed on the content or the language as she wrote.

> *First it's the ideas, because I think it's the most important, but when we finish the first draft we really need to revise it and focus on the language or the grammar.*

She received feedback from her tutors, which commented on structure and content but not grammar or vocabulary. She never sought feedback elsewhere before submitting, citing time constraints.

6.3.2.3 Exam and Dissertation period

Despite her reading speed improving over two semesters, Jie described the first stage of reading for her Dissertation as *too much work*. She read texts in electronic format to avoid printing costs despite her discomfort screen reading for extended periods. She underlined and highlighted important points electronically on these documents and added Chinese translations of new vocabulary. She also took handwritten notes of *researchers' names* and the *ideas they proposed*, with a focus on identifying and paraphrasing *topic sentences*. Jie described paraphrasing and summarising as straightforward:

> *I changed the order of the sentence or maybe I changed the passive to the active or active to passive or when you just understand the main idea of the sentence or the paragraph, then just thinking about in my mind how to use my own language to express these kinds of ideas.*

She used her notes to draft chapter outlines. Underlining helped her quickly identify important parts when returning to an article as her Dissertation developed.

Jie felt her ability to select, read and identify useful information in academic articles had vastly improved in the first nine months of her sojourn. Completing her first draft in about one month was her evidence:

I had to write which meant I had to read and collect the articles then I needed to write the Dissertation as soon as possible. So I think I read articles faster than before and could pick out the key points of the articles.

To find relevant texts, she utilised the university library database and Google Scholar. She searched using keywords and selecting relevant texts by titles and abstracts. To keep a record of her source texts for her writing, she used a free online referencing tool, citethisforme.com. While she used a dictionary to check new words that impeded her comprehension, she did not use Google Translate and by this stage she had surpassed mental translation while reading:

Before I did so much reading, sometimes I translated it into Chinese as a habit but now I read it and I don't have that process of translation. Sometimes I see the words and I know the words but I cannot reflect the Chinese meaning at first sight, I just know the words so I think maybe the process of translation sometimes disappeared.

Jie had attempted to use Google Translate early in her sojourn but swiftly rejected it as problematic:

It's a real struggle to get the point of the meaning especially when it's translated into Chinese it seems weird and so you need to spend a lot of time to think about what it is and so I think it's better to read in English. It's faster and also it's easier to understand.

Jie's topic required the use of a Chinese database, and the limited English language publications in her particular area of research compelled her to access articles in Chinese. However, reading original material in Chinese also proved challenging:

I didn't think it was very easy to understand in the Chinese version because they use a lot of paragraphs just to talk about things that aren't important and so I just read the English version and I think it was quite efficient for me […] it wasn't very easy for me to follow their ideas in the Chinese version.

Jie was quite clear that her written English had improved over the twelve months on her programme. She identified multiple aspects in which she improved. Her ability to plan and structure her writing developed and positively impacted on text selection. She found it easier to find and select relevant resources, to recognise and follow the main ideas in these, and to identify

pertinent content for her own work. While this saved time, her reading and writing were also both faster. She reported that as she felt her capability improve, her attitude to assignments changed:

> *In the past I always thought it maybe was not very easy so I started maybe as late as I could but now I think it's not very difficult for me so I started before the deadline*

Evaluating her English academic literacy progress, she said:

> *[At the start of the academic year] it wasn't very easy to write my assignments or write essays. I needed a lot of time to look for resources and to then to organise the structure and then to complete the essays. But at the end of the academic year, for example to write the Dissertation, like more than 10000 words, and at first I thought that was a lot of words but then I finished it and I thought it was not very hard. So, I think to some extent it's improved […] before studying in the UK I also thought I needed to write something in a structured way but now my structuring is better. The logic behind these two kind of languages are different, because like in Mandarin we just explain something and then draw conclusions at the end. But in English you need to propose the ideas first, to write a topic sentence first, and then to add details to explain your ideas, so this is different. I needed to shift between these two kinds of writing styles.*

Jie viewed English as potentially important in her future. She was keen to stay in Scotland to work. She had focussed her job search on global accountancy firms, and attended an online workshop with Chinese alumni from her postgraduate business school to hear about their experience of job applications. She hoped that English would be an integral part of her professional life regardless of the country in which she would work. Although she acknowledged that were she to work in a state-owned enterprise in China, English might be less useful, she was still likely to use English for overseas travel. While we mostly discussed writing with respect to academic texts, Jie also identified the improved appropriacy of her email exchanges with lecturers or other students, which helped her when applying for jobs and asking questions to recruitment teams.

6.3.3 Answering research questions 4 and 5

Jie's purposes included social and academic for spoken language, with some listening being done for pleasure. For written English there was more focus on

academic purposes, although it was possible *The Economist* was also for pleasure or for discussion in social contexts. Although behaviours below are matched with needs, Jie's interactions with others were not merely to achieve learning goals as Candy (1991) anticipated when adults seek help with learning.

Table 5: Jie's answers to research questions 4 and 5

Needs	Behaviours
Develop PGT subject knowledge through lectures (September – March) - engage with unfamiliar topics - engage with unfamiliar accents (Sem. 2) - increase lexical range	- read PowerPoint slides to prepare - checked new lexis
Develop social spoken English (September – August) - interact appropriately one-to-one and in groups - express thoughts effectively - comprehend others effectively, including those with unfamiliar accents	- studied colloquial language and interactions using podcasts and television - shadowed podcasts for pronunciation and memorisation - signed up for conversation partner scheme - met conversation partner regularly - met conversation partner's friends in a group regularly - volunteered with a student group - engaged with homeless people
Develop PGT subject knowledge through reading (September – August) - select materials effectively - read at an appropriate speed - identify relevant content - deal with unknown lexis	- selected from the lecturer provided sources (September - April) - trialled Google Translate then avoided - prioritised essential reading over further reading - prioritised recent publications over older articles - read the abstract, introduction, conclusion and findings carefully, identified key vocabulary items, checked with bilingual electronic dictionary, wrote Chinese translations on the text - avoided checking new vocabulary when reading the main body - underlined main ideas - highlighted possible useful content
Prepare for tutorial participation - developing linguistic and content knowledge reading these at a suitable pace developing key vocabulary	- read assigned texts and took notes
Develop non-academic linguistic and content knowledge	- read *The Economist* - selected according to interest by skimming headlines - read at the weekend, often in sections

	- identified new words - checked after reading - read a second time
Develop Dissertation (April – August) - plan - structure - gather data	- read Chinese articles for data gathering - contacted supervisor for direction and clarification - asked peers for suggestions - searched online for answers
Write academically to language-specific conventions - structure writing - support ideas - integrate source material - displaying critical thinking	- enrolled on academic writing support courses
Interpret experiences and express associated thoughts in English	- wrote a personal diary in English

6.4 Summary

The stories and resulting answers to the research questions here show the participants' self-perceived needs included social and academic needs. They show the need to develop understanding and the ability to communicate that understanding. It is unsurprising that the need for academic listening skills preceded the need for skills related to developing a Dissertation. However, by reading the narratives above, it is possible to view these needs from different perspectives, and to develop a more nuanced understanding of how these needs were met, avoided or changed over time. The independent, interdependent and dependent nature of their interactions can be seen as the participants progressed through their sojourns and fulfilled certain goals. Conflict between self-perceived need and want is evident in these stories, as is the impact of affective factors when there was freedom to choose.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes this Dissertation by initially reiterating why investigating second-language postgraduates' experiences is important, noting the knowledge gap that exists, and discussing how this Dissertation has contributed to developing understanding in this area. Section 7.2 summarises the main findings, showing how the three postgraduates in this study successfully survived, strove and thrived in their second-language ecosystems. Their stories both exhibit and problematise learner autonomy. Attention is also drawn here to the interplay between first and second language in constructing academic knowledge and possible language-related consequences. Section 7.3 suggests a number of professional implications for those working with international postgraduates. In Section 7.4, I discuss the changes to my own practice before highlighting the research limitations in Section 7.5. Section 7.6 outlines possible future areas of research and Section 7.7 concludes the chapter by suggesting the overall contributions this research makes to the field.

7.1 Investigating second-language postgraduates' experience

As noted, calls have been made for more research into the interaction of language learning beliefs and out-of-class behaviours from learners' perspectives (Barcelos, 2003), the contexts in which they manifest themselves (Cotterall, 2008; Gao, 2003) and how these change over time (Malcolm, 2005). In responding to these calls, I situated my investigation amongst individuals who in 2017-18 formed part of a cohort of around 320,000 non-EU international students in the UK (HESA, 2019b). The difficulties international students experience have generated research interest (see Section 1.3 and Subsection 2.2.4), yet the details of their success, how they engage in their new ecosystems and the reasons that underlie their engagement have received scant attention. In responding to calls and identifying a specific gap in international student research, this study explored the experiences of living and learning in a second-language dominant ecosystem.

In particular, this research sought to uncover the out-of-class language-related behaviours and beliefs of three Chinese postgraduates during their one-year

sojourn at a Scottish university. The study was concerned more with learning processes, progression, and any changes that occurred throughout their year than learning outcomes or linguistic achievements. I examined the complex interplay between language-related beliefs and learning behaviours, and factors which appeared to influence each. By selecting a multiple case study and gathering data over one year, I anticipated and identified divergence in experiences and changes in beliefs and behaviours in line with Personal Construct Theory (PCT). Similarly in line with PCT predictions, the findings in Chapter 6 demonstrated the influence of prior behaviours and existing beliefs over experiences which were sought or avoided. I indicated that participant interpretation of these sojourn experiences in turn influenced beliefs and behaviours. In studying participants' accounts of context-specific engagement within the second-language ecosystem, it became possible to develop an understanding of how they met their perceived needs and avoided, overcame, or were obstructed by anticipated and unanticipated obstacles. Nevertheless, beliefs and behaviours also manifested themselves in ways that were not predicted, not least because social contexts were subject to chance occurrences. This is discussed in more detail in the summary of the main findings and the research limitations below. The following section summarises the main findings, and discusses my initial assumptions and reactions to these stories.

7.2 The main findings

Formal language learning prior to arrival in the UK did not appear to have involved learner training for autonomy. Nevertheless, all three participants appeared to become active autonomous language learners. Bella clearly demonstrated this capacity from middle school as she pursued her interest in English-medium film, television and music. Jie's language learning as an undergraduate included many behaviours and beliefs that could be associated with autonomy, as did Amy's preparation for her IELTS exams. While it could be argued that they drew upon previous teacher-directed strategies to achieve their goals, not all strategies had come from others, and not all previous teacher-directed strategies were used. Instead, participants appeared to make choices involving an activity of mind (Dearden, 1972) and to evaluate these choices with regard to their learning goals within their specific contexts. That choices included previous teacher-directed strategies should not be surprising as these

would form part of the constructs that they have developed through classroom experiences as novice language learners.

All the participants successfully passed every assessment in the UK on their first attempt, met all their assignment and Dissertation deadlines, completed their postgraduate programmes, and graduated in December 2017. All of them engaged in their postgraduate programmes outside the classroom, if not always inside it, and almost all engagement occurred away from formal learning spaces and educator oversight. All participants adapted to their new contexts, engaged in the second-language ecosystem to a greater or lesser extent, and used their first language for a variety of reasons including facilitating academic learning. Bella survived despite her seemingly minimal engagement with her programme. Amy strove, balancing studying for two qualifications simultaneously. Jie created her own opportunities and thrived despite arriving with the lowest IELTS test scores. This was at odds with my expectations. Prior to interviewing, I had presumed participants would strive as they attempted to balance studying for postgraduate qualifications with developing English. I had anticipated that language level would impact social and academic engagement so that those closest to the threshold linguistic requirements to be accepted on their programmes would find engaging socially and academically in English challenging. This assumption was too simplistic. After the first interviews, I also assumed Bella would thrive. Her upward trajectory through school, her active engagement with out-of-class learning, and her capacity to create social language learning opportunities in China all indicated that she would be equally impressive in Scotland. That was not the case, underscoring the importance of querying assumptions, researching belief implementation in new ecosystems, and pointing to the significance of the longitudinal aspect of this study.

Throughout the interviews I endeavoured to maintain a neutral role as a researcher. I focussed on empathising rather than advising as the participants discussed their experiences. Other than pointing participants to possible places to access language learning activities or support (see Subsections 4.6.8 and 6.3.1) I was keen for any educator intervention to result from participants seeking this, or for it to arise as part of postgraduate programme engagement. I wanted it to be the participants' choice. Despite my non-teaching stance during interviews, I experienced many different feelings as I interviewed, transcribed

and analysed the data from each participant. I was delighted with Jie's engagement with life in Scotland. She actively pursued academic and social opportunities, contributed to the local community and developed international friendships while attending to her academic commitments. I felt very sorry for Amy. She seemed isolated as she committed many hours every week to independent study for her Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) qualifications, and she refers to having no life in Scotland as a result. When I heard she had failed her CFA exam I was devastated for her, and I still wonder how different her sojourn could have been had she had the time for other pursuits. The most unexpected story I encountered was Bella's. I was shocked at her ability to pass her assessed work with such little effort. While I did not want her to fail, I was astounded that postgraduate courses could be passed with a few days of intensive study and limited contributions to "group work". Nevertheless, Bella's story is particularly enlightening for many reasons not least because stories like hers are rarely told, and her story challenges the concept of autonomy as being wholly beneficial, just as Dearden (1972) did when he suggested that criminal activities are potentially autonomous activities.

This entire research offers a rare, detailed insight into three international postgraduates' lives, but it seems that gathering six hours of interview data from an academically disengaged participant is potentially rarer still. While Bella's prior active engagement in her language learning indicated that she had the linguistic and academic capacity, and was aware of these capacities, she applied them only enough to ensure that she passed her assessed work. Tellingly, while she expressed some regret at aspects of her limited engagement, given the chance to relive her sojourn, she was adamant that she would not modify her academic behaviour. How common Bella's approach to postgraduate studies is cannot be estimated by this research. However, it raises the point that while lecturers and other decision-makers in universities may assume that postgraduates are pursuing an overwhelming academic interest, there may be postgraduates for whom academic pursuits are only minor aspects of their sojourns. Nevertheless, Bella does appear to display learner autonomy although not necessarily autonomy in language learning (ALL). To recap, this is the definition for ALL used in this Dissertation:

> Autonomy in language learning is characterised by a readiness to take control of one's own second language learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person.

It is difficult to identify the language learning behaviour and beliefs Bella discusses as examples of taking control of her second language learning. Although her learning history seems to show her capacity to act independently and in cooperation with others, during her postgraduate studies she was often unwilling to do this with regard to her second language learning. With a few exceptions, her second-language ecosystem engagement tended to be generally limited to fulfilling academic obligations. However, she clearly took control of her own learning to meet her needs and purposes as these pertained to her postgraduate programme. Using Dam's definition of ALL as if it focussed on learner autonomy in adult education, as discussed in Section 2.3, learner autonomy may be identifiable:

> Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person (Dam, 1995, p. 1).

Bella had the capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others. She was socially responsible to the extent that she cooperated with others on group projects and did not appear to exploit others to achieve her own goals. Had she engaged more robustly with her postgraduate programme or with language learning in response to external pressure, such as from her parents or lecturers, the autonomy she appeared to show would have been compromised or, at least, changed in form. Hence Bella's case problematises learner autonomy amongst postgraduates for educators if developing academic knowledge and maximising assessed grades are not self-directed goals. Imposing such goals somewhat compromises or changes learner autonomy, yet without them, certain postgraduates are unlikely to engage to the extent that educators would prefer.

An alternative interpretation could be that Bella's undergraduate experience influenced her personal concepts of what it is to be a university student and the purpose of university. While her undergraduate experience and success was no doubt influential, when she discussed her undergraduate and postgraduate experiences, she was keenly aware that alternative courses of action were open to her. Her choices around academic engagement were considered and deliberate, allowing her time for other pursuits. Nevertheless, Bella and Amy both assumed their experiences were common among their compatriots in that Bella talked of many students being disengaged while Amy perceived many students strove to balance studying two qualifications. Identifying these contrasting behaviours as norms is of interest. Whether this is due to individuals assuming their individual experiences are general experiences, or whether individuals engage with others like themselves or perhaps pay attention to similarities in a few others and extrapolate to their postgraduate peers is unclear. Nevertheless, Personal Construct Theory provides an insight into how similar environments can be perceived differently (Menezes, 2008). As well as diverging perceptions, there were shared constructs in that all participants experimented with translation software to facilitate reading English texts and they all discussed the possibility of socialising with others who were not Chinese to develop spoken English. However, influenced by their knowledge and understanding of the world to date, their beliefs and behaviours diverged according to their interpretation and anticipation of engaging in notionally similar events.

An equally important theme which pervades the stories and caused the modification of the research questions from language learning to language-related activities was around L1 and L2 use. The tentative and limited findings here have possible implications for Personal Construct Theory in that the language used to engage in academic learning seemed to impact participants' ability to write or talk about what they had learned. If this is indeed the case, and if it affects other international students, this uncovers a further challenge to transitioning to a second-language-dominant ecosystem for academic pursuits. All three experimented with reading Chinese machine translations of English academic texts in Semester One. Amy and Bella found this an effective way to skim texts. However Jie, who seemed to have pre-existing academic business

knowledge constructed in English, found machine-translated Chinese more laborious that reading in English. During the Dissertation period, Jie was also frustrated by Chinese academic conventions when she had to read Chinese academic texts to access information not available from English sources. Bella used machine-translated Chinese for selecting information from texts to read in English. She generally wrote in English. Despite switching to Chinese when tired, she always translated this into English before finishing for the day. Amy used Chinese extensively for her postgraduate programme. Unlike the others, she read Chinese texts for background information in Semester One. When reading in English, she considered what it meant in Chinese, attributing this to her Chinese undergraduate business knowledge. Nevertheless, when she read in English, she took notes in English, and she seemed to have the capacity to write English assignments. When using Chinese sources for her Dissertation, she used Chinese notes and, under time pressure, wrote in Chinese. Whether less time-pressure or greater programme duration would have meant she would have switched to notetaking and writing in English from Chinese sources is unknown. Nevertheless, for these three participants there appeared to be a connection between language, knowledge development and capacity to express this knowledge in a specific language over which each participant had some control as knowledge was constructed.

This apparent language-specific construction of knowledge has potential implications for Personal Construct Theory which extend beyond the challenges Jankowicz (2003) identifies in communicating concepts across languages when the concept in one language does not exist in another. It possibly appears from these three participants' stories that the language in which complex knowledge is constructed in bilingual postgraduates influences the ease with which this knowledge can be communicated in different languages. This also has implications for bilingual international postgraduates who hope to discuss aspects of their postgraduate knowledge in more than one language. Given that this could also have implications for advice offered by educators, this is discussed further below.

7.3 Professional implications

This study highlights experiences that three international students had as told from their own perspectives and written as auto/biographies incorporating descriptions of numerous contextual features in each case study. To maintain the narrative flow and to allow readers from diverse backgrounds 'to discover their own path and truth inside the case' as Flyvbjerg (2004, p. 136) reports, I endeavoured to incorporate as much interview transcription data as possible within the word limit for this Dissertation. My selection of implications from my professional experiences and perceptions from my contexts follow but there may well be alternative and additional professional implications relevant to readers' experiences and perceptions of their own professional contexts. Perhaps the overarching professional implication this study demonstrates is the substantial variation in experiences. Caution must accordingly, I suggest, be exercised when referring to international students' cultural heritage or linguistic background with regards to experiences, beliefs or behaviours.

As a researcher my role was limited and although I raised participants' awareness of possible opportunities and facilitated some counselling, as a researcher I chose not to intervene further or more frequently. However, listening to international students' backgrounds and ongoing stories of their sojourns was enlightening and provided insights into their experiences and how they interpreted and reacted to these. Sharing these with other learners could promote discussion around ways of engaging socially, academically or transactionally over the course of a sojourn. Possible obstacles and barriers to engagement might be discussed as well as potential strategies that could be successful in particular contexts. Inviting learners to share their stories with each other to allow the sharing of challenges and suggestions for action may also facilitate learning. This section now sets out possible professional implications arising from the findings. Section 7.4 follows and provides an overview of how the findings have changed my practice.

7.3.1 Constructing knowledge by language

The implications from these three participants' stories are that the language in which complex knowledge develops in bilingual postgraduates might influence

the ease with which this knowledge can be communicated in the bilingual postgraduate's other language. Note-taking in English was perceived as being essential for test performance and easing the task of writing assignments in English with these participants. Learning strategies involving Chinese seemed to have varying effectiveness depending on the purpose and the individual. Accessing information in the L1 cannot be assumed to be as easy as, or easier than, accessing information in the L2 if complex knowledge has been constructed in the L2. For international postgraduates, this has profound implications if the postgraduate knowledge constructed in the L2 in the host country is difficult to communicate in the L1 in future contexts. If this is indeed the case, then creating opportunities for L1 interactions while in an L2-dominant ecosystem would be important to those who later aim to communicate their academic knowledge in their L1. Further studies could identify if my participants' experiences are shared by other bilingual students, but until then being aware of the possibility and discussing L1 and L2 engagement with bilingual students in a second-language ecosystem might raise awareness of the effectiveness and consequences of language choice on capacity to engage in each language.

7.3.2 Accessing bilingualism

As discussed, the language in which knowledge is constructed seems to matter, and in my study out-of-class participation utilised two languages. Rather than imply this is problematic, there are positive aspects to it despite possible challenges highlighted above. Kanno (2000) discusses the equal relevance of two linguistic worlds available to immigrants. This appeared to be just as pertinent for these academic migrant participants, not only with the local compatriot community but also with access to academic material and other online resources which were only available in participants' first language, albeit with the caveat that this may require more effort than assumed. Accessing this knowledge was beyond the reach of many of their non-compatriot peers and educators. Recognising the affordances offered through bilingualism could bring opportunities for international students to share these resources while also developing their criticality in both linguistic domains. Utilising international postgraduates' bilingual access to materials as a course component may be an opportunity to further draw on the capabilities of these students. This would

need to be balanced by access to L2 materials and probably involve discussions around possible consequences of using L1 and L2 for accessing material and developing knowledge.

7.3.3 Maximising collaborative learning

The participants collaborated with others in multiple ways to engage with their academic programmes. This they perceived as developing content and, to a lesser extent, linguistic knowledge. Collaboration also influenced beliefs and behaviours, which contributed to learning and assessment. As suggested in Subsection 7.3.1, there may be affordances in L1 group discussion of academic concepts being learned in a L2, particularly if these concepts might be communicated in an L1 future. Nevertheless, L2 discussions may be more relevant for effective academic engagement. However, the language of discussion is clearly only relevant when collaborative learning occurs and assigned group coursework generally became group-delegated individual work. Collaboration was also not without risk as Bella's story shows, in that her first semester group appeared to reinforce unproductive behaviours and resulted in low-level learning. This contrasted with her second semester experience in which diligent and knowledgeable group members apparently stimulated her interest, learning and productivity.

While almost all learning groups described by the participants were student-selected, thereby possibly encouraging autonomy by offering choice, self-selecting groups are potentially sub-optimal. By restricting autonomy at this stage, interacting with a greater range of others could stimulate ideas and lead to greater future autonomy. When educators direct students to work in groups, group work could be designed and guided with reciprocity in mind so that educators assign students to groups aiming for diversity of experience and cultural knowledge (Spiro, 2014). Even when teachers assign students to groups randomly, students end up with a larger, more diverse range of friends and 'learning collaborators' (Harrison, 2015, p. 422) than when left to self-select. Bamber and Tett (2000) recommend educators make explicit the positive aspects of diversity, with studies showing that diverse groups produce better quality work and receive higher grades (De Vita, 2002). My research shows some of the consequences and missed opportunities of allowing self-grouping, and the

potential for group work to be minimally collaborative. The professional implications include group allocation, communicating expectations, and designing group work that actually requires collaboration beyond task allocation and proofreading.

7.3.4 Recognising machine translation & bilingual strategies

Seemingly ignored on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, machine translation of English-language materials into L1 as a reading strategy appeared to be invaluable to specific individuals in particular time-restricted periods. This usurped reading strategies associated with skimming in English to select texts or parts of texts. Like all strategies, effectiveness is dependent on the context and the purpose, and it appeared here to be dependent on the individual participant. One participant found this strategy ineffective immediately. Another found it effective for quickly identifying pertinent content until she became familiar with the common structure of her texts when she then moved on to skimming in English. The third used it until she had fulfilled her task of selecting relevant publications. Given that all three participants experimented with machine translation technology this is clearly an option when studying in a second language. It therefore appears that this is worth substantially greater attention from EAP practitioners, for research into reading, and for L1 and L2 knowledge construction and subsequent L1 and L2 capacity to communicate that knowledge. The use of machine translation for writing appeared to have limited success and has attracted some attention from EAP researchers in recent years as technology has improved. Mundt and Groves (2016) predicted growing use for assignment writing, the urgent need for universities to develop an understanding of the implications and corresponding policies, and research, including how to incorporate machine translation into the learning process. This study supports Mundt and Groves (2016) assertions and extends them to include strategies that use machine translation for reading, note-taking and knowledge construction.

7.3.5 Communicating expectations

There were several instances where participants' academic expectations appeared to diverge from that of either course designers or Dissertation supervisors, and all instances involved assessed work. For example, Amy's initial

assignment was more descriptive than critically engaged. She learned to incorporate criticality after her feedback but too late to achieve a higher grade for her first semester work. All participants appeared to adapt to academic writing conventions by their sojourns' end, but Amy was particularly frustrated by discovering certain conventions only in the final few days. Similarly, the completion of group-work projects by delegating work and self-study potentially impacted on the intended learning outcomes. The main area where expectations may have needed clarifying was around Dissertations and of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. All three participants had very different expectations of their supervisors, and the supervisors managed their supervisees in very different ways. It may be that these expectations were clarified in student handbooks, online, or by lecturers and supervisors during lectures and meetings. Regardless of this, expectations were arguably not communicated effectively, and with such a large proportion of international students in the business school, it is unlikely that only these three participants had unmet or unrealistic expectations. Calls for academics to both clarify and examine their expectations in the pursuit of internationalisation are not new (for example Leask, 2007; McLean & Ransom, 2007; Trahar, 2010) but they appear not to have been attended to here. This study reiterates these calls for individual academics to clarify and examine their expectations. However, it seems necessary for institutional change so that communicating expectations effectively becomes policy, happens by default and is integrated into all engagement with students.

7.3.6 Engaging with accents

Although it might have been expected that Scottish accents would be unfamiliar, engagement with unfamiliar international accents received more attention. The initial unfamiliar international accents of lecturers and supervisors led to certain strategies to aid comprehension. This would suggest that those involved with designing academic English courses and assessment, including standardised English language exams such as IELTS, include a range of international accents in listening materials. The type of accent is less important than how learners might choose to engage with these to allow the unfamiliar to become familiar through exposure. For materials designers, this could involve activities which raise awareness of the strategies and resources learners currently use to support their engagement with unfamiliar accents. Other activities could include sharing

strategies and resources previous students have used so that these could be tried and evaluated by those endeavouring to engage with unfamiliar accents.

7.3.7 Supporting lecture engagement

PowerPoint slides were available in advance of lectures as part of the University's policy on accessible and inclusive learning. All participants used these to engage with lecture content, and two regularly prepared for lectures using them strategically to develop academic and linguistic knowledge before and during lectures. These resources proved themselves invaluable in facilitating two participants' engagement with unfamiliar accents. Knowing these materials might be widely used could provide lecturers who make materials available ahead of lectures with feedback that their endeavours are appreciated and prompt others to provide similar support for students participating in a second language. PowerPoint slides and associated strategies could also be integrated into EAP classes focussing on academic listening. Although it would be contentious, if pre-sessional courses are intended to develop and assess students' preparedness for university programmes, and if pre-lecture PowerPoint slide access is a feature of university courses, then assessing listening comprehension and lecture readiness could involve PowerPoint access. Making these available for students before listening assessments would provide optional resources to support listening comprehension and possibly establish strategies that could support academic programme success.

7.3.8 Acknowledging participation

Research to date on international student participation has been firmly located in the classroom and has tended to view international students as non-participatory (Murray & McConachy, 2018). This has generally been attributed to linguistic competence or cultural heritage (Straker, 2016). However, once out-of-class participation is considered, Amy and Jie actively participated for hours in preparation for each class and they then followed up with additional academic engagement. Bella minimally participated not as a result of a linguistic deficit or her cultural heritage, but through a combination of other factors which meant she deliberately limited her academic participation to achieve no more than a pass. The professional implication is to investigate and acknowledge out-of-class

participation to better understand varieties of academic participation and the possible ways that participation might be encouraged and facilitated by universities and educators.

7.4 Changes to my practice

Although I continue to consider the implications for my own practice since conducting this study, I have already incorporated aspects of the findings into my own practice. I write materials for pre-sessional and in-sessional classes and I have incorporated PowerPoint access and unfamiliar international accents into listening materials. I have included discussion activities that encourage students to consider their prior learning and their expectations of activities in the UK. These include discussion around L1 and L2 use, the possible consequences of using each, and potential out-of-class activities. Students then select and implement activities outside class, and in later lessons reflect on and share their experiences with peers.

Conducting longitudinal case studies using interviews and analysing the data so as to develop narratives were both new to me. I am keen to research in this way again. As fascinating as the initial interviews were, they did not prepare me for how the sojourns would progress. I am particularly keen to engage in further longitudinal research as continuity, change, and details emerge over time that provide insights beyond the reach of one-off interviews. Working with narrative was particularly challenging as identifying other published work which presented narrative results was difficult and I was unsure of how to structure Chapter 6. However, Chapter 6 seems to suit the dynamism required for a longitudinal study in which contexts, beliefs and behaviours are potentially changing.

7.5 Limitations

The limitations discussed with the methodology (Section 4.9) include the small number of participants, issues related to interviews, and other limitations. The small number of participants limits the generalisability of the findings. That these three volunteered to participate in English-language interviews and attended all four interview sessions may differentiate them from other Chinese business school postgraduates. Chance encounters might also have played a

significant role in their sojourns and even with the same participants, the findings could have been substantially different. What would have happened if Amy had been allocated student accommodation with flatmates to whom she felt a strong affinity? How would Bella's life have been different if she had multiple positive encounters with others in English in Semester One? What might Jie have done if her conversation partner had been non-committal and decided not to meet a second time? Small changes to chance interactions could have led to the same people having very different stories to tell. Chance encounters by their very nature could not be predicted or factored into the research design and inevitably impacted the participants' sojourns and the sojourns of any replication studies that follow this.

While interviewing in English attracted these specific participants, the stories can only be understood in the light of what my participants were willing and able to share. The anticipated limitation of conducting interviews in English was identifiable when Amy explicitly referred to the difficulty of expressing herself precisely. While she was conscious of being unable to select specific vocabulary, and self-conscious of her lack of engagement with spoken English between interviews, she did not appear less capable of communicating in English when given time to formulate her ideas. The interactive nature of the semi-structured interview allowed both of us to seek clarity when required. Where I was unsure of meaning during data analysis, I have identified this in the results with my interpretation of the meaning. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that interviewing in a second language was likely to result in a certain loss of precision and possibly limited what was said and how I understood it. Involving a translator might have allowed for greater precision but could also have other consequences that would perhaps have compromised the data, for example by further limiting the information participants were willing to share.

A significant limitation, for me as the researcher, was the maximum word length of the Dissertation. This restricted some of the detail that I would have liked to have kept in Chapters 6 and 7 when discussing the learning histories and the sojourn. While some Dissertations provide some information about all participants and then select one participant to provide greater detail (for example Navarro, 2016), I was keen to include all three participants' sojourns to capture how divergent these sojourns were. Even with the extended Dissertation

length, details had to be omitted which would have added further colour to the stories and, arguably, better represented the stories of the three participants. Nevertheless, this compromise still allowed the sharing of three very different stories.

7.6 Future research

The small scale nature of this research, which only included Chinese business school postgraduates at one Scottish university, and the large numbers of international students from diverse backgrounds engaging in many different contexts would suggest further research could be productive. Similar longitudinal research might be conducted to gain a more diverse understanding of language learning histories and the experiences of other international students during their sojourns. Apart from applying this research design to other students and contexts, future research might investigate other possible aspects of these journeys which seemed to emerge from the data. One possible area would be to investigate perceived compatriot norms amongst international students and how individual students perceive themselves as converging with or deviating from these. Similarly, investigating international students' goals and priorities on their postgraduate sojourns may uncover an array of unacknowledged objectives. Another area for further research could be into understanding how widespread the use of L1 strategies are for engaging with or creating texts, the nature and purpose of these strategies, and if, how, and why they change over time. A focus on strategies which involve machine translation could be particularly timely and inform possible future universities policies regarding machine translation for written assessed submissions and Mundt and Groves (2016) suggest such research is urgently required. Research into possible interactions between L1 and L2 knowledge development would also be useful to investigate whether the tentative findings here appear more widely, and if so, to consider the strategies that might be used to facilitate the discussion of complex knowledge in more than one language. Further research into all of these might help identify additional ways of better supporting international learners.

7.7 Contributions to the field

The findings from this study have made a specific contribution by bringing the theories of learner autonomy together from general education, adult education and second language education. In so doing, this study contributes to the fields of adult learner autonomy and autonomy in language learning as well as the areas of learner beliefs and strategies. This study has made tentative steps towards filling the research gap discussed in Section 7.1. By incorporating language-related activities rather than focussing solely on second-language-related activities, this study has uncovered aspects of language and learning which have gone widely unnoticed until now in research on autonomy in language learning and English for Academic Purposes. The interplay of first and second language used for social and academic purposes is an important contribution to both these fields. Revisiting Personal Construct Theory also appears to have been beneficial to understanding the development of knowledge, and this theory seems to bear scrutiny when applied to adult learner autonomy and autonomy in language learning despite being largely overlooked by those investigating second-language learning. And finally, the narrative analysis used in this Dissertation provides a possible use of narrative for research.

In addition to my reaction described in Section 7.2 and the changes to my practice in Section 7.4, my perspective has changed in several ways. I now see that international students accessing their postgraduate programmes close to the threshold linguistic requirements are not necessarily impeded from engaging socially and academically in English as I had thought. In addition, while I initially saw the use of L1 and machine translation as both a threat to students' L2 language development and a demonstration of social and academic disengagement, I now see it is an integral part of the learning process for some students, and possibly part of a transition process to learning in a second language. It might also be beneficial to encourage others who primarily engage in their L2 to engage in some learning in L1 depending on the current and future use to which they plan to put their knowledge. This is a pivotal change in my previous beliefs about the importance in engaging in an L2 ecosystem by avoiding L1 use. I have gained a broader perspective and can see wider implications for universities where acknowledging the importance of L1 use and

promoting this at particular points for specific purposes could be beneficial for students. There is the potential for English for Academic Purposes lecturers working with students on their academic programmes to reposition themselves as supporting Multiple Languages for Academic Purposes if my research findings around language use observed with other international students.

Appendix 1: list of problematic lexical items and preferred terms

Lexis to avoid	Preferred terms	notes
children/friends	Classmates	
skills work	Listening, reading, speaking or writing	
after-school classes	Bu Xi Ban =课后补习班/ 培训班 (private language school classes)	After school classes could refer to various classes e.g. extra classes for weak students extra classes for strong students private language school classes
Academic essays		
Authentic material		
Literature (academic) – it means Chinese literature / English literature	Academic articles or academic textbooks	Literature is understood as Chinese literature / English literature
Academic English		There is no difference between academic Chinese and general Chinese
Vocabulary notes	Vocabulary list Do you write down/collect the new English words on a notebook?	
Reading	Do you read anything in English?	Reading might be understood only as preparing for a reading comprehension test
Primary Secondary	Primary school Middle school High school	

Use past simple tense if possible – not past continuous

Appendix 2: interview themes

Interview 1

The purpose of this first interview is to find out more about your experience of learning English in China before coming to the UK, and what you plan to do to develop your English outside class while you are here.

I'm interested in how you learned English at

- Primary school
- Middle school
- High school
- University

And how the activities you did helped you improve (or maybe you think some activities didn't help you).

I'm also interested in

- How you learned English to meet the English language requirements for the University.
- What you plan to do to develop your English now that you are here. Perhaps you have plans to develop speaking, listening, reading or writing.

You do not need to write anything down, but if you can think about your English language learning at these stages, too, then I can ask you for more information.

Interview 2

The second interview will be mainly to explore how you have found your experience of coping with English academically, socially or any other way. I'm interested in what you have done (and what you have not done) to deal with living in an English-speaking environment. I'm also interested in why – your reasons for doing (or not doing) certain activities. I'm also interested in anything that might have stopped you doing what you planned to do.

- What have you done to develop your English skills outside class?
    - Materials used (and why)
    - Possible interactions with others (and why)

        - Ways of assessing language development (and why)
        - Was there a balance of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening)?
        - How you are feeling about these resources and ways of learning
        - Have your ideas about developing your English shifted in any way?

- With another 8 months of your Master's programme left, what are you planning to do (if anything) to develop your English skills outside class over the next few months?
        - Possible materials to use (and why)
        - Possible interactions with others (and why)
        - Ways of assessing language development (and why)
        - Is there a balance of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening)?
        - How you feel about these resources and ways of learning

Interview 3

The third interview will be similar to the second. The aim is mainly to explore how you have found your experience of coping with English academically, socially or any other way. I'm interested in what you have done (and what you have not done) to deal with living in an English-speaking environment. I'm also interested in why – your reasons for doing (or not doing) certain activities. I'm also interested in anything that might have stopped you doing what you planned to do.

- What have you done to develop your English skills outside class?
        - Materials used (and why)
        - Possible interactions with others (and why)
        - Ways of assessing language development (and why)
        - Was there a balance of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening)?
        - How you are feeling about these resources and ways of learning
        - Have your ideas about developing your English shifted in any way?

- With another 4 or 5 months of your Master's programme left, probably all your classes have now finished. What are you planning to do (if anything) to develop your English skills outside class over the next few months?
        - Possible materials to use (and why)
        - Possible interactions with others (and why)
        - Ways of assessing language development (and why)
        - Is there a balance of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening)?
        - How you feel about these resources and ways of learning

Appendix 3: project timetable

This research took a year at the data collection stage. The data collection was time-sensitive with the initial interview scheduled for the first month of the academic year. Subsequent interviews occurred in January and April/May, at the beginning of Semester Two and the Dissertation period respectively. The final interview was timed for the end of the academic year just after the deadline for students' Dissertation submissions.

July 2017	Application for ethical approval
September 2017	Appeal for participants
October 2017	Initial interviews
November–December 2017	Transcribing and checking ambiguities with participants; data analysis; writing
January 2018	Second interviews
February–March 2018	Transcribing and checking ambiguities with participants; data analysis; writing
April-May 2018	Third interviews
May–June 2018	Transcribing and checking ambiguities with participants; data analysis; writing
August 2018	Final interviews
September 2018	Transcribing and checking ambiguities with participants; data analysis; writing
October 2018–October 2019	Data analysis; writing

Appendix 4: Amy's prior language learning experiences and associated beliefs

Table 6: Amy's prior learning experiences

Amy	In-class	Out-of-class
Primary	Listen to and recall stories Learn and sing songs Focus on communication over linguistic accuracy	Memorise vocabulary lists outside class by saying the word, the translated meaning in Chinese and spelling the word
Middle	Listen & read prominent Speak & write to reproduce memorised texts. Focus on grammar	Memorise texts on the way to school Memorise vocabulary lists using primary school technique Write on self-chosen topic at weekends Correct teacher-identified written errors Work with peers outside class
High	Start alternate school days listening to English audio and mark prosodic features on accompanying transcript Start English class reproducing memorised texts	Memorise vocabulary and texts on the way to school, between classes, and in bed before sleep. Listen to wordlists & spell words as listening Memorise texts by either converting to Chinese, memorising Chinese & producing an English translation in class or memorise in English by reading aloud in English
University	Read and translate texts	Memorise vocabulary lists using the technique from primary school
IELTS		Practise exam with past papers Check unfamiliar repeated words Search online for writing tasks Write around 20 practice essays Seek feedback on essays Evaluate feedback on essays Search online for speaking tasks Write 16 answers to speaking tasks Memorise her personalised answers Seek feedback on spoken answers

Table 7: Amy's language learning experiences and associated beliefs

Behaviours	Beliefs
Works hard at times and is successful when she does	Language learning is the result of effort
Studied at her own pace and was rejected for prestige universities	Not studying hard enough leads to failure.
Says words aloud to aid memorisation	An effective way to memorise
Verbatim memorisation	Uninteresting but parts of larger memorised texts can be used in other texts when writing
Translated paragraphs into Chinese to learn them, and translated the learned stories back to English to display memorisation	Translation at paragraph level can be effective for language learning and fulfilling memorisation tasks
Focus on vocabulary building in order to improve reading	Building vocabulary develops reading
Attending to unfamiliar words in texts which re-occur, memorising these, and reviewing them pre-exam	Learning more frequent vocabulary is a priority
Telling stories in class in English at primary school	Speaking is necessary for second language development
Mark transcripts to show prosodic features of speech	Noticing and listening improves speaking
Regular speaking practice	Regular speaking develops fluency and memorisation but linguistic skills atrophy through lack of use
Memorising written responses for IELTS speaking test	Memorising helped but memorising is 'cheating'
Prepare of exams (IELTS) by working through past papers, and repeating these for each exam enrolment	Exposure to written and spoken language develops familiarity for receptive skill development
Aims for accuracy in texts	Making simple mistakes in her own writing is infuriating
Practicing and preparing for writing IELTS but not memorising written answers	practice is more important than memorising blocks of text
Written spoken responses in preparation for spoken exam	Personalisation of prepared texts aids memorisation
Peer work not used for error correction	Peers have limited knowledge
Peer work used to discuss and find answers to specific questions	Working with classmates can be relaxing Differentiation between who to ask for help due to perceptions of knowledge and ability
Contacting others for interaction and feedback, but also evaluating the quality	Feedback important for learning and developing speaking & writing

Placed in a lower level of students and worked hard to achieve high marks	It is more motivating to be the best student in a low group than to be rated lower in a high group Achievement is relative to one's peers achievement and affects confidence

Appendix 5: Bella's prior language learning experiences and associated beliefs

Table 8: Bella's prior learning experiences

Bella	In-class	Out-of-class
Primary	Read textbook dialogues & answer questions Listen to textbook dialogues & answer questions Complete gap-fill worksheets Spell dictated words Write on self-chosen topic	Memorise vocabulary lists outside class by saying the word aloud Correct teacher-identified written errors (only 1-in-4 done)
Middle	Read & listen similar to primary school but with longer texts Translate sentences and paragraphs	Listen daily to authentic materials: songs and television Check lyrics, and memorising English language songs through singing Watch television sitcoms with Chinese subtitles & re-watching later Use test preparation textbook for self-study Listen to school textbook audio material
High	Read English aloud daily Cover 20 pages daily Listen to additional audio with a range of accents Attend to neat handwriting Structure essays using models	Correct classroom errors Maintain an 'error journal' of linguistic errors and corrections Correct multiple drafts of essays with errors highlighted Memorise own error-free essay by reading aloud
University	Texts explained by teachers in English	Read English aloud daily Watch television chat shows Participate in English Corner Organise English Corner Mentor exchange students Meet English speakers in bars
IELTS		Practise exam with past papers Identify and read model answers Memorise model answers by reading aloud

Table 9: Bella's language learning experiences and associated beliefs

Behaviours	Beliefs
Does additional or non-monitored second language activities when it is interesting	Out-of-class second language engagement is dependent on teacher oversight or interest
Devoted more time to learning English than other subjects	Interesting content is motivating
Saying words aloud to aid memorisation	Useful
Read set texts aloud	Effective way to improve spoken English
Completes a large quantity of classroom material in class	Covering a large amount of content is more immersive and creates an English atmosphere
Watching television and listening to songs	Improved overall English skills
No note-taking or checking vocabulary when watching television	Exposure to English improves English
Using a help-for-test book	Exam preparation can be undertaken alone
Interacting with authentic material outside the classroom	Challenging material makes it achieving high test scores easier
Classroom audio incorporating less common accents	Challenging material makes it achieving high test scores easier
In-class use of reading texts meant for the next level of education	Challenging material makes it achieving high test scores easier
Exposure to working with other strong students	Different people successfully study in different ways
Participating in English Corner, guiding overseas students and meeting English speakers in bars	Engaging in English in social situations with others develops spoken English
Prepare for university exams by briefly memorising important parts but engage daily in English for hours for own purposes	Preparing for exams required different activities from using English
Prepare of exams (IELTS) by working through past papers	Exam preparation can be undertaken alone
Find and memorise model answers for IELTS writing	Exam preparation can be undertaken alone
Misses university classes	Everyone misses university classes

Appendix 6: Jie's prior language learning experiences and associated beliefs

Table 10: Jie's prior learning experiences

Jie	In-class	Out-of-class
Primary	Reading & listening to textbook dialogues	Memorise vocabulary lists outside class by writing the word and the translated Chinese meaning Listen again to textbook dialogues Record own textbook dialogues Listen to wordlists from the textbook Listen to additional audio from tapes
Middle **Interest-oriented class**	Read texts while teacher translates and discusses meaning Learn phonemic script Learn paragraph structure Recite memorised paragraph Discussion in English	Translate paragraphs Memorise vocabulary lists Write paragraphs / essays Correct teacher-identified written errors Maintain an 'error journal' of linguistic errors and corrections Memorise textbook paragraphs
High	Learn grammar Read a lot Complete multiple-choice exercises Complete weekly mock exam Follow teacher explain every exam answer Start and finish school day with exam listening practice	Do exam practice workbook Write weekly/biweekly essay Memorise a text sometimes
University	Read and listen to textbook English Follow Chinese explanations of English textbook material Discuss topics in English Follow some business courses in English Sit some business course exams in English Learn key business vocabulary by repeated exposure in texts	Preview upcoming textbook material Practise exam with past papers Listen to songs, check lyrics & sing Watch films & television programmes Check subtitles Read novels occasionally Talk to teachers

Exchange programme	Participate in English	Listen to BBC language learning podcasts
IELTS	Follow Chinese explanations about the exam and how to obtain higher grades Practise exam listening	Anticipate topics for speaking and writing papers Speak aloud on topics when alone Record spoken samples Listen to BBC language learning podcasts, repeat and record Send audio recordings to teacher for feedback daily Exam practice with past papers Practise writing logically

Table 11: Jie's language learning experiences and associated beliefs

Behaviours	Beliefs
Works hard at times and is successful when she does	Language learning is the result of effort
Writes words to aid memorisation	Boring and unnecessary
Repetition of individual words	Develops understanding of audio – bottom up processing
Listening to second language audio outside the classroom	Listening develops familiarity with sounds and rhythm of English
Watching television & checking dictionary but never taking notes	Memorisation through repeated exposure and following content
Listen to radio programmes aimed at language learning, repeat and record	Listening and repeating can help memorisation and pronunciation
Felt less confident with speaking on an exchange problem and acted to engage with listening and speaking in English	Practicing listening and speaking develops spoken ability & confidence
Found information about developing an academic discussion in English	Developing an academic discussion in English has to be learned
Listen to radio programmes aimed at language learning, repeat and record & sought feedback on recordings from IELTS teacher	Feedback important for learning and developing speaking
Anticipated certain IELTS topics and spoke aloud to practice when alone. Audio recorded her speaking.	Speaking and checking output is valuable for developing speaking
Continued to record and listen to check her inclusion of linguistic features	Speaking and checking output is valuable for developing speaking
Practiced and prepared but did not memorise for IELTS	Memorising texts may lead to inflexible responses to written or spoken prompts but practice can provide greater fluency
Learned English phonemic script	Useful for reading unknown words
Translated paragraphs into English	Very helpful, developed understanding of texts, and improved reading through reading more
Encountered frequent vocabulary in context thereby remembering it	Memorisation through repeated exposure in context
Self-corrected errors in own writing & maintaining an error correction diary	Useful for remembering correct uses of vocabulary and grammar
Prepared for class by looking ahead and checking meaning of unfamiliar words	Preparation aids understanding
Attended all university classes	
Self-study practice for exams	Exam preparation and practice can be done alone with a book for guidance.
Enrolled on an IELTS taught course	Different exams assess different applications of skills
Sought guidance on structuring responses to IELTS spoken and written prompts	Different languages convey thought and logic in different ways

Appendix 7: post-interview 1 information emailed

Dear [name removed],

It was really fascinating listening to your language learning history. It's going to form a very interesting part of my Dissertation.

If you think of anything else you want to discuss, or have any questions, email me any time.

In the meantime, here are some ideas for finding opportunities for speaking – these are ideas I posted for one of my classes on Moodle.

Here are a few we know previous students have become involved in.

University clubs and societies

There are 200+ clubs and societies at the University. They welcome new members and are a great way to get to know new people. [URL removed]

If you are reluctant to take time away from studying, you could choose a club that is associated with your academic area: [URL removed]

Sport

If you live in official student accommodation, you automatically receive a University '[proper noun removed]' membership to the sports club. All other students can join.

There are many different clubs to choose from: [URL removed] and some of them, such as the Ski & Snowboarding club, are proud that they socialise and party more than they actually ski or snowboard.

There are also drop-in sessions where individuals can meet to play with other people looking for partners and teams: [URL removed]

Volunteering

There are many opportunities to volunteer on and off campus and with a variety of people, and over shorter or longer periods of time: [URL removed]. As well as providing your with chances to develop your listening and speaking, volunteering looks great on your CV and is something you can talk about in an interview.

There is a full list with a summary of each position here: [URL removed]

English Conversation Programme

The student volunteer service run a conversation programme that will pair you up with an English speaker or let you know when there are ‘language cafe’ sessions you can join for a chat. [URL removed]

Language Exchange

Put your details on the noticeboard on the ground floor of the [proper noun removed] with your first language and the language you want to practice. You can then meet up with someone who wants to learn your language and you can learn theirs.

There are also often non-Chinese students joining the Confucius Institute looking for language exchange practice. Some of these students are preparing to study abroad in China. [URL removed]

Regards

Bob

Appendix 8: initial analysis examples

Figure 1: Amy's undergraduate years

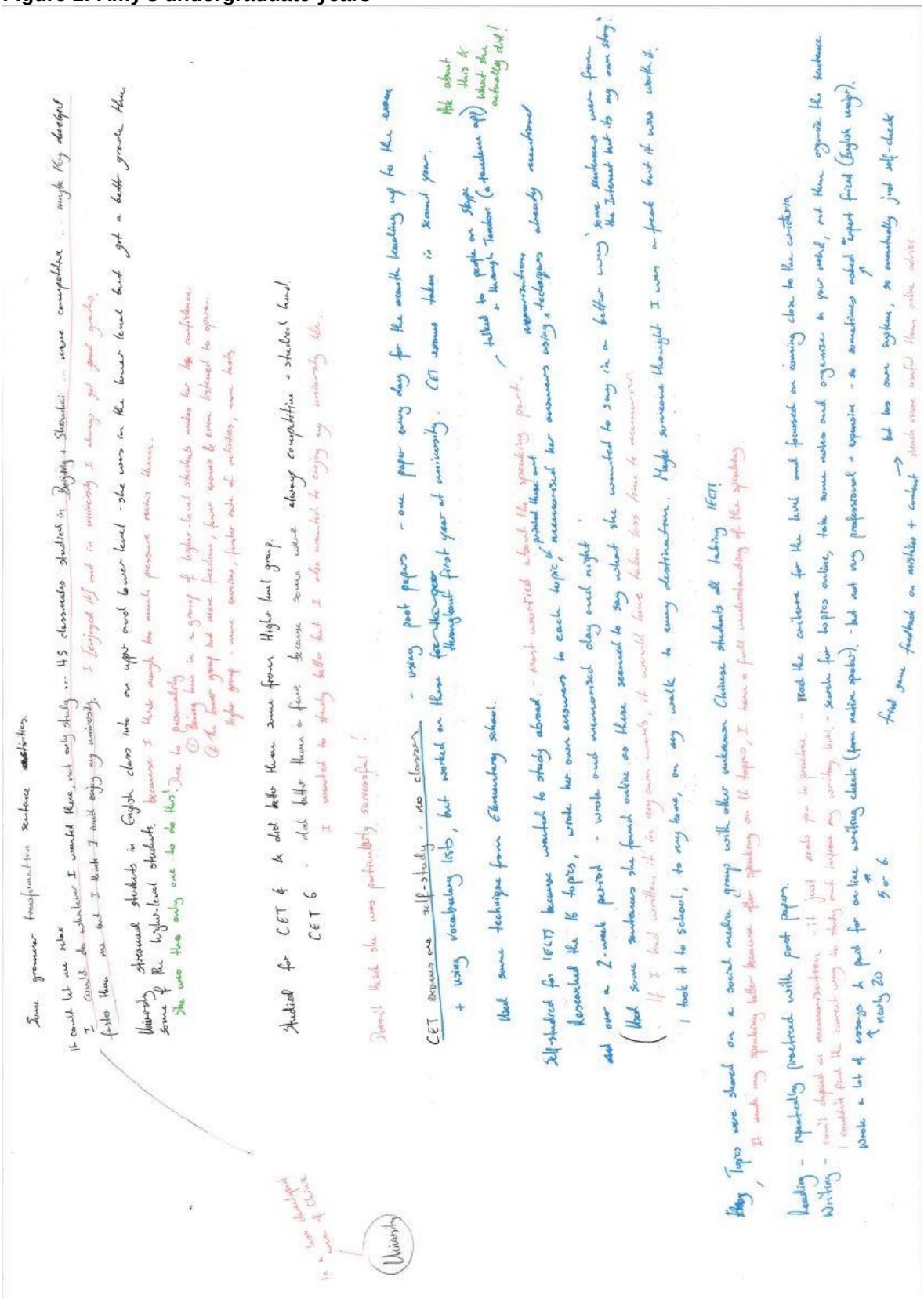
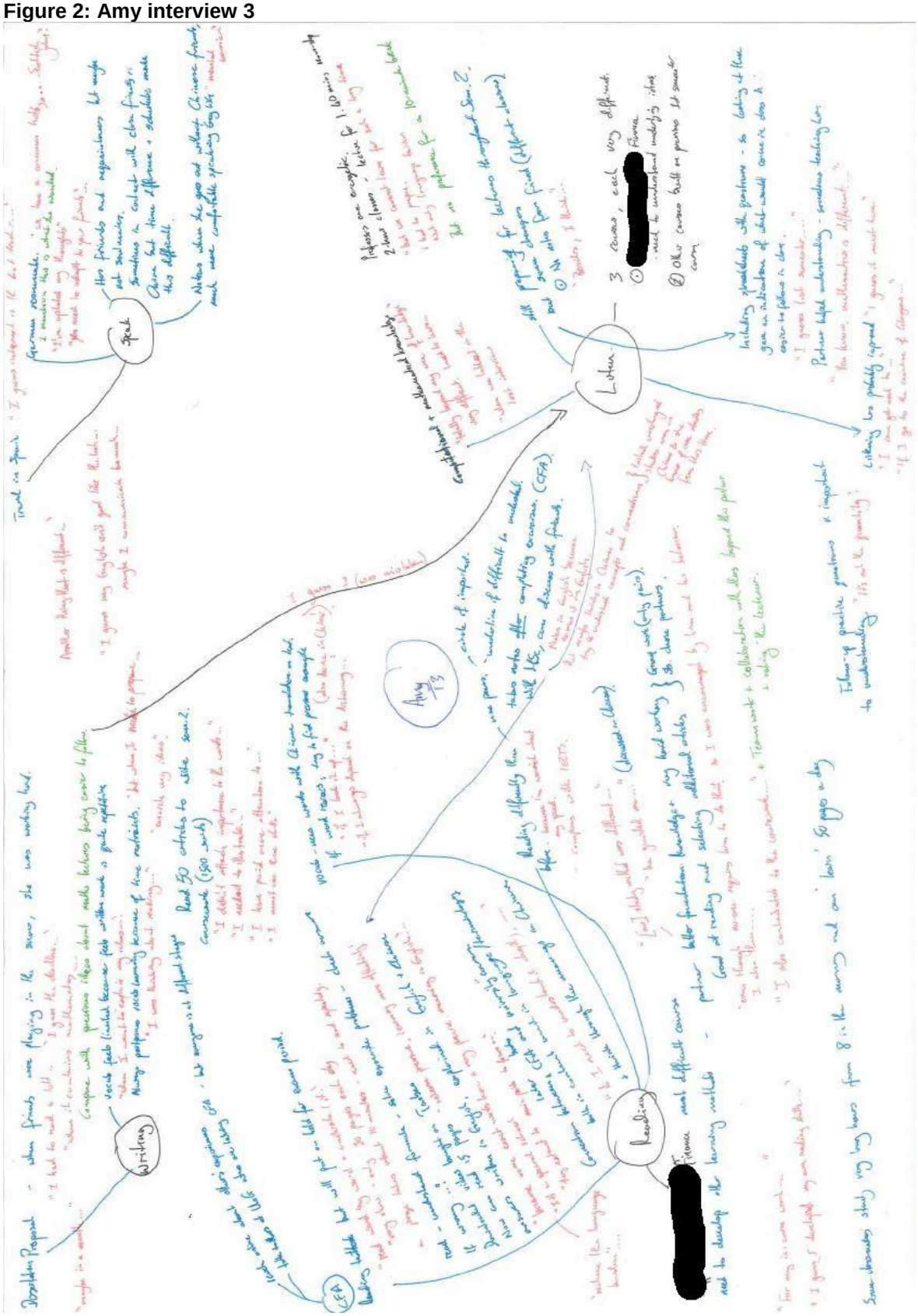


Figure 2: Amy interview 3



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