

The Role of Significant Others on International Students' Agency in Chinese Learning: Translanguaging Lens

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Abstract

This paper is based on a case study conducted on the international students' agentic choices and actions in response to such significant others' impact on their competency, confidence and achievements towards Chinese learning through being engaged in translanguaging pedagogical practices. In the study, the data was collected from a photo-elicitation interview in the form of a focus group among the student participants. The data analysis revealed that the participants tended to display peer-directed, teacher-facilitated and community member-reinforced agency towards speeding up their self-understanding competency in class, improving self-learning efficacy after class, and enhancing self-awareness of tones, as a result of interacting with diverse significant others in translanguaging space. Correspondingly, this study illustrated three categories of significant others, including class peers, native Chinese teachers and members of Chinese-speaking communities who can exert the influences on enacting international students' agency towards Chinese learning in a flexible, efficient and critical way. These findings offer an insight into shaping an overseas learners' agency-oriented approach to make Chinese as a learnable language from a translanguaging perspective. Furthermore, the concept of significant others is linked to the field of international Chinese language education. Thus, it is expected to provide some contributory implications to native and non-native Chinese teachers, educators and researchers, particularly on paying more attention to such emergent interactions between significant others and international students' agentic emotions, feelings and attitudes towards learning of Chinese language in different circumstances.

Keywords: significant others, students' agency, Chinese as a foreign language, translanguaging

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Under the influence of 'zhōng wén rè -中文热' (Chinese fever), more and more international students come to China for the learning of Chinese language in the local context. For instance, according to the statistics provided by Baidu Encyclopedia (2021), 2,300 overseas students have been officially enrolled in our university. The differentiated ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as educational experiences tend to result in their diverse goals, interests, difficulties and preferred instructional strategies in Chinese learning. It is further noted that these international students are confronted with the definite burden of obtaining the HSK4 (Hanyu Shuiping 4 Kaoshi) certificate. This is a very necessary condition of being conferred with a Bachelor Degree for the overseas students, in accordance with the graduation requirements newly set by the Ministry of Education of the PRC (People's Republic of China) in 2019. However, taking *Comprehensive Chinese* as an example, the fail rate is now between 30% and 50% in each semester among the international students of different majors in our university. Viewing this, the multilingual and multicultural co-existing practices not only arouse the problems and difficulties in striving for such a learning target, but also lead to the challenges and implications for fulfilling such a teaching purpose. In the following section, the major barriers in enabling the learnability of Chinese language for overseas students are identified and discussed.

1.2 Research Problem

First, the native Chinese teachers are always labeled as they are unable to think critically on choosing appropriate learning materials and teaching methods, in terms of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) to the overseas students (Orton, 2008; Moloney & Xu, 2018). The very essential factor is relevant to the disconnection between the students' intended pedagogy and the particularity of educational context (Duff & Lester, 2008; Wang, Moloney & Li, 2013). As a result, these Chinese lessons are always made boring, unrelated to the learners' daily lives and interests, as

well as beyond their real learning abilities (Singh & Han, 2014). The cramming and character drilling instructional style further impaired the CFL learners' agency (Zhang & Li, 2010). Another aspect is related to the use of "monolingual theoretic pedagogical framework" (Singh & Han, 2015, p.168). This means the value of international Chinese learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires as the intellectual resources are unable to be activated in class.

Henceforth, that is accompanied by the high fail rate, especially among those emergent learners during the process of pursuing the more advanced level in Chinese learning. Their depressed agency towards learning Chinese is not only mainly linked to the native teachers' pedagogical limitations, but also relevant to the prevailing belief on Immersion Pedagogy. That is to say, when the examination-oriented doctrine and the monolingual pedagogy meet diverse overseas Chinese learners, their interactional impact is incompatible with the learners' external agentic actions and inner anxiety towards mastering a new language - Chinese in an unfamiliar educational milieu (Cummins, 1998; Orton, 2008; Singh & Han, 2014). Thereby, such influential others cause international students to gradually lose their self-confidence and reduce their corresponding enthusiasm in learning of Chinese language.

It is also argued that the daily interaction with significant others helps to internalize the obtained information, form the agentic attitudes and shape the educational expectations within a particular socio-cultural reality (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Entwisle et al., 1988; Picou & Carter, 1976; Woelfel & Haller, 1971). In view of this, the members of target language community have the tendency towards influencing the overseas students' Chinese learning and usage through socializing with the native speakers in their daily lives.

1.3 Research Focus

The present study intends to probe into significant others and international students' agency through the translanguaging lens, which reciprocally interact for improving the learnability of Chinese language in class and daily community-based lives. To this end, this paper is anticipated to explore the categories of significant others that can exert a certain influence on enacting the international students' dynamic agency towards Chinese learning through shaping a variety of learning and lived experiences in class and after class.

2. Theoretic-Pedagogical Framework

2.1 Significant Others

Social psychologists have generally defined the significant others as "persons who exercise major influence over the attitudes of individuals" (Woelfel & Haller, 1971, p.75). Furthermore, significant others refer to the people who have robust influences, not only on an individual's daily life, but also are critical to his or her psychological well-being and confidence, as well as self-evaluation and behavior in the social environment (Sullivan, 1953; Woelfel & Haller, 1971). In an indigenous sense, significant others are generally composed of one's parents, siblings, relatives, spouses, teachers, friends and colleagues (Sullivan, 1953). Also, 'significant others' is the term especially used to refer to "persons in an adolescent's social relations with whom there is a perceived attachment and/or social influence relationship" (Blyth, Hill & Thiel, 1982, p.429). A significant other is also defined as "an individual who is or has been deeply influential in one's life, and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested, including members of one's family-of-origin and people encountered outside of family relations" (Andersen, Chen & Miranda, 2002, p.160).

For instance, the concept of significant others was used as instrument to pinpoint the people who played a positive role during student teaching experiences and the nature of significant others' influences. The reasons for listing such significant others included personal support, role development and professional skills (Karmos & Jacko, 1977). Moreover, it is argued that the students' educational expectations across races were largely influenced by the significant others. It was further found aspirations from parents, close relatives and peers to be distinct, not because of the learners' racial statuses, but because of these nominated others' categories (Cheng & Starks, 2002). Similarly, significant others in one's life enacted the multiple selves of an individual as the essence of interpersonal patterns occurred in circumstances of appropriate self-other relationship (Andersen et al., 2002). That emphasized parents, siblings, friends and colleagues not only may influence individuals by means of their existent companionship, but also by their mental representation, namely the psychological presence of such significant others (Shah, 2003).

With the development of significant others, this concept has been widely introduced into the field of foreign language education, especially for understanding how peers, teachers, family members and members of target language community, as significant others encourage or discourage students' engagement in foreign language learning. For example, one study adopted a focused essay technique to explore how the support from different people, combined with the learning context could mutually influence various learners' motivation on ESL learning based on the Self-Determination Theory (Noels, Adrian-Taylor, Saumure & Katz, 2019).

Given the above-mentioned, significant others play an influential role in individual's educational expectations and language learning motivation. Namely, the significant others are necessarily interacted with a person's daily lives,

insensibly transforming his/her original belief, emotion, feeling, attitude or self-identity cognition. Under this psychological interference, people tend to actively make immediate changes and take initiative actions in diverse fields. However, it is controversial that significant others are not always advantageous or detrimental (Zayas, Surenkok & Pandey, 2017). From this perspective, learners' agentic awareness and adaptation tend to be contingent in different circumstances. However, there is rare literature on how significant others potentially enrich the learning of Chinese language, along with a stance of learners' agency in the authentic learning context and living communities.

2.2 Learners' Agency in Foreign Language Learning

From a sociological perspective, agency means "people's ability to make choices, to take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation" (Duff, 2012, p.417). It is with clarity that agency designates positioned practices, or the progressive aspects of individuals to take actions (Rigby, Woulfin & März, 2016). Agency is thus a vital element for someone seeking to learn a second language in depth, hence giving him/her a different perspective on how to begin learning and interacting in the target language community (Duff et al., 2013). It indicates that students can perform initiative actions in constructing their own learning process. Also, their learning practices tend to be influenced by the significant others within both macro and micro environments.

From the perspective of social psychology, Social Cognitive Theory was utilized to illuminate the meaning of human agency. People are not simply adapted and suited to the society. However, they are the contributors to their life circumstances with being self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating and self-reflective (Bandura, 2006). With the guidance of social psychology, research on agency has been applied to the field of leadership, child care, science learning and foreign language education. Especially, in the field of foreign language learning, agency is connected with other elements to affect and develop one's language learning. For example, van Lier (2010) proposed an ecological perspective regarding language learning, which includes several concepts, such as context, relationship, identity and agency. Informed by this point of view, learners' agency indicates their every influential action and behavior happened spontaneously in a conducive learning environment (van Lier, 2010). Furthermore, study on learners' agency has recently been presented with the dynamic development. Mercer (2012) showed the learners' personal agency as a belief emerges from a complex dynamic interaction of components in multiple levels of language learning context.

Meanwhile, analyzing the environment for enacting the learners' agency is a tendency towards criticizing the previous second language education, which only focused on its pedagogical practices. The environmental impact on agency emphasized that the resourceful structure, classroom space and teachers' concern are full of empathy and significance that affect EFL learners' agency (Wassell, Fernández Hawrylak & LaVan, 2010). Given the classroom environment, to a larger extent, the very social network, such as diverse living communities for foreign language learners is extremely essential for deploying their agency (Toohey & Norton, 2003). Similarly, Lamb (2013) identified the socio-cultural structure is a broad environment that can both constrain and facilitate human agency.

Notwithstanding, research revealed that students with low agency tend to lead to their unsatisfied learning outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). To an opposite side, learners with a high level of agency have the tendency towards seeing language learning as an active process with the clear goal and achievement pursuits. That is to say, the "perceived agency is the degree to which learners believe that the efforts they are putting into the language learning process is sufficient with respect to the learning objective" (Brown, 2014, p.101). In this sense, multiple levels of international students' agency potentially embody their differentiated learning feedback, self-efficacy, awareness, achievements and strategy uses towards Chinese language, particularly when interacting with diverse significant others within a certain context.

Considering this, the past studies on agency, especially in the field of foreign language education, were mainly focused on the influential factors, such as institutional environment, parents and social structure. Up to date, rare research on learners' agency in foreign teaching and learning was connected to the concept and role of significant others, especially on teaching Chinese as a foreign language to the international students.

2.3 Translanguaging as a Pedagogy

Within the educational setting, translanguaging is identified as "a pedagogical practice where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use" (García & Wei, 2014, p.20). From a deeper perspective, translanguaging is referred to as "both the complex language practices of plurilingual individuals and communities, as well as the pedagogical approaches that use those complex practices", and as "the product of acting and languaging in our highly technological globalized world" (García & Wei, 2014, p.20). In addition, Canagarajah (2011, p.401) claims that translanguaging is the embodiment of "the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system". Meanwhile, Baker (2011, p.288) argues that translanguaging is "the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages".

As translanguaging is brought into foreign language teaching, it encounters conditions of dynamic bilingualism (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). García (2009, p.54) points out that dynamic bilingualism implies that language learners are necessarily endowed with “differentiated abilities and uses of multiple languages” regarding the language use in the new age from the senses of being both physical and visual. Such a phenomenon mirrors “a general and holistic concept of which translanguaging is a process” (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012, p.656). Considering the essence of translanguaging, especially when it occurs in the classroom of foreign language teaching, the relevant instruction strategies are applied to fully mobilize the language learners’ possible bilingual proficiency in meaning producing. A case in point is Creese and Blackledge (2010, p.112) who put forward a malleable bilingual pedagogy, which “adopts a translanguaging approach and is used by participants for identity performance as well as the business of language learning and teaching”.

Along with the adaptable bilingual pedagogy, another standpoint on language ecology is proposed. Such a new outlook is mainly concerned with “the study of diversity within specific socio-political settings in which the processes of language use create, reflect, and challenge particular hierarchies and hegemonies, however transient these might be” (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p.104). In this sense, ecological awareness on foreign language education is advantageous for generating a “panoramic space”, where “perception and action go together” via “sustaining a rich multisensory experience of, in and with language”, thus “providing the conditions for emergent learning” (van Lier, 2008, pp.54-55). An ecological point of view regarding translanguaging not only enables the students’ full linguistic repertoires to be enacted, becoming the dynamic bilingual/multilingual users, but also encourages them to obtain fresh knowledge from their developing bilingual/multilingual identity towards Chinese learning (Wells, 1986; Gort & Sembiante, 2015). Therefore, it is asserted that “such ecological models acknowledge that bilinguals’ languaging practices are dynamic, malleable, and influenced by naturalistic opportunities in the environment that tap into their potential to develop and use multiple languages, language varieties, and literacies” (Gort & Sembiante, 2015, p.9).

With regards to the above, the notion of translanguaging provides a malleable and ecological pedagogy for teaching Chinese language to those emergent bilinguals or multilinguals in the Chinese educational context through enacting their agency towards interactions with such significant others in the local learning and living communities. Therefore, the research question proposed in this study is:

RQ: How can the significant others contribute to enacting the international students’ agency towards learning of Chinese language through engaging in translanguaging pedagogy?

3. Methodology

3.1 Case Study as the Research Method

A case study as the empirical research method was adopted in the present study, for it allowed the teacher-researcher to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p.15). When it comes to the context, it is pointed out that a phenomenon being explored can be “in its natural surroundings, namely in the case’s natural context” (Swanborn, 2010, p.13). Furthermore, case study is powerful in allowing the problems to be studied deeply by providing robust attention on a group of participants (Yin, 2018). Just as the current study focused on understanding the categories of significant others, and their influences exerted on the international students’ agency towards Chinese learning in the real education and living context. Considering this, the next part will first cast light on the research site and participants, followed by the detailed processes, as well as the instrument used for data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Site

It is informed that case study can be a “one case (single) study” or a “several cases (multiple) study” (Swanborn, 2010, p.21). This study was situated within a southern university in China, which provides a series of Chinese language courses to international students. Principally, a Chinese class was the research site, as the teacher-researcher was offered such an opportunity to deliver lectures for international students. It is the very place that students are willing to express their complex and controversial emotions, as well as to share various experiences and feelings on Chinese learning. Hence, a single-sited case study was naturally shaped.

3.3 Participants

As a lecturer in this university, the researcher undertakes a Chinese course entitled *Comprehensive Chinese* for the international students with the level of HSK3. These students made up a Chinese class during the Spring Semester of 2021, lasting from March to June. The learners in this class are endowed with the mutual goals, being able to pass HSK4, as well as equipped with such capability for a prosperous career or higher education. Meanwhile, they have the following characteristics:

1. They are emergent Chinese language learners with the intermediate level.

2. Most of them are from African ethnic tribes, sharing cultural similarities, common linguistic features, as well as social behaviors.
3. The language they prefer to use for daily communication with their peers is French, especially with the ones from the same origins, while they can also speak English and Chinese, mainly for knowledge intake and survival through their day-to-day lives.
4. They have been learning Chinese language for at least two years in China.

Considering this, this cohort of student participants not only is eager to attain immediate and fresh Chinese knowledge in class, but also is ready to apply the learnt Chinese terms and phrases to their real-life situations through the interaction with the local people in Chinese-speaking communities. In order to protect the identity and privacy of these participants, some Chinese names were utilized as their pseudo names in this research project.

3.4 Data Collection Method

The current study mainly employed the photo-elicitation interview (PEI) as the instrument for the data collection. Four students volunteered to participate in the interview. Two of the students were male, two were female, with their average age 23. It is here worth noting that during the interview, one of the participants left for a while, and the expressions were rarely relevant to address the proposed research question. Thus, no such data excerpts were presented. All the relevant data was gathered with the approval of the participants' signing the consent form for agreeing to participate in this study.

The PEI in this study included the following five phases (Torre & Murphy, 2015). First, the relevant photographs were gathered and selected. Second, interview questions (see Appendix 1) were raised and prepared in advance to make the whole process relevant to the proposed research focus and research question. Third, the interview protocol was designed and adopted to guide such a process to be conducted smoothly and purposefully. Then, the interview was carried out in the form of a focus group at the end of semester after class, through employing the appropriate photographs and general questions to elicit educationally purposeful conversations from the participants. Finally, the collected data was recorded into the audio files, then transcribed and stored in the text documents for the data analysis.

Here, it is worth mentioning that the photographs used in the interview were composed of the photos taken in class with their permission, and screenshots from daily Chinese lesson plans. Such electronic photographs were printed out and provided with a short description on the back of each photograph, playing the role of a caption. Afterwards, by combining annotations and images, a miniature album was created. By doing so, the visualized materials, together with the guided interview questions were accessible to the participants for providing the detailed description and information during the interview process. Meanwhile, Chinese was the main language used for conducting the interview, along with some simple English explanations when needed. Responses from the participants were mainly made by Chinese, along with a little bit of English. However, some Chinese expressions were the fragmentary sentences. Considering this, their interview transcripts were firstly made complete in understandable Chinese expressions and sentences, and then translated into the concise and accurate English texts for the data analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials" (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013, p.12). In this study, a two-cycle coding process was employed to "retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units" (Miles, et al., 2013, p.73). Table 1 summaries the coding methods adopted, as well as the coding purposes and the outcomes attained through engaging in two major cycles for coding.

Table 1. Choices of coding methods and achievements of coding

Coding cycle	Coding method	Coding purpose & attainment
Open coding	Descriptive coding	Establishing basic awareness and sense of familiarity with the generated data, such as recognizing a catalog on the significant others and identifying the influences on these students' initiatives towards the learning of Chinese language both in class and after class.
	In Vivo coding	
	Emotion coding	Illustrating the participants' actual feelings, emotions and attitudes relevant to their agency, as well as improvements towards Chinese learning, based on the feedback and comments deriving from the educationally purposeful conversations with a group of students.
	Evaluation coding	
Focused coding	Pattern coding	Grouping the embodiment of various significant others and the corresponding influences into the participants' daily Chinese learning and usage both in class and after class, thereby seeing and justifying the significance and effectiveness of such 'others' in enriching the their agency, followed by their achievements towards the learning of Chinese language in the local educational context and living communities through a translanguaging lens.
	Axial coding	Bettering the major themes, categories and concepts identified for further understanding regarding how to link them to the research question proposed for the intended inquiry.

Afterwards, four procedures were adopted to make meaning for the collected data and writing data analysis (Singh, 2013).

Procedure 1: provide the evidentiary excerpt which can be a direct quotation, a table, a visual photograph, a vignette or a descriptive excerpt.

Procedure 2: introduce the evidentiary excerpt by providing oriented information that refers to the source of the excerpt.

Procedure 3: write a sentence introducing the significant concept to be discussed here, which is a conceptual statement that identifies the key analytic point.

Procedure 4: write a conceptual commentary, accompanied by using theoretical tools grounded in the details of the excerpt.

Based on those emerging conceptual constructs, the corresponding findings will be presented in the next section, followed by the discussion and conclusion.

4. Findings

The analysis of data identified three main categories of significant others who play an influential role on overseas students' agency in their learning of Chinese language in the local context. The significant others include the class peers, the native Chinese teachers, as well as the members of Chinese-speaking communities. Such significant others as a catalyst enact these students' agency in effectively engaging themselves with Chinese learning, being embodied through the generated themes including: speeding up self-understanding competency in class, improving self-learning efficacy after class, and enhancing self-awareness of Chinese tones to reduce communication barriers in their daily lives. Each of the following subsections is entitled with a theme from the collected evidence.

4.1 Class Peers as Significant Others

The student participants reported that how they thought their peers could influence and change their agency, as well as their corresponding actions and attitudes towards learning of Chinese language in class, especially when it comes to understanding synonyms and difficult Chinese expressions.

4.1.1 Agency Towards Speeding up Self-Understanding Competency in Class

The following data excerpts indicated that students regarded the immediate assistance and support from their peers as such a significantly effective strategy in facilitating them to understand the confused Chinese synonyms in class, especially from those who were easy-going and ready to provide help to others at any time. For instance, participants talked about how they felt in class, with a primary focus on increasing his speed and ability to master the meanings and usages of Chinese synonyms:

(发发) I think I could ask 卡卡 for help, as he is an international student like me in class. If 卡卡 understood that word, he was able to use the simple language and words to explain it to me. More importantly, both his speed and style in explanation were not so fast as the teacher. 卡卡 can use other languages, such as English to learn Chinese, translate and explain the meanings of synonyms to me in French, helping me to understand the usages of such synonyms in French more quickly and better. If 卡卡 made me understand the basic meaning, then the teacher explained it further and I can understand it better. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

According to this student's feedback, in class there exists a person like 卡卡, who is from the same country as him and also can speak English and their native language - French. More importantly, such a person not only has a very solid foundation with Chinese language, but also he is quick to understand and master new Chinese knowledge. Apart from this point, 发发 clearly positioned himself and 卡卡 to be the overseas students, namely he could identify the learning support from the person, who is from his same ethnic group and shares cultural, linguistic and logic similarities in gaining a language. In this sense, 卡卡 can not only use the students' commonly spoken language - French to respond to his peers' learning difficulties in class, but he can also improvise and adopt the appropriate pitches and gestures that classmates could easily make sense of. Such support from significant others is meaningful to improve learners' capability in gaining new knowledge, as they can bestow learners a sense of being cared and concerned due to the immediate feedback and interpersonal relevance (Noels, et al., 2019; Hosek, Houser & Richmond, 2017; Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). It has been suggested that peers' in-class initiative direction helps to develop a sympathetic and participative classroom atmosphere, rather than a competitive and disengaged one (Clarke, Howley, Resnick & Rosé, 2016). As a result, under the immediate guidance from such an influential person in class, this participant found himself a quicker learner in Chinese class, as he could also follow and master the teacher's lesson content and instruction better.

It can also be seen that the Chinese language classroom, by its very nature, is a particularly micro-social context in which the students are entitled to enact their agency through dialoguing purposefully and interactively, thereby equalizing their learning opportunities in such a cooperative environment (Stromquist, 2015; Rigby et al., 2016). In essence, 发发's immediate agency was driven by such a significant peer in class, which was reflected in his actively dealing with the learning encounters and frustrations caused by the Chinese synonyms. However, 娜娜 added and emphasized that:

(娜娜) 卡卡's personality is different from others. He is not kind of an arrogant person, but if it is another student, maybe that student can think like "I'm the better one, I'm the good one", but that doesn't help. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

Obviously, when it comes to the peers' influence on helping others out of Chinese learning in class, this participant highlighted the significance of such a person's personality. If that person is extremely complacent, egocentric and selfish, it is thought that he or she is not willing to offer any prompt assistance in class, and that will make no difference for other students' agentic turn to solving the problems in Chinese learning. It is contended that the learners' agency would be fluctuated, in spite of the significant others belonging to the same category (Zayas, et al., 2017). Likewise, significant others are always indifferent or unwilling to provide the immediate support (Noels, et al., 2019). In this study, the very essential influence from such others tends to be brought by the persons with the warm and enthusiastic personality and such like that. Given that, peers as the significant others contribute to broadening the students' mastery on novel Chinese knowledge in a more extensive, flexible and critical way.

4.2 Native Chinese Teachers as Significant Others

In this section, student participants expressed their ideas on native Chinese teachers as another category of significant others, who play a critical role in enriching their agency, enhancing their confidence and maintaining interest in learning Chinese.

4.2.1 Agency towards Improving Self-Learning Efficacy After Class

The following participants' accounts are relevant to their thoughts on the teaching strategies employed by different Chinese teachers, which profoundly impacted their efficiency and competency, as well as emotion and attitude towards Chinese learning. It is worth noting that one of the participants recalled and commented as follows:

(娜娜) It is my first time to meet such a teacher who uses actions or his performing to introduce new language to us. Using actions in learning a new language or abstract knowledge can make us relaxed and under no pressure during such a process. But the previous Chinese teacher gave us much more homework to do and I needed to carry all the pressure after class. Now when I reviewed some learnt Chinese knowledge at home, and saw that Chinese word, I would think of those actions that you performed and showed to us in class, as you were explaining the vocabulary meanings. Because you did

this, this, this..., then I copied your *actions and performances to help me recall the meanings of these words*. Right, I still have a deep impression of it. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

This student's feedback suggested that the native Chinese teachers play a significant role in making Chinese learnable for her, as well as the efforts paid and emotion devoted to her Chinese learning after class. When being compared with her previous Chinese teacher, this participant could still remember the learning pressure and burden that she had to suffer and needed to survive from after class. At that time, to achieve her learning goals and improve herself in Chinese, all that has been focused on such unlimited assignments and the way of rote-learning incurred by those conventional teaching concepts and the out-of-date instructional styles in the local educational context.

However, the participant recognized that the current Chinese teacher could utilize vivid and flexible instruction approaches in class, such as acting, converting the abstract and dead vocabulary knowledge into the perceivable and lively actions. Viewing this, the student has been made to rid herself of the original overload imposed by the previous Chinese teacher after class. In this sense, it is identified as the very essential significance and direct influence exerted by such totally different Chinese teachers, particularly being reflected on their preferred teaching methods applied to the Chinese learning in class. In turn, such ongoing impact would be tangibly transferred to the student's capable self-learning and the self-directed review with high-efficiency after class. Also, during the process of the conversation, this participant described and repeated her fresh and fabulous Chinese learning experiences and feelings with full enthusiasm and strong memory regarding how she was deeply influenced by this new Chinese teacher as she never met before.

Informed by the above evidentiary information, after class this participant was able to consciously imitate such meaning-making body movements and gestures generated by the Chinese teacher in class, as she emotionally preferred and connected. In doing so, that not only contributes to enhancing her memorization of the newly learnt Chinese vocabulary, but also increasing her self-learning efficiency in Chinese after school. Research findings indicated that the support from instructors was the most noticeable aspect of the youth's academic success with no gender discrepancies, especially within an ecological education atmosphere (Plunkett, Henry, Houlberg, Sands & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008). In this regard, it can be seen that if a teacher employs the instruction strategies that can suit the students' learning habit and preference, such teaching influence tends to be extended to deploying the learners' agentic actions on efficiently autonomous learning after class. Another salient difference that has been made was concerned with her identity cognition in learning Chinese, namely from a passive help-seeker to an active assistance-provider, shown in the next accounts:

(娜娜) Originally, I preferred to make a friend to learn Chinese and ask him/her some questions and ask for help from him/her after class. Namely, I needed some help from others in my Chinese learning before. But now I can help my friends with their Chinese learning. I think I have this kind of capability and confidence. And I became very good and happy. I changed myself. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

Having equipped herself with appropriate learning competency and skills, this participant could turn to actively applying her language expertise and confidently providing immediate support to her peers after class. That is to say, under the mutually positive influence from the peers and the Chinese teacher, this participant transformed herself, from being a passive knowledge receiver to an agentic knowledge contributor. Namely, her learning achievements have also been bettered, being a significant other to influence others' Chinese learning. In the meantime, this participant's learning satisfaction interacting with her learning process, as well as the learning outcomes were mutually produced by her hard work, and the proper pedagogy employed by the Chinese teacher. All that was influenced by the Chinese teacher as a significant other on how to engage the international students in their learning of Chinese language in class.

Nevertheless, it is claimed that students tend to be easily regarded as the 'puppets' due to their ignored agency, choices or actions during the process of constructing learning experiences (Rind, 2016). Viewing this, the native Chinese teachers as the significant others are supposed to support the overseas learners' autonomy by acknowledging their perspectives and providing learning opportunities to them in an autonomous and personally meaningful manner (Noels, et al., 2019). Accumulatively, this student's Chinese learning achievements have been an outstanding progress. As a result, her confidence and interest in learning Chinese is undoubtedly enacted, reshaped and preserved, which can be seen from the following data excerpt:

(娜娜) And that improved my learning achievements a lot. Yes, yes, yes, that also increased my learning confidence and interest. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

Furthermore, when it comes to the international students' daily attendance rate, there always exists a big problem. However, such an issue could be solved through the influence exerted by Chinese teachers' engagement in the translanguaging pedagogy to a certain extent, which was informed by the following description:

(娜娜) Now, I enjoy this Chinese learning process. Every morning, when I realize that we have Chinese lessons today, even if I feel kind of tired and I don't want to come to class, but I just think like there will be something new, like I have to go, I have to be there. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

It is clear that constructing the teaching process to be attractive and desirable has more possibilities of retaining Chinese language learners in class. Such a learning process potentially would meet students' learning needs, and the desired instructional modes that match their characteristics. Considering this perspective, it is expected to experience diverse learning activities and tasks with the mobilization of learners' agency, under the influential facilitation from the native Chinese teacher. This reinforces the statement that significant others possess the aptitude to shape one's motivational relevance, further promoting one's spontaneous goal accessibility, commitment and pursuit from the psychological presence (Shah, 2003). Moreover, another participant mentioned two main aspects that possibly lead to the students' incomprehension and disengagement in Chinese class:

(发发) If I can't understand the teacher's explanation, there may be two reasons as follows. The first one is that the teacher was speaking fast. Another one is that the teacher was using a more difficult word to explain the new knowledge. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

It is suggested that if a Chinese teacher talks too fast and is unable to use the very basic words from students' vocabulary inventory, especially when explaining new and difficult Chinese knowledge, learners would fail to follow the immediate instruction in class. In this sense, on the one hand, significant others are not extremely positive or negative, which are like a double-edged sword (Zayas, et al., 2017). However, on the other hand, it is argued that significant others can also frustrate a learner's self-determination, making the learner lack of interest or lose his/her confidence (Noels, et al., 2019). Indicated by such feedback, the native teachers as the significant others for the overseas students' learning of Chinese language embody their willingness and capability to utilize those appropriate, innovative and popular teaching strategies in class. Therefore, such student-centered and visualized pedagogical practices are beneficiary in progressively and positively enacting those overseas learners' agentic performances and achievements in Chinese learning, which are not just limited in class, but extended to outside classroom.

4.3 Members of Chinese-Speaking Communities as Significant Others

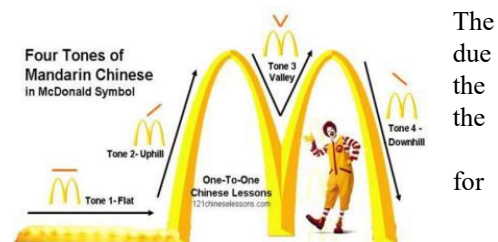
The overseas Chinese learners are necessarily involved in the interaction with the local people in their daily lives in China. To survive from the very essential situations, such as shopping, seeing a doctor, or buying some medicine, they have to equip themselves with clear expressions and pronunciations. The data below illustrate that the participant experienced her unexpected communication hindrances when contacting with the native in Chinese-speaking communities for accomplishing a very basic practice.

4.3.1 Agency towards Enhancing Self-Awareness of Tones

Having encountered the communication barriers in daily lives, for instance, one of the participants realized the tone problems like that:

(丽丽) Tones are very important to us. Because when we are outside the classroom, native Chinese people always say: “听不懂，听不懂。” If we don't pay much more attention to the tones or master them well, we tend to encounter some embarrassing situations in our daily lives. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15)

(丽丽) I had a toothache once and went to the chemist. person there couldn't understand my pronunciations to my poor tones. So, I wrote down my expressions on phone and showed to her. Even though we are now in intermediate class, our tones have big problems. The McDonald's picture you used in class is very helpful correcting and improving our tones. (Focus Group Interview, 2021/6/15) (downloaded from <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/525162006519100551/>)



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It can be seen that this participant was made to emphasize the importance of correct and standard Chinese tones, derived from her unsuccessful and unforgettable experience. Due to her problematic tones, the dialogue with a local pharmacist was unable to be performed smoothly, even though they were in a familiar context. Then, typing on the phone was adopted as an alternative for achieving her communication purpose. Obviously, this student could immediately perceive the major problem that was relevant to her poor tones. The very direct feedback provided by this native Chinese speaker was this student's ambiguous Chinese pronunciations. That sense of unacceptable identity was reflected in this participant's perceived social barrier from a member of the local community. It is defined as a relatively stable

cognition and impression that significant others are concerned about us and value us (Brock, Sarason, Sanghvi & Gurung, 1998).

However, as an intermediate Chinese learner, her pronunciations could be understood by Chinese teachers with few efforts, due to their frequent contacts in class. However, in daily community-based lives, especially when meeting the strange people in a local environment, overseas students' Chinese pronunciations are always labeled as being problematic and unable to be recognized to a large extent. Having had such an embarrassed experience with a native pharmacist of the local community, this participant naturally devoted her agentic awareness to enhancing the accuracy of her Chinese pronunciations caused by the problematic tones.

Based on a holistic perspective, it is demonstrated that significant others from a certain community could intervene one's lived experiences due to their unprejudiced stances (Mattsson & Johansson, 2019). Notably, the members of Chinese-speaking communities as the significant others are identified as the effective mechanisms in unconsciously facilitating the international students to perceive their Chinese learning difficulties, and take initiative to strive for better Chinese learning attainments (Mac Intosh, Martin & Ewing, 2020). Given that, in class when such a visualized approach was adopted, as a translanguaging pedagogy, students with the problematic tones could intentionally engage themselves into this learning activity for bettering their Chinese pronunciations.

5. Discussion

Based on the photo-elicitation interview, the present study has examined the three categories' significant others who could impact the international students' agency in learning Chinese through engaging in those translanguaging pedagogical practices. Here, it was found that these significant others include the class peers, the native Chinese teachers, the members of local Chinese-speaking communities. Similarly, in most cases, teachers, peers and members of target language communities are considered as those significant others who could affect the learners' motivation on ESL and their agency (Noels, et al., 2019). It is worth noting that this research project has specifically explored the students' multiple agentic actions when interacting with such significant others in various circumstances. For instance, the participant realized that peers as significant others can better their self-understanding competency in class, being able to follow the teacher's lecture and instruction smoothly and immediately. However, it was noticed that it is only made by those peers who are ready to provide the immediate support to his/her classmates in class.

Considering this, it is proposed that the overseas Chinese learners' agency tend to fluctuate with reference to the peers with distinguished personalities. Namely, class peers as significant others could positively or negatively influence the international students' agency towards their direct Chinese learning turn and gains in class. In this case study, this peer has the significance of bettering other learners' agency in comprehension, attainment and retention of Chinese synonyms in their own preferred style and speed. Such significant others are commonly named as the 'language experts', who are eager to offer spontaneous assistance to other students having difficulty in learning Chinese in class. They are identified as the "trigger, solver, contributor and observer" in class, who can contribute to deploying the silent and slow learners' agency (Dobao, 2016, p.41; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

As for the native Chinese teachers as significant others, the differentiated pedagogical beliefs and practices resulted in the essential influences on the international students' agency in self-governing efficacy towards Chinese learning after class. This echoes the findings of previous studies (e.g. Smith & Lovat, 2003; van Compernelle, 2016; García & Wei, 2014), which highlighted the importance of teachers' pedagogical knowledge on constructing the situated learning practices for mobilizing the learners' sociolinguistic agency in a translanguaging space. Viewing this, utilizing translanguaging pedagogy in CFL classroom tends to make students "negotiate their linguistic and meaning-making repertoires" (García & Wei, 2014, p.75). Hence, the significant role of the native Chinese teachers lies in enabling these international students to access to their optimum agency towards self-initiated learning with high capability and efficiency.

The findings also demonstrated that the international Chinese learners' agency would be enacted by the members of the target language communities in daily lives, especially towards correcting their problematic tones. Previously, it was pointed out that the EFL learners' motivation on enhancing their English language proficiency were largely impacted by the significant others, such as teachers, family members, peers and members of the target language communities (Noels, et al., 2019). The present study revealed that international students' agentic and urgent awareness of increasing the accuracy of their Chinese tones was formed by their unsuccessful communication with the native speaker in a common Chinese-speaking community. However, in daily Chinese classroom, these students scarcely encountered such an embarrassed situation. Community of practice is a possible reason for explaining this phenomenon. It is described as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.9). In this sense, Chinese learning is more than the process of acquiring definite forms of knowledge, and the circumstances of

co-participation need to be placed into such a process to socialize relationships (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Influenced by such native significant others through engaging in the local community of practice, international students are not considered as the silent bystanders in learning Chinese. They are the knowledge co-constructors with the agentic goal pursuit towards Chinese learning.

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated three significant others' (class peers, native Chinese teachers and members of local communities) influences on the international students' agentic choices and actions towards learning of Chinese language in class and after class. To be exact, the three categories of significant others would impact the overseas students' agency in the self-understanding competency in class, self-learning efficacy after class, as well as self-awareness of tones separately, in terms of learning Chinese in the local educational and living context. Consequently, some conclusions, implications and limitations are put forward for the field of Chinese language education from the pedagogical perspective.

First, receiving the very immediate learning support from peers in class, especially those from the same ethnic group is contributory to promoting international students' agency towards their mastery of novel Chinese vocabulary. Naturally, they tend to retain new knowledge better for peer-directed engagement and building agentic and positive identity in CFL classroom. Meanwhile, the impact from significant others is relative. Namely, peers as the significant others would be unstable with reference to their diverse personalities, different educational backgrounds and ethnic groups.

In addition, knowing the international students, including their characteristics, language diversity, knowledge foundation, learning habit and preference is usually the very first step for the teachers of native Chinese speakers to conduct appropriate translanguaging pedagogical practices. Therefore, it is recommended that the native teachers should alter their original beliefs on CFL, through mediating their veiled translanguaging capabilities to enable the international students' self-regulated agency in making Chinese as a learnable language (Zhao, 2020).

Finally, the interaction with the members of Chinese-speaking communities in daily lives is an indispensable social practice for international students. In the present case study, encountering communication barriers with a local pharmacist made the participant realize the necessity of speaking the standardized tones in the real-world. Nonetheless, there was no sense of crisis and pressure imposed by their weak tones in class. Therefore, the change on their psychological state naturally, but urgently occurred, for seeking the advantageous and avoiding the detrimental. To this end, international students are agentic to cultivate their Chinese tones' accuracy and proficiency.

However, due to the time and financial limitations, as well as the research ethics considerations, the findings from the current research project were only from a local university in China within a specific teaching period. Also, the number and scope of participants were limited, namely different teaching milieus and participants may produce different research results. Therefore, the teacher-researcher pointed out that when utilizing the present research outcomes, they need to be modified accordingly for adapting to more emergent international Chinese learners with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in different educational contexts.

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Appendix 1: Guiding Questions for Photo-Elicitation Interview

1. What is your HSK level?
2. How long have you been in China?
3. What do you think those learning tasks and activities performed in the form of a team in our class, especially for your Chinese learning outcomes? Why?
4. After this term's Chinese learning in our class, how has your confidence in Chinese learning been changed? Established, improved, lost or as the same? Why?
5. Sometimes in class or after class, why do you prefer to ask for help from your classmates, peers or friends to better understand some Chinese language knowledge?
6. What do you think when teacher used some English and actions to explain difficult Chinese words, expressions and grammars in class? Or do you prefer teacher to use full Chinese in class? Why?
7. What do you think of the learning atmosphere in our class? Why?
8. What are your difficulties and challenges in learning Chinese in class and after class?
9. In which situations of your daily lives, you would use Chinese, French, English or more than one language to communicate with people and perform activities? Why?

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